

**Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee**

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

**Parliament Portfolio**

**Department of the Parliamentary Reporting Staff**

Budget Estimates 2003-04, May 2003

**Topic: DPRS Client Survey 2003**

**Hansard Page: P58**

Senator Ray asked:

**Senator ROBERT RAY** —I managed to retrieve out of my filing system last night the communication from you, Mr President, dated 15 May. It is about a DPRS survey. I do not know whether you are familiar with it. You are using ARTD, whoever they are.

**Mr Templeton** —They are a Sydney based firm.

**Senator ROBERT RAY** —I said I retrieved it from the filing system—and I am going to put it back there in a moment because I have had a fair bit to do with surveys. This is the choice you are given: `very good', `good', `adequate' or `poor'. My question is: why isn't `very poor' listed there? For instance, question 3.3 asks us about the ease of remote and mobile access to the Parliament House computer network, which is extremely `very poor' and every member of parliament attests to it. We have complained about it for years and nothing can ever be done about it. This survey is worthless if you don't have the option of a `very poor' response. You get away with the first three: `very good', `good' and `adequate'. You would say that that is a virtual tick. You get no range to put down `very poor'. I can't understand how they could put out a document like this.

Answer:

The department, and the independent consultants, ARTD Management and Research Consultants, determined a four point Likert response scale of `Very Good', `Good', `Acceptable' and `Poor' for the 2003 Client Survey. The department's previous client survey results have reflected very high levels of overall client satisfaction, with the department's last major survey of clients in 2000 reflecting average ratings of `very satisfied', `satisfied' or `acceptable' levels of satisfaction with services by 97% of respondents. In comparison, the average rating of `poor' was reflected by only 3% of respondents. It was considered that breaking down such a small proportion of responses into two levels of client dissatisfaction would not add any value to the survey results due to its relative statistical insignificance. Senator Ray correctly identified that remote and mobile computing was the topic of highest dissatisfaction from respondents in 2000.

The use of a four point Likert scale question format requires respondents to think carefully about their level of satisfaction with the services provided. The Likert scale method is considered robust for measuring ratings of various forms (non-parametric data) and scales commonly range from three to seven points. Odd number scales allow respondents a central point of neutrality while even number scales force an opinion on one side or other (however slight). In order to both minimise respondent burden and focus opinions on whether a service provided was either good or merely acceptable, the four point scale used was considered fit for the intended purpose.

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Alternate forms of question could be considered, such as grid-types or semantic differential scales, but these would likely add to respondent burden and result in higher non-sampling error rates.

The department's clients have a range of opportunities on the survey form to express strong dissatisfaction with any of the services provided. The survey form notes that a response of 'poor' indicates dissatisfaction with the service and each section also provides a write-in response box for clients to further expand on their tick-box response. All survey recipients are also invited to participate in a face-to-face interview to express their views. In addition to this formal survey, mini-surveys of clients are also conducted regularly, as a follow-up to service requests raised, and these mini-surveys gauge levels of client satisfaction or dissatisfaction and any service-related issues.