House of Commons
Chambre des communes
CANADA

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

CIMM • NUMBER 044 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, December 8, 2016

Chair

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

Thursday, December 8, 2016

● (1530)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.)): Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on October 4, the committee will begin its study on the modernization of client service delivery.

We have officials from the department before us today once again: Mr. Robert Orr, assistant deputy minister; Paul Armstrong, director general, centralized network; and Michelle Lattimore, associate director general. I note that we have Mr. Fraser Valentine with us as well.

Mr. Orr, the floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Orr (Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you, Mr. Chair, for this opportunity to address this committee.

I can say right from the start that the subject of this study is something that Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada takes very seriously. Indeed, it is one where the minister is determined to make considerable headway.

Over the last number of years, the department has made significant strides in laying the groundwork for a modernized client experience that maintains the integrity of our immigration system.

[*English*]

To this end, we have implemented a global case management system for almost all of our major lines of business. Building on this system capacity, we've improved the flexibility of our processing network. We can now shift less complex client applications from temporarily overloaded offices to those with the available capacity to help out. Among other things, this approach has helped us deal with an enormous increase of more than 40% in applications for temporary residence over the past few years.

We have also put in place across the world a visa application centre network—132 centres in 94 countries—to support those clients who want personalized help in filling out their forms. As an example of the results, today a client in Beijing who wants to visit Canada can go to a local visa application centre and get help in Mandarin, have their information sent electronically to the operations support centre in Ottawa overnight for uploading into the global case management system, and then have their file ready for a decision-maker back in Beijing by the time the visa office opens for business the next day.

At the same time, today a client who needs an electronic travel authorization to come to Canada can quickly apply from their smart phone and, for the vast majority of applicants, get a decision right back to their phone within three minutes.

These types of client interactions are possible because of our sustained focus on and investment in a modernized processing infrastructure that supports our ability to be vigilant with respect to the integrity of our programs, which is in fact the foundation of good client service.

We recognize that while we've made significant progress in certain lines of business, there remain considerable opportunities for further improvement. IRCC offers clients over 75 services, but while temporary and economic permanent resident clients can apply online, not all of our clients currently have access to these service delivery channels, and we don't have processing times down to where we want them to be. Further rollout of online applications and reduction of processing times remain a key priority for us.

[*Translation*]

But we also know that the client experience is not just about online applications and reduced processing times. And so we are committed to listening to and learning from the clients who use our services. We do this in a number of different ways.

For example, we conduct a client satisfaction survey every two years, which gives us information about what clients like and what they want more of. In our last survey, clients told us that overall 85% of them were satisfied with their immigration and citizenship experience. But they also told us that they would like to get more information about their case status.

We also have a client service feedback web form online, and receive approximately 150 emails a week from people telling us about their service experience. These messages not only help to give us instant feedback when things aren't working, but also have helped us to identify parts of our instructions which are not clear.

[*English*]

We are trying new methods of gathering client insights as well. For example, this year the department experimented with using human-centred design techniques to better understand the client experience. We went out and talked directly to clients, NGOs, immigration consultants, academics, and others to better understand the whole experience from the client's perspective. This initiative was hugely worthwhile and has helped us to refocus much of our work on client service.

All of this information from surveys, direct client feedback, and design challenges has led us to establish three new client experience priorities for the department: first, innovating our processes so that they make better sense to clients; second, finding new ways to provide clients greater assurance that their cases are moving forward; and third, making sure that we are listening when clients need to talk to us.

● (1535)

While our work in gathering client insights remains important and continues, we've already launched a number of initiatives in these three areas. For example, just yesterday our minister announced changes to the processing of family class applications, which will go a long way in improving the ease of the process for those clients. We're also making improvements to how easy it is to upload documents and pay fees online.

To provide clients with greater assurance as to the status of their applications, IRCC rolled out "link my application" functionality earlier this year. It's an online tool that lets many clients who submitted paper applications get access to the same online account information as those who applied electronically.

We'll also be adding more case status information into the online account to give clients who are waiting more frequent and meaningful updates. In addition, we're also looking at new ways to reduce the amount of time it takes to let clients know we've received their application, and we will be experimenting with sending text messages to clients when their applications reach our mailroom. This will help to close the gap that exists for clients between mailing an application and getting an official acknowledgement of receipt letter.

[*Translation*]

Listening to clients and building trust is also a priority. We have piloted a new approach at the IRCC national call centre, enabling agents to provide clients with detailed case information even if regular processing times have not elapsed. We also log all calls right in the case management system so that if a client calls back we know right away what their concern was the last time and can follow up as necessary.

While this approach is taking more time upfront, it is significantly reducing same day repeat callers, and demonstrating that an upfront investment can reduce client anxiety without necessarily reducing productivity. In other words, good client service also adds business value.

[*English*]

Mr. Chair, I can assure this committee once again that innovating and improving service is at the very top of IRCC's agenda. Through incremental innovation and risk-based analysis, IRCC can achieve service excellence and meet client needs while continuing to uphold confidence in the integrity of the immigration, settlement, citizenship, and passport programs.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for the invitation to be here today.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Orr.

Mr. Sarai, please, for seven minutes.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Good afternoon, Mr. Orr. I thank you and the rest of your team for joining us today and for your presentation before the committee.

One of the surprises that I and many of my colleagues around this table shared when we were elected as members of Parliament is that we also had to become experts in immigration, and our offices became the front line. Can you share with us what initiatives, if any, you have initiated over the past 10 years to help remedy some of the customer service issues that we hear about on an almost daily basis?

Mr. Robert Orr: Mr. Chair, there's a whole variety of different initiatives that have already been undertaken, and a large number of them are continuing. We realize that client service has to be multifaceted and that our strategy to attack client service has to be multifaceted, not only in the clarity of the information that is provided up front, but also very much in giving assurance to our clients that their cases are moving and so on. It's within those parameters, which I've already outlined, that we've done a number of things.

First of all, there is the centralized intake of applications, which is a fairer process. All applications are coming into one area. We've increased our use of risk triage. What this essentially means is that we are distinguishing between those cases that are complex or non-complex and are trying to get the non-complex cases through as quickly as we can so that we can focus our efforts and time on the more complex cases. We get the straightforward cases out of the system as fast as we can, which is better client service for everyone and so on.

A number of other different things have gone on to provide better service to our clients. I could mention the open work permits for spousal cases; the intake cap for parents and grandparents, which has gone up; and the ministerial instructions, which have helped us control the intake of applications and how we manage those applications in a wide variety of areas.

Some of the things we're doing right now are very important. I think the work at the call centre is critically important, and we've made major efforts in that area since the summer. We are doing more and more to allow people to get information electronically about the status of their application so that they're aware of what's happening on that side of things. We are ending upfront medicals. We will require medicals only at the time when we're actually able to progress with the application. Also, more and more applications are online, and that includes all our temporary lines of business. Of course, express entry is entirely online. Likewise, eTA is all online.

All of this is moving in the right direction. There is a lot more to be done; we have no qualms about that. On the other hand, I think very major progress has been made in a variety of different areas.

● (1540)

Mr. Randeep Sarai: I want to also explore the idea of service standards. I know that governments, federal and a number of provincial ones, have this in place when providing services to Canadians. What sort of service standards does IRCC currently have in place, and can you inform me and my colleagues on what happens when service standards are not met?

Mr. Robert Orr: We have a very robust list of service standards and a very long list of them for the various lines of business. For some we do not have service standards for a variety of reasons, but for the vast majority we do have them. We take those very seriously indeed. Overall we are meeting those service standards. We report on that on a regular basis. It's available on our website, how we're doing, and we also report to Treasury Board on our service standards.

We take these very seriously. We try to meet them whenever we can. If we're not meeting them, I can assure you that we are very prudent and very conscious of that. We make real efforts to understand both why we're not able to meet those service standards and what we can do to improve the situation.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Can you inform this committee on what kind of feedback the department receives from new Canadians, immigrants and refugees, about their programs and the accessibility for folks who are trying to find out information about their applications?

Mr. Robert Orr: Perhaps I can start off, and my colleague Ms. Lattimore might be able to carry on with some of this.

We get information in a variety of ways. One of them is the survey we do every two years. That shows an 85% satisfaction rate, which is reasonably good news but by no means grounds for complacency. We also get an awful lot of information back through emails on a regular basis. On a weekly basis, as mentioned, we get about 150 emails, which bring issues to our attention—we can talk about that—and that's helpful to us.

Perhaps Ms. Lattimore could explain that a little bit more. It's particularly valuable at the call centre, for which she is responsible.

Ms. Michelle Lattimore (Associate Director General, Centralized Network, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you.

It's true that we collect information from our clients in a variety of ways. We're certainly looking to expand more in that direction, because we know that at the end of the day the clients are the real source of insight for us into where we need to be investing. We do know that clients become frustrated with us. They send us web forms, and we received about 5,000 complaints last year. We act on those. We have a group of analysts who look at that information and feed it back throughout the department so that we can ensure there's an ongoing feedback loop that helps us to inform programs moving forward.

We also collect a significant amount of data at the call centre. We look at our top complaints. We understand what people are calling us about. Generally speaking, about 50% of the calls we get at our call centre are about case status. That's really given us an indication that we need to do more work to get people case status information as quickly as we can.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: That's a lot of what we get as well, case status updates.

I'd like to talk about the IRCC website. The website is accessible in that its help is available in many different languages. There's also a lot of information available to prospective Canadians who want to make Canada their home. That said, I want to explore another side of accessibility, and that's navigating the website, ensuring that the information people are looking for is clear. I'm wondering if this is something you're looking into exploring and implementing, and also, if there's a complaint that you've heard in the past about the website, if there's a way to make it more user-friendly.

● (1545)

Mr. Robert Orr: The website is something that we're very conscious we really need to address. We're doing an awful lot of work on that. It's an evergreen thing. We revisited and then redid the website a couple of years ago. That was a major step in the right direction, but it's time we looked at it. We continue to do that. We also did a few things. We launched the “come to Canada” wizard and an online help centre, which has been useful. We implemented the Google search capability, which has been helpful. We launched an interactive “pay your fees” tool. We also launched a processing times calculator, which has been valuable.

There have been some very positive things on that site. We also are conscious, though, that certain parts of the website are hit more than others. We're really focusing our efforts on those areas that we know are hit the most so that we get the most bang for our media buck.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Orr.

Mr. Saroya, for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC): Thank you to all the officials for coming in and giving us the lowdown.

My first question, for Mr. Orr or anybody else, is with regard to the passport. Passport Canada’s information systems are being integrated into the global case management system. This follows the 2013 shift in responsibility for passports to what was then the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. A recent internal audit of the integration process found that, among other things, planning for security requirements was inadequate. Could you please give the committee an update on actions taken to fix the system and on when you expect the passport program to be fully integrated into the GCMS?

Mr. Robert Orr: Indeed, Mr. Chair, that is absolutely correct. What was Passport Canada at the time became the passport program of IRCC in July 2013. One of the reasons for that was to modernize the program and to make the passport program more accessible to Canadians and so on.

In general, the success of the passport program is quite remarkable. We are meeting service standards well over 99% of the time, and the satisfaction rate with the passport program from Canadians is at over 96%. There are very strong and positive views of how the passport program is operating at the moment.

We do need to make changes to ensure that the program is modernized, that it stays up to date and so on. Indeed, one of the things we want to do is to migrate the computer system from the existing IRIS system into GCMS. We're doing that very deliberately and slowly. It's a major business transformation piece, and thus we want to do it very prudently.

I cannot give you an exact date for when that is going to happen, because we do want to be very cautious on how we do it, but there is very active work going on within IRCC and with our service department, Service Canada, which actually delivers the passport program at the moment, to ensure that service to Canadians is not impacted negatively in any way.

Mr. Bob Saroya: Thank you.

In 2015, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada launched a survey to measure the impact of program modernization on client satisfaction. How many people participated in this survey? Were participants Canadians or foreign nationals? Can you share the highlights of the survey with the committee? Also, have any measures been taken to respond to the results of the survey? Last, does IRCC plan to do more surveys on the same topic?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: The client satisfaction survey is done every two years. We started in 2013. For us, 2015 was the first opportunity we had to really look back and compare performance over previous years.

In 2015, 85% of our clients reported being very satisfied with our service. That was down 1% from 2013; however, there was a notable increase in satisfaction for those who were granted citizenship, likely thanks to processing times, which had sped up considerably for these clients.

The satisfaction survey results are based on responses from about 3,700 applicants. These are applicants who have completed the service with the department. It's a response rate of about 11%, so it's still low, but certainly within expectations. There is a margin of error of only about 1%.

One of the important pieces that we implemented based on feedback from the 2015 survey is actually the processing times calculator that ADM Orr referred to recently. Clients told us in the 2015 survey that they were very frustrated that they couldn't get accurate information about processing times online. We were able to implement changes to that just at the end of last year, actually, and we have seen quite favourable results from clients as a result.

● (1550)

Mr. Bob Saroya: Were the 15% of customers dissatisfied basically because it was taking too long? I see that 85% were satisfied. Mr. Orr's statement says “85% of them were satisfied with their immigration and citizenship experience. But they also told us that they would like to get more information about their case status.”

Their dissatisfaction was really with the length of time...?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: It's interesting. We tend to make an assumption sometimes that it is the processing time that is the highest irritant for clients. What we've found through other outreach avenues with clients is that in fact that tends to fall in the bottom half of what really upsets people. What we understand from clients, having spoken to them—and especially following the work that we did with our family class design challenge this year—is, as Mr. Orr mentioned, that the inability to access case status information is an irritant. Also, having to work through processes that don't seem intuitive and that don't seem to make sense to them is an irritant to the clients. They also feel that they need to be heard by us, that they need to be heard when things go off the rails. They don't always feel heard.

Mr. Bob Saroya: The target for economic immigrants in the 2017 immigration level plan is 73,700, a significantly higher number than the number of foreign nationals who arrived through express entry in the first year of this operation. There were 9,740 individuals, including principal applicants and their families, who came. How many economic immigrants have arrived through express entry in its second year? Has the department been able to maintain the service standard of processing 80% of express entry applications in six months or less?

The Chair: A brief and succinct answer in 20 seconds, please.

Mr. Robert Orr: It was always intended that the express entry would start off slowly and build. That's what we're seeing.

We had cases that were residual cases from the old program. Increasingly, those are being finished, and they will be finished pretty much entirely by the end of 2016, so we will see entirely from express entry for the federal skilled worker program...and, yes, we are maintaining the six-month processing time.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Kwan, please, for seven minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you to all the officials.

To follow up with you, Ms. Lattimore, I think you mentioned that last year you received 5,000 complaints. I wonder if you can advise us of what your top three complaints are in those 5,000 complaints.

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: Of the 5,000 we received, the top complaint that came in through our web form was about processing times, at about 1,100. Then it dropped significantly, with 348—a fairly small number of our clients—about call centre services, and then 239 about our “MyCIC” services online.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Does it elaborate? When you say “call centre services”, what is the issue with that complaint?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: I don't have information from analysis of the web forum. We can certainly look into that in more detail. Our understanding, from speaking with clients at the call centre, is certainly that they experience frustration sometimes in trying to get hold of an agent. Also, often, as I mentioned, about 50% of our clients were trying to access case status online and weren't able to get the information they wanted about their case from the agent.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, I think it would be very useful and helpful for the information they have with respect to complaints to be passed on to the committee. Then we can actually go through the details of it, as opposed to going through it bit by bit at committee within my seven minutes. It would be helpful if we could get a confirmation that we could receive that information.

With respect to complaints, I have one issue that my office often gets. People phone the call centre and cannot get informative information. It's an ongoing cycle of not getting information, and the level of frustration is beyond measure. I've tried it myself. You phone the hotline, and the information you get is so generalized that it is hopeless and, frankly, useless.

I then phone the minister's office. I've experienced this myself. I get the information from the minister's office and it's contradictory to what the government had announced within the time frame that the application would be processed, for example. I'm sort of left standing there and thinking, who do I believe? I don't know what is the real information anymore, and I hardly know what to tell my constituents. No wonder they're so frustrated.

How can we improve on this? How is it that people phone the hotline and get such general information that it's basically rendered useless?

● (1555)

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: Perhaps what would help is that I'll take this opportunity to tell you about a project that we worked on this year with the Privy Council Office's innovation hub and the Treasury Board Secretariat, as well as OCAD University in Toronto. It was to work on what we called the family class design challenge. For us, the family class design challenge was an opportunity to document the service experience for the first time from a client perspective and to then identify new and innovative approaches to changing the way we address client concerns.

One of the things that was really significant for us that came out of that study was that clients were really unhappy with our call centre. They found that the language we used wasn't helpful and, for those 50% of clients who were contacting us to get case status information, we weren't giving it to them. We were redirecting them to our website.

Based on this insight that we received from clients during the design challenge process, we've actually changed things very significantly at the call centre since the middle of August of this year. In August 2016, we started piloting new work at the call centre, where, for family class clients only—because we really wanted to track results and see if this meant something to clients—we changed a few things. We changed the language we used. We started using more welcoming language. We started actually going into client files for those clients who were looking for case status information in order to deliver to them the assurance they were looking for.

This, of course, has had an impact on business. It's taking us a little longer to deal with those calls, about 16% longer, but one of the other pieces we've actually seen is a significant 30% decrease in same day repeat calls at our call centre. That, to us, indicates that things are working well. We've also received positive feedback from clients who are telling us that they feel more assured, and that they don't feel the need to call back multiple times. We've never seen results like that before.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I think that's good, but I can tell you about my direct experience of phoning the call centre from my office and not being able to get information. We sort of get the runaround of: “We'll get back to you in a couple of weeks”. They tell us to do different things. Some cases are quite urgent, so we phone the ministerial line to get that information. As I said, the information that's received from the minister's office contradicts what the government has announced, which is concerning to me. I just want to flag that as something for you to look into. I hope that can be rectified.

I also want to ask this question. Oftentimes people get rejections, for example, for their travel visa, and they get these boxes ticked off. The information is so generalized that it leaves the person who's made the application wondering how they can perhaps improve the application next time. Financial security is one piece that's often the box ticked off. There's no indication, though, as to what parameters within financial security they need to be in, in order to get the approval, or what goal they could work toward, for example. In other situations, it seems there is little consideration with regard to people's travel history. Some people may not have a lot of resources, so they don't have a whole lot of travel history. It's not within their norm. Yet that's an automatic box. If you haven't actually travelled, then automatically you are out of luck.

Again, this is a very important thing for a lot of people. How can we improve on this?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

Mr. Robert Orr: Mr. Chair, certainly it's an issue that we continually try to address, to give the best information we can and to give clarity about our decision-making. There's nothing automatic about it. We look at a variety of different factors in an application to decide what will be there or not.

In terms of the ticked box, one of the issues—just because we have no time—is the resource requirement. Because of the resources that would be required to give detailed responses to each and every person, it just makes it impossible, given the volumes we have. We're trying to get a balance between what's appropriate. We may not have the balance quite right, and we continue to look at that, but we have to consider a variety of different factors in that.

● (1600)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jenny Kwan): The time is up.

We'll move on to Ms. Dzerowicz.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Thanks so much for coming back today and for your great presentation.

In my area, one of the things I find is that 52% of the people in my riding of Davenport weren't born there, so there are a lot of people whose first language isn't English. I couldn't understand why so many of them were using immigration consultants. I wondered why they were using these people. Then I started realizing that because the process is so complex and their first language isn't necessarily English, they're using immigration consultants because, for them, in many cases, it facilitates their getting through a process that they find very, very onerous.

You talked about your design challenge. I'm assuming that's the same thing you're talking about on page 6, where you mention that you talked “to clients, NGOs, immigration consultants, academics”. Did you actually sit down with groups of people who didn't speak English and ask them to go through the process so that you could actually understand how people whose first language isn't English or French might actually understand the system?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: That wasn't a specific study that we made as part of the design challenge. You're correct that our web content is only available in both official languages. We do have challenges providing detailed information to clients in more than those official languages. Translation costs, keeping things up to date, is certainly a challenge for the department.

We are developing a business case to look at the value of doing that again. We understand that it's a client irritant, not only within Canada but overseas. We do have a network of visa application centres overseas that helps those clients, but certainly we understand that those within Canada do tend to go to immigration consultants for that kind of assistance.

Mr. Robert Orr: I might just add that when we did do the family class design challenge, in looking at that, we did look at the language that's available for the spousal application. That's one of the reasons we completely redid all of the spousal application, the guides and so on, which will be available on our website next week. We found it was at about a grade 11 status, which was too high. We have tried to ensure that the new forms and guides are at a more appropriate level.

We'll have to do this across various lines of business, but we're starting off and very much trying to make that effort, and likewise on the website, to try to see that the language is appropriate.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I can't stress enough how important I think it is for us to bring in groups of people whose English may be good enough to work here in Canada—and their families are here—and to maybe have them go through the process. I think that would give us some insight. I'll be digging deeper around the language as we move forward on the study.

I've also heard about a number of different embassies or offices around the world doing some upfront sessions for those who want to come to Canada, to immigrate here. I've heard that those who attend one of those sessions actually go through the process very successfully and quickly.

Are those offered everywhere? Is it up to each office to decide whether or not it offers them? Can you talk a little bit about that?

Mr. Robert Orr: You're absolutely right. Some of the work that has been done abroad is very valuable. We have contracted out some of this work. There are cultural orientation sessions, particularly for refugees, but also for others who are coming. They're not available everywhere, but they are available in an increasing number of places around the world.

These are part of our settlement program. Providing this information in advance helps people to prepare themselves for the move so that when they arrive, they are in a better position to start seeking employment and get settled very rapidly.

There's real value in these sessions. We are investing more in them, but they certainly have real payoff.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I'm assuming the reason they're not offered everywhere is just a resource issue at this point as opposed to anything else.

Mr. Robert Orr: It's a resource issue, and I think they're something we're growing gradually as well.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: This gets me to third party review. I have a grandmother in Portugal who has been trying to get to Canada for a while. Apparently her application has been stuck at the security level for a year and a half. I've raised this as a red flag so many times.

To what extent is there a third party review? As part of the whole immigration system, we have to use third parties to do certain things. To what extent do we review their service levels and whether they are fulfilling them, and maybe find ways so that if there are actually issues that are brought to your attention, they are addressed with these third parties?

● (1605)

Mr. Robert Orr: If there are matters of security and those sorts of issues, they will involve dealing with our partner at CBSA. It is a matter of working with them, and generally they certainly respond very well within service standards.

There are certain cases that are outliers, which is certainly unfortunate for those individuals, but overwhelmingly they do meet service standards.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: The last thing I want to mention is that if I had to envision a system, I would love to see one that is like the system for ordering pizza. It tells you exactly when the order has been accepted, when they are baking it, how long it's going to take, and when it's ready, and so it tells you where it is all along the way. Ideally, I would love to see a system like that so that people who are applying for whatever can see where they are in the system. Then if there's a problem, a red light goes on, and there is a phone number and email they can contact.

Have you talked to companies like FedEx and so on that could maybe help us a little bit with our systems and our process?

Mr. Robert Orr: Certainly we're looking very carefully at anything we can learn from outside partners or outside sources. We've looked at something like that with regard to tracing it. The immigration process is not quite as straightforward, of course. A number of different factors are involved, which makes it a little more complicated than just mapping out where a parcel is. We're dealing with people, not things, and so what goes on is rather more complicated. Nevertheless, we are trying to work on that area.

I think what's really important is the information people can get if they can log on to MyCIC and get that electronic link. They can now monitor much more rapidly and easily the status of their application, what has been done, and what remains to be done.

We continue to try to improve that facility, so we're giving more and more information and clearer information to applicants. I think we've made major strides forward in that area already.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Madam Chair, how much time do I have?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jenny Kwan): You have five seconds.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you so much.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jenny Kwan): Ms. Rempel.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): I want to begin with a couple of questions on the eTA process. We've been hearing that some travellers have experienced problems with the new eTA requirement that makes it necessary for visa exempt travellers to obtain an eTA to fly to or transit through the country. While this helps us to understand who is coming into the country, there have been some problems with its implementation. We heard from a spokesperson for Air Canada that it has been encouraging the government to do more to publicize its eTA requirement.

Could you give us a sense within the context of your client service delivery model why this hasn't been better publicized for those travelling to Canada, and what practices could be put in place to ensure this doesn't happen in the future?

Mr. Robert Orr: The electronic travel authorization program has been a huge initiative for the department and for our partner, CBSA. It's a joint piece with CBSA. We're responsible for the eTA application process, and there are over 2.5 million people around the world who have obtained an eTA since it went live. The IAPI process, which is the actual interface with the airlines, is managed by CBSA. It went fully live on November 10. Since that time, overwhelmingly, I think it has gone very well.

In terms of publicity, we did a vast amount of publicity prior to its going live, and I think, to wit, we have seen 2.5 million people who have indeed obtained an eTA. The vast majority of people who are showing up for flights now do have them.

What we're trying to do at the moment is diagnose exactly where the pockets are where perhaps the message has not gotten across. We're trying to target those areas the best we can, whether it's certain countries or certain groups within countries, and so on, so that we can really target our efforts in that respect. There's been a huge amount of publicity already, but we continue to try to respond to where we see there are gaps.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Has there been any formal working group or process put in place with Canadian airlines specifically, given the feedback from Air Canada in order to address some of their concerns? Have you guys reached out and formalized any sort of dialogue process?

Mr. Robert Orr: Constantly, there's very regular contact with the airlines, both with all the airlines together and then individual airlines as well.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: What are you hearing from them in terms of concrete recommendations to improve the awareness process?

● (1610)

Mr. Robert Orr: Again, what we're trying to do is diagnose exactly where there may be gaps right now. That's what we're trying to do working with them to see what they're seeing. One of the issues, I think, is not so much with people arriving for their initial flight, because people are able to get an eTA very rapidly, the vast majority within three minutes. The problem is those people who are transiting. That's why we're trying to get at that group, trying to zero in on that.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: So far you guys have not diagnosed exactly, to your words, what the problems would be coming out of some of the.... We're hearing a lot of this in the media as well that there are issues. From what you just said, you actually haven't identified the problems yet.

Mr. Robert Orr: Let's say there are multiple things we are trying to attack, and for all of them, there is no silver bullet to solve them and ensure every single person...and get 100%. We're close. It's very high.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: In terms of the multiple things, what would those be?

Mr. Robert Orr: Some of them are systems changes, which may help, because of people putting in passport numbers incorrectly, so that we self-correct that. There are issues like trying to get the word out to certain groups which are not aware of it. There are multiple things we are trying to do. We've set up the airline support centres so that airlines are able to phone if they have a client who does not have the proper documentation.

Within IRCC, we have hired 177 people who are working on eTA to ensure that we are responding as rapidly as we can to ensure that with those cases which are not automatically approved and fall out of the system, we get a response to them as rapidly as we possibly can.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Obviously, as you mentioned, they're shared responsibilities with CBSA. Could you tell us a little about the communication process that IRCC has put in place in order to functionalize or operationalize the eTA? Have there been any bumps along the way on that?

Mr. Robert Orr: It's a huge system, so inevitably there are some bumps along the way, but I think we've addressed the vast majority of them and we continue to do so.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Is there an operational or project management group, a working group or something to that effect?

Mr. Robert Orr: Yes.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: How has that been working?

Mr. Robert Orr: It's been working very well. There's a governance level, from the working level to the director general level, to the ADM level, and the deputy ministers hold a meeting biweekly at the moment.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Are you tracking numbers, in terms of how many people have experienced issues? Do you have a CRM model or anything in terms of tracking problems?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jenny Kwan): I'm sorry, your time is up.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thanks.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jenny Kwan): Next, we have Mr. Ehsassi for five minutes.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): I understand you've updated the website. I was wondering, in terms of risk mitigation, what your strategies are to deal with the possibility of cyber-attacks or data breaches.

Mr. Robert Orr: I don't pretend to be an IT specialist, but IRCC works very closely with Shared Services Canada to ensure there is a robust system in place to manage any cyber-attacks. We're very conscious that the GCMS platform, the global case management system platform, is something which has to be very carefully protected, and there's been no indication thus far that there have been any attacks. We continue to monitor that constantly.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: My second question is in regard to the global case management system. What lines of business that are undertaken by IRCC can be done through the global system? Does it apply to all categories?

Mr. Robert Orr: It does not apply to all categories, but to a very significant number of them. It would be all temporary resident, all permanent resident, permanent resident card categories, and it would be the citizenship program as well. It does not apply to the passport program, or at least to the vast majority of the passport program, at this time.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: The next question I have is with respect to service standards. I understand that last year you announced that for citizenship you're trying to make it one year or less. What are the consequences in the event that the department fails to meet its own service standards?

Mr. Robert Orr: Well, in terms of citizenship, in fact, we're exceeding it. The processing times at the moment are 10 months. As I said earlier, the consequences are that we look very carefully at it to see what's going wrong and why we're not meeting those standards, and we do everything we can to ensure that we do get back within the service standard.

Citizenship is a very good example of where we were well over where we wanted to be. For citizenship, about three years ago it was taking close to three and a half years, and we've now brought it down to 10 months for new applications.

● (1615)

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Okay.

In terms of service standards, how does it work with various officers if there are officers who are outliers in terms of acceptance or timelines? Do you identify those officers?

Mr. Robert Orr: Yes, certainly. The managers in any given office are going to be monitoring the work of individual officers all the time. It may not be on specific cases, because there may be very good reasons why a specific case is taking a long time, but overall, yes, we're going to be monitoring productivity, and we're going to be monitoring how long they're taking to do cases and so on.

Mr. Armstrong may be able to speak to that, because he certainly has very rigorous systems in place.

Mr. Paul Armstrong (Director General, Centralized Network, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Madam Vice-Chair, yes, we have very strict performance management criteria to which all employees have to adhere. We also regularly conduct quality assurance exercises to make sure that the decision-making is of high quality.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Okay.

We understand that you're on top of various employees. How does it work? Is there a huge variation among various offices around the world?

Mr. Robert Orr: No—

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: How do you deal with it when you identify that some are more difficult than others?

Mr. Robert Orr: Well, I think what we're looking at when we look at various offices is the service standards. For instance, on the temporary resident side, the service standard is 14 days. On a regular basis we do look at what offices are meeting that and which offices are not. There may be very good reasons why a office is not able to meet that standard, and sometimes it's surprising why it's difficult to do so.

We monitor it closely: does it make sense, and what's being done to address it so that we are providing the best service we possibly can? As well, one of the things we can do is that if an office is overwhelmed with applications, we are now able, with the global case management system, to move cases around the system. We have greater surge capacity to respond to unexpected increases.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: A last question would be with respect to service standards for those who are going through the security check—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jenny Kwan): You have five seconds.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: What are the timelines that you have in mind for that category?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jenny Kwan): I'm sorry, but the time is up.

We're going to move to Mr. Gourde.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses.

Over the past 10 years, my office has provided a great deal of assistance on various files. Very often, incomplete requests or forms are sent to the department. This, of course, eventually causes delays in the process.

It seems that people have trouble doing the basic work and obtaining the necessary information. We often find that a document is missing or has not been signed, or that a supporting document is missing. This really bogs down the system and delays processing times.

People come to see us and we have to start the whole process over again with them. We take the time to sit down and look at the form. We go back to the beginning of their application and review the entire process as far as they have reached to see what is missing. Departmental employees do nonetheless provide valuable assistance. They remind us of things.

Is there a lack of information initially? Are there enough agents to provide assistance from the outset? If an hour or more were invested with each person, people would be able to fill out their forms properly in the first place, and that might eliminate days, weeks or months of delays.

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Orr: Madam Vice-Chair, I understand that the issue can be very difficult, and sometimes it would be useful to have assistance at the outset. I think one of the things we are trying to do to deal with that issue is to reduce the volume of information which is out there and to provide more clear, concise information. The family class and the spousal application process, which was just announced yesterday, is an excellent example of moving forward in that area.

We've gone from 180 pages, which was the guide for a spousal application, and we've reduced it now to a simplified guide of 12 pages, and then there's a longer guide, which is, I think, 60 or so pages. I think that one of the big things we can do is be clearer on what we require, and make sure it's absolutely concise, simple, and straightforward to follow. What we are trying to make the big effort to do is to provide better information to our clients up front, and then we can expect greater adherence to what we're looking for so that it's better for all of us.

● (1620)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Do you know how many files have gone through the entire process without a hitch?

In my constituency office, I have to assign at least one employee full-time to deal with immigration files and make sure a second person is trained if the first person is on maternity leave or is absent for other reasons. This requires a tremendous amount of energy from an MP's office. Yet I am in a region where the immigration rate is not particularly high. It seems like all the files end up at my office sooner or later. For example, the files of all four members of a single family have ended up at my office. It seems that the success rate is low.

Do you have statistics on that?

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Orr: Madam Vice-Chair, I don't think I have any numbers on exactly how many go through without any issues at all. The overall acceptance rate is very high, so I think it's fair to say that the majority of applications do indeed go through that way. When we define complex versus non-complex cases, the vast majority of cases are non-complex and go through in that way. That being said, we're very conscious that there is an incomplete rate. Something that we're trying to do is give better information so that there's less reason for an incomplete rate. The incomplete rate in certain lines of business can be as high as 30%, and so we are trying to do what we can to clarify instructions and to simplify the process.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jenny Kwan): Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Ms. Sidhu for five minutes.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Thank you to all the witnesses.

Like many of my colleagues in their ridings, I have a high rate of casework in Brampton South. Over the last years I have seen a steady improvement, but there's definitely more we need to do. Yesterday in Brampton the minister announced that the processing time for family class applications will be cut from 24 months to 12 months.

Is there any work that you're doing on processing parent and grandparent sponsorship applications for reunification? Is there any timeline?

Mr. Paul Armstrong: Madam Vice-Chair, yes, there is work that the department has undertaken to improve parent and grandparent processing. An example of that is, in addition to centralized intake which we have for parent and grandparent cases, we've also implemented risk triage so that we see from the beginning stages if cases are complex or if they're not complex. If they're not complex, then we process them in Canada.

In the case of parents and grandparents, I can inform you that about 56% of cases are actually now being processed in Canada. That shouldn't surprise you because it's likely a result of things like the super visa, wherein parents and grandparents are able to come and visit Canada, and then if they apply for permanent residence, we conduct a risk triage. That's certainly a way that we're looking at speeding up processing of cases and improving client service.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: I just heard about uploading documents and paying the fee online. What is the implementation timeline for this initiative to modernize the system?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: We're working right now on initiatives to improve the quality and clarity of information that is on the website by the end of the fiscal year. We are making changes to have additional plain language on the website. In terms of the usability of applications and tools, we're working very much towards improving those pieces as well. It's an active file, I would say, and we expect significant improvements by the end of the fiscal year.

● (1625)

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: I hear a lot from applicants themselves and particularly from one visa office in Chandigarh, as do many members here. Can you speak to the experience of applicants in more challenging contexts? What can we do to bring more equal service standards across the board?

Mr. Robert Orr: We're very conscious of some of the issues in Chandigarh, and I've had the opportunity to visit Chandigarh twice in the last six months. I think there are a number of issues there. One of the big things we are trying to do is, again, this idea of work sharing across the network, so that when there is a particular surge in an office like Chandigarh, we're able to spread the work to places, perhaps larger offices, that are able to respond to that increase in applications.

In the India network this year, the volume was up dramatically on the temporary resident side, and for students it was up by over 70%. That is inevitably going to have an impact on how well and how quickly we're able to get through all the applications. We're back now to being well within service standards for both temporary residents and students, and in fact we were by the end of September, despite the vast increase, and we're determined to do our best to maintain service standards in the Chandigarh and India network.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jenny Kwan): Thank you very much.

Now with the rotation it comes to the NDP, which is me, for three minutes.

The department used to have an office that constituents or people could visit to get assistance on how to fill out forms, how to deal with their applications, and so on and so forth. That's now been done away with, and I think as a result of that, a lot of the work has been shifted to MPs. I think it's fair to say that across the board for MPs from all the different parties, the volume of casework has increased exponentially because of that.

I'm wondering whether or not there's been any consideration to reinstating a service provision in different parts of the regions where people can actually get that kind of support for their applications from the departmental officials.

Mr. Robert Orr: I'm actually not aware of that level of service having been provided previously, but at the moment we are really trying to focus on a couple of things. One is the visa application centres abroad, which do offer some of that sort of work, and which have proven to be a very successful network, because we are able to provide applicants with support in their own language. That's been a very valuable resource, which has been put in place over the last few years.

At the moment, we are trying to focus on making our requirements clearer and simpler. I think we are making progress in that area, but it's very much a work in progress right now.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jenny Kwan): Thank you for that. I would urge the department to consider actually making available a person who could help people navigate through the application process, in a non-partisan way for all the people who have these challenges. Otherwise, at the end of the day, they do actually fall into our office and then we have to provide that assistance. I'll leave that for now.

The last time the officials were here, I raised the question of the EE, express entry, profile with respect to the glitch that happened with the website on which people update their information. It's just been hanging, and it has not updated. I wonder if you could quickly give me an update on what's happening with respect to that challenge.

Mr. Robert Orr: Certainly. There were some changes to express entry that were implemented on November 19, and then there were some issues with people being unable to successfully update their profiles. We have made changes, and I think people are now in a position to be able to do it. We've done an awful lot of outreach as well to clients to ensure that no one was disadvantaged through this process. We put Qs and As on our website. We've responded to Twitter posts. We've responded to questions via the call centre. We've also sent out an email to all clients with specific instructions on the situation.

● (1630)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jenny Kwan): Thank you very much.

My time is up, and we are going to move to the seven-minute rotation.

Ms. Zahid.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Thanks to our officials for coming back to help us start the study on the modernization of client services.

Yesterday, Minister McCallum announced that spousal reunification applications will now be processed in 12 months or less. This is great news, especially for the riding of Scarborough Centre. It will be received very well.

I would like to thank you and your team for your work on this file. I understand that many of the efficiencies gained to make this reduction in processing time possible came from the work of a tiger team of young front-line civil servants who took a critical look at every aspect of the process and made suggestions for modernization.

Will you be applying this tiger team approach to the other lines of business within your ministry?

Mr. Robert Orr: Madam Vice-Chair, yes, there certainly has been some very positive work done on the spousal project, and it has been done largely through a tiger team. It has also been done through a variety of other inputs into that, including the work that was done with OCAD U, with other people influencing things and so on, but it's been very positive.

In terms of moving forward, yes, we would like to use tiger teams in different ways on different parts of the program. It is resource intensive, so we have to keep that in mind, but on the other hand, the results are very positive as well.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: On family reunification, we have heard previously about processing times for parents and grandparents and for the caregivers program, which are both pretty high, and families are waiting back home to be reunited. Perhaps there could be some sort of study or project undertaken on that also.

Mr. Robert Orr: On the issue of parents and grandparents, as you know, the intake has been increased and the level space has been increased. Likewise, we have significant level space for live-in caregivers. That is going to be the biggest positive step forward in those two categories.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: In many private sector organizations companies are creating an executive leadership position with responsibility for customer service experience, often titled as chief customer service officer or customer experience officer. This is an executive leader with the specific responsibility and accountability of making sure the experience customers have with the particular organization is as optimal as possible.

At IRCC is there one designated member of the leadership team with specific responsibility for the end user experience, or is the responsibility diffused among the leadership team?

Mr. Robert Orr: Madam Vice-Chair, indeed all members of the executive team are very conscious that client service is key, but yes, in September 2015 we did appoint one person, one senior executive responsible for client service, Ms. Lattimore.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Madam Vice-Chair, through you to Ms. Lattimore, is it your responsibility to oversee all client services in all categories?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: Our role, Madam Vice-Chair, is to oversee the client experience. Often we find it's quite difficult talking about client service because we end up talking about service delivery and not necessarily the experience at the end of the day for the client. Our role is relatively new within the department. It is a year old at this point. We really have spent, as I've described, the last year focusing on trying to unlock new ways of learning from clients directly, insights that will lead us in the right direction as to where we should best make our investments to improve that experience.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you.

IRCC has established service standards for different lines of businesses. What is the consequence, if any, for the management leaders if these standards are not met?

Mr. Robert Orr: Madam Vice-Chair, we very much monitor the service standards on a regular basis to ensure that the various parts of the network are meeting the requirements.

In terms of overall management of them, we report to Treasury Board annually on how successful we have been in meeting or not meeting the service standards. It's something we certainly take very seriously.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Much of the volume of the constituency cases I have in my office, and I think for most of my colleagues as well, with regard to immigration is simply requests for information. People want to know where they are in the process, at what stage their application is. All they can find online is that the case is in process, and it will continue to say that for months and sometimes over a year. We can get more information when we inquire on their behalf, but sometimes we get the same answer, that it is in process.

Sometimes we are told that security screening is happening or they are waiting for the medical. Could this information not be made available to the applicants online rather than just saying that it's in process, so applicants can know at what stage their application is? For example, in any particular case, if you have five stages, they could know if they have passed the second stage and are on the third.

● (1635)

Mr. Robert Orr: The department has made considerable efforts to try to get more information online, and to get that same information even for those who've applied on paper, so that if they go online and create an account, they can get information about their application.

What we have to do—and I think that's a fair comment—is give better information online and feed more. We've made significant strides. It's a lot better than it was, but nevertheless, there's a further distance we can go to ensure the information is more meaningful for our clients.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jenny Kwan): Thank you.

I'm sorry I misread the clock. I'll add another 11 seconds to your time.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: With regard to my previous question, sometimes the PR applications are put into a review and don't meet that service standard you have put in of 10 months in cases of citizenship applications. Whenever we inquire, or the people whose applications are in there inquire, we're told only that it is under review. There is no time period given. What about that sort of application?

Mr. Robert Orr: We can look at it and try to see what we can do on that. Sometimes, it's quite true, we do not know how long it's going to take to complete that application, and that may be part of the situation.

I don't know if any of my colleagues have anything to add on this.

Mr. Paul Armstrong: Madam Vice-Chair, I would add to Mr. Orr's comments that we certainly monitor the progress of applications. Now, certainly, a case may be furthered for security or for medical review or for the need for more information. Using the global case management system, we're able to view cases and the stages where cases are electronically rather than looking for a paper file. I think that as time passes we will be able to enhance our client service.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jenny Kwan): Thank you.

I gave you an extra 20 seconds for cutting you off.

Ms. Rempel.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Going back to my colleague Jacques Gourde's line of questioning, just so you know, for all of us around the table here it is an enormous amount of work in our constituency offices to deal with immigration casework. Again, just to re-emphasize what some of my Liberal colleagues have said, this is a non-partisan thing. We have very small operating budgets, and I also will say that I have a full-time employee in my office who deals just with client service delivery issues.

I'll preface this by saying that the decision made earlier this year to take away MP access from embassies, as well as the ministerial advisory office, was very poor. It was a terrible decision. It really affected service delivery within our office. I'm glad to see that it has been semi-reversed.

I'm not sure what some of my colleagues would say, but certainly for me and my office, one of the biggest complaints we get from people is the reporting of failures in customer service by the call centre in Montreal. I would say that's probably, by an order of magnitude, the number one complaint that I get. People experience very long wait times on the phone, as well as very onerous automated call menus, especially for people whose English or French is their second language. The number one thing I have to respond to in my office is that they don't understand the information that was given to them or that it's confusing, or the charge is that it's unhelpful.

Do you track the call centre usage at all? We are going to write up a report here. Is there anything that you think could be done to overcome this? It's such a burden on our offices right now.

Mr. Robert Orr: I'll let Ms. Lattimore speak about the call centre in a little more detail, but I think we have made major changes there since August, and they're starting to pay off. They're not for all lines of business. We started off with the family class and the success there is being rolled out to other areas, but a couple of things are happening. One is the change in the attitude, which I suppose is the best way to put it. Giving a bit more scope for our agents to respond to things has, I think, helped our clients dramatically. It's also helped morale within the office itself, and then—

● (1640)

Hon. Michelle Rempel: What would be.... I'm sorry. Go ahead. I was just going to say in terms of attitude, what are the critical success factors in performance evaluation that you use for a front-line call centre worker in Montreal? What are they tasked with managing? What would their supervisor be looking at in terms of an employment review framework or a performance review framework?

Mr. Robert Orr: First of all, we're looking at the number of calls they're handling and at how long they're handling them. All case calls are taped so we can do a playback on them. We do quality assurance on all calls that come into the call centre and so on. I think there are very stringent controls on the agents and what's going on there.

Ms. Lattimore can speak to that more, but—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Would you be willing to table with the committee information on what the key critical success factors or performance review metrics would be for front-line call centre workers in terms of documentation?

To me, it seems a little off that quantity would be what their performance evaluation would be.

Mr. Robert Orr: I did not say that. I said that's one of the factors, and there's a number of factors that we're looking at.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Okay. Would you be willing to table that information with the committee in a written format?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: Absolutely, Madam Vice-Chair, we can provide information around quality assurance with our agents at the call centre.

As Mr. Orr mentioned, we do record 100% of the calls, and we are able to track not only the sort of quantitative pieces of that, but we are also able to provide agents with feedback on the tone that they use with callers, and their capacity to provide helpful and respectful advice.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Do you have a proactive quality assurance process for that, or is it just reactive?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: We do have a proactive process.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Great.

One of the complaints that I get in my office is that when people phone the call centre, it seems that the algorithm the agents are driving to is to get an email address so that template information can be provided. Where my office gets burdened with it is: “They didn't answer my question; they just provided me with a template.”

Can you tell us a bit more on why that process is there as part of your service delivery algorithm?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: Yes, Madam Vice-Chair, that process is there because a decision was made at one point that in order to deal with a very, very high volume of calls and our desire to help those clients who were really in a difficult situation and had applications that were beyond processing times and needed the attention of agents, we would try to use our website to provide those clients who were looking for standard case status information the ability to do that via the web.

What we have found though, and certainly the work that we did on the design challenge this year has led us to insights in this manner and to change our approach completely with those clients, was that it wasn't at all helpful for them to go to the web to get that information. In fact, they were calling us back again and again. So, we were speaking with a client three or four times instead of investing that extra minute the first time to really give them the assurance and the information that they were looking for. So—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I guess I'll just close with this, and it's more of something to explore with my colleagues around the table. I think it would be really useful. I've been doing this for five years now. We want to be your allies, and we want you to be our allies because immigration processing works when we're all giving the same information and messaging and it's arm's-length and it's not politicized. I think there's often a disconnect in terms of what MP office staff, especially new MP office staff, understand as your service delivery algorithms, and there's really no feedback in terms of saying, “Hey, this isn't working”, because what we're getting are the complaints all the time.

I would just suggest that if the department, as part of this survey, would be willing to provide greater information on where your algorithms are right now, we could provide feedback as well in terms of where we see the friction points on that, and then hopefully have some sort of continuous feedback mechanisms with MP office staff as well, too.

I think that, for me, would have been the first step, before changing the call centre process, because at the end of the day, we want to be on the same team here. I'm not sure if there's been any thought given to that sort of thing, but certainly I would offer this up in the time I have, and as a QA process as well.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jenny Kwan): Thank you for that.

I am the next questioner, and there are seven minutes for me.

I want to follow up on the question around scope. I think, Mr. Orr, you mentioned the scope of the information that can be provided to the individual who phones in. Could you run through for us if there are limitations on what kind of information, the scope of information, that can be given to any one person who phones in? If there is a limitation on scope, why is there a limitation?

● (1645)

Mr. Robert Orr: I think that overall we try to be quite forthcoming, and especially we're learning that it's valuable for us to be more forthcoming as well. There's real business value from our point of view, but certainly far better client service as well to provide as much information as we can. So, overwhelmingly, yes, we are providing that information now.

Again, Ms. Lattimore might be able to respond more specifically.

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: Our greatest concern at the call centre is really to ensure that the individuals who call have the right to access the information in their file. We're doing the work that we need to do to ensure that privacy is respected and that we're speaking to the right individual. Assuming that we're speaking to the right individual, there's a limited amount of information that we wouldn't be able to provide to a client. One of the things we have recognized is that there can be inconsistency—and I think this is a reflection of training, which we've been working on with call centre agents—in what one agent versus another may provide. That's something we're addressing very carefully as we move forward.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jenny Kwan): If training is the issue, then I would get on to that forthwith, because we do often get information and complaints back at our office about people not being able to get information. There have been times in our own office when we have phoned in and have experienced delays as well, or they haven't provided us the information and we have had to phone back and they've said that they'll get back to us, and on and on it has gone.

Imagine what that would be like if someone phoned in and the information was right there and because of your digital system you could actually tell them that they were not required to contact us again to provide that information, to add that extra step. Often when they provide us the information, there's something else missing and then we have to phone back to get the information, and on and on the cycle goes. If they could get that information forthwith right on the first call, it would make life so much easier for everybody. If training is the issue, I would really urge you to make that your first priority, to get everybody up to speed to make sure they provide that information accordingly.

I also want to ask about quality control. Every phone call is recorded, so how do you do the quality control? How often do you do it, so that you can sort of figure out where the situation is going awry?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: We do record 100% of calls, and we have a client service unit at our call centre that reviews calls from agents at least twice a year so that individuals can sit down with their supervisors and learn. That's the proactive quality monitoring that we would do at a minimum with individuals. But of course we are also in a position in the event that anyone raises a question about a specific call, or in the event that we receive a complaint, that we can go back and review on a reactive basis at that point as well.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jenny Kwan): If you're doing the quality control checks twice a year, I wonder whether that's really sufficient. If you want to improve quality, you want to make sure that work is undertaken.

The other issue about service, and I raised it in my last meeting with officials as well, is with the inconsistent information that shows up on the website.

I thank you, Mr. Orr, and your department, for fixing my constituent's case. I really appreciate the prompt response to that. I would imagine, however, that would not have been the only time someone might have experienced something like that.

What kind of work is being undertaken by the department to make sure that accurate and not conflicting information is showing up on the government's official websites?

Mr. Robert Orr: Madam Vice-Chair, every time a change is made to the website, there is a considerable amount of work done to ensure that there is consistency in all areas of the website. However, it is a huge website and occasionally things do get missed and it's unfortunate when that happens. When something is brought to our attention, we certainly fix it quickly, but on the other hand, I think in the vast number of cases, we do get it right and it is consistent right across all aspects of the website. Where there are issues, there are client feedback mechanisms. People can let us know, and we take very rapid action to ensure that we rectify that situation.

● (1650)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jenny Kwan): Is it the case that every time there is a change, someone looks at every website and makes the changes accordingly? Even for the cross links, sometimes one link is related to another link and you have to catch all the links to correct the information. Are you telling me that this work is being undertaken every time there is a change in information?

Mr. Robert Orr: That is correct, and that's why sometimes it's frustratingly slow to make a change.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jenny Kwan): Is this standardized then? Do you have a standardized list of links to all of the information, and then it is a matter of the person who's making the changes to just go through each one accordingly? Do you have that list in order to make sure you don't miss any?

Mr. Robert Orr: Madam Chair, I don't think anyone on the panel here is in a position to respond with regard to how exactly that works and what the mechanics of it are.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jenny Kwan): Okay. Perhaps we can get that information back from the officials, then. I'm interested in that. If there's not a system in place to deal with that, then that's where you actually run into problems and where things get dropped. In the case of my constituent, it wasn't just because there was a change in a policy. It was something that had existed for some time and continued to be a problem.

Someone needs to make sure there's accurate information. That, I think, will help solve a lot of problems for a lot of people, on the side both of MPs and officials.

Mr. Robert Orr: Yes. I fully agree. I believe the mechanism is in place, but I simply do not know what it is or the details and mechanics of it. I think it's fair to say, though, that the sort of incident you have brought to our attention—thank you very much—is a rarity.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jenny Kwan): Thank you for that.

Ms. Dzerowicz, for seven minutes.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: You mentioned that some significant changes have been made in the Montreal call centre, that you have given more latitude to the front-line workers, that there's been a change in attitude, and that there's better morale. I just want to acknowledge that, and I want to say thank you. I think we're all anxious to make sure that works well.

That said, I know you've gone out and done the human-centred design feedback loop. Have you actually gone to the front-line workers, taken groups of them, and asked them, for instance, “How is it that you can help? What are your thoughts?” I know that when I'm not happy at a customer service thing, I'm yelling, pretty much, and I don't like that, but they must get it all the time. What feedback have they given, and how have you integrated that into improvements?

Ms. Michelle Lattimore: Madam Vice-Chair, we have in fact consulted with our agents. It was one of the first undertakings when we established our client experience area of focus in September 2015. They were expressing dissatisfaction. They felt they could not help callers the way they wanted to. That was certainly impacting wellness, I would say, at the call centre, in a way that we weren't comfortable with.

They have been our allies in making changes at the call centre. They have been very supportive to date of the efforts we have made to give them additional tools. I think soft skills training has been really important. We do provide our agents with 23 weeks of training. It's quite an extensive process, but we realized that sometimes what they really need is more training in how to talk to people, how to phrase things, how to question properly.

We understand from them as well that sometimes there's the perception that inconsistent information is being delivered, when actually it's because the agents haven't been able to get at the core of what the clients are really trying to ask. Sometimes that's a language barrier. We need to provide agents with tools to help them get at the core so that if clients calling us two or three times are asking the same question every time, the agent's understanding is the same every time.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I think what you're highlighting for me is that language really is an issue, even for people who have been here for many, many years. Often they just understand things differently, and maybe that's why they ask the same questions. It's something I will be pondering as we go through this study, about how we can continue to address that and better serve. I would just encourage continued feedback from the front lines, because I do think they know where they're at.

My second question is around the error rate in applications that come in. At times I hear that if people have one thing wrong on their application, their application is just set aside. They don't always have to start from the beginning, but in some cases it majorly delays their application. Do you actually monitor the error rate for each application process for visas, for express entry, for permanent residence, for Canadian applications? Do you actually have an error rate for each, and then what do you do with that? Do you say, “Oh, this has reached a high level, so let's look at the actual application to see where it is we're finding the errors”, and then actually make changes? Perhaps someone could address that.

● (1655)

Mr. Paul Armstrong: Certainly, Madam Vice-Chair, monitoring the error rate is something that we do very regularly, because the error rate can be indicative of a number of things. One is that sometimes it can be that our kits or application forms are not clear. As Ms. Lattimore has mentioned, in some cases where that's the issue, we provide that feedback to the individuals who are responsible for providing the kits. We say that they provide functional guidance. We do that because sometimes that's a very real issue where our clients can't understand. Other times, there is error rate because clients simply don't comply. Some things may seem simple to you, for example, making sure that the document is signed, or if we need the birth certificate, marriage certificate, which are essential documents to the application. We monitor that very closely in the quality assurance that we do.

In the changes that are being made, such as the changes which the minister announced yesterday around family class sponsorships, we're also as a department simplifying the forms. As Ms. Lattimore pointed out, the work that we did with OCAD University and talking to front-line staff is really leading us to try to simplify application forms, change, for example, the upfront requirements that we made. For example, Mr. Orr made reference to the fact that we are not going to be requiring the upfront medicals because we were in fact causing a delay because sometimes the medicals expired.

It's really a multi-pronged strategy. It's not just one thing, but it's a lot of things that the department is trying to do to really improve the client experience, improve the client service, and at the end of the day, to process cases more rapidly.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you, Mr. Armstrong.

Madam Vice-Chair, I'm going to give the rest of my time to Mr. Ehsassi.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you.

If we could go to back to what I would say is the favourite topic today, the hotline, as I understand in the previous exchange.

First of all, when was that hotline set up? What year was it?

Mr. Robert Orr: I think we're stumped on that one.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Okay, no problem.

Mr. Robert Orr: It's been there for a number of years.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: If I'm not mistaken, you've heard from everyone here that the hotline is very frustrating. It appears, truthfully, that the people who are operating it really see no need to actually assist and to make things more simple for us. I think you were talking about how the department did actually attempt to fix things several years ago, but there were challenges. Is that correct?

Mr. Robert Orr: For the call centre itself?

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: For the call centre, the department itself wanted to make improvements—

Mr. Robert Orr: We're consistently making changes. A few years ago, I guess one of the decisions was so that we could focus on the complex cases, we made a decision that we were not going to...if the case was still within service standards within processing times—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Jenny Kwan): Thank you, Mr. Orr.

That's all the time we have for this part of the committee.

We're now going to suspend for two minutes and then we're going to go in camera.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]