

International Research

Evaluation of Year One of the Pilot Relocation Advisory Service

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Introduction

The Scottish Executive's Relocation Advisory Service (RAS) was set up in October 2004 as part of the Fresh Talent initiative. RAS aims to provide a one-stop information and advisory service for people interested in moving to Scotland for work or study from other countries and for Scottish businesses looking to recruit from overseas. The Scottish Executive commissioned BMRB Scotland and DTZ Consulting & Research to undertake the evaluation of the first year of this three-year pilot.

Main Findings

- RAS offers information and advice services similar to services in other countries (New Zealand, USA, Canada and Australia). However it does so with fewer financial and staff resources. Unlike RAS, these countries tend to explicitly target specific types of workers.
- RAS has started to build good relations with key partners, through consultation and development of formal working structures with some partners. The service RAS provides is well thought of by its partners and the rationale for the service is supported. However, the limits of the service RAS can provide, because of its size, was acknowledged by partners.
- Many of RAS's customers were young males. Over a quarter were from India, with a further quarter from Poland. The majority of customers contact RAS by email.
- On the whole, customers were generally satisfied by the overall service they received from RAS.
- 39% of customers said they received all the information they requested from RAS, with students more likely to state this. Most other customers received some of the information requested.
- Although almost 70% of customers received a response from RAS within 1 month, 15% waited longer than this and the remainder did not remember receiving a response.
- 77% of customers agreed that RAS had some positive influence on their decision about moving to Scotland.
- Over a third of customers had in some way acted on the advice received from RAS at the point of the survey. However, no systems are set in place to record how many customers subsequently migrated to Scotland.

Background

The pilot Relocation Advisory Service (RAS) is one arm of the Scottish Executive's Fresh Talent Initiative. The Executive has established it on a three-year pilot basis initially, with an overarching aim to stimulate and support the in-migration of bright, talented, hard working people (Fresh Talent) who can make a positive contribution to the Scottish economy and society.

RAS identified five key target groups it hopes to assist:

- International Students
- People seeking employment
- Entrepreneurs and the self employed
- Scottish businesses looking to recruit from overseas
- Expatriate Scots looking to return home

In January 2005, the Scottish Executive commissioned BMRB Scotland and DTZ Consulting & Research to evaluate the first year of RAS, examining the extent to which RAS:

- attracts and supports "Fresh Talent" to relocate to Scotland;
- delivers its services efficiently, effectively and fairly; and
- works effectively with partners to deliver seamless services.

Method

BMRB and DTZ Consulting & Research used a variety of methods to gather evidence for this evaluation including:

- A desk research and benchmarking exercise
- Qualitative interviews with partner organisations (10 interviews), the Head of the RAS, and RAS customers (20)
- Analysis of RAS management information data
- An e-mail survey of customers (2950) who had contacted RAS up to May 2005. A response rate of 30% was achieved
- Mystery shopping of the RAS service. A total of 102 mystery shops were conducted

Research Findings

Benchmarking

Addressing the information needs of potential migrants is an important component in attracting Fresh Talent. The

evaluation found that other countries including New Zealand, USA, Canada and Australia provide information and advice with services similar to RAS for potential in-migrants. In general, the main aim of all such services is to attract skilled workers.

Two main differences between services offered by other countries and RAS are:

- Other countries more explicitly target specific types of worker; and
- RAS delivers its services with fewer financial and staff resources.

Partnership Working

Partner organisations are defined as those with which RAS has or should have a relationship due to overlapping remits and/or where synergies could be created by joint working relationships. Key issues highlighted by partners are presented in this section.

All of RAS's possible partners reported that they were aware of RAS.

RAS had explored ways of working with the partners and was taking their comments into account in structuring its service. In some cases, RAS was in the process of developing more formal partnership working arrangements, including identifying clear roles, targets and priorities, and assigning responsibilities.

The size of RAS presented some challenges according to partners. For example, in its first year, Fresh Talent promotional work led to an increase in demand that RAS struggled to cope with within existing resources and which resulted in a backlog of work.

Partners highlighted that the services offered by RAS were somewhat limited. For example, some partners considered that RAS did not provide the detailed information that in-migrants might need if they were to be encouraged to relocate to Scotland (e.g. personalised advice on employment opportunities).

On the whole, partners thought that RAS had the potential to help in-migrants gain employment in Scotland more quickly than they would otherwise, without duplicating service provision.

Profile of RAS Customers

In its first year of operation, just under 7,000 people contacted RAS. Two-thirds of customers were male and relatively young, with an average age of thirty.

The most common reasons for contacting RAS were work related, such as help in finding work opportunities or

enquiries about work visas, etc. (66% of customers and 44% of customers respectively). A quarter of customers contacted RAS about studying in Scotland.

Most (86%) customers contacted RAS by email.

In the first year of RAS, over one-quarter of customer enquiries were from people from India. This was directly related to Indian-based promotional activity in December 2004. Another quarter of enquiries were received from people from Poland. Enquiries from Poland were more likely than average to focus on finding work or accommodation in Scotland and to enquire about the recognition of qualifications.

Customer Views About the Service offered by RAS

From an e-mail survey of customers who had used RAS (those surveyed were based throughout the world), most customers, generally, were satisfied with the service provided by RAS. Around eight in ten customers were satisfied or very satisfied with RAS overall.

Around four in ten (39%) customers received all the information they had requested from RAS and most other customers received 'some' of the information they requested. Students were more likely than those seeking employment to report that their request for information was fully met.

An emerging theme was that customers would welcome a service more tailored to their individual needs. Customers who were more highly skilled were more likely to suggest this.

Another theme was that RAS should, as a priority, reduce response times. In line with the rest of the Scottish Executive, RAS has a turnaround target of 20 days. However there were times during RAS's first year when this target was not met. RAS responded to almost 70% of enquiries within one month. However, around 15% of customers waited longer than a month for a reply. The remainder said they did not know or did not remember receiving a response from RAS.

Impact of RAS

Most customers agreed that Scotland offered them opportunities to study and opportunities to work (with 84% and 65% agreeing with these statements respectively).

Contact with RAS had some influence on RAS's customers' thinking about relocation to Scotland. 77% of customers agreed that RAS had some kind of positive influence on their decision about moving to Scotland.

At the time of the survey, over one-third of customers said that they had already acted in some way on the advice

received from RAS. For some customers, personal circumstances did not allow them to take action – this included awaiting the outcome of visa applications, job offers, financial constraints, or commitments to family or studies.

The total costs of RAS in its first year were just under £521,000. A lot of these costs were one-off consultancy costs involved in setting up the service. Budgeted staff costs for 2006/07 are £260,000 and make up 50% of total costs.

Letter and email have the lowest unit costs for communicating with customers (£1 and £5 respectively). Telephone and face to face have considerably higher costs (both over £25).

In terms of very broad comparisons with similar services, RAS compares favourably on unit cost per enquiry.

Conclusions

In its first year of operations:

- RAS has started to build relations with key partners;
- Its promotional work has been successful in attracting interest from its target audiences;
- The majority of RAS customers are satisfied with the services they received; and
- Contact with RAS had a positive influence on customers' decisions about moving to Scotland

Areas for possible development have also been identified. In particular, both partners and customers considered there was room for improvement in two key areas:

- Providing a service more tailored to individual needs. Amongst customers, higher skilled customers most often noted this view; and
- Reducing response times.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Scottish Executive considers different scenarios for the development of RAS, including the further tailoring of the services and/or targeting of customers. Any consideration of scenarios should take into account resource implications.

This evaluation is the first attempt to baseline RAS's service provision. Future evaluations can therefore use this data to measure the progress of the service. It appears, at the moment, that RAS is largely delivering according to initial

expectations, but the real measure of impact will depend on the extent to which potential migrants are encouraged to move to Scotland. Due to the infancy of the service, there is little information on the number of people moving to Scotland

after using RAS. Future research and evaluation work could therefore target and track people who use RAS to see the impact that the service is having, particularly on those who subsequently move to Scotland.

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The report, "Evaluation of Year One of the Pilot Relocation Advisory Service", which is summarised in this research findings is a web only document and is available on the publications pages of the Scottish Executive website at www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch

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