

Living in Lancashire Wave 25 survey

Trading Standards

Prepared by Nicola Pemberton and Steven Knuckey
Corporate Research and Intelligence Team
Policy Unit
Lancashire County Council
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1 Executive Summary

This wave of the Living in Lancashire panel looked at the awareness of Trading Standards, and looked at the trading standards problems people have experienced and how they dealt with them. The survey was sent to all 3031 members of the panel on 3 June and the fieldwork ended on 10 July 2009. In total 2430 questionnaires were returned, giving an overall response rate of 80%.

1.1 Key findings

- Three in five respondents felt informed about their rights as a consumer (60% informed), though the majority are only fairly well informed (53%).
- Respondents are less aware of the county council's Trading Standards service than they are of their consumer rights (58% had only heard of it but that's all, or never heard of it), though older respondents are more likely to know more about the service. This measure has fallen since the last survey in 2005 when fewer people said they hadn't heard of the service (8%, compared to 16% on this survey).
- Areas of work that people were most aware of are fair trading (66%), protecting children and young people (65%) and preventing illegal trading practices (60%). One in eight respondents weren't sure what Trading Standards does, more so among younger respondents and people from a BME background.
- People preferred information to be sent to them in written communications like leaflets (57%) and local newspapers (51%). Very few people didn't want information on trading standards. Preference for the internet was higher among the highest socio-economic groups and among younger respondents.
- Most people expect it to be fairly easy to find information or get advice on their consumer rights (46%), though a third did expect it to be fairly difficult (33%).
- The majority of respondents have not experienced a consumer rights or trading standards problem (57%), people with a disability or living in council housing were more likely to have experienced problems. The problem respondents had experienced the most was around fair trading (33%).

- Those people having a problem, a third go unreported (34%). When they were reported, respondents mostly contacted Trading Standards (31%) or sorted it directly with the trader (20%).
- The majority of problems do get resolved (41% all resolved, 25% some resolved). However, a quarter of problems remain unresolved (23%).
- Respondents' priorities for Trading Standards over the next three years are to protect older and vulnerable people (55%) and children and young people (47%), and to prevent illegal trading practices (44%).

1.2 Recommendations

- Increase awareness of the county council's Trading Standards service by promoting the services provided, particularly among younger residents and among BME communities. Communication methods that could be utilised to give greatest effect the internet to reach younger residents, and local newspapers and posters to reach BME communities.
- Look at ways of aligning business plans for the Trading Standards service with public priorities for the service. Also, continue to provide support around fair trading because it is the most frequently experienced problem.
- Encourage people to report problems, as this is the best way to ensure they are resolved.
- Look at ways to further increase the rate of problem resolution so more consumer rights issues are dealt with successfully.

2 Introduction

Lancashire County Council has used Living in Lancashire regularly since August 2001 (formerly known as Life in Lancashire). A panel of willing participants is recruited and is approached on a regular basis to seek their views on a range of topics and themes. Panel members are voluntary participants in the research they complete and no incentives are given for completion.

The panel has been designed to be a representative cross-section of the county's population. The results for each survey are weighted in order to reflect the demographic profile of the county's population.

The panel provides access to a sufficiently large sample of the population so that reliable results can be reported at a county wide level. It also provides data at a number of sub-area and sub-group levels.

Each wave of Living in Lancashire is themed. Firstly, it enables sufficient coverage on a particular topic to be able to provide insight into that topic. And secondly, it comes across better to the residents completing the questionnaires if there is a clear theme (or 2-3 clear themes) within each survey.

The panel is refreshed periodically. New members are recruited to the panel and some current members are retired on a random basis. This means that the panel remains fresh and is not subject to conditioning i.e. the views of panel members become too informed with county council services to be unrepresentative of the population as a whole.

3 Research Objectives

The objectives of this consultation are to find out general awareness of Trading Standards and their areas of work in Lancashire, look at the trading standards problems people have experienced and how they dealt with them, and to find out their priorities for the future of the service.

4 Methodology

This wave of Living in Lancashire research was sent to 3031 members of the panel on 3 June. A reminder was sent on the 24 June, and the fieldwork ended on 10 July 2009.

In total 2430 questionnaires were returned, giving an overall response rate of 80%.

All data are weighted by age, ethnicity and district to reflect the Lancashire overall population, and figures are based on all respondents unless otherwise stated. The weighted responses have been scaled to match the effective response of 2091, which is the equivalent size of the data if it had not been weighted and was a perfect random sample.

4.1 Limitations

The table below shows the sample tolerances that apply to the results in this survey. Sampling tolerances vary with the size of the sample as well as the percentage results.

| Number of respondents | 50/50 + / - | 30/70 + / - | 10/90 + / - |
|-----------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| 50 | 14% | 13% | 8% |
| 100 | 10% | 9% | 6% |
| 200 | 7% | 6% | 4% |
| 500 | 4% | 4% | 3% |
| 1000 | 3% | 3% | 2% |
| 2000 | 2% | 2% | 1% |

On a question where 50% of the people in a sample of 1000 respond with a particular answer, the chance are 95 out of 100 that the answer would be between 47% and 53% (ie +/- 3%), versus a complete coverage of the entire Lancashire population using the same procedure.

In charts or tables where responses do not add up to 100%, this is due to multiple responses or computer rounding.

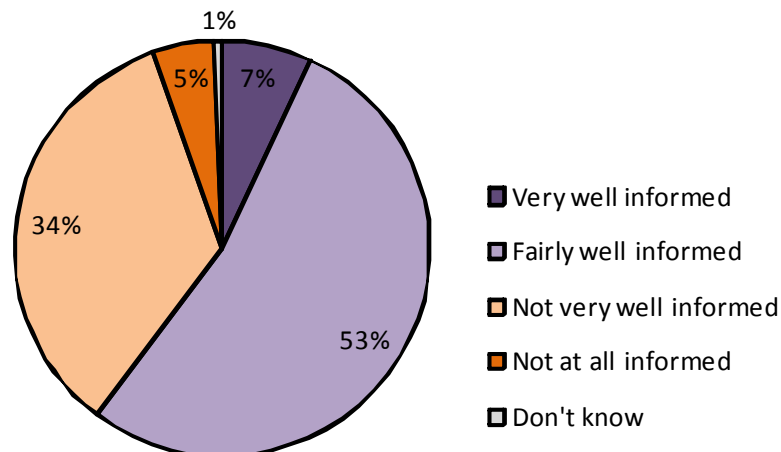
5 Main Research Findings

5.1 Awareness of Trading Standards in Lancashire

The first questions on the questionnaire looked at levels of awareness among Lancashire residents of the Trading Standards service. The first question asked respondents how well informed they felt about their rights as a consumer. Examples given were if people know their entitlements if they've bought a faulty product or experienced a poor service.

Three in five respondents felt informed about their consumer rights (60%), though the majority only felt fairly well informed (53%). Few people felt not at all informed (5%), and a third didn't feel very well informed (34%).

Chart 1 - How well informed do you feel about your rights as a consumer? For example, knowing what you are entitled to if something you have bought is faulty or a service is poor.



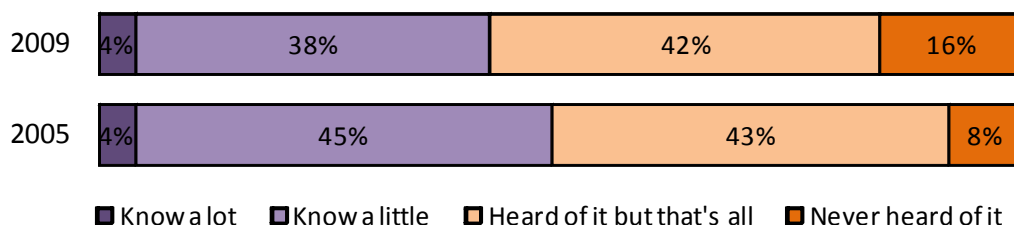
Base: All respondents (unweighted 2404, weighted 2076)

There were no differences in how informed residents feel about their rights as a consumer by different demographic types or geographic location.

When asked specifically about the county council's trading standards service, respondents were less aware of the service than they were of their consumer rights. There are more respondents who say they don't know anything about trading standards (58% heard of it but that's all, or never heard of it) than are know something about the service (42% know a little or a lot).

This question was also asked on a previous Living in Lancashire survey in 2005. The main difference between the two surveys was that more people now say they haven't heard of trading standards (16%) compared to four years ago (8%).

Chart 2 - How much would you say you know about Lancashire County Council's Trading Standards?



Base: All respondents (unweighted 2409, weighted 2080)

Knowledge of Trading Standards does vary according to respondent's age. It is older residents who are more likely to know at least a little about the county council's Trading Standards service (47% of people aged 45 and over know a little or a lot).

The areas of work of the trading standards team respondents were most aware of are fair trading (66%), protecting children and young people (65%), preventing illegal trading practices (60%) and promoting health and wellbeing (56%). Almost one in eight people thought that trading standards covered none of these areas (13%).

Chart 3 - Lancashire County Council Trading Standards service covers a wide variety of areas. Which of the following areas were you aware are covered by trading standards?



Base: All respondents (unweighted 2326, weighted 2012)

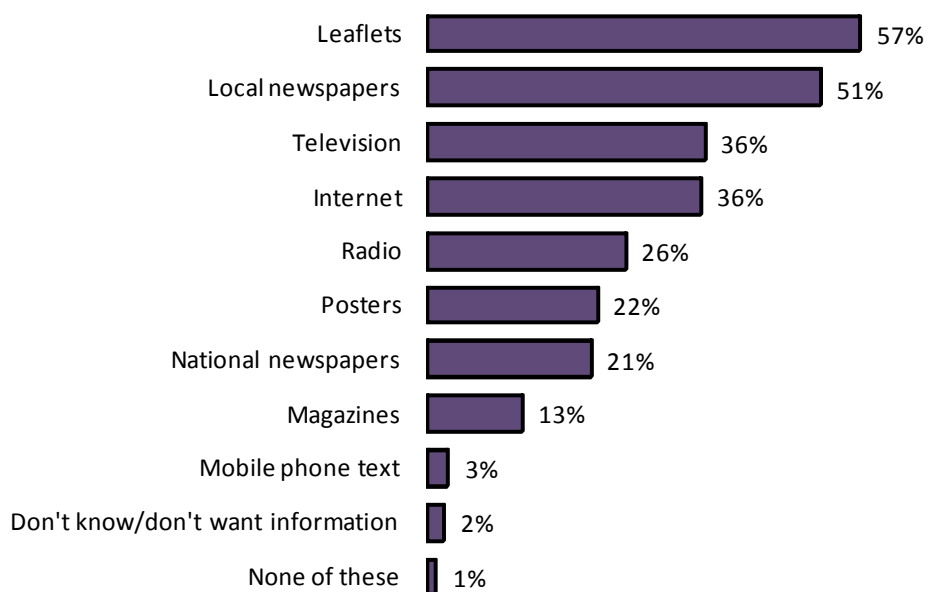
Awareness of trading standards services reflects respondents' knowledge of the service. It is lowest among younger age groups as the 16 to 24 age group were more likely to say that Trading Standards covered none of the areas listed (43%), as are respondents from a BME background (24%). The over 60 age group were more likely to say the service covered many of the areas listed, particularly protecting the environment (50%) and rural issues (45%). People with a disability were also more likely to be aware of the areas covered, possibly related to their experiences of experiencing more consumer problems. Respondents from the lowest socio-economic groups (see the appendix for a description of these) were more likely to say Trading Standards deals with rural issues (C2 43%, DE 40%).

Residents of Burnley district were also less likely to say that fair trading was in the remit of Trading Standards (49%).

5.2 Promotion of Trading Standards

The panel were asked how they would prefer to receive information on consumer protection and other trading standards services. The most popular forms of communications were written communications in leaflets (57%) and local newspapers (51%). Very few people said they didn't want information (2%) or none of these (1%).

Chart 4 - From which, if any, of the following sources would you prefer to receive information on consumer protection and other trading standards services?



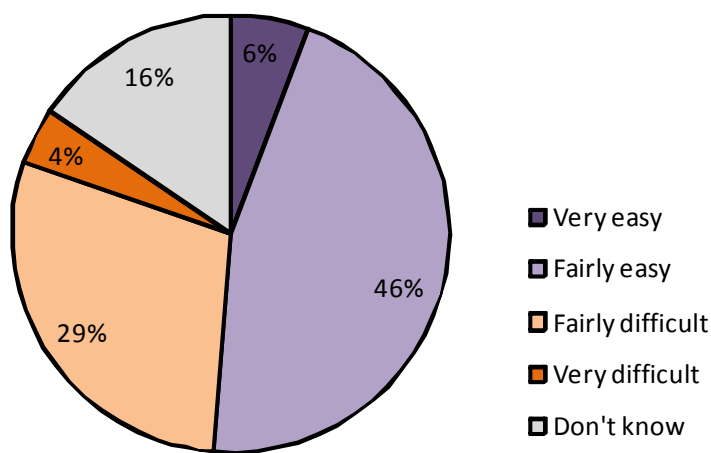
Base: All respondents (unweighted 2397, weighted 2065)

Again there are differences among demographic groups. Preference for using the internet to find out about trading standards is related to age and socio-economic group. Older respondents were less likely to prefer the internet (17% for the over 60s), and the highest socio-economic groups were more likely to give it as a preferred communication method (AB 47%, C1 40%). Preference for newspapers also differs, the over 45s and men are more likely to use national newspapers (45-59 group 26%, 60+ group 29%, 25% men), whereas respondents from a BME background prefer local newspapers (68%, only 11% stating national newspapers). Respondents from a BME background were also more likely to prefer posters and text messages as a form of communication (35% and 16% respectively).

The only geographic difference was a lower preference for local newspapers among Fylde residents (34%) compared to four other districts.

Most people think that it is easy to find information or get advice about their entitlements if they are sold a faulty product or receive a poor service (6% very easy, 46% fairly easy). One in six people didn't know (16%) perhaps because they haven't had cause to look for it. However, a third did expect to find it difficult to get information or advice (4% very difficult, 29% fairly difficult).

Chart 5 - How easy or difficult do you think it is to get information or advice about what you are entitled to if you are sold a faulty product, or receive a poor service?



Base: All respondents (unweighted 2560, weighted 2188)

The only significant difference in perceptions was that respondents' from a BME background were more likely to say that getting information or advice would be fairly difficult (45%).

5.3 Prevalence of trading standards problems

The key areas of work of the trading standards service were used to assess how many people have experienced problems with them. Only a third of respondents said that they hadn't experienced any problems (32%), however less than half of respondents answered this question. By far the biggest issue was problems around fair trading, such as dealing with postal scams and regulating trade to ensure fair and correctly described goods and services (33%). One in five people had also experienced problems around community safety and engagement (eg safe storage of goods, 22%) and protecting older and vulnerable people (eg rogue traders' cold calling, 22%).

Chart 6 - Which of the following areas have you experienced a problem with?



Base: All respondents (unweighted 844, weighted 766)

It was people over 60 years old who were more likely to say they had experienced a problem in the area of protecting older and vulnerable people (40%). Whereas respondents from a BME background were more likely to say they've experienced a problem in the areas of community safety and engagement (48%), preventing illegal trading practices (30%) and rural issues (30%).

The next question investigated how people deal with consumer rights problems when they arise. This question is perhaps a better measure for how many people have experienced problems because more respondents answered the question. Three in five people said they haven't had a consumer rights or trading standards problem (57%).

Chart 7 - Proportion of respondents experiencing a trading standards problem¹



Base: All respondents (unweighted 2035, weighted 1750)

The type of person who was more likely to say they had experienced one of the listed consumer rights or trading standards problems had a disability (53%) or live in council or housing association property (52%).

The following chart shows who respondents' contacted when they had experienced a trading standards or consumer rights problem (ie excluding the people who answered 'have not had a problem' to this question). A third of problems go unreported (34% did not contact anyone). The most common way to report them was to Trading Standards (31%). Many respondents also sort the problem out directly with the trader (20%), and the Citizen's Advice Bureau is also used by around one in seven respondents (15%). Fewer people take a more serious legal route by contacting a solicitor (6%) or community legal services (2%).

Chart 8 - Who respondents contacted, if anyone, when they have experienced a consumer rights/trading standards problem.



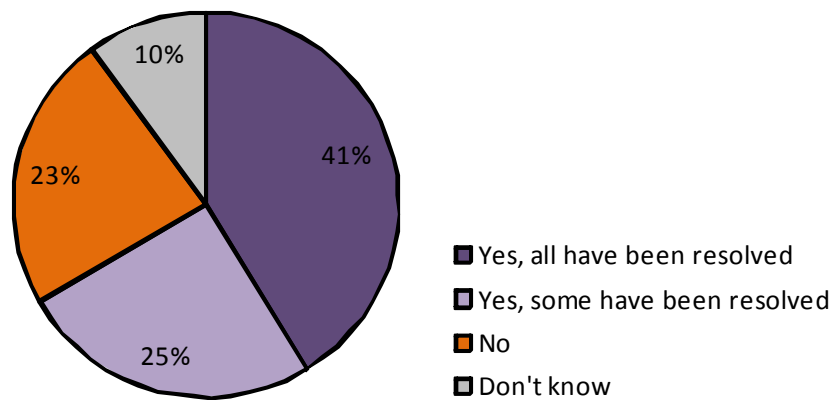
Base: All respondents (weighted 746)

¹ Any respondent answering that they have contacted someone, or not contacted anyone is shown as 'yes, had a problem' in the chart.

The only significant difference was that women were more likely to contact Trading Standards with a problem than men (33% versus 27%).

Those who had a problem with a product or service they had purchased were then asked if that problem had been resolved to their satisfaction. Two-fifths said that all of their consumer problems had been resolved (41%), and a further quarter said some had been resolved (25%). Almost a quarter said that their consumer problem hadn't been settled (23%).

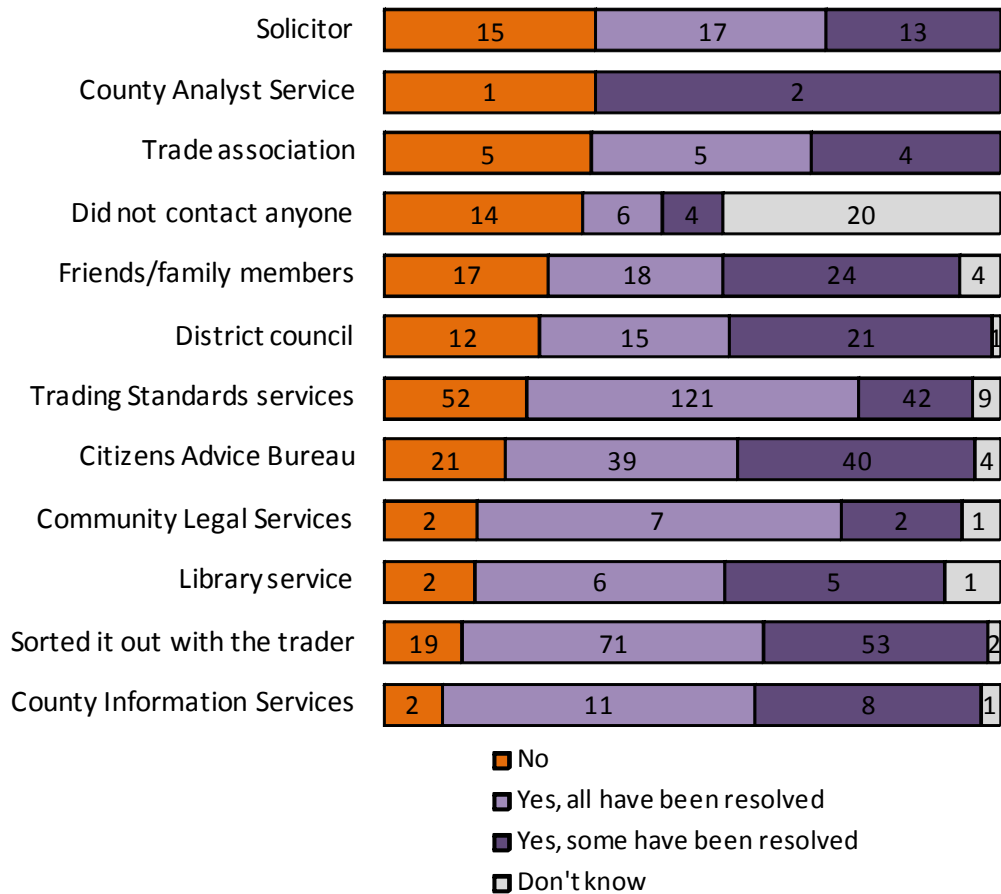
Chart 9 - Has the problem/s been resolved to your satisfaction?



Base: All respondents (unweighted 683, weighted 580)

Women were more likely than men to say that all the problems they've experienced have been resolved (48% versus 35%). The following chart shows the outcome of respondents' consumer issues by the person or organisation they reported it to. Those not reporting the problem were more likely to answer don't know to this question, though there were no other significant differences.

Chart 10 - If consumer rights or trading standards problems have been resolved shown by who they contacted about the problem.



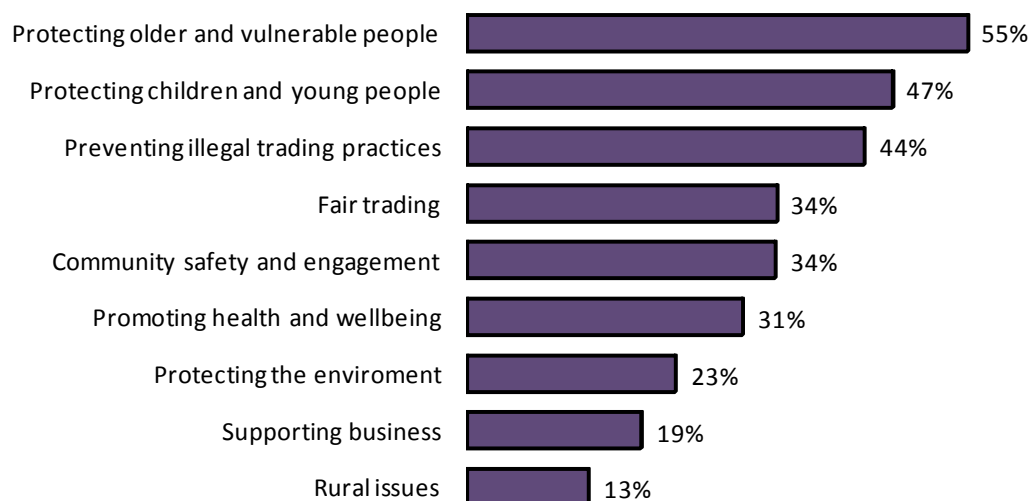
Base: All respondents (unweighted 614, weighted 521)

5.4 Priorities for trading standards

Following on from these questions all panel members were asked what they thought the priorities for trading standards should be for the next three years.

The top three priorities were protecting older and vulnerable people (55%), protecting children and young people (47%), and preventing illegal trading practices (44%). Although fair trading was the area most people had experienced a problem with, respondents didn't feel it should be one of the top three priorities for the service (34%).

Chart 11 - Which of the following areas of work do you think should be the top three priorities for Lancashire County Trading Standards over the next 3 years?



Base: All respondents (unweighted 2399, weighted 2073)

There are some differences in respondents' priority areas for the work of Trading Standards in the next three years. The over 60 age group and white respondents were more likely to want protecting older and vulnerable people as a high priority (67% and 56% respectively). The youngest age group (16 to 24) and those living in council or housing association property wanted promoting health and wellbeing to be a higher priority (48% and 42% respectively). Younger respondents also wanted supporting business to be a higher priority than the older respondents (16 to 24 years 30%, 25 to 44 years 24%).

6 Appendix

6.1 Socio-Economic-Group Definitions

These groups are based on Market Research Society definitions and on the respondent. They are graded as A, B, C1, C2, D and E.

Group A

- Professional people, very senior managers in business or commerce or top-level civil servants.
- Retired people, previously grade A, and their widows

Group B

- Middle management executives in large organisations, with appropriate qualifications
- Principle officers in local government and civil service
- Top management or owners of small business concerns, educational and service establishments
- Retired people previously grade B, and their widows

Group C1

- Junior management, owners of small establishments, and all others in non-manual positions
- Jobs in this group have very varied responsibilities and educational requirements
- Retired people, previously grade C1, and their widows

Group C2

- All skilled manual workers, and those manual workers for responsibility for other people
- Retired people, previously grade C2, with pensions from their job
- Widows, if receiving pensions from their late partner's job

Group D

- All semi skilled and unskilled manual workers, and apprentices and trainees to skilled workers
- Retired people, previously grade D, with pensions from their late job
- Widows, if receiving pensions from their late partner's job

Group E

- All those entirely dependant on the state long term, through sickness, unemployment, old age or other reasons
- Those unemployed for a period exceeding six months (otherwise classified on previous occupation)
- Casual workers and those without a regular income