

Mystery shopping, what is it all about?

What is mystery shopping?

Mystery shopping is a type of market research in which individuals are trained to observe, experience and rate the service they receive from an organisation.

Why are Solon doing mystery shopping?

This research will provide us with information about the quality of our services so that we can identify problem areas and improve services.

What does a mystery shopper do?

A resident mystery shopper acts as a customer and phones Solon with a planned enquiry, which monitors the quality of customer service. They then report back on their experiences in a detailed and objective way.

As we are working jointly with two other housing organisations, you may be asked to make calls to one of the other organisations to test their services.

For example, as a mystery shopper you may be asked to phone the office and ask for information about how to deal with Anti-Social Behaviour. You would monitor how long it took staff to answer, how you were greeted and how professionally your request was handled – was the staff member polite and informative?

You would then report back by completing a questionnaire.

How long will it take?

We expect mystery shoppers to take about 10 minutes to prepare for each mystery shop, about 5 minutes on the phone and up to 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire, making a total of 35 minutes to complete one mystery shop.

You will be asked to complete 5 mystery shops and there is usually a period of three weeks to do the mystery shops in.

How often will I mystery shop?

We aim to have up to 4 rounds of mystery shopping a year. We will ask you before each round whether you want to take part. You can stop being a mystery shopper at any time and you can also miss out particular rounds if you want to.

Will staff know that mystery shopping is taking place?

All staff have been told that mystery shopping is happening, but they do not know when it will happen or by whom.

Will I be identified by members of staff?

Neither mystery shoppers nor individual members of staff are identified in the report.

You will receive full training that includes hints and tips on how not to identify yourself to staff, although it is not always possible for calls to be anonymous, as customers phoning in are usually asked for their details.

If you are calling as yourself, the scenario will be written so that it should not be obvious that the call is a mystery shop. Scenarios will say whether you can be yourself for the call or whether to try and do it anonymously.

What happens to the information?

All the completed feedback forms will be fed into a database. A report will be produced giving feedback on customer service and saying what action will be taken to improve the service.

Mystery shoppers are not identified and neither are individual members of staff, although individual staff may receive feedback relating to the calls they took.

What skills do I need?

You will need to:

- Have a phone you can use for making the calls
- Be able to take notes during the call
- Be able to read and follow the questionnaire and fill it in clearly
- Be able to attend training
(this may be over one full day, 2 half days, or 3 evenings – please tell us what you would prefer on the application form)

How much will I earn?

Each mystery shopper will be asked to complete the training and carry out 5 mystery shops. If you successfully complete the training and return your completed questionnaires by the deadline, you will receive £50 of shopping vouchers. If you return your forms up to a week after the deadline, you will receive £40.

For future rounds of mystery shopping you will be sent the scenarios and questionnaires through the post and will not need to come to any more training. If you return your completed questionnaires by the deadline, you will receive £40 of shopping vouchers. If you return your forms up to a week after the deadline, you will receive £30.

The vouchers you receive are intended to reward you for your work and cover the cost of the calls.

We are not paying mystery shoppers in cash as this would have tax implications and might prejudice some people's entitlement to benefits.

We will pay reasonable travel and child care costs for training sessions.

How do I become a mystery shopper?

Complete an application form and return it to us.

You will need to complete the training before you can do your first mystery shop. We will let you know when this will be.

What do I get out of it?

Aside from the shopping vouchers, we believe that the training, support and experience you get from being a mystery shopper will help you develop skills which could assist you in the future career development and will:

- Build confidence
- Develop organisational skills
- Improve communication skills
- Develop interviewing techniques

Residents from other organisations have gone on to do paid mystery shopping for other organisations.

If you have any questions, please contact:

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