

*FRANCE, case 2*  
Marianne Charter

The following presentation has been divided into two symmetrical, complementary parts:

A) – Implementation of a common core of commitments to quality in reception by all State departments and agencies.

B) – A textbook case: the Val d'Oise Prefecture.

**1. Title of the case:**

Marianne Charter

***A- Implementation of a common core of commitments to quality in reception by all State departments and agencies.***

**2. General description of the organisation and/or project:**

The decision was reached in 2003 to set up a charter on reception for application in all State departments and agencies, known as the Marianne Charter. The Marianne programme was implemented in the following stages:

- April to November 2003: design and development of the charter
- January 2004: trial launch of the charter in six *départements*<sup>1</sup>.
- March 2004: circular by the Prime Minister requiring all State departments and agencies to upgrade to standards for application of the charter by January 2005.
- January 2005: general posting of the Marianne charter.
- End 2005: evaluation of general posting.

**3. The main content of the case:**

The Marianne Charter is a generic framework of commitments structured under 5 headings:

- Easier access to our services
- Attentive, courteous reception
- An understandable reply to your demands in a timely manner
- An answer to your complaints
- Listening to you for progress

Each of these headings comprises a set of commitments, some mandatory and others optional. The quality standards applying to these commitments are adaptable. **On the basis of this general framework and Ministerial instructions, each department and agency defined its own local version of the charter.**

The first three headings cover the various types of contact with the public (physical, by phone, e-mail and mail) and review the basic characteristics of a quality relationship. The aim is not to achieve immediate, spectacular improvement in reception, but rather to take more long-term action designed first to establish a commitment-based approach that would then foster conditions for continued progress. In other words, the aim is learning to be reliable, which may take modesty in the beginning, before becoming ambitious.

<sup>1</sup> The bulk of local public service by the French State is organized on the basis of the administrative divisions existing on two different levels: the *département* and the *région*. There are 100 *départements* and 22 *régions* in France.

The 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> headings are more innovative. The 4th heading aims at systematising registration and processing of complaints, and the 5th, at measuring and publishing results and at polling user expectations and satisfaction. Such practices, still exceptional today, are indispensable corollaries in meeting the "challenge of the commitment-based approach".

Beyond that common core of commitments, the Marianne Charter also lays out:

- Standard benchmarks for communication (a name, the "Marianne Charter", slogans, "For better reception", the 5 basic commitments and a visual identity) which are important in reinforcing public and employee perception of the charter's unifying, decompartmentalising impact.
- A methodological framework: methodological guidelines providing recommendations and advice on procedures to be implemented, guidelines on follow-up to commitments, guidelines on reception of persons in difficulty.

#### **4. The reasons behind the case:**

Improvement of user reception has been a recurring theme in State reform, reopened periodically for the past 15 years or more by one government after the other, whatever their political leaning. Yet the findings of a report submitted to the Prime Minister in October 2003 were at best inconclusive: reception practices are still far from harmonised and, despite a handful of undeniably outstanding undertakings, reception is often a secondary concern, if that. That was the background for the three goals in the "Marianne" programme:

- send a strong signal of the State's will to improve its relations with users
- harmonise reception practices
- build a consistent, common approach to improvement of service quality around reception, a powerful cross-disciplinary theme.

#### **5. The actors behind the case:**

In January 2004, the President of the Republic set the deadline for general application of the charter at the beginning of 2005. Further impetus came with two circulars issued by the Prime Minister in March 2004, followed by specific directives by Ministries to their networks issued between June and September 2004. Beyond these institutional guidelines, preparation for general application demanded considerable effort to accompany and involve thousands of people. The process was managed under the authority of the Minister in charge of State reform and backed by the creation of two networks:

- a network of ministerial correspondents (steering committee)
- a network of departmental "Marianne" project managers appointed by the prefects. They manage the process locally, in particular by organising meetings regularly with the department or agency correspondents to share information on good practices, report on progress and review difficulties encountered. They play a decisive role as a driving force behind the process. In addition, they are a vehicle for direct dialogue between central interministerial management and local actors.

#### **6. The process leading to success:**

The success of the Marianne programme resides primarily in the guiding principles behind its development and deployment:

- \* Building on previously acquired knowledge and progress already accomplished. The Marianne Charter drew on successful past experience for inspiration (commitments by tax authorities, reception charters in certain prefectures, etc.), more to unite such efforts

than to replace them. It also benefited from the findings of user surveys, which highlighted strong user demand for accurate, detailed information about the level of service offered, however modest. Users do not so much demand "always more, always better" as they want to know what they can expect and count on.

- \* Providing a common core of commitments which are not only unifying but adaptable to a variety of different missions and target publics. An adaptable generic framework was chosen as the means to reconcile the will to create a general movement with the possibility for each department or agency to make practical, realistic commitments.
- \* Following a collective process to encourage involvement by the different actors. The operation is carried out under the supervision of a steering committee which includes ministerial representatives and is run by State reform departments<sup>2</sup>. At key stages in the project, meetings were organised for consultation with "civil society".
- \* Supporting the actors. Production of methodological resources and periodic communication with departmental project managers undeniably helped ensure the project's success, as signs of determination at central level to provide support and make sure the actors are not left to face the problem alone.

## **7. Results indicating the success:**

and

## **8. The main obstacles of the case:**

General application was launched on 3 January 2005, and announced at press conferences held by the prefects in each *département*.

Today, the Marianne Charter is applied in more than 2100 State departments, agencies and jurisdictions.

Most of the mandatory commitments were accepted (>95%), with the exception of two: answering e-mails (86% acceptance), public information on results and progress made (73% acceptance).

Department and agencies showed definite signs of willingness, since two thirds accepted at least 6 to 8 optional commitments out of 13. The efforts made to answer mail more quickly should also be stressed: 70% undertake to reply within a month or less, whereas the obligatory (and legal) time limit is 2 months. However, only 45% undertake to answer e-mails in less than a week.

### "Mystery user" surveys.

In addition to local systems for follow-up on commitments, an external evaluation system was set up following the "mystery user" principle. A pollster contacts a department or agency (visit, phone call, e-mail or letter) claiming to be a user with a routine request and evaluates the conformity of the reception process with commitments made on a standard observation score sheet.

In each of the 100 *départements*, 10 or 11 departments or agencies were polled (out of 1021 in all). Each department or agency polled received 3 visits, 3 phone calls, 2 letters and 2 e-mails.

Each department or agency studied was rated according to:

- an "ambition score", calculated on the standard for the commitments made;

---

<sup>2</sup> The Delegation for Users and Administrative Simplification until the end of 2005, General Directorate for State Modernisation since January 2006.

- an "effectiveness score", established after processing the analysis score sheets filled out by the pollsters;
- a total score, equal to the sum of the ambition score and the effectiveness score.

On completion of the surveys, a detailed report on the main findings, listing areas of desirable improvement, was sent to each *département*.

The relatively high ambition scores (average 7.9 on a scale of 10) is an indicator of the departments' and agencies' willingness.

The breakdown of effectiveness scores is fairly consistent with intuitive understanding of a score on a scale of 10:

- 4% "very satisfied" ( $\geq 8.5$ ) and 24% "satisfied" ( $\geq 7.5$  and  $< 8.5$ );
- 37% "average" ( $\geq 6.5$  and  $< 7.5$ );
- 23% "fairly low" ( $\geq 5.5$  and  $< 6.5$ ) and 11% "low" ( $< 5.5$ ).

The highest scores were reported for heading 1 "Easier access to our services" and for heading 4 (processing of complaints). The scores for heading 3 ("An understandable reply to your demands in a timely manner") were very uneven, particularly in replies to mail (40% of the departments and agencies are reliable but 15% reply very late or not at all). The main shortcoming concerns the heading "Listening to you for progress", where improvement is necessary in the means of expression available to users and in public information about actions taken and results achieved.

The "mystery user" method proved useful in gaining a more objective perspective on the quality of reception by the State and in giving departments and agencies indications as to their strengths and weaknesses.

#### Qualitative evaluation of the general application.

A qualitative evaluation was made to more finely gauge the impact of the "Marianne" programme on local practices. It was based primarily on a survey of project managers and on on-site visits in a sample of 17 *départements*.

The methodological recommendations concerning the charter were unevenly taken on board:

- A minority of departments and agencies adopted, at least partially, the practices inherent in a quality approach (measurement, listening, consultation, training, work on organisation), but many of them formalised commitments that corresponded to their current practices, without any real intention of seeking continuous improvement;
- Generally, local interministerial mobilisation mustered around the challenge of launching the charter, but then frequently waned; some *départements* instituted more long-term action around reception.

In short, where local willingness already existed, the "Marianne" programme served as a catalyst; its impact was very widespread but often fairly superficial. Nevertheless, acceptance of the principle of explicit commitments marked a milestone. This was an undeniably positive result, achieved in only 18 months. The task now is to find levers to engage all departments and agencies in a genuine effort to achieve real progress.

The plan is to develop a reference system based on the Marianne charter leading to third-party recognition (via certification or a label). The advantages that can be expected from such a system are standardised methodological requirements stemming from the reference system and fixed target objectives (certification or label conferred) posing the fundamental issue of a rigorous approach to improvement. Local interministerial leadership should also be strengthened.

## **9. Main sources of inspiration behind the case:**

and

## **10. The most important lesson learned:**

The Marianne Charter was the first step toward answering a fundamental question, how to introduce a quality culture concretely in an administration covering thousands of different departments and agencies whose missions, target publics and professional cultures are extremely diverse. This programme clearly offers a source of inspiration in far-reaching work undertaken on a massive scale.

Given the scope of the issue, the "Marianne" programme is a good illustration of the need to strike a balance between ambition and realism in objectives, between the policy-making phase and effective management of change and between standardisation of references and adaptability to real-world situations. It also demonstrates the need for organisers and leaders to assume a position of consensus builders, listeners and teachers. Without claiming to reach solutions that are fully satisfactory to all concerned, they must engage in dialogue to give everyone the sense that their viewpoint has been taken into account in tradeoff decisions. If there is one lesson to learn, it is that rules have to be followed in meeting a long-term challenge. Although the Marianne Charter did not revolutionise reception in State departments and agencies, it sowed the seeds of sustainable, managed progress. The first round was won, but to make that victory meaningful, the stakes have to be put back on the table for a second round. That is the real challenge of the future "QualiMarianne" label.

### ***B) – A textbook case: the Val d’Oise Prefecture.***

#### **2. General description of the organisation and/or project:**

The Val d’Oise Prefecture was involved in the "Marianne" programme on two levels: in the application of the charter itself and in local interministerial organisation of the approach. It stands out for its excellent results in the mystery-user surveys. In fact, it achieved the highest "total score" of all 1021 departments and agencies polled, and the score for the Val d’Oise *département* ranked it sixth out of 100 *départements*.

#### **3. The main content of the case:**

##### *Local interministerial organisation of the "Marianne" approach.*

A network of 15 correspondents delegated by the various departments and agencies collaborate closely with each other under the authority of the Prefecture's Director of Resources and State Modernisation, who was designated to manage the "Marianne" project. This network comprises:

- the *département's* 3 subprefectures (Sarcelles, Argenteuil and Pontoise);
- 11 of its departments and agencies dependent on the tax authorities and on the Ministries for consumption, agriculture, industry, health and social affairs, employment, education, youth affairs and sports and culture.

##### *Implementation of the "Marianne" Charter in the Val d’Oise Prefecture.*

Among the most noteworthy features of the Prefecture's action were the emphasis on relations with users, efforts made in new technology and two specific projects – a telephone information service and a queue manager.

#### **4. The reasons behind the case:**

Continuous improvement of reception has been one of the Prefecture's objectives for a number of years, so the introduction of the Marianne Charter did not in fact initiate the process there, but rather rationalised and gave it better visibility.

#### **5. The actors behind the case:**

The Director of Resources and Modernisation manages the interministerial process locally, working with the correspondents for the 15 departments and agencies concerned (see B.3).

Many actors are involved in implementing the Marianne Charter at prefectural level, primarily in two directorates:

- the Directorate of Resources and Modernisation, and more particularly two offices: the modernisation unit in charge of its application and the information systems unit which implements all technology-related measures;
- the Directorate of Public Liberties and Citizenship (*Direction des Libertés Publiques et de la Citoyenneté*), which is responsible for all employees in direct or indirect contact with users.

Good coordination among the various departments and agencies is thus particularly important in ensuring effectiveness.

Trade union representatives are partners in the process. In addition, the 130 employees in the Prefecture's reception services were invited to make their contribution to the improvement effort through questionnaires and encouragement to continue submitting suggestions.

#### **6. The process leading to success:**

##### Local interministerial leadership in the "Marianne" process.

The correspondents for the 15 departments and agencies meet quarterly to assess their respective accomplishments in the field of reception, evaluate further progress to be made and pool their experience.

Resources are also shared in certain specific fields such as the reception of persons with disabilities. For example, the Prefecture has taken part in the "*Signes en Ligne*" experiment since 17 May 2005. This is a videoconference system which enables deaf or hearing-impaired persons to communicate face-to-face with a public service employee, via a webcam connection with a French Sign Language interpreter, for help in carrying out their administrative formalities. Although located at the Prefecture, the system is available for use by all State departments and agencies.

##### Implementation of the "Marianne" Charter in the Prefecture.

The user liaison officer continuously monitors reception, whether by mail, e-mail or telephone. The officer also compiles a weekly report on "Comments and Suggestions Sheets" filled out by users, by which they submit comments on how they were received and propose suggestions for improvements. A written reply is sent within the following month, and more specific comments are passed on to the relevant department heads for treatment. User suggestions are a key part of the process of continuous improvement in reception. In response to suggestions made in sheets, the Prefecture recently installed a change machine.

The Prefecture has also invested considerable effort in new technology: installation of interactive terminals for public use (internet and issuance of official documents) and flat

screens to make the user's wait more pleasant, or the experimental "*Signes en Ligne*" system mentioned earlier.

Certain problems were observed, for which solutions were sought to enhance effectiveness and adapt to user expectations. Two measures are particularly good illustrations of this policy and its success.

– SART (*Service d'Accueil et de Renseignements Téléphoniques*)

Muotoilltu: ranska (Ranska)

The Prefecture had a serious and longstanding problem with congestion in call reception at its various offices. In fact, the Val d'Oise Prefecture ranked last (placed 95<sup>th</sup>) in a nationwide mystery survey conducted by France Telecom in 2001.

To improve call reception service, shorten queue time and ease congestion in call servicing, a telephone reception and information system known as SART was created in November 2003. A single number with a voice server (08 21 80 30 95) was set up to centralise calls made to any of the sites (prefecture and subprefectures). When the line is busy, the call is diverted to the switchboard. The intended goal is to take calls before the third ring.

SART is made up of four stations: employees can access all files (except those relating to passports) directly from their computer workstation. It is functionally linked to the Directorate of Public Liberties (and not to the switchboard), which receives the bulk of phone calls. The switchboard manager and the director of public liberties do, however, collaborate closely.

SART receives 80,000 calls a year, or roughly 7,000 calls a month (7,813 calls in January 2005 or an average 370 calls a day). It is able to answer 93% of all questions posed by phone: out of the 7,813 calls received in January 2005, it dealt with 7,215 and redirected the remaining 598 calls to the appropriate department or agency.

With the implementation of the SART system, department and agency employees spent less time answering phone calls and were able to devote more time to handling cases. As a result, cases were processed more quickly and better.

Although the service was easy to implement technically, the managerial aspects required more attention. The process at the Val d'Oise Prefecture consisted of giving new recruits in departments and agencies general training in reception, followed by eight-day training sessions in each of the departments and agencies concerned (car registration, permits for foreigners, etc.), to thoroughly familiarise them with the types of cases handled. The advantage for employees, despite the high pressure due to the number of calls to process, lies in the fact that they have access to users' personal files.

– The Q-Matic queue manager

Queue management was also a recurring problem at the Prefecture, particularly with regard to seating capacity, given the daily flows of hundreds of people.

To solve the problem, in November 2003, the Val d'Oise Prefecture called in Q-Matic, a company specialising in queue management and customer reception solutions, to rationalise its system.

Renovation work had to be undertaken to create new front-office space as well as more seating capacity, in particular for pre-reception. With the implementation of the new computerised management system, large numbers of queues can now be handled simultaneously. A ticket is distributed to each user, specifying the average time he or she can expect to wait. Electronic display screens notify users when their turn comes and

indicate which window they should go to. Reception employees are notified of the number of people waiting, so that they can, where necessary, manage queue flows.

The time taken to issue official documents is recorded, on the basis of which precise statistics can be drawn up to quantify flows in departments and agencies, thereby enhancing their efficiency. The system also furnishes information on queuing and case processing time, daily and by time slot, so that staff scheduling can be adjusted for busy or slack periods.

The outcome was measurable improvement in reception quality and efficiency, notably in terms of management, the aim being to consider users of public services in the same way as private companies would their customers.

## 7. Results indicating the success:

and

## 8. The main obstacles of the case:

The results achieved by the Val d'Oise Prefecture in the "mystery user" surveys show that it was able to reconcile ambition in making commitments with effectiveness in delivering on those commitments.

	<i>Highest score out of 1021 departments and agencies</i>	<i>Lowest score out of 1021 departments and agencies</i>	<i>National average</i>	<i>Val d'Oise Prefecture score</i>
Ambition score	9.8 / 10	1.8 / 10	7.9 / 10	9.4 / 10
Effectiveness score	9.6 / 10	3.4 / 10	6.9 / 10	9.5 / 10
<b>Total score</b>	<b>18.9 / 20</b>	<b>8.9 / 20</b>	<b>14.8 / 20</b>	<b>18.9 / 20</b>

Although its track record is very positive, many improvements still have to be made.

Several projects are planned:

- \* Creation of a "children's space", because as many as a hundred children may be waiting with their parents on site during busy periods. The Prefecture has opted for a TV area to hold their attention while keeping the noise level down.
- \* Improvement of the queue manager to optimise its performance, combined with reorganisation of "service areas" (photocopiers, photo booths, beverage-sweets vending machines, telephones, etc.) to better meet user needs by determining the best strategic layout and by modernising equipment.
- \* Following the "*Signes en Ligne*" experiment for deaf or hearing-impaired persons, the Val d'Oise Prefecture has plans for a new project to make its website accessible to blind or sight-impaired persons by introducing voice readout software. Once again, this is a project intended for interministerial application, and the Prefecture hopes that other State departments and agencies in the *département* will be won over by the initiative.

## 9. Main sources of inspiration behind the case:

and

## 10. The most important lesson learned:

In conclusion, it is worth stressing that the Prefecture recently accepted to become a pilot *département* in a certification procedure specifically for prefectures, "QUALIPREF". Issuance and renewal of the AFAQ "Engagement de Service" certificate by the certifying body are

subject to precisely defined auditing criteria that set far higher standards than the Marianne Charter, which should be considered a first step.

This certification, which corresponds to a quality label in reception and offers a guarantee of user satisfaction, thus marks a decisive step forward in improving the quality of reception at the Val d'Oise Prefecture.