



Annual Report:

Complainant satisfaction with services
provided by the Police Ombudsman's Office,
2019/20



Published: 5th January 2021

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Introduction

This statistical report presents the results from the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland (*the Office*) complainant's survey. A questionnaire is posted to each complainant once the Office has concluded their complaint, it covers a range of topics including how they felt they were treated by the person dealing with their complaint and what they thought of the service they received.

The results in this report are based on the 2019/20 data, 269 completed questionnaires of complaints which were closed during this year. This is a return rate of X% for public complaints closed between April and January 2019¹ or a x% return rate of all public complaints closed during the year. The data is comparable with previous years. Due to a low response rate, caution should be exercised in interpreting the results.

Trend information has also been provided for the last five years in the tables in Appendix 1. Further trend information is also available in the accompanying excel spreadsheet published on the Office's website.

Official Statistics

This is an Official Statistics publication. Official Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Statistics. Compliance with the Code gives confidence that the statistics are of public value, are of high quality and that they can be trusted. They are also produced free from any political interference.

¹ See explanation in the Covid-19 impact for why the survey focuses on complaints closed between April and January and not the full financial year.

Covid-19 Impact

Acting on government advice, the Office closed in mid-March 2020 to all but essential staff. The impact was that survey forms were not issued for complaints closed during February and March 2020. As only ten months data was collected rather than data for the whole year, as in previous surveys, the data will not be as representative as previous years and thus will be of a lower quality. Thus care should be taken when comparing results from 2019/20 with previous years.

Revisions

No revisions have been made to this publication.

Breaches of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

There was a breach of the Code of Practice for official statistics prior to publishing this report. The statistics in their final form were published by the Police Ombudsman's Office in their Annual Report prior to the publication of this report, contrary to Practice T3.4 of the Code.

Performance against targets

Information from this survey is used by the Office to measure compliance against four key performance indicators which deal with improving service delivery. During 2019/20, the Office aimed to maintain or improve performance against its Service Charter and in particular aimed to ensure:

Target 1: 90% of complainants should report they were treated with respect

The Office failed to meet this target during 2019/20 as 80% of complainants reported that the member of staff they had been dealing with treated with respect.

Target 2: 90% of complainants should report that staff were easy to understand

The Office failed to meet this target during 2019/20 as 80% of complainants reported that the member of staff they had been dealing with were easy to understand.

Target 3: 80% of complainants should report that staff were knowledgeable

The Office failed to meet this target during 2019/20 as 66% of complainants reported that the member of staff they had been dealing with were knowledgeable.

Target4: 60% of complainants consider that the Office dealt with their complaint in an independent manner

The Office failed to meet this target during 2019/20 as 43% of complainants reported that they thought their complaint had been dealt with independently.

Results

The results for the next four questions are based on the 87% of respondents who reported they had spoken to a member of staff from the Office.

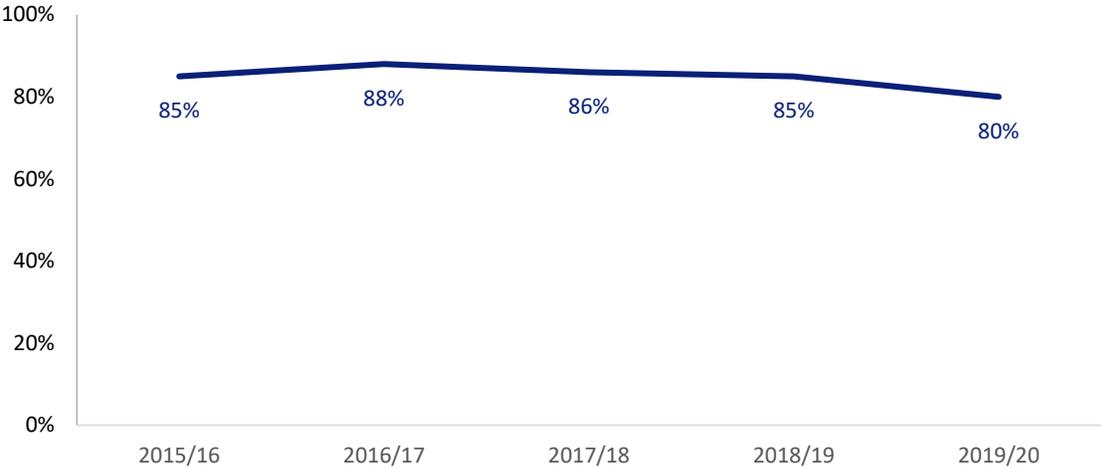
Complainant’s Perceptions of Ombudsman Staff

Treated with respect

During 2019/20, four in five (80%) complainants thought that the member of staff they were dealing with from the Office treated them with respect and 20% thought they did not (Table 1).

The Office failed to meet its target that 90% of complainants thought they were treated with respect.

Figure 1: Proportion of complainants who thought staff treated them with respect, 2015/16 to 2019/20

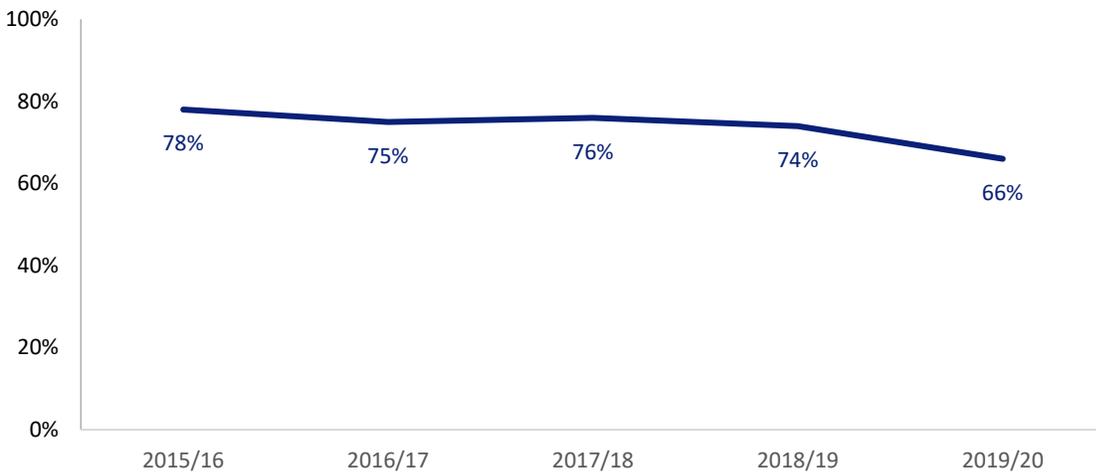


The results for each of the last five years showed that 80% or more of complainants who had spoken to a member of staff thought they had been treated with respect. A smaller proportion of complainants in 2019/20 thought they had been treated with respect than in 2016/17 (80% and 88%, respectively) (Figure 1, Table 4).

Treated fairly

During 2019/20, almost two thirds (66%) of complainants that had spoken to a member a staff thought they had been treated fairly and 34% thought they had not (Table 1).

Figure 2: Proportion of complainants who thought they were treated fairly, 2015/16 to 2019/20



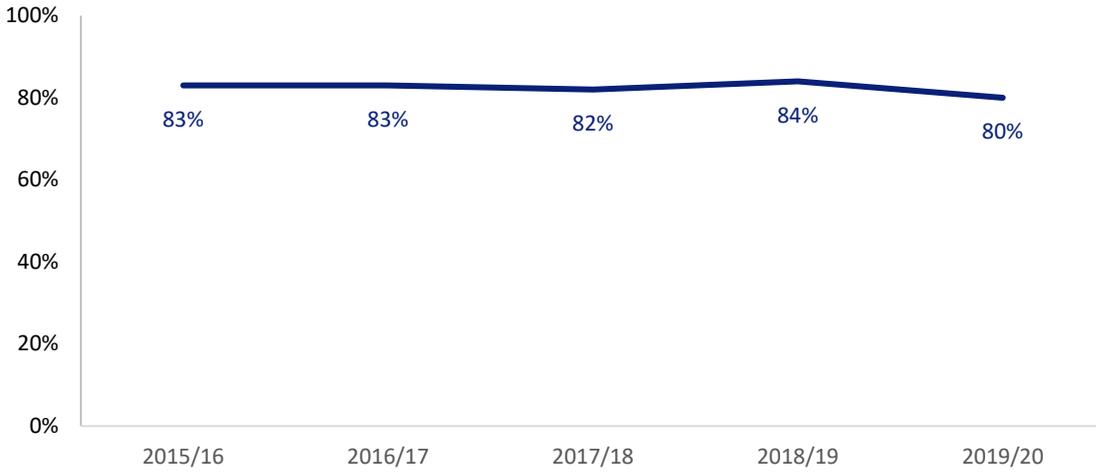
In the four previous years around three quarters (75%) of complainants thought they had been treated fairly, this decreased to 66% in 2019/20 (Figure 2, Table 4).

Staff easy to understand

Four in five (80%) complainants in 2019/20 that had spoken to a member of staff thought they were easy to understand and 20% thought they were not (Table 1).

During 2019,20 the Office failed to meet its target that 90% of complainants thought staff were easy to understand.

Figure 3: Proportion of complainants who thought staff were easy to understand, 2015/16 to 2019/20

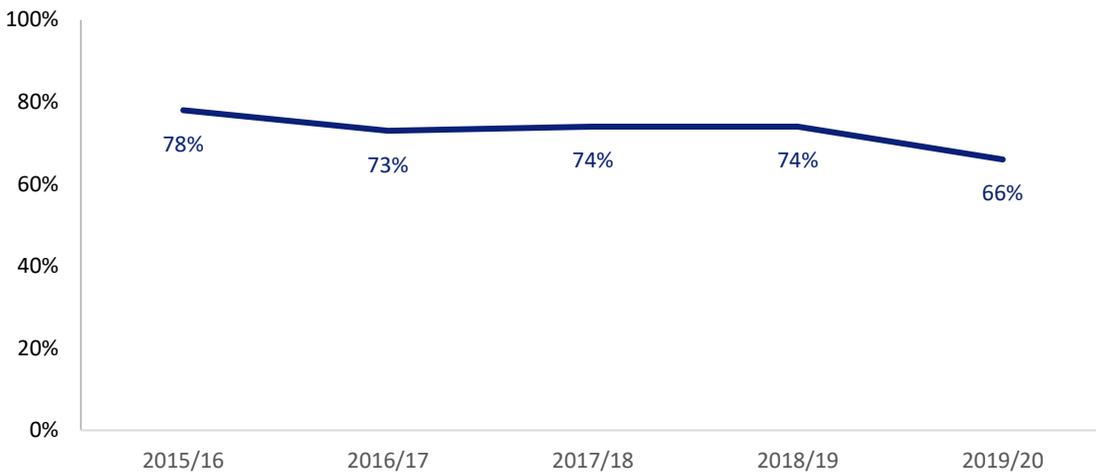


A similar proportion of complainants thought staff were easy to understand in each of the last five years, this ranged from 80% in 2019/20 to 84% in 2018/19 (Figure 3, Table 4).

Staff were knowledgeable

Almost two thirds (66%) of complainants in 2019/20 thought the member of staff they had spoken to were knowledgeable and 34% thought they were not (Table 1).

Figure 4: Proportion of complainants who thought staff were knowledgeable 2015/16 to 2019/20



A smaller proportion of complainants thought that staff were knowledgeable in 2019/20 than in 2015/16 and 2017/18 (66%, 78% and 74%, respectively) (Figure 4, Table 4).

Complainant's satisfaction with seven aspects of the complaints process

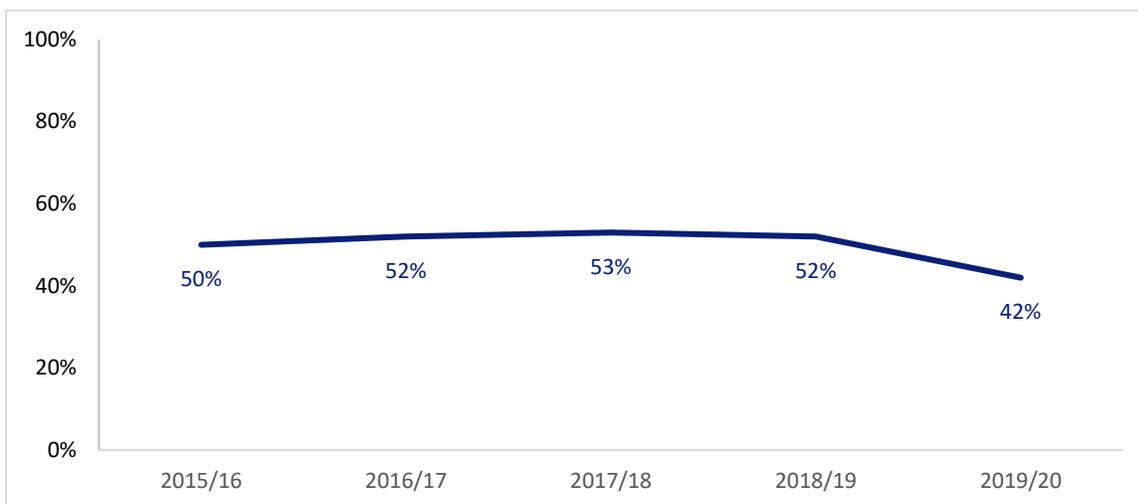
During 2019/20, more than half of the complainants reported being satisfied with the length of time taken to reply to the initial complaint and how clearly the process was explained to them. While none of the aspects of the complaints process had more than half of complainants report they were dissatisfied (Table 2).

From this section forward the results are based on all respondents and not just those who had spoken with a member of staff.

Satisfaction with the advice they received from the Office

During 2019/20, around two in five (42%) complainants stated they were satisfied with the advice they received from the Office, a similar proportion (40%) stated they were dissatisfied with the advice and 18% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (Table 2).

Figure 5: Proportion of complainants who were satisfied with the advice they received from the Office, 2015/16 to 2019/20

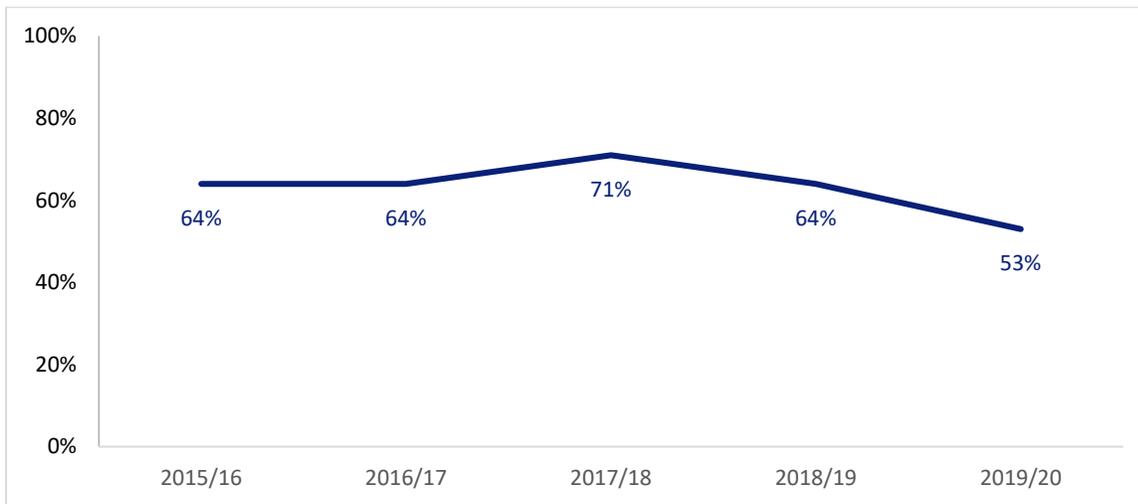


During the four previous years around half of complainants reported being satisfied with the advice they received from the Office this decreased to 42% during 2019/20 (Figure 5, Table 5).

Satisfaction with the length of time taken to reply to the initial complaint

More than half (53%) of complainants in 2019/20 stated they were satisfied with the length of time it took the Office to reply after they made the initial complaint, 29% reported they were dissatisfied and 18% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (Table 2).

Figure 6: Proportion of complainants who were satisfied with the length of time taken to reply to the initial complaint, 2015/16 to 2019/20

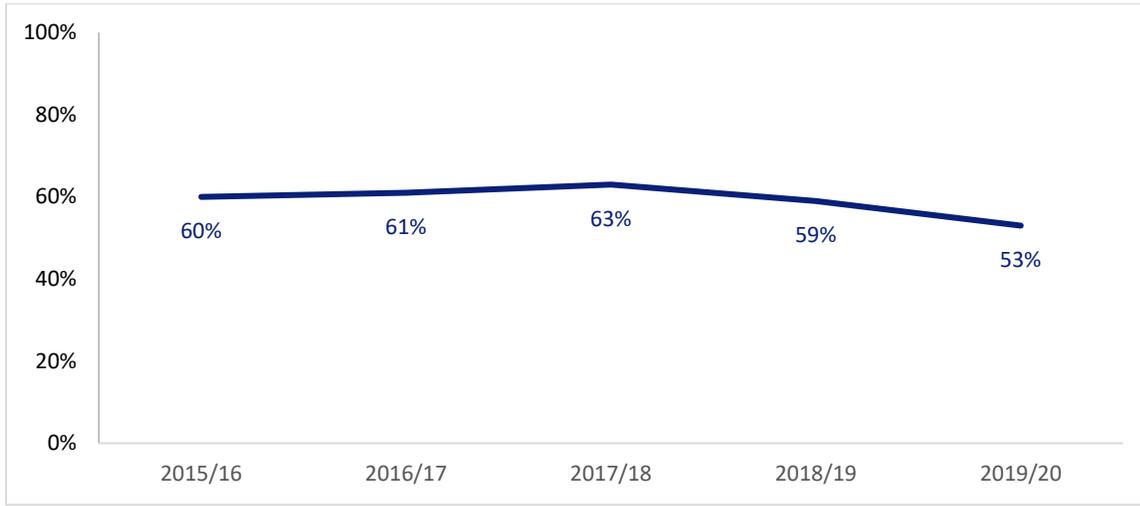


During the four previous years, 64% or more of complainants reported they were satisfied with the length of time if took the Office to reply to the initial complaint this decreased to 53% during 2019/20. Also satisfaction levels were higher in 2017/18 than in any of the other years since 2015/16 (Figure 6, Table 5).

Satisfaction with how clearly the process was explained

Similar to the results for time taken to reply, more than half (53%) of complainants in 2019/20 stated they were satisfied with how clearly the complaints process was explained to them. While 28% reported being dissatisfied and 19% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (Table 2).

Figure 7: Proportion of complainants who were satisfied with how clearly the process was explained to them, 2015/16 to 2019/20

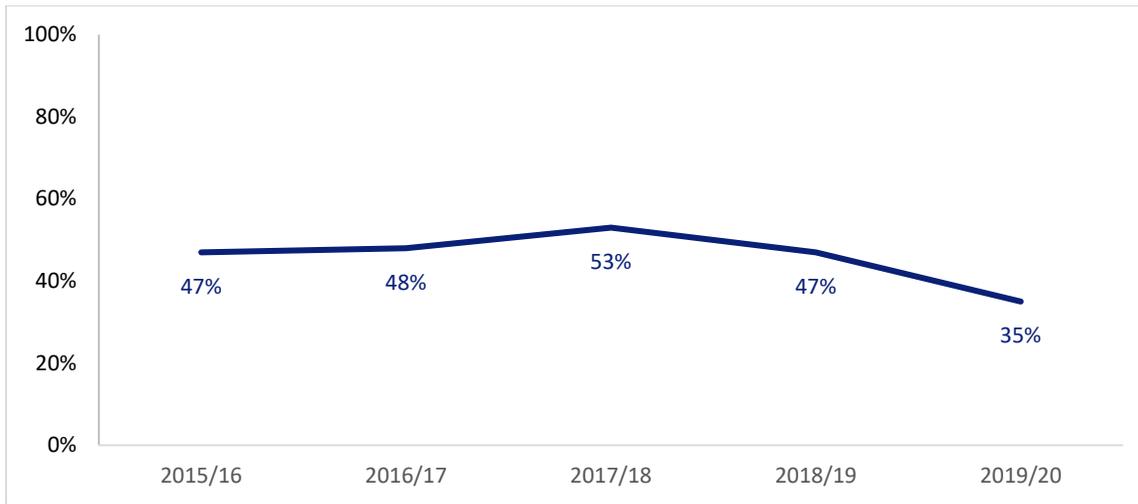


The proportion of complainants how reported being satisfied with how clearly the process was explained to them was smaller in 2019/20 than it was in both 2016/17 and 2017/18 (Figure 7, Table 5).

Satisfaction with how often progress of the complaint was provided

Just over one third of complainants (35%) stated they were satisfied with how often they were kept updated on the progress of their complaint during 2019/20 while 42% reported being dissatisfied. The remaining 24% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (Table 2).

Figure 8: Proportion of complainants who were satisfied with how often progress of the complaint was provided, 2015/16 to 2019/20

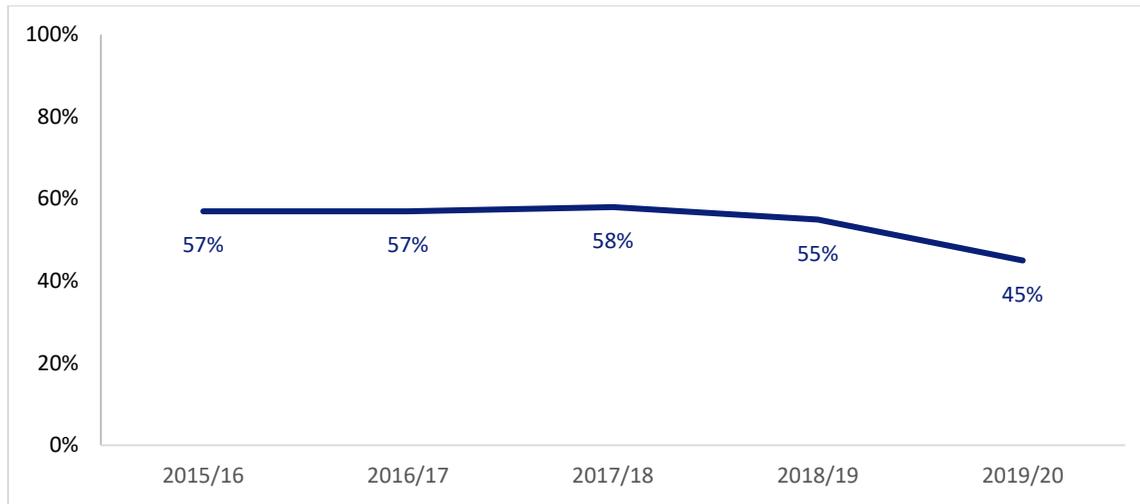


In each of the four previous years around half of complainants reported they were satisfied with the frequency of updates they received, this decreased to 35% during 2019/20 (Figure 8, Table 5).

Satisfaction with the clarity of the correspondence

Nearly half (45%) of complainants reported that they were satisfied with the clarity of correspondence during 2019/20, 35% were dissatisfied and 20% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (Table 2).

Figure 9: Proportion of complainants who were satisfied with the clarity of correspondence, 2015/16 to 2019/20

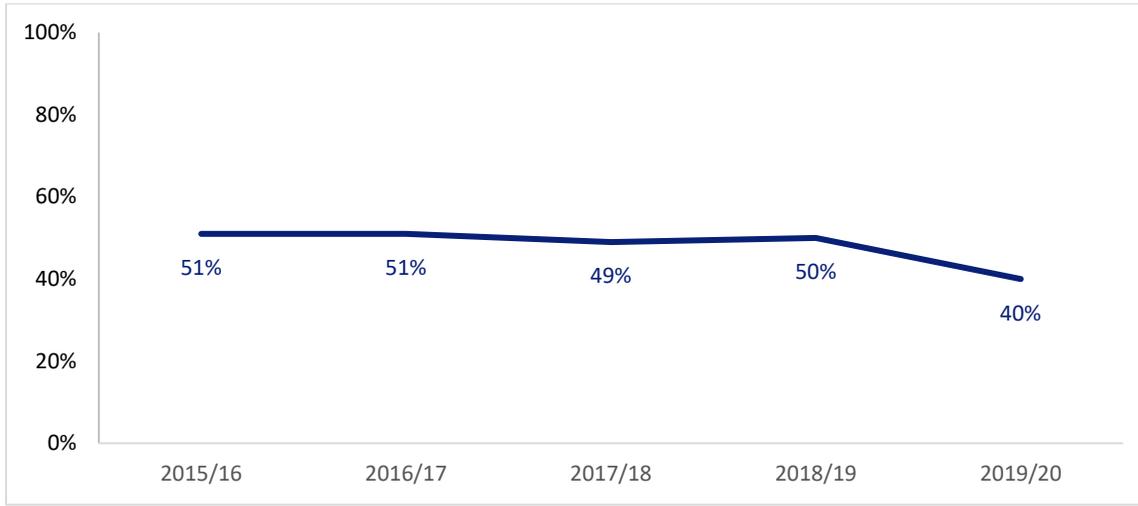


The proportion of complaints reporting that they were satisfied with the clarity of correspondence decreased from just under 60% between 2015/16 to 2018/19 to 45% during 2019/20 (Figure 9, Table 6).

Satisfaction with the manner in which the complaint was treated

Two in five (40%) complainants reported that they were satisfied with the manner in which their complaint was treated during 2019/20, 46% were dissatisfied and 14% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (Table 2).

Figure 10: Proportion of complainants who were satisfied with the manner in which their complaint was treated, 2015/16 to 2019/20

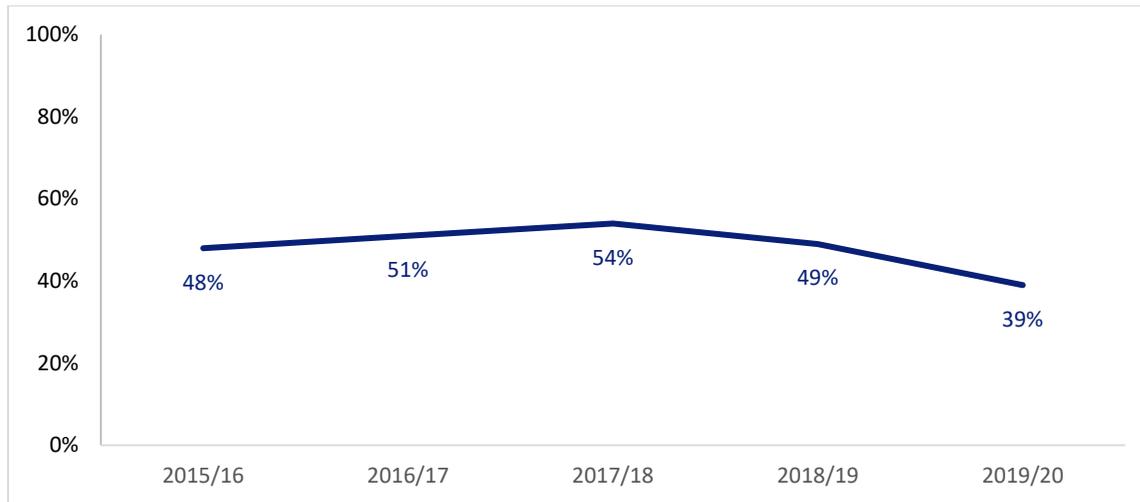


A smaller proportion of complainants were satisfied with the manner in which their complaint was treated during 2019/20 than in each of the previous four years. This has decreased from around half between 2015/16 to 2018/19 to 40% during 2019/20 (Figure 10, Table 6).

Satisfaction with the overall time taken to resolve the complaint

During 2019/20, almost two in five (39%) complainants reported being satisfied with the overall time taken to resolve their complaint. A similar proportion (42%) reported being dissatisfied and 19% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (Table 2).

Figure 11: Proportion of complainants who were satisfied with the overall time taken to resolve the complaint, 2015/16 to 2019/20



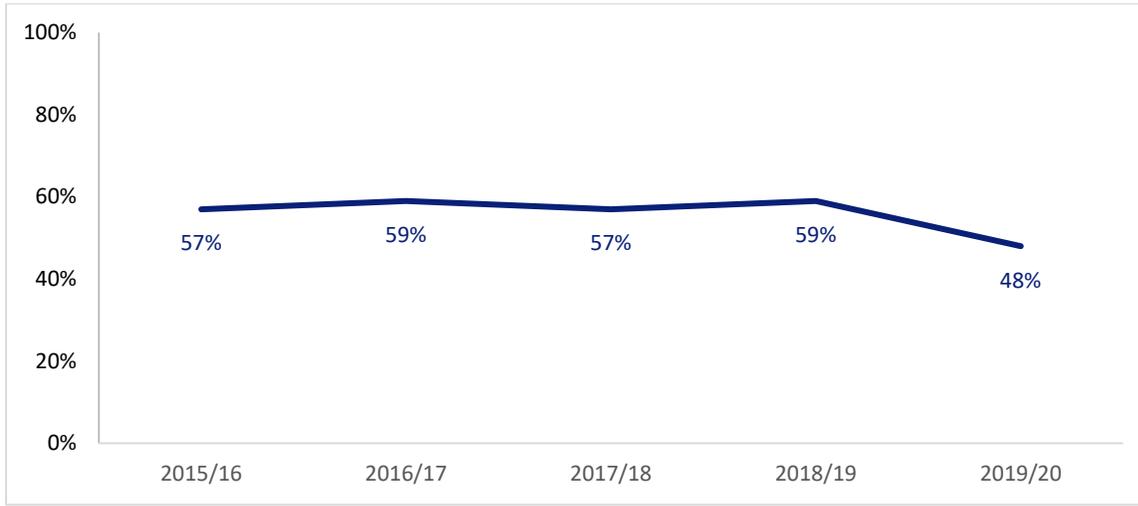
A smaller proportion of complainants reported that they were satisfied with the overall time taken to resolve the complaint during 2019/20 than in each of the four previous years. This has fallen from around half between 2015/16 to 2018/19 to 39% during 2019/20 (Figure 11, Table 6).

Complainant's understanding of the final closure letter for the complaint

Understanding of the final decision of the complaint

During 2019/20, almost half (48%) of complainants reported they understood the reason the Office gave for reaching the final decision of the complaint and the remaining 52% reported they did not understand the reason (Table 3).

Figure 12: Proportion of complainants who reported they understood the reasons provided for final decision about their complaint, 2015/16 to 2019/20

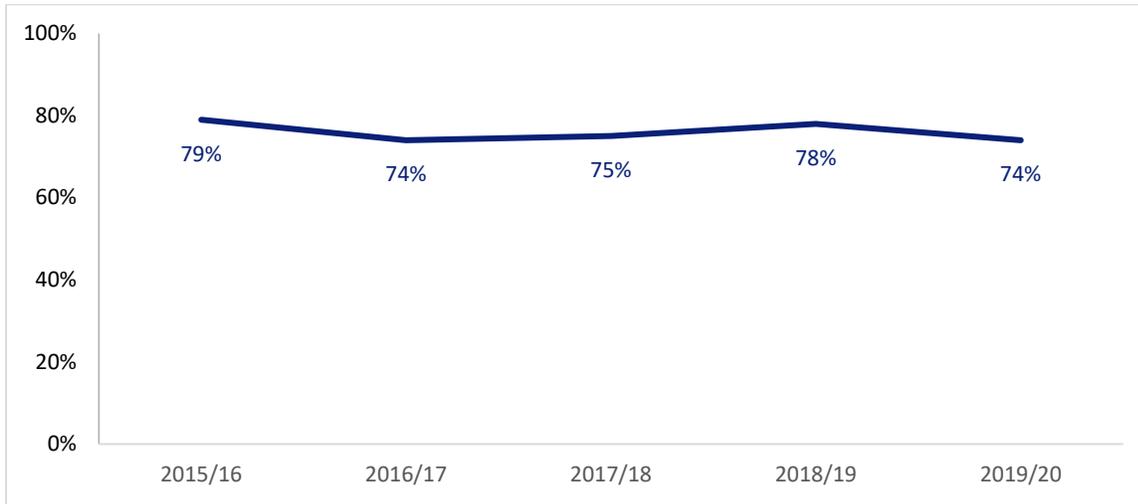


A smaller proportion of complainants during 2019/20 reported that they understood the reason the Office gave for reaching the final decision of the complaint than in each of the four previous years. This decreased from just under 60% in the previous four years to 48% during 2019/20 (Figure 12, Table 7).

Accepted how the decision was reached

Nearly three quarters (74%) of the complainants who stated they understood the reason for the final decisions accepted this decision and the other 26% stated they did not accept the decision (Table 3).

Figure 13: Proportion of complainants that accepted the final decision about their complaint of those who reported they understood the reasons provided for final decision, 2015/16 to 2019/20

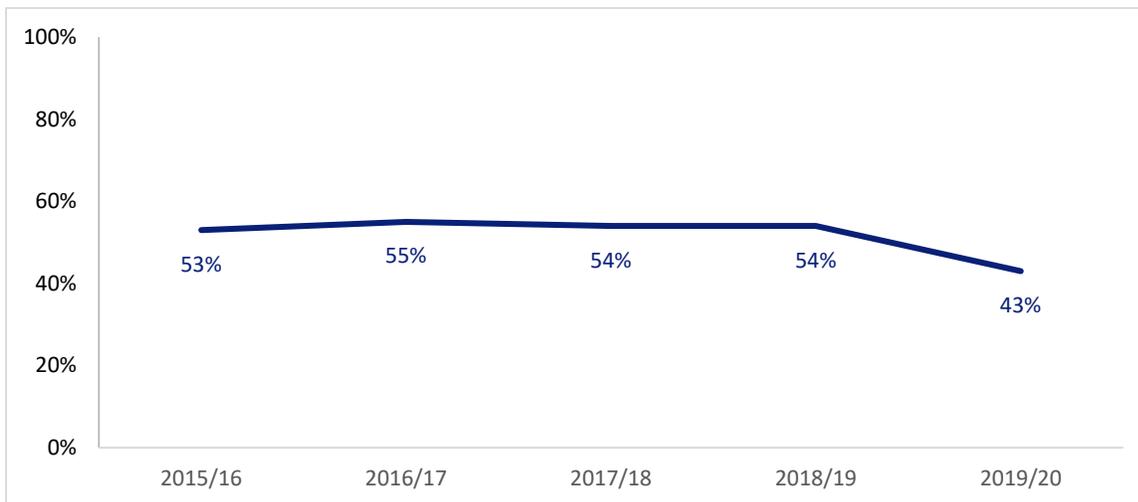


The proportion of those complainants who understood the reasons for the final decision that accepted the decision has remained similar across each of the last five years (around 75%).

Complaint dealt with independently

During 2019/20, just over two in five (43%) complainants thought that the Office had dealt with their complaint independently and 57% thought it had not been (Table 3).

Figure 14: Proportion of complainants that reported their complaint had been dealt with independently, 2015/16 to 2019/20

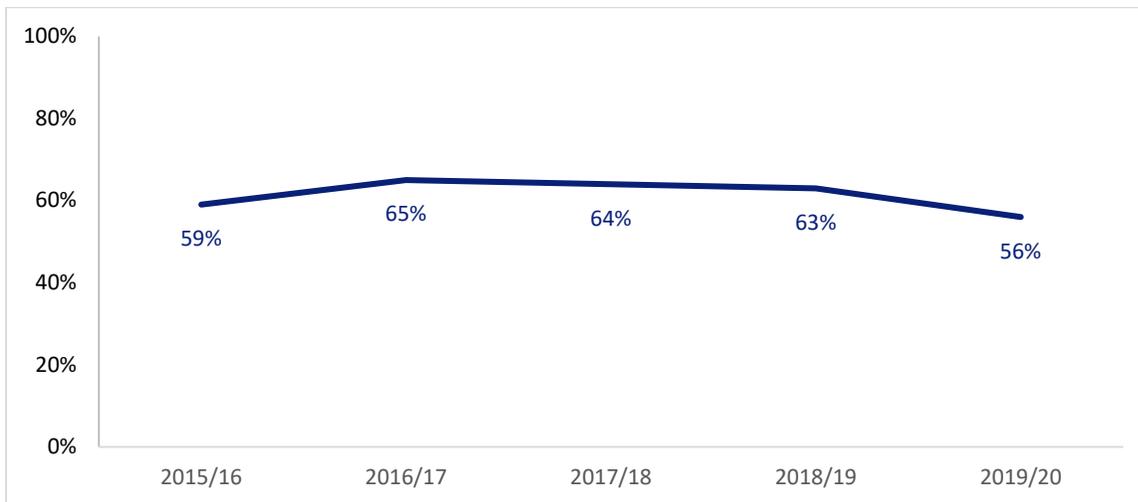


A smaller proportion of complainants thought their complaint had been dealt with independently in 2019/20 than in each of the four previous years. During 2019/20, 43% of complainants thought their complaint was dealt with independently compared with more than half in each of the four previous years (Figure 14, Table 7).

Contact the Office again

More than half of complainants (56%) during 2019/20 reported that they would contact the Office again if they had a new complaint about the police and 44% stated they would not (Table 3).

Figure 15: Proportion of complainants that reported they would contact the Office again if they had a new complaint about the police, 2015/16 to 2019/20



The proportion of complainants reporting that they would use the Office again if they had a new complaint about the police was smaller in 2019/20 than in 2016/17 but is similar to the other three years (2015/16, 2017/18 and 2018/19) (Figure 15, Table 7).

Appendix 1: Result Tables

Table 1: Perceptions of Ombudsman staff, 2019/20²

Perception	Yes	No	<i>Base Number</i>
Treated with respect	80%	20%	206
Treated fairly	66%	34%	203
Easy to understand	80%	20%	198
Knowledgeable	66%	34%	195

² Questions asked to complainants who reported they had spoken to a member of staff.

Table 2: Satisfaction / dissatisfaction with aspects of the complaints process, 2019/20

Aspect	Satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	<i>Base Number</i>
Advice received from the Office	42%	18%	40%	249
The length of time the Office took to reply to the initial complaint	53%	18%	29%	249
How clearly the process was explained	53%	19%	28%	246
How often you were told about the progress of the complaint	35%	24%	42%	248
The clarity of correspondence	45%	20%	35%	245
The manner in which your complaint was treated	40%	14%	46%	248
The overall time taken to resolve your complaint	39%	19%	42%	245

Table 3: Final decision, Independence and use service again, 2019/20

Question	Yes	No	<i>Base Number</i>
Understand the reasons given for reaching the final decision of the complaint	48%	52%	253
Accept the final decision ³	74%	26%	120
Was the complaint dealt with independently	43%	57%	246
Would you contact the Office again, if you had a new complaint	56%	44%	248

³ Of those who reported they understood the results given for reaching the final decision.

Table 4: Five-year trend information on perceptions of staff, 2015/16 to 2019/20

Perceptions of Staff	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
<i>Respect %</i>	85%	88%	86%	85%	80%
<i>Respect (base number)</i>	330	350	281	263	206
<i>Fairly %</i>	78%	75%	76%	74%	66%
<i>Fairly (base number)</i>	312	326	260	247	203
<i>Easy to understand %</i>	83%	83%	82%	84%	80%
<i>Easy to understand (base number)</i>	303	324	255	242	198
<i>Staff knowledgeable %</i>	78%	73%	74%	74%	66%
<i>Staff knowledgeable (base number)</i>	295	319	241	226	195

Table 5: Five-year trend information on satisfaction with the first four aspects of the complaints process, 2015/16 to 2019/20

Satisfaction	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
<i>Advice %</i>	50%	52%	53%	52%	42%
<i>Advice (base number)</i>	402	420	351	319	249
<i>Time taken to reply %</i>	64%	64%	71%	64%	53%
<i>Time taken to reply (base number)</i>	401	420	350	319	249
<i>Explanation of the process %</i>	60%	61%	63%	59%	53%
<i>Explanation of the process (base number)</i>	400	421	344	317	246
<i>Frequency of updates %</i>	47%	48%	53%	47%	35%
<i>Frequency of updates (base number)</i>	394	414	343	310	248

Table 7: Five-year trend information on satisfaction with the last three aspects of the complaints process, 2015/16 to 2019/20

Satisfaction	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
<i>Clarity of correspondence %</i>	57%	57%	58%	55%	45%
<i>Clarity of correspondence (base number)</i>	398	417	345	318	245
<i>Manner treated %</i>	51%	51%	49%	50%	40%
<i>Manner treated (base number)</i>	404	420	352	319	248
<i>Overall time to resolve complaint %</i>	48%	51%	54%	49%	39%
<i>Overall time to resolve complaint (base number)</i>	399	417	349	312	245

Table 7: Five-year trend information on final decision, independence & use service again, 2015/16 to 2019/20

Question	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
<i>Understand final decision %</i>	57%	59%	57%	59%	48%
<i>Understand final decision (base number)</i>	395	413	352	308	253
<i>Accept final decision %</i>	79%	74%	75%	78%	74%
<i>Accept final decision (base number)</i>	220	242	200	180	120
<i>Dealt with independently %</i>	53%	55%	54%	54%	43%
<i>Dealt with independently (base number)</i>	389	399	344	310	246
<i>Use service again %</i>	59%	65%	64%	63%	56%
<i>Use service again (base number)</i>	393	417	346	313	248

Appendix 2: Additional Information

Data Use:

The results of this survey are used to monitor and evaluate the service provided to those who have made complaints to the Office and identify any issues that arise in a timely manner.

The data are also used by the Office to measure performance against the targets in the Office's business plan which are detailed in the 2019/20 Annual Report and Accounts, which is available on the Office's website.

The data may also be used to answer enquiries from members of the public, key stakeholders and any other departmental body.

Data quality:

The survey forms are processed and posted out by the Statistics and Research Team in the Office following the closure of a complaint. The information on returned forms is entered into a dataset and stored electronically. A minimum of a 10% check for of the data is carried out by a supervisor to ensure accuracy. The data is considered to be of high quality.

This year, 1,821 questionnaires were issued and 269 were returned, this is a 15% response rate for all forms issued or a 13% response rate of all suitable complaints closed during 2019/20. As described in the COVID-19 Impact section of this report due to the lower return rate the data for this year is less representative and of a lower quality than previous years and thus care should be taken when interpreting the results.

Understanding the statistics:

Questionnaires are normally issued to all complainants when their complaint has been closed. However, in some cases forms are not issued, for example when the complainant did not provide their address. Questionnaires are not issued in the following circumstances:

- Complaints that have been closed as ‘duplicate’ or ‘repetitive’
- Complaints where it is known that the complainant has died
- When the investigation was a not a complaint from a member of the public (Section 55 referral, Call-Ins, notifications or a complaint made on or behalf of an organisation)
- Complaints that were dealt with by the History Directorate (complaints about the ‘Troubles’)

Sometimes a complainant will request to not be included in future surveys, whilst staff will try to encourage them to complete the survey, if they still do not wish to be included then no questionnaire will be sent.

Changes to the Survey

No amendments have been made to the questions during 2019/20.

During 2015/16, several changes were made to the survey to reflect the new service charter produced by the Office. New questions were added and some of the previous questions removed. Also during this year the Likert scale used for the ‘satisfaction’ question (Question 3) was reduced from five categories to three and from 2017/18 this reverted to five categories. Therefore, care should be taken when comparing trend information across this time period.

Conventions:

Statistics provided in the tables may not add up to 100% due to the effect of rounding.

Statistical significance tests have been carried out on the results and any difference are only reported where they have been found to be statistically significant at the 5% ($p < 0.05$) level of probability (two-tailed). This means that for any observed result that is found to be statistically significant one can be 95% confident that this has not happened by chance.

Figures may be subject to minor revisions and these will be notified in accordance with our revisions policy which can be accessed at www.policeombudsman.org

Further information:

Information showing trends from 2006/07 (where applicable) are available in the accompanying excel spreadsheet. Results from surveys prior to 2006/07 can be found on the Office's website.

Appendix 3: Questionnaire

SATISFACTION FORM

IN CONFIDENCE

Please take this opportunity to tell us about the service you received

1. Did you speak to a member of staff?

YES (please go to question 2)

NO (please go to question 3)

2. If yes, (i.e. you did speak to a member of staff, did you think they:

Treated you with respect Yes or No

Treated you fairly Yes or No

Were easy to understand Yes or No

Were knowledgeable Yes or No

3. How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with each of the following aspects of service?

(Using the following answer categories on a Likert scale: very satisfied, satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, dissatisfied or very dissatisfied)

The advice you received from the Office

The length of time we took to reply after you initially made your complaint

How clearly the process was explained to you

How often you were told about the progress of your complaint

The clarity of our correspondence

The manner in which we treated your complaint

The overall time taken to resolve your complaint

Thinking about the final closure letter you received:

4. Did you understand the reasons we gave for reaching our final decision about your complaint?

Yes or No

5. Did you accept why we reached this decision?

Yes or No

6. Do you think that we dealt with your complaint independently?

Yes or No

7. Would you contact us again if you had a new complaint about the police?

Yes or No

8. If you have any further comments about the service you received please detail them below.

THANK-YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY FORM



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Belfast

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This publication and other statistical information about the work of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland are also available on the internet at:

Website: www.policeombudsman.org



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