

Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland:

Complainant Satisfaction Survey 2006/07

Contents

	Page
1. Executive summary	3
2. Introduction	5
3. Methodology	5
4. Survey results	8
Behaviour of staff	8
Fairness of treatment	9
Satisfaction with service	10
5. Appendix	18

Executive Summary

The Complainant Satisfaction Survey allows complainants to the Police Ombudsman's Office to express their views on services provided by the Office. This report presents the findings from the sixth survey. The data were collected via a postal questionnaire from April 2006 to March 2007.

The main findings are given below.

- Three quarters of respondents (75 per cent) overall, thought that they were treated fairly by the Police Ombudsman's Office.
- Sixty three per cent of respondents overall, taking everything into account, were satisfied with the service they received. This includes 32 per cent who were very satisfied.
- Seventy six per cent of respondents would use the complaints system again.
- Ninety eight per cent of respondents thought staff were polite.
- Ninety seven per cent of respondents thought staff were friendly.
- Ninety five per cent of respondents thought staff were easy to understand.
- Ninety five per cent of respondents thought staff were patient.
- Eighty nine per cent of respondents thought staff were knowledgeable
- Ninety four per cent of respondents thought staff were professional.
- Seventy one per cent of respondents thought staff were impartial.
- Eighty eight per cent of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the ease of understanding of any letters written to them.
- Eighty three per cent of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with how long the office took to reply after they first reported the incident.
- Seventy three per cent of respondents who had made their complaint directly to the Office were satisfied or very satisfied with the advice given to them at that time.

- Sixty six per cent of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with how seriously the office treated their complaint.
- Seventy seven per cent of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with how clearly the complaint process was explained to them.
- Seventy per cent of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with how often they were told about the progress of their complaint.
- Forty per cent of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the outcome of their complaint.
- Fifty nine per cent of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the overall time it took to resolve their complaint.

Introduction

The Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland was set up by the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998 in order to provide an independent system for investigating complaints against the police in Northern Ireland. The Police Ombudsman is committed to providing an independent and impartial investigation process of the highest quality, which is timely and secures the confidence of both the public and police.

The Complainant Satisfaction Survey allows complainants to express their views on services provided by the Office. This report presents the findings from the sixth survey. The data were collected via a postal questionnaire from April 2006 to March 2007.

Methodology

Up until September 2005 complainant satisfaction surveys were based on samples of complainants comprised of those who had their complaint closed (finally dealt with) during the last month of each quarter in a financial year (June, September, December and March, apart from those who had requested otherwise). From September 2005 the Office began surveying all complainants who had a complaint closed.

The total sample for this report comprised those whose complaints were closed between April 2006 and March 2007. Each complainant surveyed was mailed a confidential self-completion questionnaire, with full instructions and return envelope. A copy of the questionnaire is at Annex 2. A total of 2,748 were issued and 606 responses were received, representing a response rate of 22 per cent. The response rate has increased from 13 per cent in 2003/2004 and then stabilised to 22 per cent from 2004/2005 until 2006/07 (Figure 1).

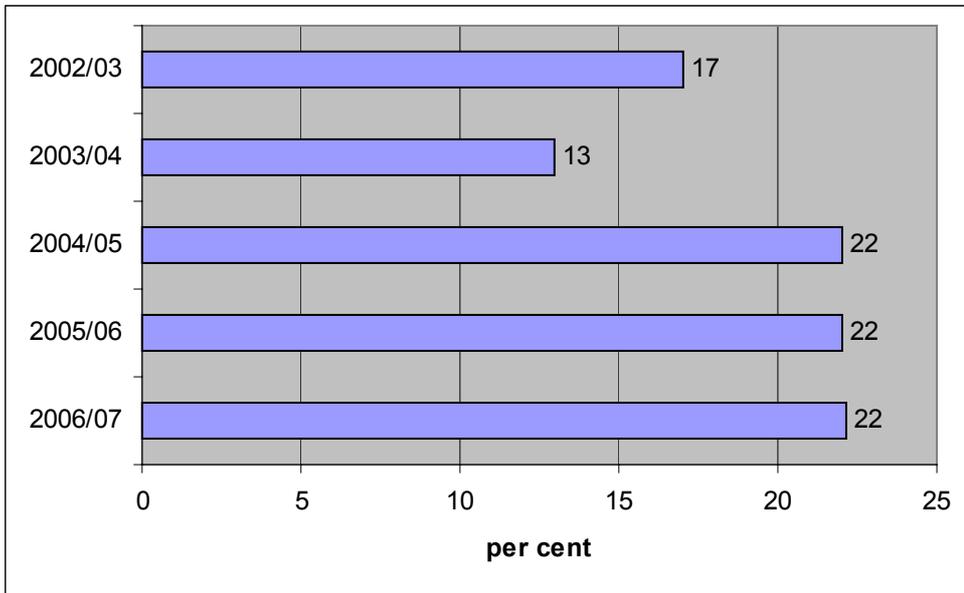


Figure 1: Survey Response Rate 2002/03 – 2006/07

Figure 2 shows the proportions of the eight main complaint closure types surveyed and for which responses were received. The greatest proportion of respondents (30 per cent) had their complaints dealt with through Informal Resolution (IR). As might be expected, the greatest difference between the proportions of complainants surveyed and those who responded was for those whose complaints had been closed because of complainant non-cooperation, which comprised 29 per cent of complainants surveyed compared to 11 per cent of respondents.

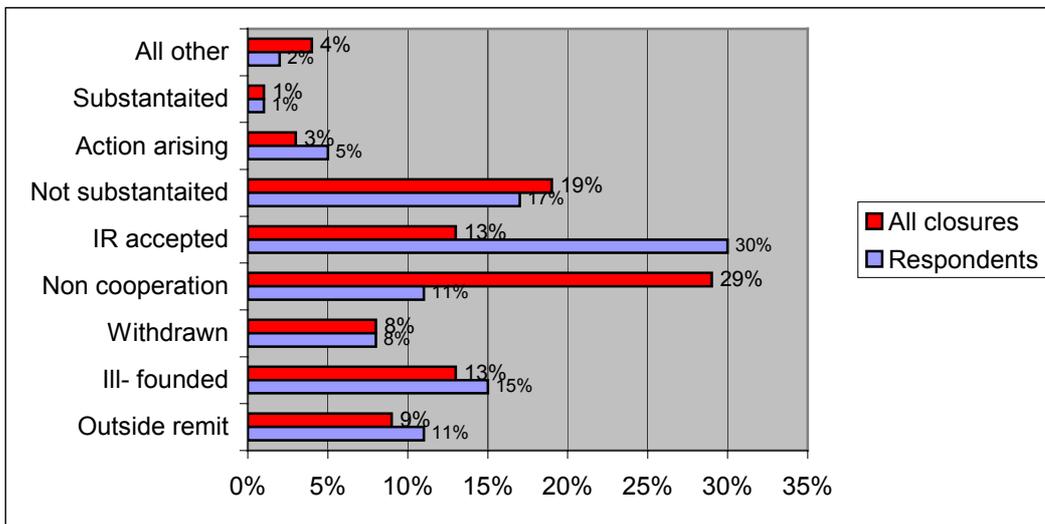


Figure 2: Sample and respondents by closure category

Over one third of respondents (34 per cent) were female. This is a slightly higher proportion than found in complaints closed (28 per cent). This reflects the higher response rate for females than males to the survey (Figure 3).

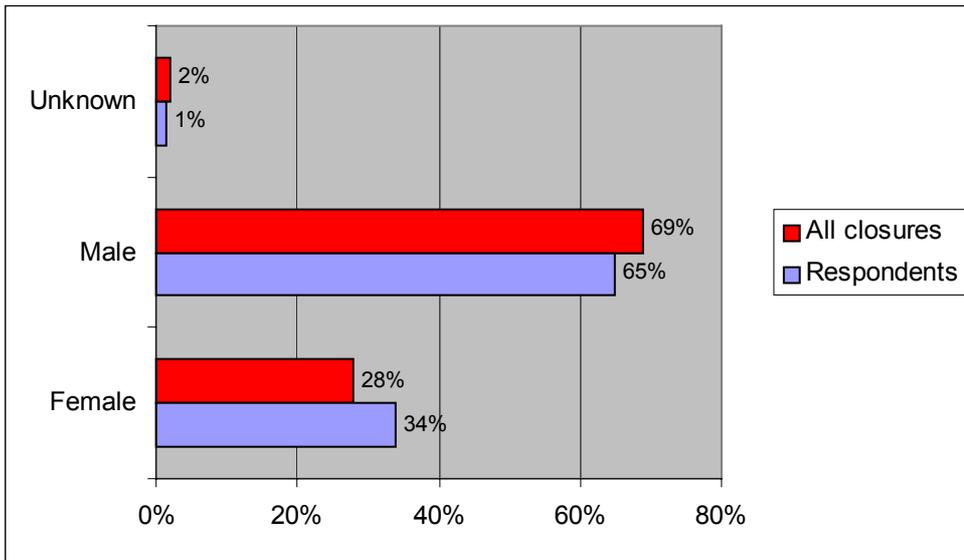


Figure 3: Sample and respondents by gender

Although, data for complainants' age are not available in about 17 per cent of complaints closed, it is interesting to note that older complainants were more likely to respond to the survey than younger complainants. This may suggest a misrepresentation of the sample by age. (Figure 4)

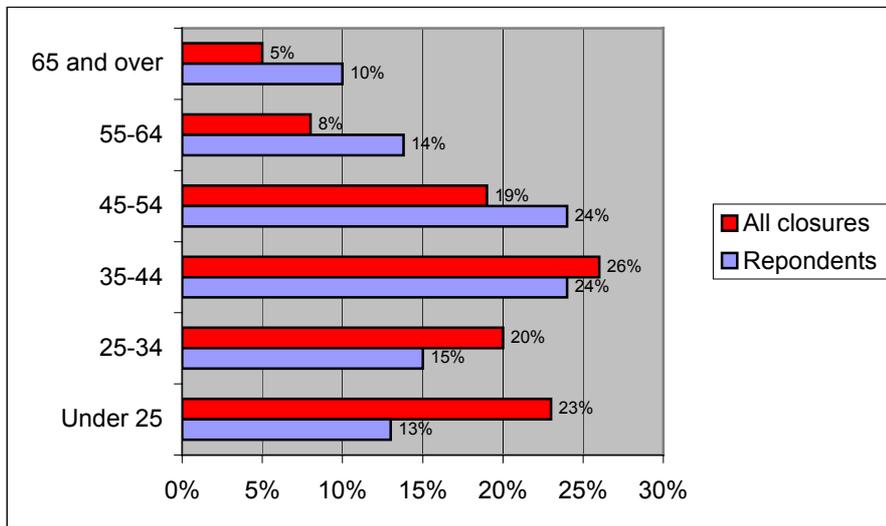


Figure 4: Sample and respondents by age group

Every person who makes a complaint to the Office of the Police Ombudsman is asked to complete a confidential self-completion questionnaire for equality monitoring purposes (unless they have specifically requested not to receive correspondence or surveys). This questionnaire asks for indicators of the respondent's gender, age, religious belief, ethnic

group, marital status, disability, employment status, political opinion, sexual orientation and whether or not they have dependants.

Of the 606 respondents to the complainant satisfaction questionnaire, 600 responded to the equality monitoring questionnaire. This allowed an analysis of satisfaction ratings by some of the different equality categories. Unfortunately the numbers of respondents who identified themselves as being of an ethnic group other than White or of a sexual orientation other than heterosexual were too small to allow any meaningful analysis. Where responses to questions differ according to equality groups this is noted. Otherwise it can be assumed that there were no such differences.

Survey Results

Did you at any time speak to staff from the Police Ombudsman’s Office?

The majority of respondents (83 per cent) had spoken to staff. This was similar to the proportion reported in the previous year’s survey (80 per cent).

If you did speak to staff from the Office, How did they seem to you?

Respondents were asked how staff appeared to them in relation to a number of both positive and negative characteristics. Figure 5 shows the proportions of respondents in descending order who considered that staff displayed these characteristics.

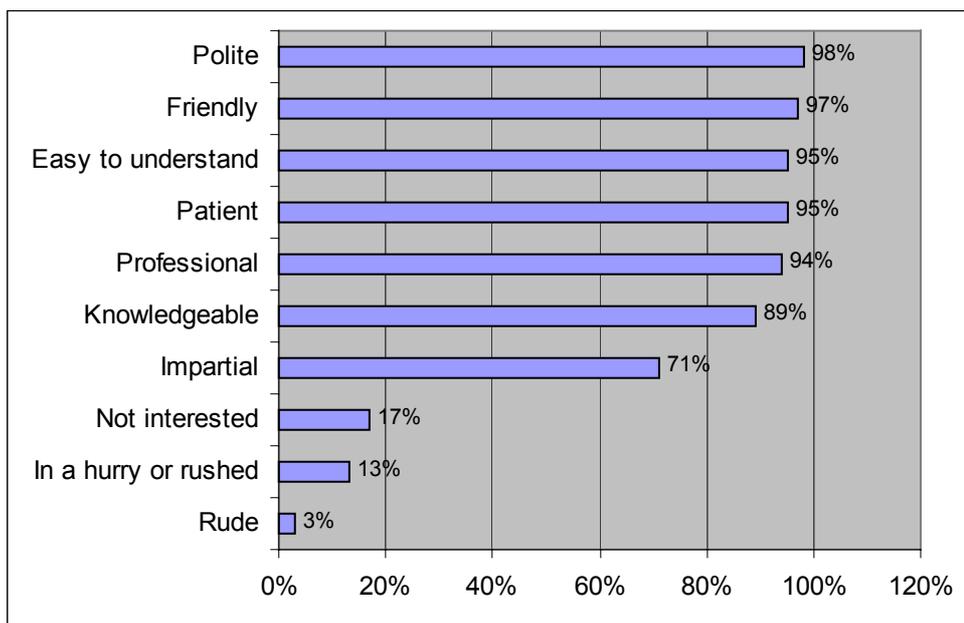


Figure 5: How did staff seem to you?

Overall perceptions of staff were very positive: -

The majority of those who had spoken to staff thought they were polite (98 per cent) or friendly (97 per cent). Those aged 25-34 however were not as positive as other age groups (92 per cent of this age group thought they were polite and 94 per cent friendly). Overall 89 per cent thought staff were knowledgeable.

Similarly, the majority also thought staff were patient (95 per cent), easy to understand (95 per cent) or professional (94 per cent). Further analysis showed that females had even more positive views than males in relation to these three areas (around 99 per cent compared to 92 per males agreed with each statement). Those aged 25-34 were less likely than other age groups to agree that staff were patient (89 per cent).

Overall, 71 per cent thought staff were impartial. Those aged 25-34 were least likely to agree (56 per cent). People without a disability were more likely to have positive views than people with disabilities (79 compared to 54 per cent). Those who were working (either self employed or working full or part time) were also more likely to agree staff were impartial compared to those who unemployed or permanently ill (78 compared to 60 per cent).

Only a minority had negative perceptions of staff:

A total of 13 per cent thought staff they were in a hurry or rushed and 3 per cent thought they were rude (decreased from 7 per cent in 2005/06). Those aged 25-34 were more likely to think staff were rude (9 per cent).

In total 17 per cent thought staff seemed disinterested. This proportion was higher for respondents who had a disability (24 per cent).

Overall, do you think you were treated fairly by the Office?

In 2006/07, three quarters of respondents thought that they were treated fairly by the Police Ombudsman's Office. This proportion has risen from 70 per cent in 2005/06. Further analysis showed female respondents and those with dependants were more likely to respond positively (82 females compared to 72 per cent males, 82 per cent of those with dependants compared to 71 per cent of those without).

Those who were working were also more likely to agree they were treated fairly than those who unemployed or permanently ill (83 compared to 69 per cent).

If you think you were not treated fairly by the Office, please say why.

Those respondents who felt that they had not been treated fairly by the Office were asked to say why this was. A total of 171 commented. Respondents whose complaints had been closed as not substantiated or ill-founded or who had failed to co-operate with the investigation of their complaint were more likely than respondents overall to provide comments.

Not all comments received were negative or critical of Police Ombudsman's staff. Several respondents felt that the complaints system was unfairly weighted in favour of police officers. Others felt that Police Ombudsman's staff did not take complaints seriously enough or that complaints were not investigated thoroughly and questions remained unanswered. Other respondents felt that Police Ombudsman staff did not have enough power and complaints should be investigated regardless of time elapsed.

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

How long it took for the Office to reply to you after you first reported the incident.

Over eight in ten (83 per cent) of respondents were satisfied with how long it took the Office to reply. This includes 36 per cent who were very satisfied. Only 5 per cent were very dissatisfied (Figure 6). This proportion of respondents who were satisfied has risen from 2005/06 when 76 per cent said they were satisfied.

Those aged 65+ were more likely to be satisfied (96 per cent) whilst those aged 25-34 were less likely to be satisfied (73 per cent) than other age groups. Married respondents were also more likely to be satisfied (89 per cent) than single respondents (80 per cent). Those who were working were more likely to be satisfied (85 per cent) compared to those who unemployed or permanently ill (75 per cent).

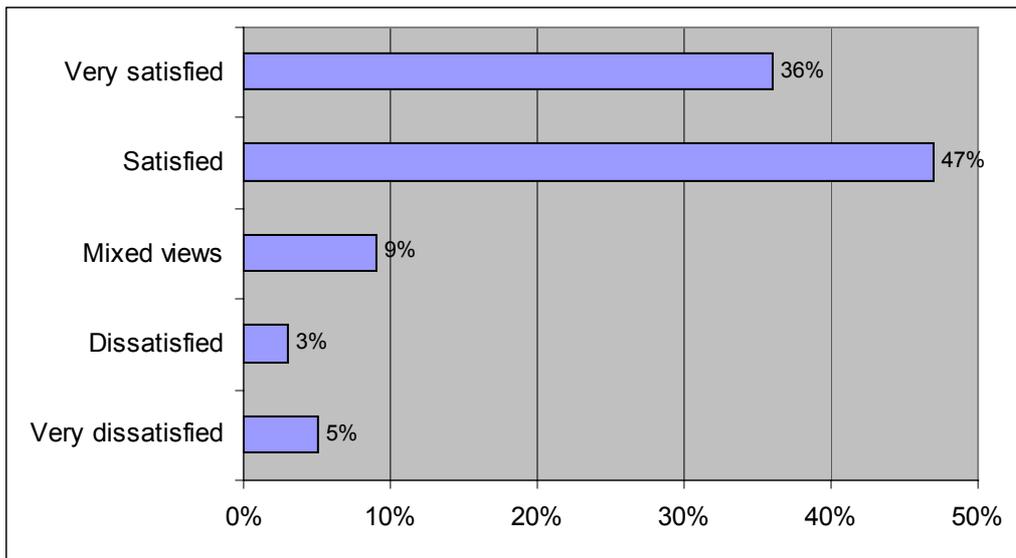


Figure 6: Satisfaction with how long it took for the Office to reply after the incident was first reported

The advice given to you

A new question was added to the survey in 2005/06 asking how satisfied complainants were with any advice given to them by the Office at the time of making their complaint. A total of 73 per cent of respondents who had made their complaint directly to the Office were satisfied with the advice given to them at that time (Figure 7). This includes 28 per cent who were very satisfied. This proportion has risen from last year when 64 per cent said they were satisfied with the advice given to them.

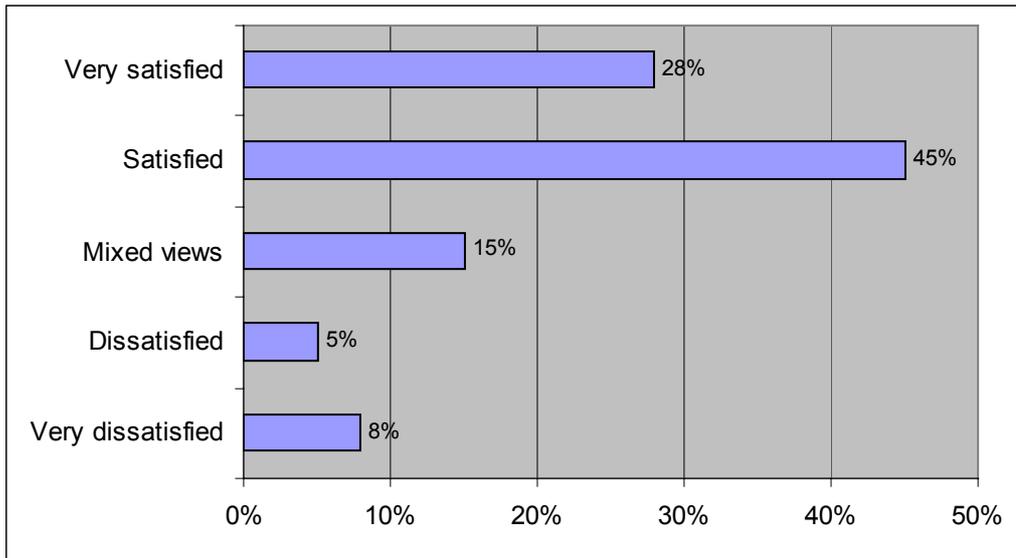


Figure 7: Satisfaction with advice given

Female respondents (82 per cent) were more likely than males (68 per cent) to be satisfied. Those respondents who reported they had a disability were less likely to be satisfied (67 per cent) than those without a disability (79 per cent). Those who were working were more likely to be satisfied with the advice given (79 per cent) compared to those who unemployed or permanently ill (66 per cent).

How seriously the Office treated your complaint

Overall 66 per cent of respondents were satisfied with how seriously the office treated their complaint. This includes 29 per cent who were very satisfied (Figure 8). This proportion has increased since last year (59 per cent satisfied).

Females were more likely than males to be satisfied (72 compared to 62 per cent).

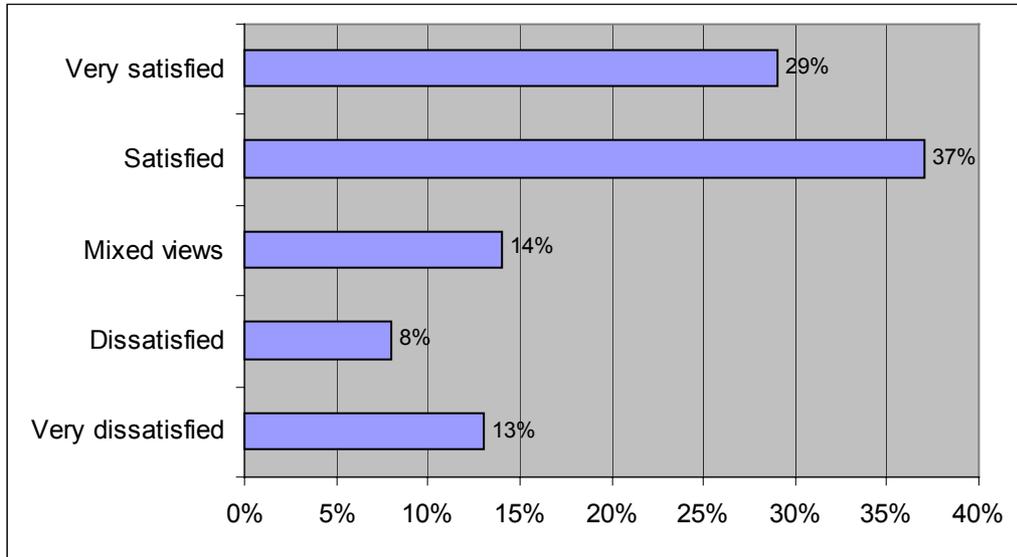


Figure 8: Satisfaction with how seriously the Office treated the complaint

How clearly staff explained the complaint process to you

Some 77 per cent of respondents overall were satisfied with how clearly the complaint process was explained to them (Figure 9). This includes 34 per cent who were very satisfied. This satisfaction figure is higher than the 2005/06 level of 68 per cent.

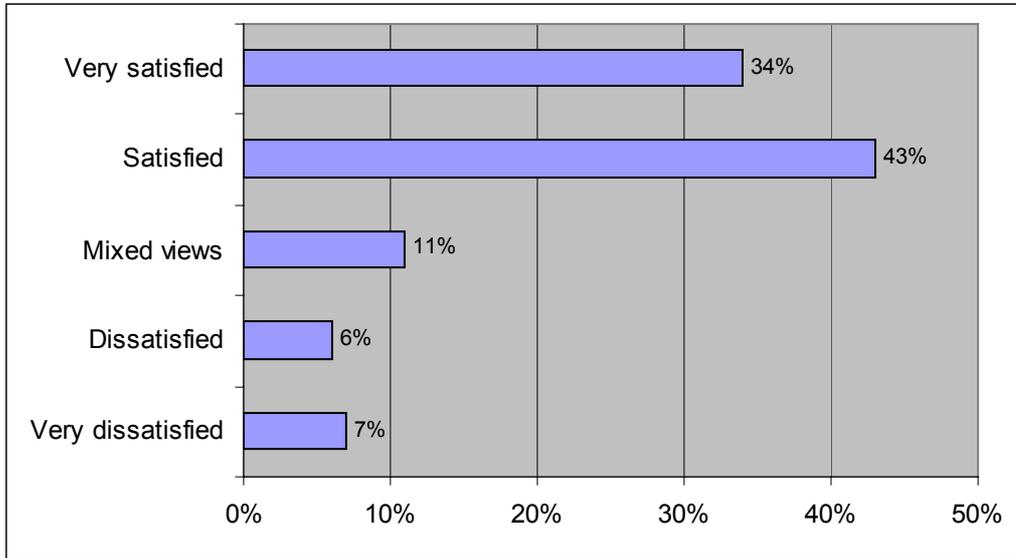


Figure 9: Satisfaction with how clearly the complaint process was explained

Females (84 per cent) were more likely than males (73 per cent) to be satisfied. Those who were working were more likely to be satisfied compared to those who were unemployed or permanently ill (82 compared 71 per cent).

How often you were told about the progress of your complaint

A total of 70 per cent of respondents were satisfied with how often they were told about the progress of their complaint, including 27 per cent who were very satisfied (Figure 10). This overall satisfaction level is similar to the 2005/06 level of 67 per cent.

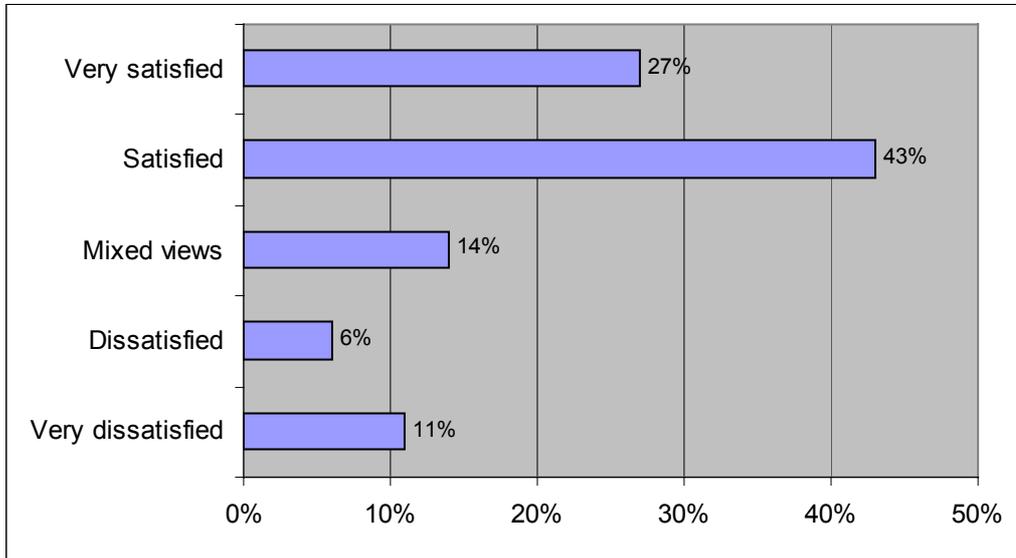


Figure 10: Satisfaction with how often complainant was told of complaint progress

Again females were more likely than males to express satisfaction (72 compared to 69 per cent). Those without a disability were more likely than those with to be satisfied (76 compared to 64 per cent). Those who were working were also more likely to be satisfied compared to those who unemployed or permanently ill (75 compared to 58 per cent).

How easy to understand any letters written to you were

A total of 88 per cent of respondents were satisfied with how easy to understand any letters written to them were, including 41 per cent who were very satisfied (Figure 11). This overall satisfaction level has risen from 79 per cent in 2005/06.

Females (93 per cent) were more likely than males (86 per cent) to be satisfied. Those in the 25-34 age group were least likely to be satisfied (77 per cent). Those who were working were more likely to be satisfied compared to those who unemployed or permanently ill (93 compared to 79 per cent).

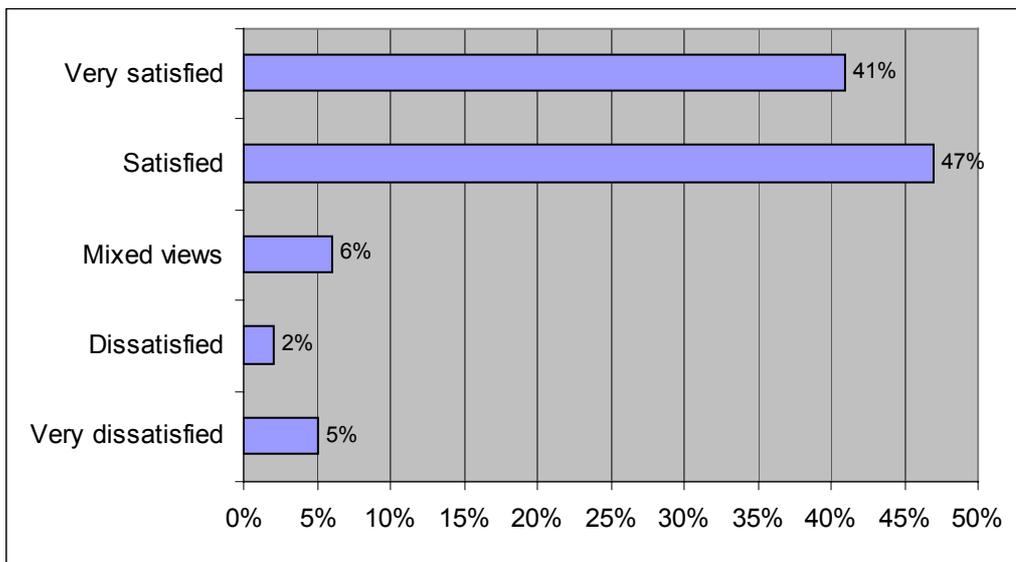


Figure 11: Satisfaction with ease of understanding of letters

The outcome of your complaint

Some 40 per cent of respondents were satisfied with the outcome of their complaint, including 16 per cent who were very satisfied (Figure 12). This overall level of satisfaction is similar to the level in 2005/06 (38 per cent).

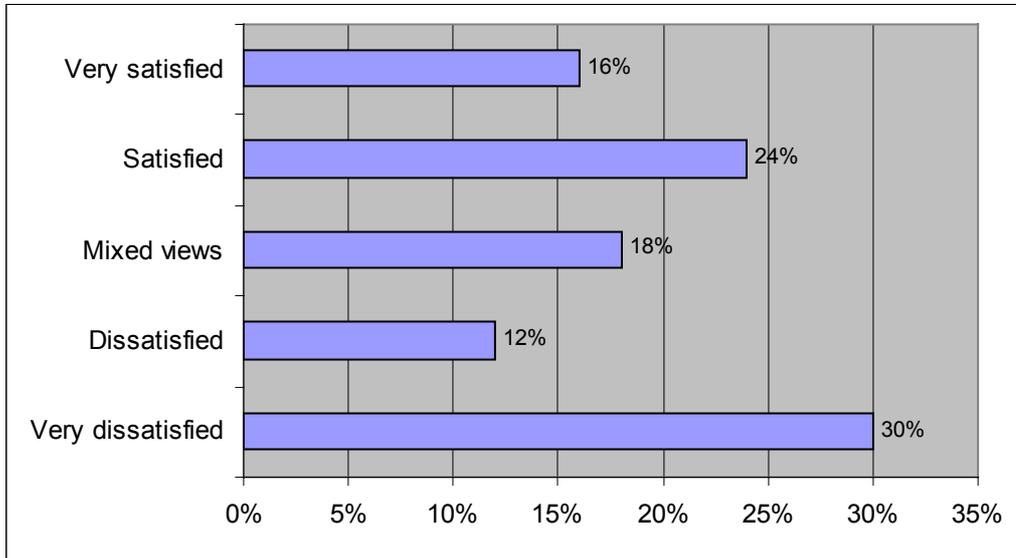


Figure 12: Satisfaction with the outcome of the complaint

Again females were more likely than males to express satisfaction (47 compared to 36 per cent) . Those who were working were more likely to be satisfied (46 per cent) compared to those who unemployed or permanently ill (26 per cent).

The overall time it took to resolve your complaint

A total of 59 per cent of respondents were satisfied with the overall time it took to resolve their complaint, including 22 per cent who were very satisfied (Figure 13). This overall satisfaction level is equal to 2005/06 level (59 per cent).

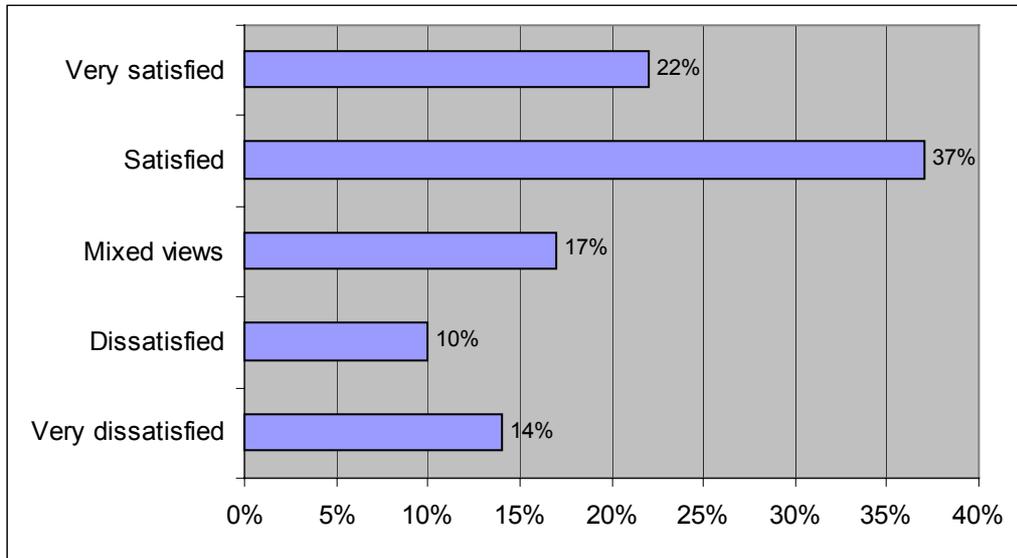


Figure 13: Satisfaction with the overall time it took to resolve the complaint

Married people were more likely to be satisfied (71 per cent) than single people (56 per cent). Those who were working were more likely to be satisfied (64 per cent) compared to those who unemployed or permanently ill (51 per cent).

Overall, taking everything into account, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the service you received from the Police Ombudsman’s Office?

Overall 63 per cent of respondents were satisfied with the service received from the Police Ombudsman’s Office, including 32 per cent who were very satisfied (Figure 14). This overall level of satisfaction is similar to the satisfaction level reported in the 2005/06 survey (58 per cent). Those who were working were more likely to be satisfied (67 per cent) compared to those who unemployed or permanently ill (54 per cent).

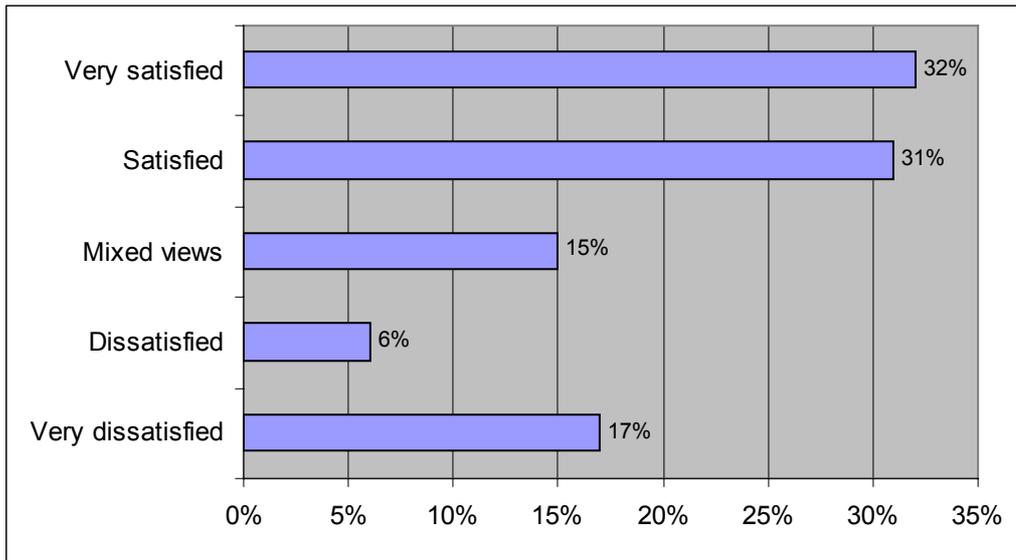


Figure 14: Overall satisfaction with service received

If you had a new complaint about the police, would you use the complaints system again?

When respondents were asked if they had a new complaint over three quarters (76 per cent) would they use the complaint system again – this has increased since last year when 70 per cent said they would use the system again.

Further comments

More than half (309) of respondents made comments. Half of those who made comments were satisfied, and nearly one third (32 per cent) were dissatisfied with the overall service they received.

Many of the positive comments were made in relation to the Ombudsman staff. Respondents found staff professional, knowledgeable, professional, efficient and polite.

“Whenever I chose to contact the Ombudsman's office I was seen quickly. My complaint was heard and explained efficiently. The language used to explain my complaint was easy to understand and was not too technical. I was put at ease immediately and I felt my problem was the only one they had. A great service.”

Several comments related to the success of establishment of the system for dealing with police complaints:

‘Without your office we could not make changes and there would be no one to complain to.’

Some of the negative comments made related to the original complaint or to general criticism of police, rather than the complaints system. Some thought the Office did as much as they could but the police told lies.

“This seemed to be a pointless exercise. The police really are a law unto themselves. The Ombudsman office just went through a procedure that the police know well.”

A number of those that did relate to the complaints system concerned perceived inaction by the Office or a lack of information on the progress of the complaint. Some comments related to the fact that the office was only interested in ‘high profile’ cases or that their case was not taken seriously enough.

Appendix 1: Additional Tables, 2005/06, 2006/07 Results

Table 1: Did you at any time speak to staff from the Police Ombudsman's Office?

	05/06 %	06/07 %
Yes	80.4	83.1
No	19.6	16.9
Total	100	100.0

Table 2: How did they seem to you - polite?

	05/06 %	06/07 %
Yes	96.2	97.9
No	3.8	2.1
Total	100	100.0

Table 3: How did they seem to you - friendly?

	05/06 %	06/07 %
Yes	94.2	97.2
No	5.8	2.8
Total	100	100.0

Table 4: How did they seem to you - knowledgeable?

	05/06 %	06/07 %
Yes	88.1	89.1
No	11.9	10.9
Total	100	100.0

Table 5: How did they seem to you - not interested?

	05/06 %	06/07 %
Yes	21.1	17.0
No	78.9	83.0
Total	100	100.0

Table 6: How did they seem to you - patient?

	05/06 %	06/07 %
Yes	92.8	94.5
No	7.2	5.5
Total	100	100.0

Table 7: How did they seem to you - easy to understand?

	05/06 %	06/07 %
Yes	93.3	94.9
No	6.7	5.1
Total	100	100.0

Table 8: How did they seem to you - professional?

	05/06 %	06/07 %
Yes	92.0	94.3
No	8.0	5.7
Total	100	100.0

Table 9: How did they seem to you - rude?

	05/06 %	06/07 %
Yes	6.8	3.3
No	93.2	96.7
Total	100	100.0

Table 10: How did they seem to you - in a hurry or rushed?

	05/06 %	06/07 %
Yes	12.4	13.0
No	87.6	87.0
Total	100	100.0

Table 11: How did they seem to you - impartial?

	05/06 %	06/07 %
Yes	74.2	70.8
No	25.8	29.2
Total	100	100.0

Table 12: Overall, do you think you were treated fairly by the Police Ombudsman's Office?

	05/06 %	06/07 %
Yes	69.8	75.2
No	30.3	24.8
Total	100	100.0

How satisfied were you with -

Table 13: The advice given to you if you made your complaint directly to the Office?

	05/06 %	06/07 %
Very satisfied	25.9	27.7
Satisfied	38.0	44.8
Mixed views	20.1	15.1
Dissatisfied	6.2	4.6
Very dissatisfied	9.9	7.8
Total	100.0	100.0

Table 14: The length of time it took the Office to reply to you after you first reported the incident?

	05/06 %	06/07 %
Very satisfied	34.1	35.8
Satisfied	42.3	46.8
Mixed views	10.1	9.4
Dissatisfied	6.8	2.9
Very dissatisfied	6.8	5.2
Total	100.0	100.0

Table 15: How seriously the Office treated your complaint?

	05/06 %	06/07 %
Very satisfied	29.2	28.8
Satisfied	29.4	37.2
Mixed views	16.4	13.8
Dissatisfied	9.4	7.5
Very dissatisfied	15.7	12.7
Total	100.0	100.0

Table 16: How clearly the complaint process was explained to you by staff?

	05/06 %	06/07 %
Very satisfied	32.9	33.8
Satisfied	35.4	42.8
Mixed views	17.4	10.5
Dissatisfied	6.5	5.7
Very dissatisfied	7.7	7.3
Total	100.0	100.0

Table 17: How often you were told about the progress of your complaint?

	05/06 %	06/07 %
Very satisfied	28.7	27.0
Satisfied	37.5	42.9
Mixed views	13.2	13.7
Dissatisfied	11.0	5.9
Very dissatisfied	9.6	10.5
Total	100	100.0

Table 18: How easy to understand any letters written to you were?

	05/06 %	06/07 %
Very satisfied	37.7	40.9
Satisfied	41.4	46.9
Mixed views	11.4	5.8
Dissatisfied	3.9	1.6
Very dissatisfied	5.6	4.7
Total	100.0	100.0

Table 19: The outcome of your complaint?

	05/06 %	06/07 %
Very satisfied	17.3	16.0
Satisfied	20.7	23.6
Mixed views	17.6	18.4
Dissatisfied	11.1	12.1
Very dissatisfied	33.3	29.9
Total	100	100.0

Table 20: The overall time it took to resolve your complaint?

	05/06 %	06/07 %
Very satisfied	24.2	22.0
Satisfied	34.6	37.0
Mixed views	15.4	17.4
Dissatisfied	7.2	9.9
Very dissatisfied	18.6	13.7
Total	100	100.0

Table 21: Overall, taking everything into account, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the service you received?

	05/06 %	06/07 %
Very satisfied	28.9	31.5
Satisfied	29.2	31.3
Mixed views	13.6	14.5
Dissatisfied	7.9	6.1
Very dissatisfied	20.3	16.6
Total	100.0	100.0

Table 22: If you had a new complaint about the police, would you use the complaints system again?

	05/06 %	06/07 %
Yes	70.2	75.7
No	29.8	24.3
Total	100.0	100.0

Additional copies of this and other publications are available from:

Policy and Practice Directorate
Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland
New Cathedral Buildings
St. Anne's Square
11 Church Street
Belfast
BT1 1PG

Telephone: 028 9082 8648

Fax: 028 9082 8605

Email: research@policeombudsman.org

These publications and other information about the work of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland are also available on the Internet at:

Website: www.policeombudsman.org