

Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland:

Annual report on  
public awareness of the  
Police Complaints  
System in  
Northern Ireland,  
2015/16

December 2015

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## Introduction

This statistical report presents the findings from the Police Ombudsman's module in the September 2015 Omnibus Survey. The results from the survey are used to monitor public awareness and confidence in the Police Ombudsman's Office.

The survey is carried out by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). The Police Ombudsman's Office includes a module in this survey annually which is normally included in the January survey, however this year it was included in the September survey.

## Target Monitoring

The Office measures its performance against a range of targets in its Balanced Scorecard. The results from this survey are used to monitor performance on three targets in the "Maintain Impartiality and Independence in dealing with complaints" key area. Details of the targets and results are below:

### ***Maintain a level of at least 80% public awareness of the Office***

- Target met as 90% of respondents had heard of the Police Ombudsman

### ***Maintain a level of at least 80% awareness that the Office is independent***

- Target met as 83% of respondents that had heard of the Police Ombudsman were aware that he is independent from the police

### ***Maintain a level of at least 80% confidence that the Office deals with complaints in an impartial way***

- Target met as 80% of respondents that had heard of the Police Ombudsman were confident that he deals with complaints in an impartial way

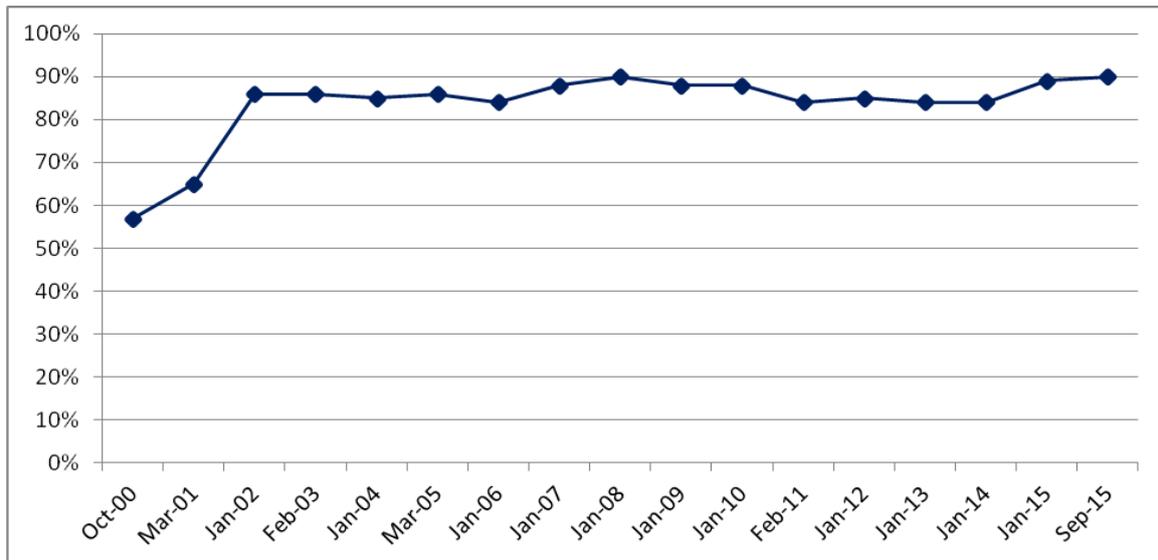
## Survey findings:

### Awareness of the Police Ombudsman

Nine out of ten respondents (90%) stated that they had heard of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland in September 2015.

Awareness levels have been greater than 80% since 2002; fluctuating between 84% and 90% since then. Although awareness levels remained fairly stable over this time period, awareness of the Police Ombudsman dipped between 2011 and 2014 (Figure 1, Table 1).

**Figure 1: Level of awareness of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, 2000-2015**



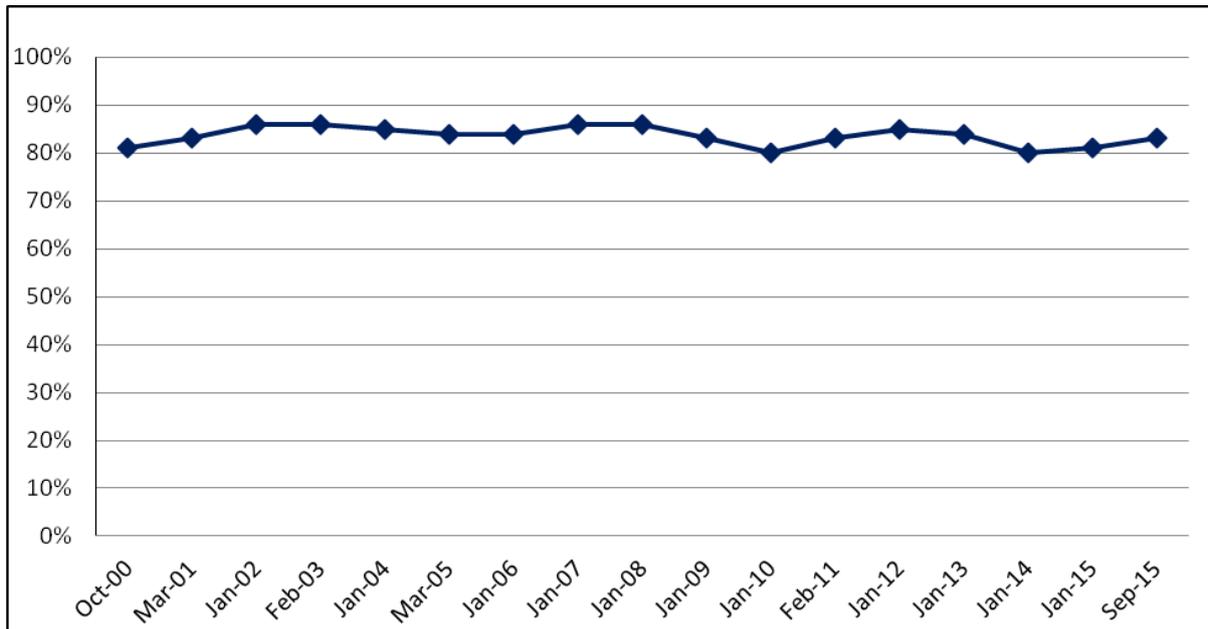
The following results in this report are based only on respondents that reported they had heard of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland.

## Independence of the Police Ombudsman

In September 2015, of those respondents who had heard of the Police Ombudsman, just over four out of five respondents (83%) thought that he was independent of the police.

Since the Office opened the proportion of respondents who thought the Ombudsman was independent of the police has ranged from 80% to 86% (Figure 2, Table 2).

**Figure 2: Perception of independence of the Police Ombudsman, 2000-2015**

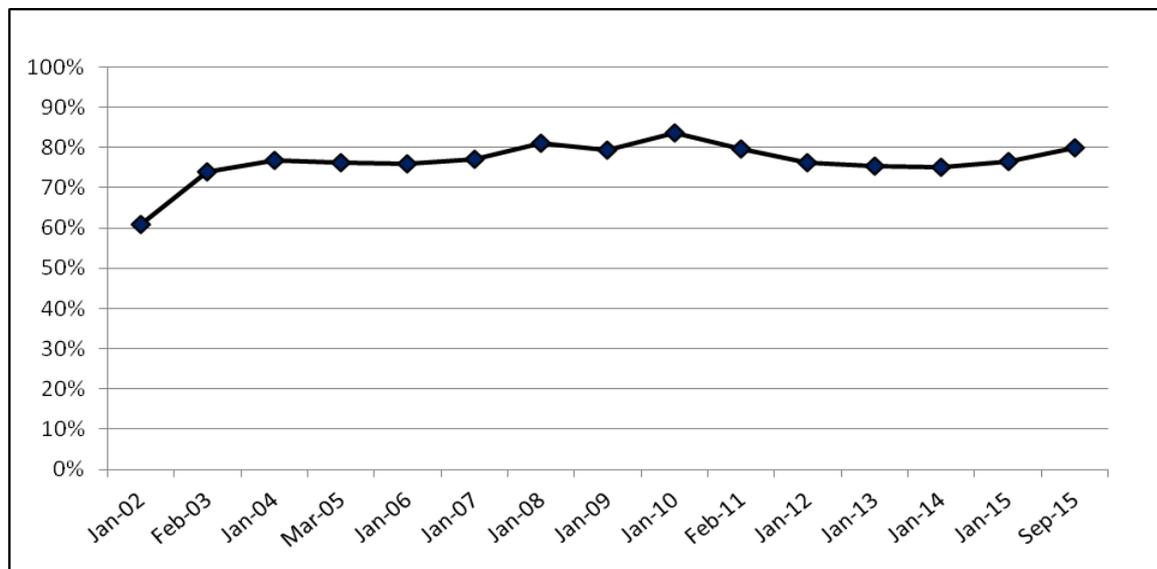


## Impartiality of investigation

In September 2015, four fifths (80%) of respondents who had heard of the Police Ombudsman were confident that he deals with complaints in an impartial way.

In September 2015, confidence levels increased compared with the previous survey (77% to 80%). This is the first year there has been an increase in confidence levels since 2010 (Figure 3, Table 3 & 4).

**Figure 3: Level of confidence that the Police Ombudsman deals with complaints in an impartial way, 2002-2015**

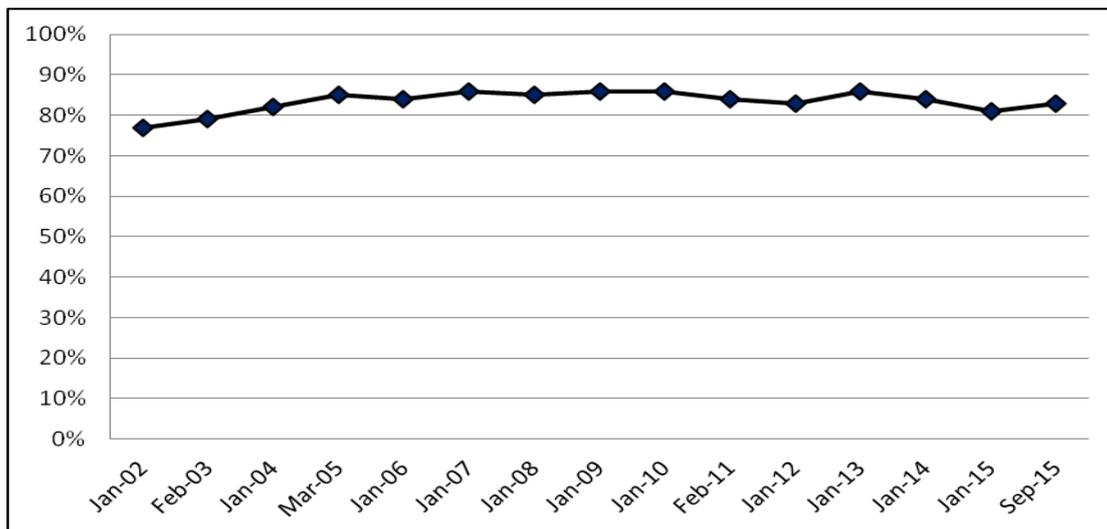


## Fairness of treatment

In September 2015, around four out of five (83%) of respondents stated that they thought they would be treated fairly if they made a complaint.

Since 2004, the proportion of respondents who thought they would be treated fairly has remained fairly stable; ranging from 81% to 86%. The latest results are similar to those from the previous survey carried out in January 2015, however, there was a decrease in the proportion of respondents that stated they thought they would be treated unfairly (from 16% to 12%) and an increase in the proportion of respondents who didn't know if they would be treated fairly or not (3% to 5%) (Figure 4, Table 5).

**Figure 4: Perception of fair treatment when making a complaint, 2002-2015**

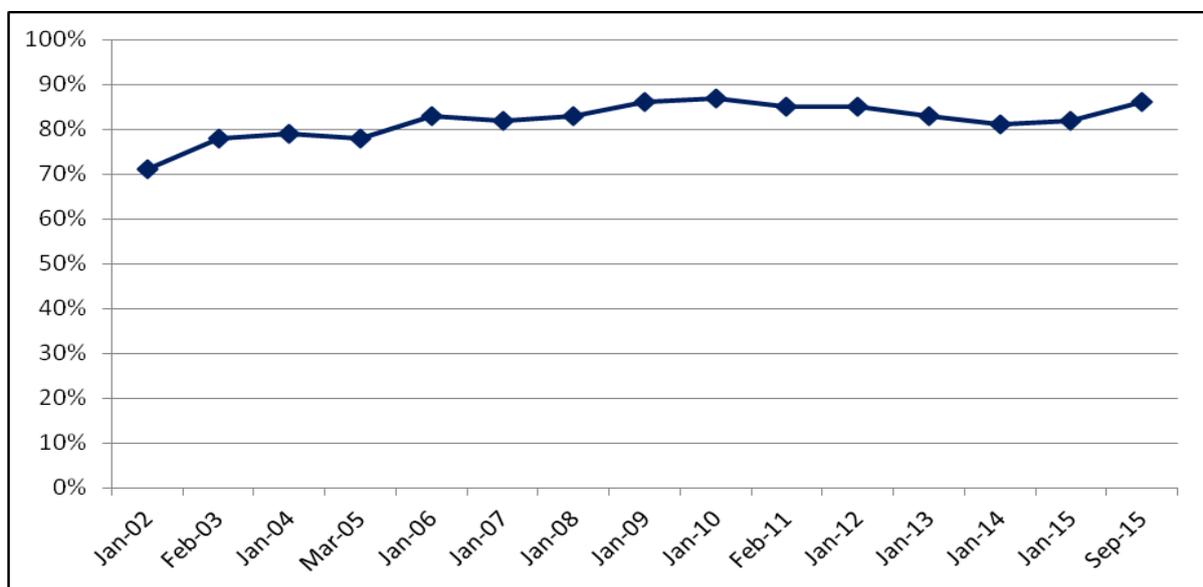


## Effect of Police Ombudsman on policing

In September 2015, 86% of respondents felt that the Police Ombudsman would help ensure that the police in Northern Ireland do a good job.

The percentage of respondents who felt that the Ombudsman would help police do a good job increased in September 2015 compared with the levels reported in the previous two surveys (Figure 5, Table 6).

**Figure 5: Belief that the Police Ombudsman will help ensure that the police do a good job, 2002-2015**



## Appendix 1: Tables of Results for key questions

Note: Additional tables showing the responses to these key questions by gender, age and religion of respondents are available in the accompanying spreadsheet.

**Table 1: Have you heard of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland?**

	Oct-00	Mar-01	Jan-02	Feb-03	Jan-04	Mar-05	Jan-06	Jan-07	Jan-08	Jan-09	Jan-10	Feb-11	Jan-12	Jan-13	Jan-14	Jan-15	Sep-15
Aware	57%	65%	86%	86%	85%	86%	84%	88%	90%	88%	88%	84%	85%	84%	84%	89%	90%
Not aware	41%	35%	14%	13%	14%	14%	16%	12%	10%	12%	12%	15%	15%	16%	16%	11%	10%
Don't know/refusal	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Total survey respondents	1189	1076	1142	1214	1292	1092	1122	1211	1238	1126	1216	1109	1141	1154	1217	1114	1109

*Asked to all persons aged 16 and over*

**Table 2: Do you think the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland is part of the police or independent of the police?**

	Oct-00	Mar-01	Jan-02	Feb-03	Jan-04	Mar-05	Jan-06	Jan-07	Jan-08	Jan-09	Jan-10	Feb-11	Jan-12	Jan-13	Jan-14	Jan-15	Sep-15
Independent of the police	81%	83%	86%	86%	85%	84%	84%	86%	86%	83%	80%	83%	85%	84%	80%	81%	83%
Part of the police	11%	10%	9%	12%	11%	11%	11%	10%	12%	14%	17%	15%	12%	13%	14%	16%	14%
Don't know/refusal	8%	7%	5%	2%	4%	5%	5%	3%	3%	3%	2%	2%	3%	4%	5%	2%	3%
Total survey respondents	682	699	984	1044	1102	930	941	1073	1117	999	1068	939	978	977	1025	998	992

*Asked to all persons who were aware of the Police Ombudsman*

**Table 3: How confident are you that the Police Ombudsman deals with complaints against the police in an impartial way?**

	Jan-02	Feb-03	Jan-04	Mar-05	Jan-06	Jan-07	Jan-08	Jan-09	Jan-10	Feb-11	Jan-12	Jan-13	Jan-14	Jan-15	Sep-15
Very confident	15%	17%	20%	21%	17%	24%	26%	19%	18%	18%	14%	16%	14%	16%	18%
Fairly confident	46%	57%	56%	57%	59%	54%	55%	60%	65%	62%	63%	60%	61%	61%	62%
Not very confident	23%	17%	14%	13%	14%	14%	12%	14%	11%	14%	17%	15%	16%	16%	13%
Not at all confident	11%	5%	4%	3%	3%	4%	4%	3%	2%	3%	3%	3%	4%	4%	4%
Don't know/refusal	6%	4%	5%	7%	6%	4%	4%	5%	3%	3%	3%	5%	6%	3%	3%
Total survey respondents	984	1044	1102	930	941	1073	1117	999	1068	939	978	977	1025	998	992

*Asked to all persons who were aware of the Police Ombudsman*

**Table 4: Confidence that the Police Ombudsman deals with complaints against the police in an impartial way**

% Confident/Very confident (Combined)	
Jan-02	61%
Feb-03	74%
Jan-04	77%
Mar-05	76%
Jan-06	76%
Jan-07	77%
Jan-08	81%
Jan-09	79%
Jan-10	84%
Feb-11	80%
Jan-12	76%
Jan-13	75%
Jan-14	75%
Jan-15	77%
Sep-15	80%

**Table 5: If you were to make a complaint against a police officer, do you think you would be treated fairly?**

	Jan-02	Feb-03	Jan-04	Mar-05	Jan-06	Jan-07	Jan-08	Jan-09	Jan-10	Feb-11	Jan-12	Jan-13	Jan-14	Jan-15	Sep-15
Treated fairly	77%	79%	82%	85%	84%	86%	85%	86%	86%	84%	83%	86%	84%	81%	83%
Not treated fairly	13%	15%	11%	8%	9%	8%	10%	9%	9%	11%	12%	9%	10%	16%	12%
Don't know/refusal	10%	6%	6%	7%	7%	6%	5%	4%	5%	5%	5%	5%	6%	3%	5%
Total survey respondents	984	1044	1102	930	941	1073	1117	999	1068	939	978	977	1025	998	992

*Asked to all persons who were aware of the Police Ombudsman*

**Table 6: Do you think the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland will help ensure that the police do a good job?**

	Jan-02	Feb-03	Jan-04	Mar-05	Jan-06	Jan-07	Jan-08	Jan-09	Jan-10	Feb-11	Jan-12	Jan-13	Jan-14	Jan-15	Sep-15
Yes	71%	78%	79%	78%	83%	82%	83%	86%	87%	85%	85%	83%	81%	82%	86%
No	19%	16%	15%	15%	10%	12%	11%	8%	9%	10%	11%	11%	12%	13%	10%
Don't know/refusal	9%	6%	6%	7%	6%	6%	5%	6%	4%	4%	4%	6%	7%	5%	4%
Total survey respondents	984	1044	1102	930	941	1073	1117	999	1068	939	978	977	1025	998	992

*Asked to all persons who were aware of the Police Ombudsman*

## Appendix 2: Methodology and Notes

### Methodology:

Five questions were commissioned by the Police Ombudsman's Office for inclusion in the September 2015 NISRA Omnibus Survey.

The survey sample was drawn from the Pointer Database of private addresses. Interviewers called at each address on the list and randomly selected one person aged 16 or over living at the address for interview.

The total sample size was 2,200 addresses. The fieldwork took place between 01 September and 07 November 2015. From an eligible sample of 1,939 individuals 1,109 interviews were achieved, giving a response rate of 57%.

Weighting factors were applied to the data in relation to household size.

The percentages given in the tables have been rounded to the nearest whole number. The following symbols have been used:

- 0%: figure in cell is less than 0.5%
- cell is empty: category not applicable

In certain cases percentages may not add to 100% due to the effect of rounding. Totals may also add up to more than 100% as in some cases respondents could provide more than one response.

Statistical significance tests have been carried out on the findings and differences are 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. Additional technical details and tables are available upon request.

### Notes:

This is an Official Statistics publication. Official Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They undergo regular validation checks to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference.

An excel spreadsheet has been published along with this report (Accompanying Excel Spreadsheet September 2015). The tables in this spreadsheet include a breakdown of the answers to each of the questions asked in the survey by gender, age and religion of respondents for the last five years.

We are always keen to receive feedback on all our statistical publications. If you have any feedback or comments on this report we would like to hear them. Please contact us by email at: [info@policeombudsman.org](mailto:info@policeombudsman.org) or see our alternative contact details on the back page of this report.



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