

# Complainant Satisfaction Survey 2009/2010

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# 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 data from questionnaires issued to complainants who had complaints closed from April 2009 to March 2010.

The main findings are given below.

- Seventy five per cent of complainants, overall, thought that they were treated fairly by the Police Ombudsman's Office.
- Perceptions of Police Ombudsman staff were very positive - over nine out of ten respondents who had spoken to staff thought they were polite, friendly, patient, easy to understand and professional.
- Sixty five per cent of respondents overall, taking everything into account, were satisfied with the service they received. This includes 36% who were very satisfied.
- When complainants were asked about individual aspects of the service the highest levels of satisfaction were reported for the following aspects: ease of understanding of any letters written to them and the length of time the Office took to reply after they first reported the incident. The lowest level of satisfaction was received with the outcome of the complaint.
- Seventy one per cent of respondents would use the complaints system again.

# 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 eighth survey. The data were collected via postal questionnaires from April 2009 to March 2010.

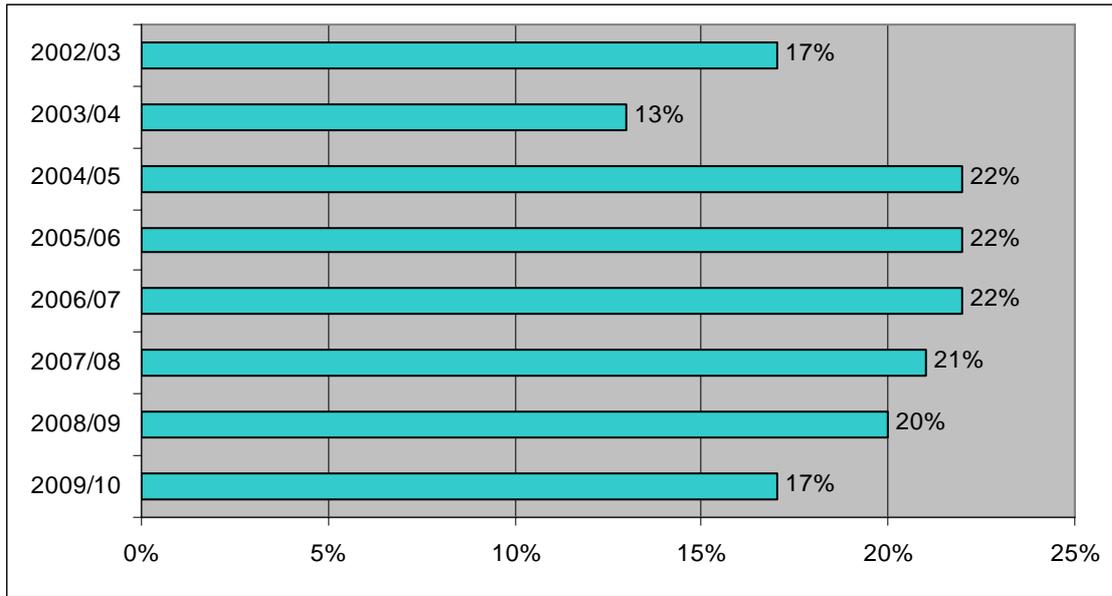
## Methodology

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. 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 2009 and March 2010. Each complainant surveyed was mailed a confidential self-completion questionnaire, with full instructions and a return envelope. A copy of the questionnaire is at Appendix 2.

### **Response rate**

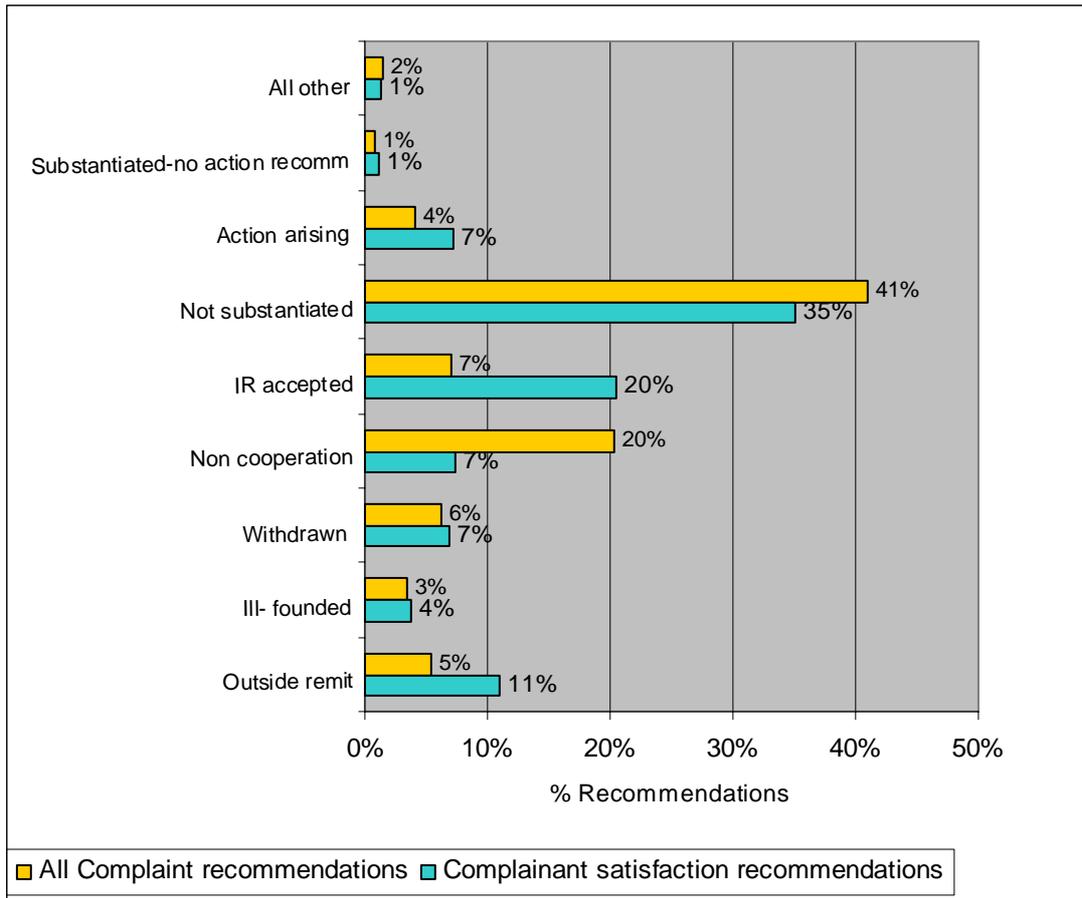
A total of 3,268 questionnaires were issued and 562 responses were received, representing a response rate of 17%. The response rate has increased from 13% in 2003/2004 and then rose to 22% in 2004/2005. The rate has remained fairly stable until 2008/2009 (20%). (Figure 1).



**Figure 1: Survey Response Rate 2002/03 – 2009/10**

## Respondent profile

The following paragraphs compare the profile of the respondents (i.e. those complainants who responded to the complainant satisfaction survey) to the profile of all complainants whose complaint was closed during the time period April 2009-March 2010.



**Figure 2: Recommendations arising from all complaint closures and respondents**

Figure 2 compares recommendations arising from all complaints closed with recommendations arising from complaints made by respondents to the satisfaction survey.

As might be expected, respondents to the complainant satisfaction survey were more likely to co-operate to the investigation process than overall complainants who had a complaint closed during the time period.

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

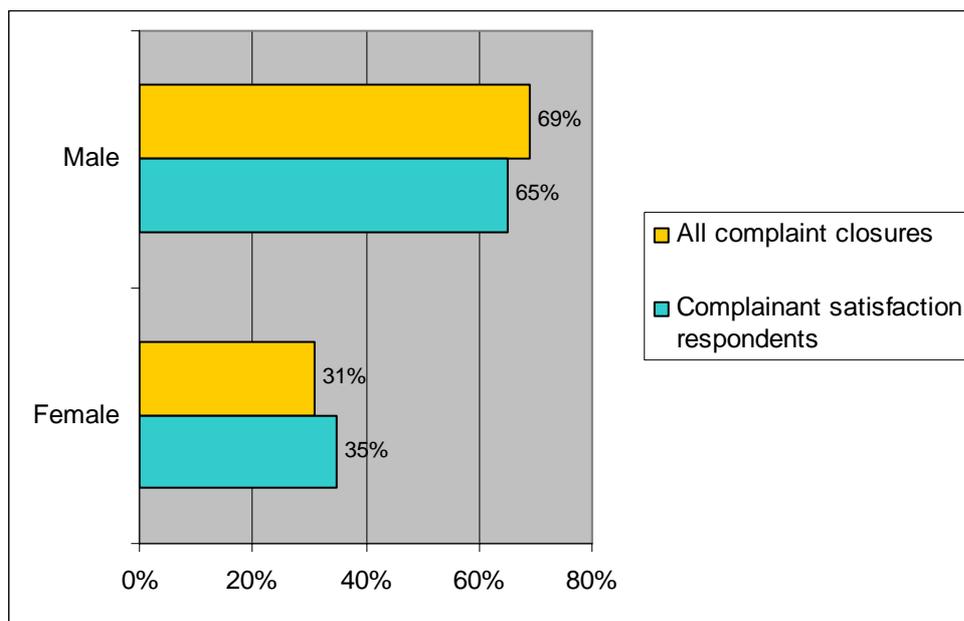
Of the 562 respondents to the complainant satisfaction questionnaire, 368 responded to the equality monitoring questionnaire. This allowed an analysis of satisfaction ratings by some of the different equality categories. (Questions 3,5,6 and 7 see Appendix 2). In addition to those respondents who declared their gender on the monitoring form, it was also possible to determine the majority of complainants' gender from their title or salutation. This meant that salutation was known for over 99% of respondents.

In addition to those who declared their age on the monitoring form it was also possible to determine age from date of birth already provided. This allowed analysis by age of 76% of overall respondents. 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.

Due to the small numbers involved some groups were combined. Those who described themselves as married, co-habiting or in civil partnership were grouped as "living as part of a couple" and those who were divorced, separated, single or widowed were grouped as "not living as part of a couple". Those who described themselves as self employed or working full time or part time were combined into the category "working"; those who were unemployed or not working because they are permanently sick as "not working". With regard to religious belief, the categories of Catholic, Methodist, Church of Ireland, Presbyterian, Other Christian, Other Religious Belief and No religion were collapsed into "Catholic", "Other Christian Religion", "Other Religious Belief" and "No Religion". Those who indicated that the political party that best represented their current political thinking was Sinn Féin, the Social Democratic and Labour Party or other Nationalist parties

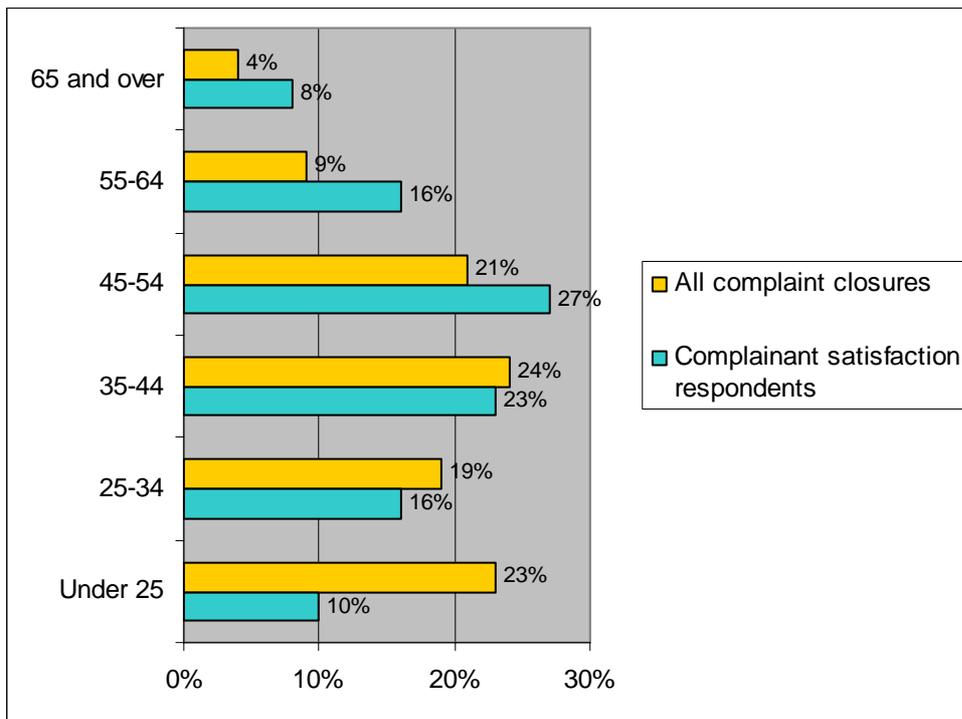
were combined into the category “Nationalists” and those who indicated the “Democratic Unionist Party”, the “Ulster Unionist Party” or other Unionist parties were grouped together as “Unionists”.

Thirty five per cent of respondents were female. This is a slightly higher proportion than found for all complainants whose complaint was closed during the time period (31%). This reflects the higher response rate for females than males to the survey (Figure 3).



**Figure 3: All Complaints and respondents by gender**

Although data for complainants’ age are not available for about 24% of respondents and 46% of complainants whose complaint was closed during 2009/2010, 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: All complainants and respondents by age group**

### Statistical Significance

Statistical significance tests have been carried out on the findings and differences 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.

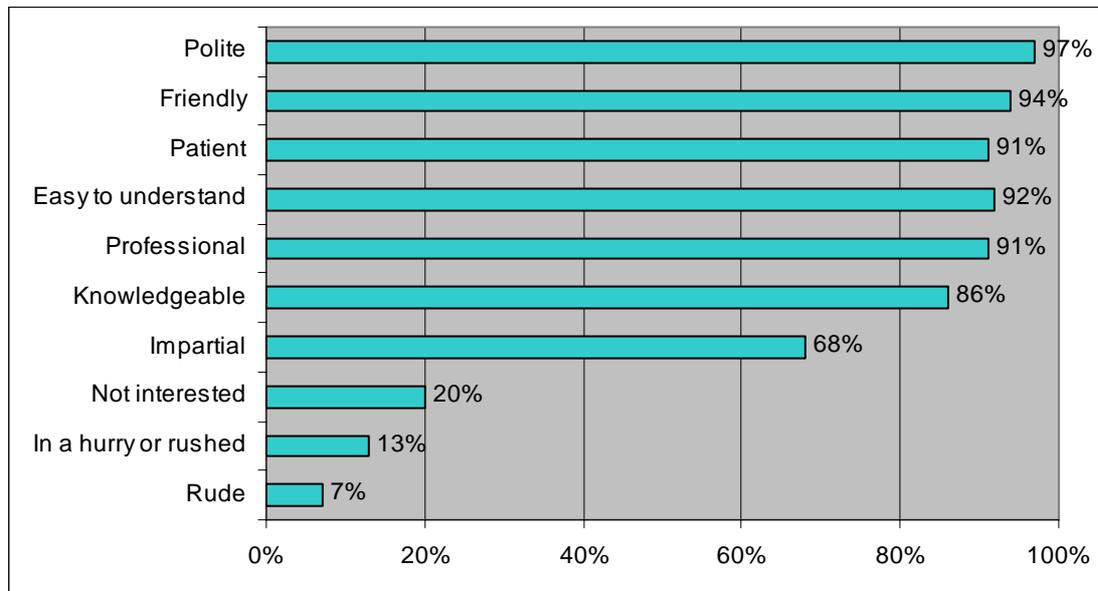
# Survey Results

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

The majority of respondents (90%) had spoken to staff.

## 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. Over nine out of ten respondents who had spoken to staff thought that they were polite, friendly, patient, professional and easy to understand.

Large proportions also felt that they were knowledgeable (86%) and almost seven out of ten (68%) thought that staff were impartial.

Only a minority had negative perceptions of staff. Thirteen per cent thought that staff were in a hurry or rushed, 7% thought that they were rude and 20% thought

that staff seemed disinterested.

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

Overall, 75% of respondents thought that they were treated fairly by the Police Ombudsman's Office. Further analysis showed that women were more likely to think they had been treated fairly than men (81% of women compared to 72% of men). Those living as part of a couple were more likely to think they had been treated fairly (81%) than those not living as part of a couple (71%).

Those who were working (81%) were more likely to think they were treated fairly than those who were students, retired or looking after the family home (72%) and those who were unemployed or permanently ill (71%).

### **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 substantial number of respondents made comments about the outcome of their complaint:

*"The staff I dealt with were always courteous however the letter telling the outcome of the case changed my entire perception of the case. It seemed you were more interested in checking procedures than checking if the police actually got it right."*

Several respondents felt that the Investigation Officers were more inclined to believe police officers than complainants:

*"Because you listened to our side, then you listened to his side and that was the end of it because being a police officer, obviously his side must be the truth."*

Others felt that Police Ombudsman's staff did not take complaints seriously enough, complaints were not investigated thoroughly and questions still remained unanswered:

*“The final report was generated to the extent that it did not capture the seriousness of the situation or the extreme distress caused by it - nor did it answer the questions or queries.”*

Other complainants referred to the lack of information received throughout the investigation:

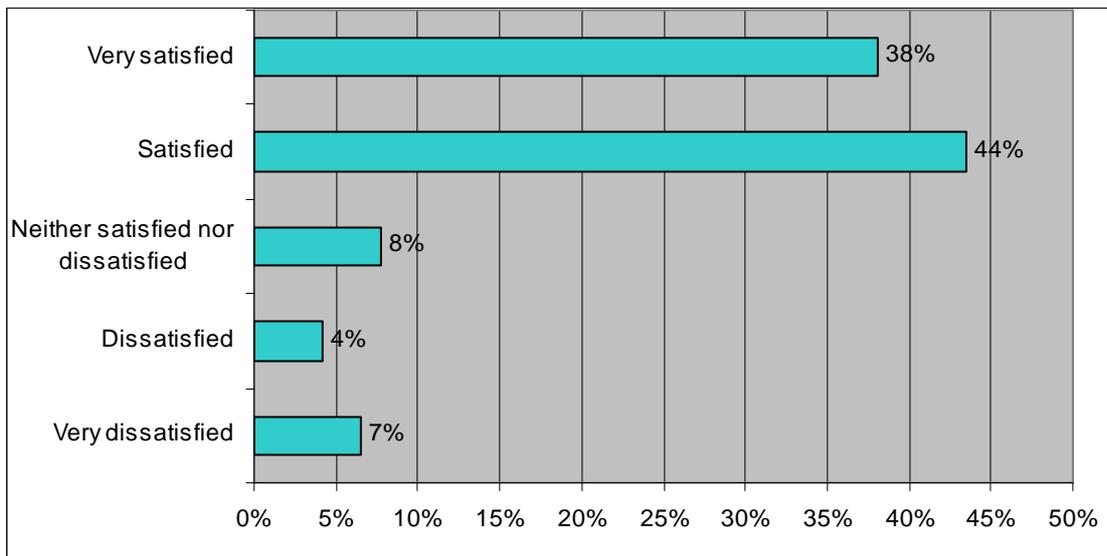
*“I have not had any kind of real service. I have not been kept informed. I believe your department act as an apologist for the PSNI /RUC.”*

### **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.**

Eighty two per cent of respondents were satisfied with how long it took the Office to reply. This includes 38% who were very satisfied. (Figure 6). The proportion of respondents who were satisfied is greater than the level reported in 2008/2009 when 74% said they were satisfied.

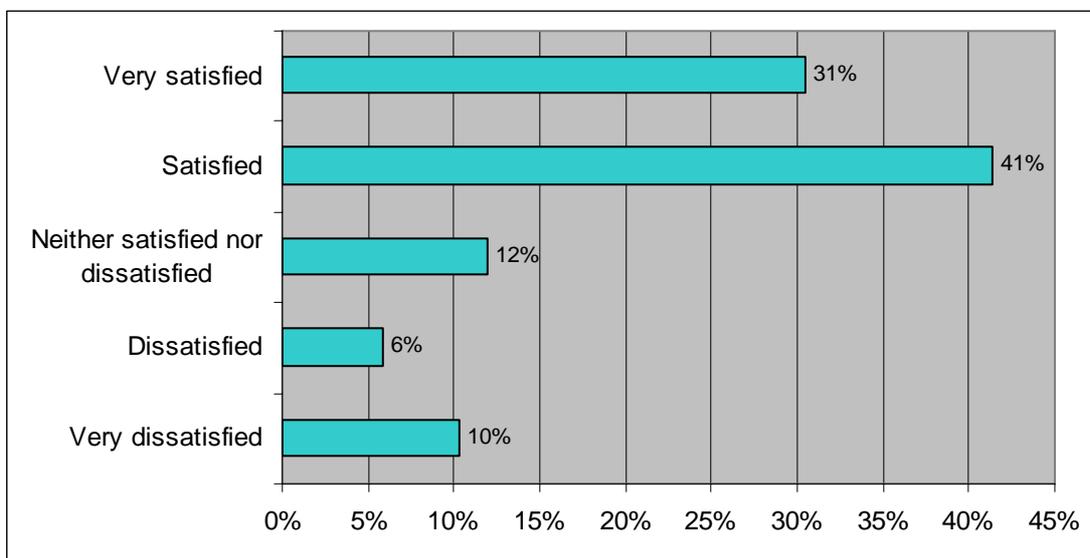
Older respondents were more likely to be satisfied than younger respondents (92% of those over 55 compared to 81% of those aged 16-34 and 80% of those aged 35-54 +). Those who stated they were of an ‘Other Christian Religion’ (88%) were more likely than Catholics (78%) to be satisfied with how long the Office took to reply after they first reported the incident.



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

### The advice given to you

Seventy two 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 31% who were very satisfied.



**Figure 7: Satisfaction with advice given**

Women (78%) were more likely than men (69%) to be satisfied.

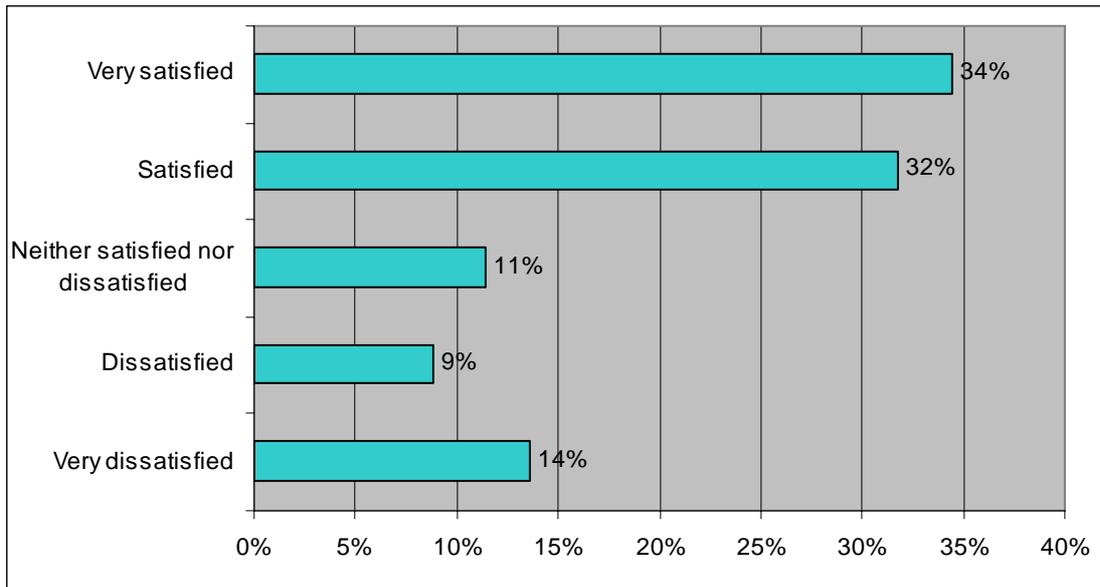
## How seriously the Office treated your complaint

Overall 66% of respondents were satisfied with how seriously the office treated their complaint. This includes 34% who were very satisfied (Figure 8).

Women were more likely than men to be satisfied (73% compared to 62%). Older respondents were more likely to be satisfied (85% of those aged 55+) than those in the younger age groups (62% of those aged 16-34 and 64% of those aged 35-54).

Those who stated that they were of an 'Other Christian Religion' (76%) were more likely to be satisfied than Catholics (64%) and those who stated they had 'No religion' (60%) with how seriously the Office treated their complaint.

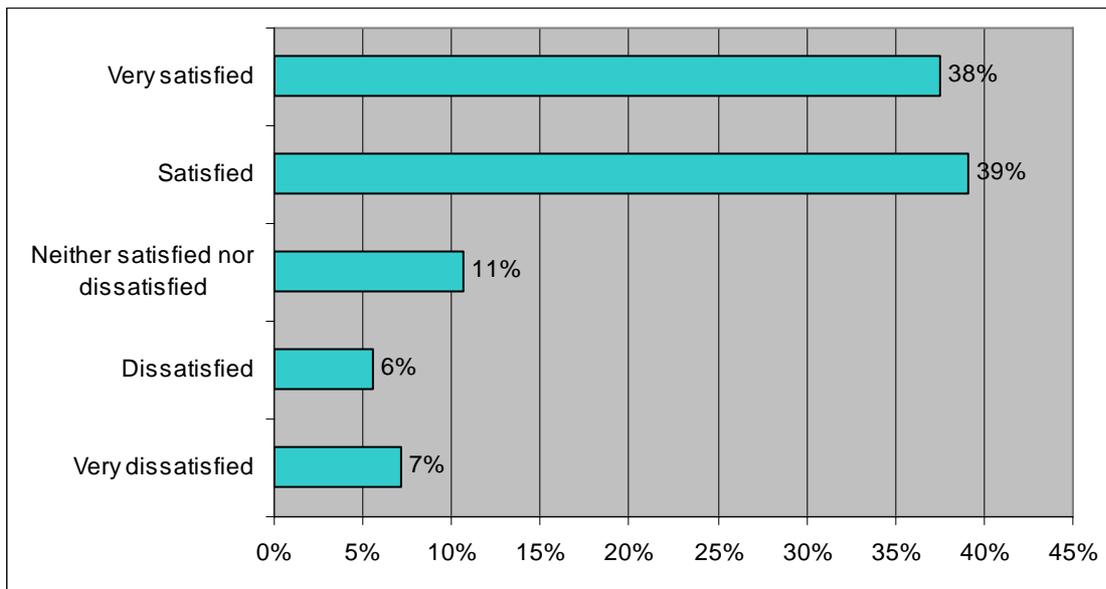
Those living as part of a couple were more likely to think that they had been treated fairly (78%) than those not living as part of a couple (60%).



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

## How clearly staff explained the complaint process to you

Seventy seven per cent of respondents were satisfied with how clearly the complaint process was explained to them (Figure 9). This includes 38% who were very satisfied. The level of satisfaction is higher than the 2008/09 level of 68%.

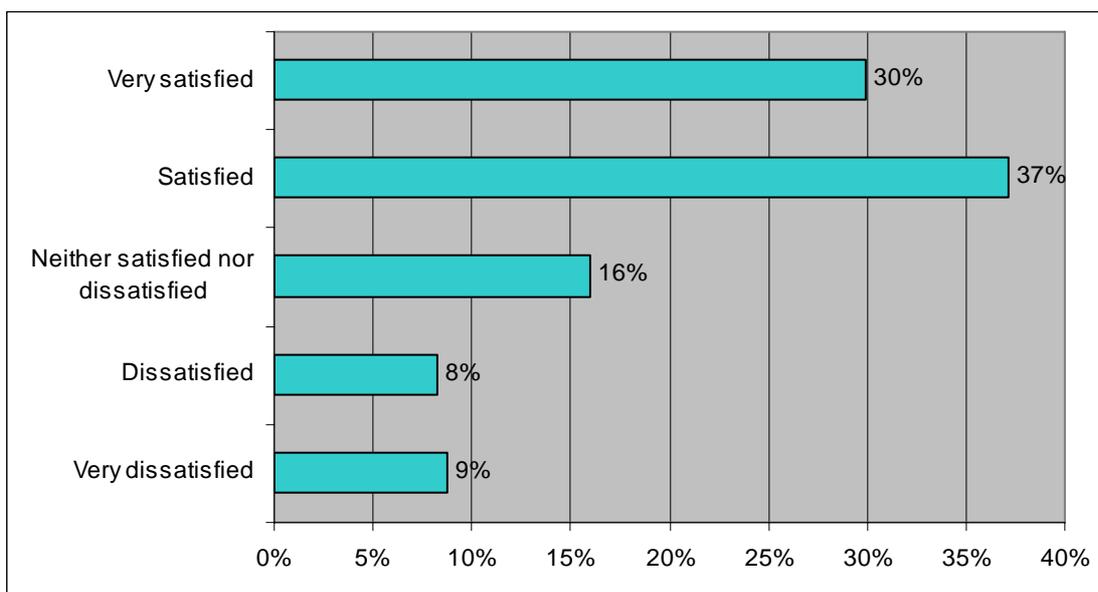


**Figure 9: Satisfaction with how clearly the complaint process was explained**

Again women (83%) were more likely than men (73%) to be satisfied. Older respondents were more likely to be satisfied than younger respondents (88% of those aged over 55 compared to 77% of those aged under 35 and 76% of those aged 35-54).

### How often you were told about the progress of your complaint

Overall 67% of respondents were satisfied with how often they were told about the progress of their complaint, including 30% who were very satisfied (Figure 10).



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

Again women were more likely than men to express satisfaction (74% compared to 63%). Older respondents were more likely to be satisfied than younger respondents (81% of those aged over 55 compared to 67% of those aged under 35 and 63% of those aged 35-54). Those living as part of a couple were more likely to be satisfied with how often they were told about the progress of their complaint (73%) than those not living as part of a couple (61%).

### How easy to understand any letters written to you were

Eighty six per cent of respondents were satisfied with how easy to understand any letters written to them were, including 41% who were very satisfied (Figure 11). The overall satisfaction level was higher than last year (81%).

Older respondents were more likely to be satisfied than younger respondents (96% of those aged over 55 compared to 85% of those aged under 35 and 84% of these aged 35-54).

Nationalists (97%) and Unionists (93%) were more likely to be satisfied with this aspect of the service than those who supported 'No Political Party' (81%).

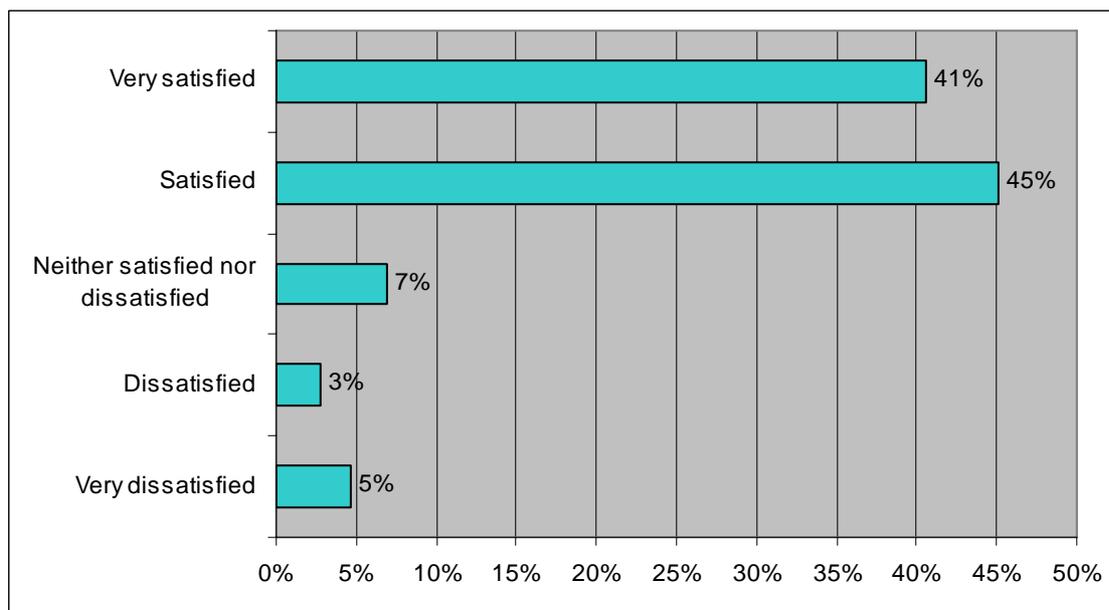
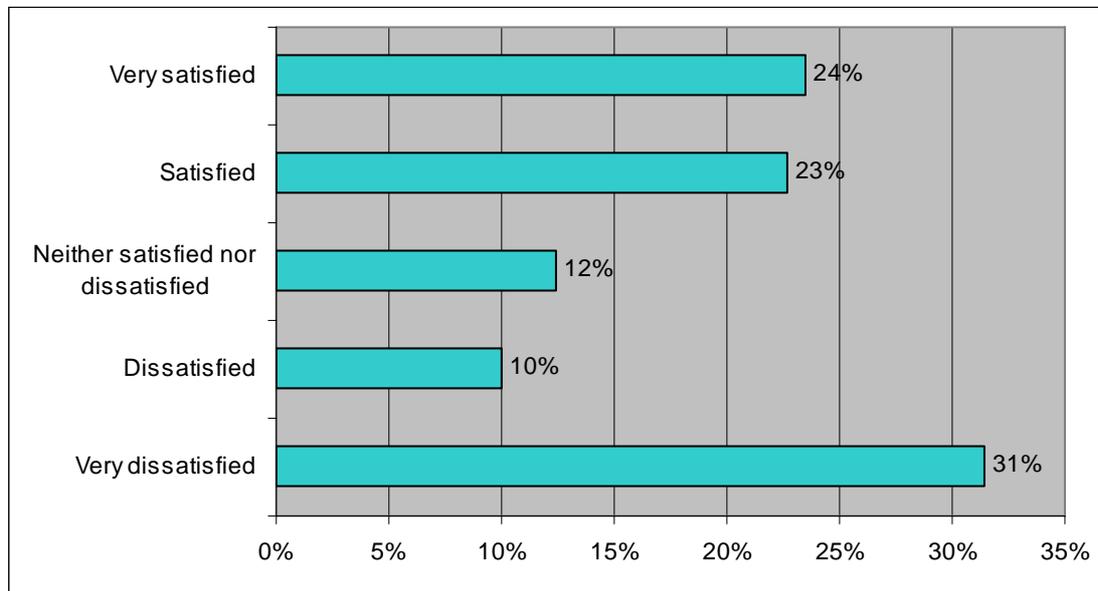


Figure 11: Satisfaction with ease of understanding of letters

## The outcome of your complaint

Forty six per cent of respondents were satisfied with the outcome of their complaint, including 24% who were very satisfied (Figure 12).

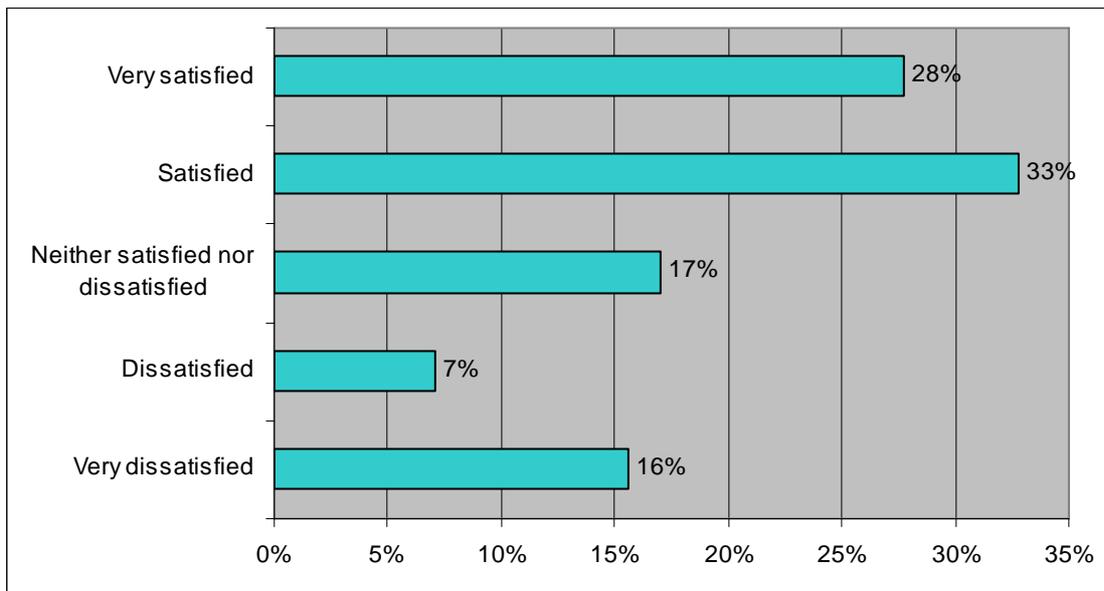


**Figure 12: Satisfaction with the outcome of the complaint**

Again women were more likely than men to be satisfied (55% compared to 42%).

## The overall time it took to resolve your complaint

A total of 61% of respondents were satisfied with the overall time it took to resolve their complaint, including 28% who were very satisfied (Figure 13).

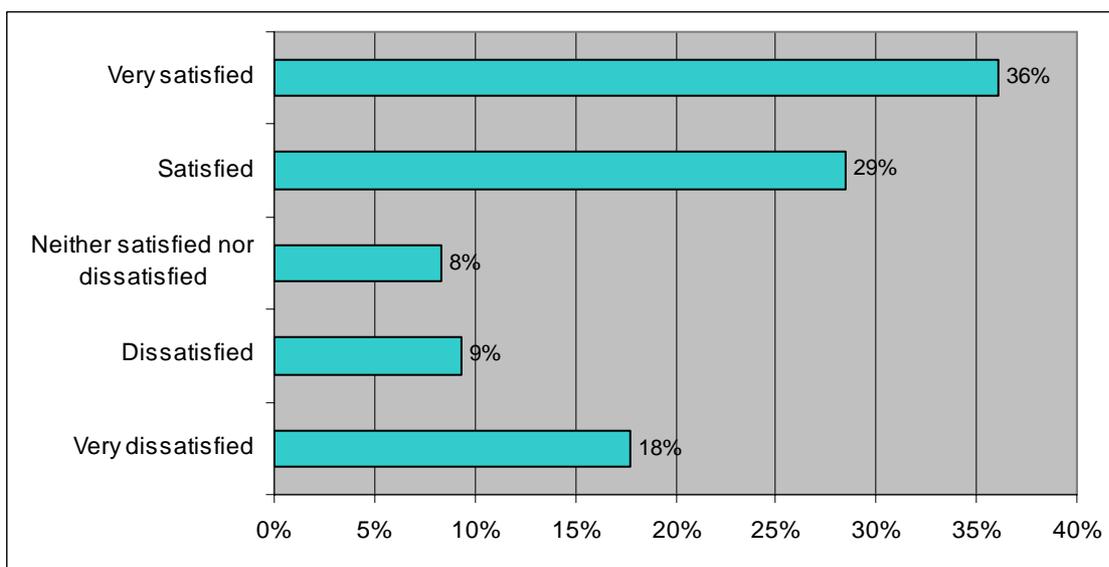


**Figure 13: Satisfaction with the overall time it took to resolve the complaint**

Women are more likely to be satisfied than men (69% compared to 56%).

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

Overall 65% of respondents were satisfied with the service received from the Police Ombudsman’s Office, including 36% who were very satisfied. This overall level of satisfaction is higher than the level reported in the 2008/09 survey (59%).



**Figure 14: Overall satisfaction with service received**

Those living as part of a couple were more likely to be satisfied (72%) than those not living as part of a couple (61%).

**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, 71% said they would use the complaints system again. People with dependants were more likely say that they would use the system again than those without dependants (80% compared to 69%).

## Comments regarding measures the Office could take to improve its service

When respondents were asked what measures the Office could take to improve its service, 317 complainants made comments. Although due to the nature of the questions the majority of the comments were negative, nearly one quarter of the complainants who commented thought that the Office did not need to take any measures to improve its service or made other positive comments.

The positive comments reflected earlier results around the perceptions held of Ombudsman staff.

*“Service was brilliant and the complaint was dealt with informally through a friendly yet professional service - thank you.”*

A substantial number of comments related to the length of the investigation, the perceived inaction by the Office or a lack of information on the progress of the complaint.

*“Informal Resolution took forever to resolve my complaint - over 2 years- we all had our claims for damages settled quicker. Why can't we be told of the outcome of the disciplinary hearing? Why can the Chief Constable not write to us and tell us that he agrees we were badly treated and apologise for how our accident was dealt with?”*

Some respondents complained that in certain cases the Investigation officer valued the opinion of the police officer too highly:

*“Instead of taking the PSNI word, maybe use community workers or people in my community.”*

Reflecting earlier results a substantial number of respondents made negative comments about the outcome of their complaint. Other comments were in relation to the investigation process:

*“Staff conducting interviews should have their research done before the interview and be more supportive”.*

Some comments were concerning the remit of the Office. Other respondents felt

that the Police Ombudsman did not have enough power or that complaints should be investigated regardless of time elapsed:

*“As a member of the public I was unaware that a complaint must be about a policeman / woman not as I thought against the police in general. It would be helpful if this fact could be more readily advertised.”*

Some of the comments were general criticisms of the police rather than specific comments on the complaints system.

*“I would say there would be less complaints if members of the Police were given better training in people management, people skills and use common sense along with book procedure.”*

## Appendix 1: Additional Tables, 2008/09, 2009/10 Results

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

	08/09%	09/10%
Yes	87	90
No	13	10
Total	100	100

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

	08/09%	09/10%
Yes	96	97
No	4	4
Total	100	100

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

	08/09%	09/10%
Yes	94	94
No	6	6
Total	100	100

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

	08/09%	09/10%
Yes	85	86
No	15	14
Total	100	100

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

	08/09%	09/10%
Yes	21	20
No	79	80
Total	100	100

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

	08/09%	09/10%
Yes	91	91
No	9	9
Total	100	100

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

	08/09%	09/10%
Yes	90	92
No	10	8

Total	100	100
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**Table 8: How did they seem to you - professional?**

	08/09%	09/10%
Yes	89	91
No	11	9
Total	100	100

**Table 9: How did they seem to you – rude?**

	08/09%	09/10%
Yes	5	7
No	95	93
Total	100	100

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

	08/09%	09/10%
Yes	13	13
No	87	87
Total	100	100

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

	08/09%	09/10%
Yes	67	68
No	33	33
Total	100	100

**Table 12: Overall do you think you were treated fairly by the police Ombudsman’s Office?**

	08/09%	09/10%
Yes	73	75
No	27	26
Total	100	100

**How satisfied were you with -**

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

	08/09%	09/10%
Very satisfied	26	31
Satisfied	42	41
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	14	12
Dissatisfied	6	6
Very dissatisfied	12	10
Total	100	100

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

	08/09%	09/10%
Very satisfied	36	38
Satisfied	38	44
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	13	8
Dissatisfied	5	4
Very dissatisfied	9	7
Total	100	100

**Table 15: How seriously the Office treated your complaint?**

	08/09%	09/10%
Very satisfied	30	34
Satisfied	31	32
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	11	11
Dissatisfied	9	9
Very dissatisfied	19	14
Total	100	100

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

	08/09%	09/10%
Very satisfied	31	38
Satisfied	37	39
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	13	11
Dissatisfied	8	6
Very dissatisfied	11	7
Total	100	100

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

	08/09%	09/10%
Very satisfied	26	30
Satisfied	39	37
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	15	16
Dissatisfied	7	8
Very dissatisfied	13	9
Total	100	100

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

	08/09%	09/10%
Very satisfied	36	41
Satisfied	44	45
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	10	7
Dissatisfied	4	3
Very dissatisfied	6	5
Total	100	100

**Table 19: The outcome of your complaint?**

	08/09%	09/10%
Very satisfied	15	24
Satisfied	27	23
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	15	12
Dissatisfied	10	10
Very dissatisfied	33	31
Total	100	100

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

	08/09%	09/10%
Very satisfied	22	28
Satisfied	36	33
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	16	17
Dissatisfied	9	7
Very dissatisfied	18	16
Total	100	100

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

	08/09%	09/10%
Very satisfied	31	36
Satisfied	28	29
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	11	8
Dissatisfied	7	9
Very dissatisfied	23	18
Total	100	100

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

	08/09%	09/10%
Yes	69	71
No	31	29
Total	100	100

# COMPLAINANT SATISFACTION FORM

## IN CONFIDENCE

You made a complaint about the police to the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland. We are interested in how well you think the Office dealt with your complaint, and would be grateful if you could take a few minutes to complete this form.

### 1. DID YOU AT ANY TIME SPEAK TO THE STAFF FROM THE POLICE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE?

Please tick the appropriate box.

Yes (Please go to Question 2)

No (Please go to Question 3)

### 2. IF YOU DID SPEAK TO STAFF FROM THE OFFICE, HOW DID THEY SEEM TO YOU?

Please tick the appropriate box.

	Yes	No
The staff were polite	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The staff were friendly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The staff were knowledgeable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The staff were not interested	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The staff were patient	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The staff were easy to understand	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The staff were professional	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The staff were rude	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The staff were in a hurry or rushed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The staff were impartial	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### 3. OVERALL, DO YOU THINK YOU WERE TREATED FAIRLY BY THE OFFICE?

Please tick the appropriate box.

Yes (Please go to Question 5)

No (Please go to Question 4)

### 4. IF YOU THINK YOU WERE NOT TREATED FAIRLY BY THE OFFICE PLEASE SAY WHY.

PLEASE TURN OVER

## 5. HOW SATISFIED OR DISSATISFIED WERE YOU WITH EACH OF THE FOLLOWING ASPECTS?

Please tick the appropriate box on each row.

	VERY SATISFIED	SATISFIED	NEITHER SATISFIED NOR DISSATISFIED	DISSATISFIED	VERY DISSATISFIED	COMPLAINT ONGOING
If you made your complaint directly to the Office the advice given to you at this time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
The length of time it took for the Office to reply to you after you first reported the incident	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
The seriousness with which the Office treated your complaint	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
How clearly the complaint process was explained to you by staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
How often you were told about the progress of your complaint	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
How easy it was to understand letters written to you	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
The outcome of your complaint	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The overall time it took to resolve your complaint	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## 6. IF YOU HAD A NEW COMPLAINT ABOUT THE POLICE, WOULD YOU USE THE COMPLAINTS SYSTEM AGAIN?

Please tick the appropriate box.

Yes  No

## 7. OVERALL, TAKING EVERYTHING INTO ACCOUNT

Please tick the appropriate box.

	VERY SATISFIED	SATISFIED	NEITHER SATISFIED NOR DISSATISFIED	DISSATISFIED	VERY DISSATISFIED
How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the service you received from the Police Ombudsman's office?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## 8. IN YOUR OPINION ARE THERE ANY MEASURES THE OFFICE OF THE POLICE OMBUDSMAN COULD TAKE TO IMPROVE ITS SERVICE TO THE PUBLIC?

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Research and Performance Directorate  
Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland  
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St. Anne's Square  
11 Church Street  
Belfast  
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