

Complainant Satisfaction Survey 2008/2009

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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 2008 to March 2009.

The main findings are given below.

- Seventy three 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 and easy to understand.
- Fifty nine per cent of respondents overall, taking everything into account, were satisfied with the service they received. This includes 31% 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 (81% satisfied) and the length of time the Office took to reply after they first reported the incident (74%). Only 42% of complainants were satisfied with the outcome of the complaint.
- Sixty nine six 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 2008 to March 2009.

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 2008 and March 2009. 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.

Response rate

A total of 2,757 were issued and 562 responses were received, representing a response rate of 20%. 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 08/09 (20%). (Figure 1).

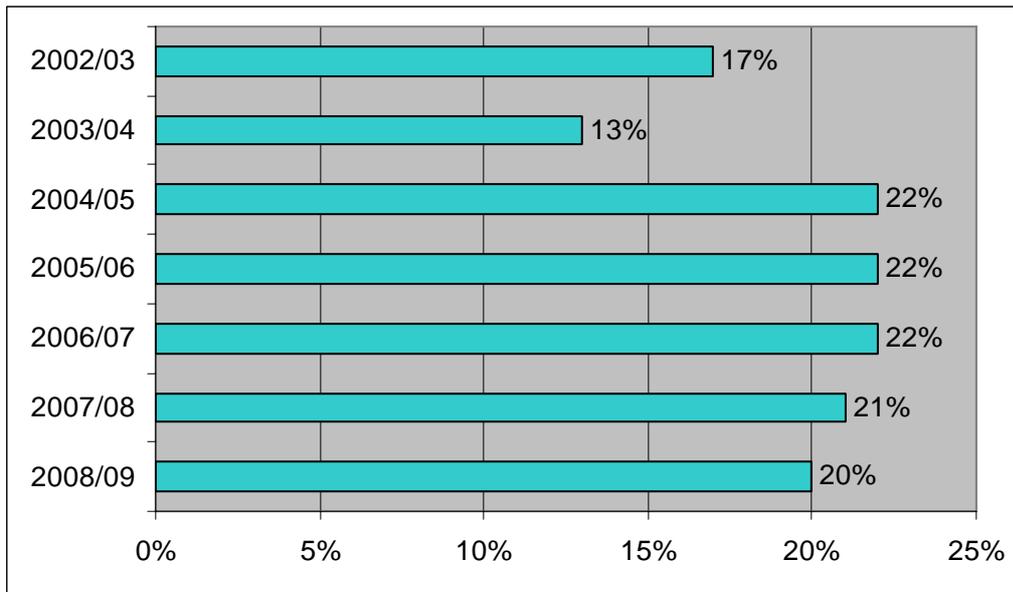


Figure 1: Survey Response Rate 2002/03 – 2008/09

Sample profile

Figure 2a shows the closure types for all complaints closed from April 2008 until the end of November compared to the closure types for complaints for which responses were received. Up until the end of November 2008 data was recorded on the Case Management System. On this system one closure was made against each complaint. The greatest proportion of respondents had their complaints dealt with through Informal Resolution. 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 co-operation, which comprised 23% of complainants surveyed compared to 8% of respondents.

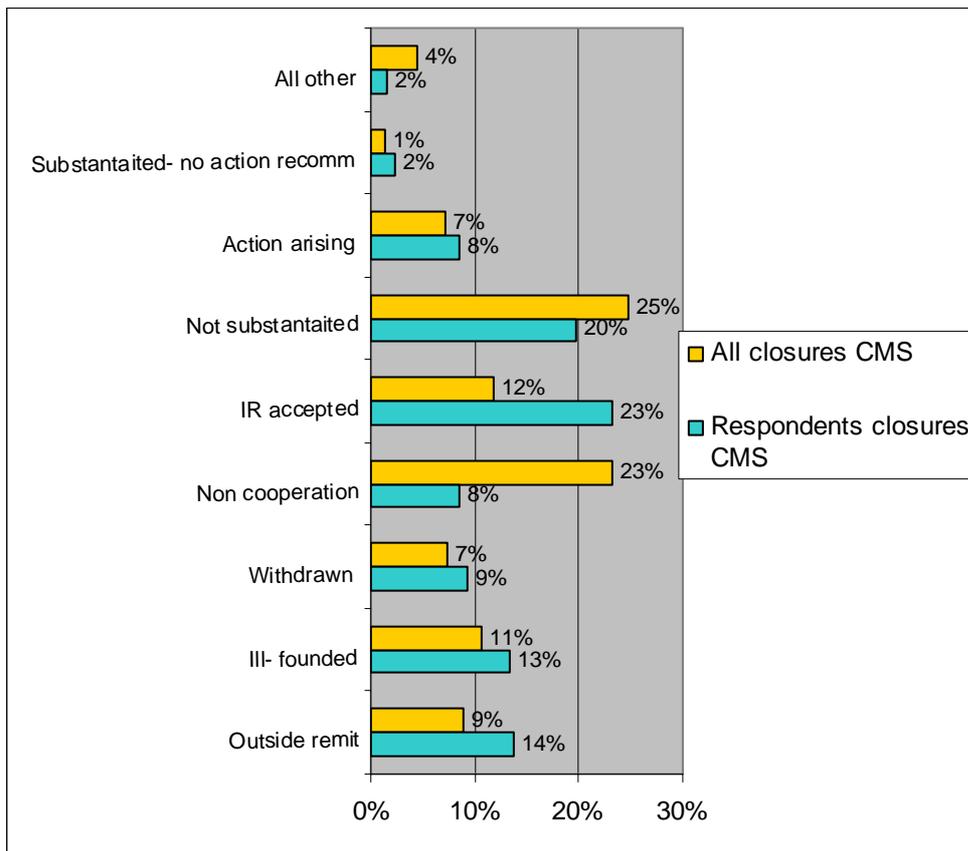


Figure 2a: Sample and respondents by complaint closure category April –November 2008

On 1 December 2008 the Office replaced its complaints based management recording system with one that is allegation based. (Figure 2b) The new system reports on recommendations made against each allegation.

Again the greatest difference between the proportions of allegation closure types for complainants whose complaints had been closed and those who responded was for those whose complaints had been closed because of complainant non co-operation, which comprised 24% of all closures compared to 9% of respondents.

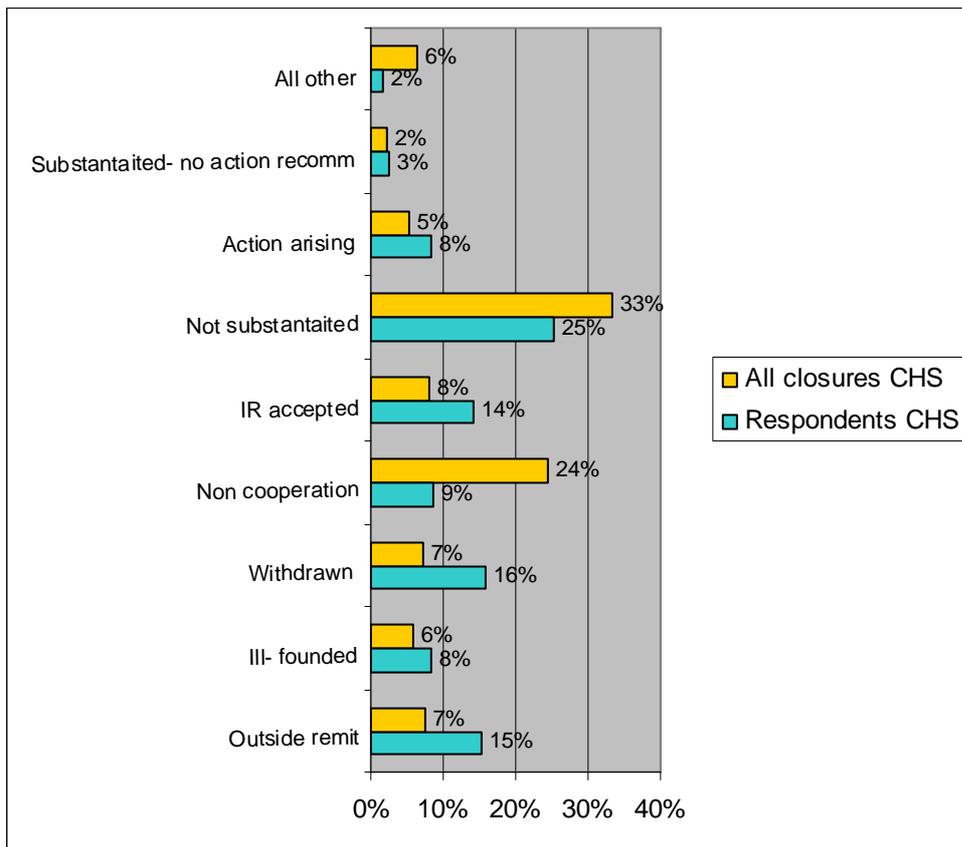


Figure 2b: Sample and respondents by allegation closure December 2008-March 2009

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 562 respondents to the complainant satisfaction questionnaire, 410 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). 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 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 79% 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, cohabiting 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 respondents were asked were they Catholic, Methodist, Church of Ireland, Presbyterian, Other Christian , Other Religious Belief or No religion. These groups were collapsed into the following groups “Catholic”, “Other Religion” and “No Religion”.

Thirty six per cent of respondents were female. This is a slightly higher proportion than found in complaints closed (29%). This reflects the higher response rate for females than males to the survey (Figure 3).

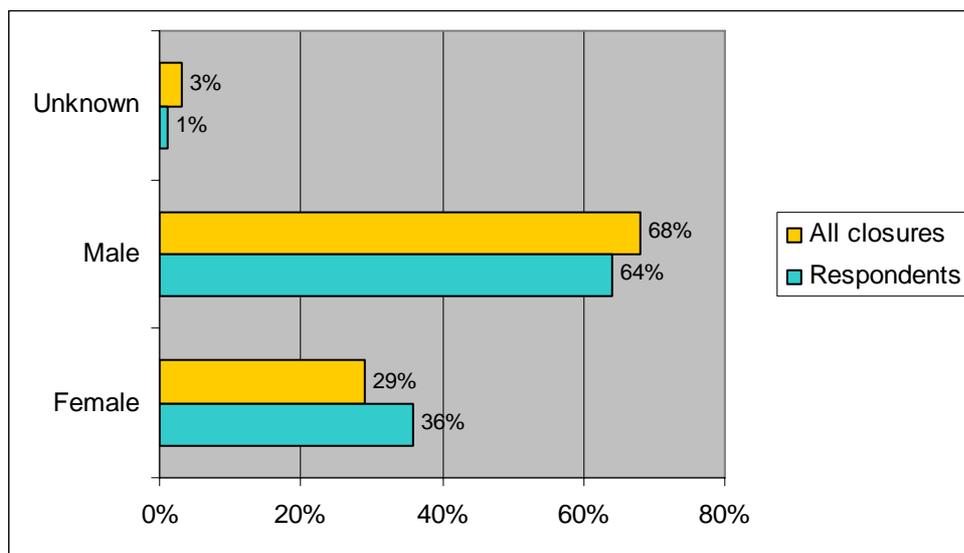


Figure 3: Sample and respondents by gender

Although, data for complainants' age are not available for about 21% of respondents and 42% of complainants whose complaint was closed during 2008/2009, 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)

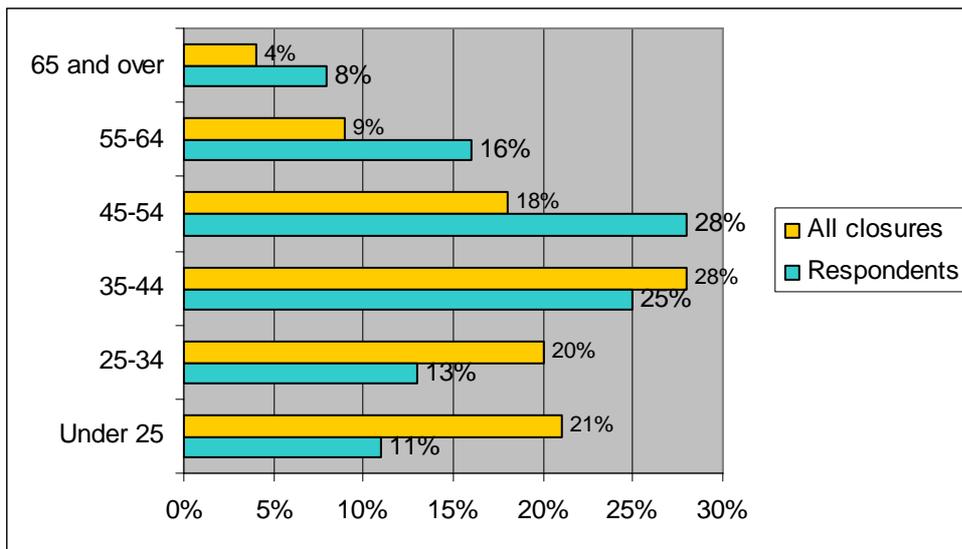


Figure 4: Sample and respondents by age group

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 (87%) had spoken to staff. This was similar to the proportion reported in last year's survey (86%).

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.

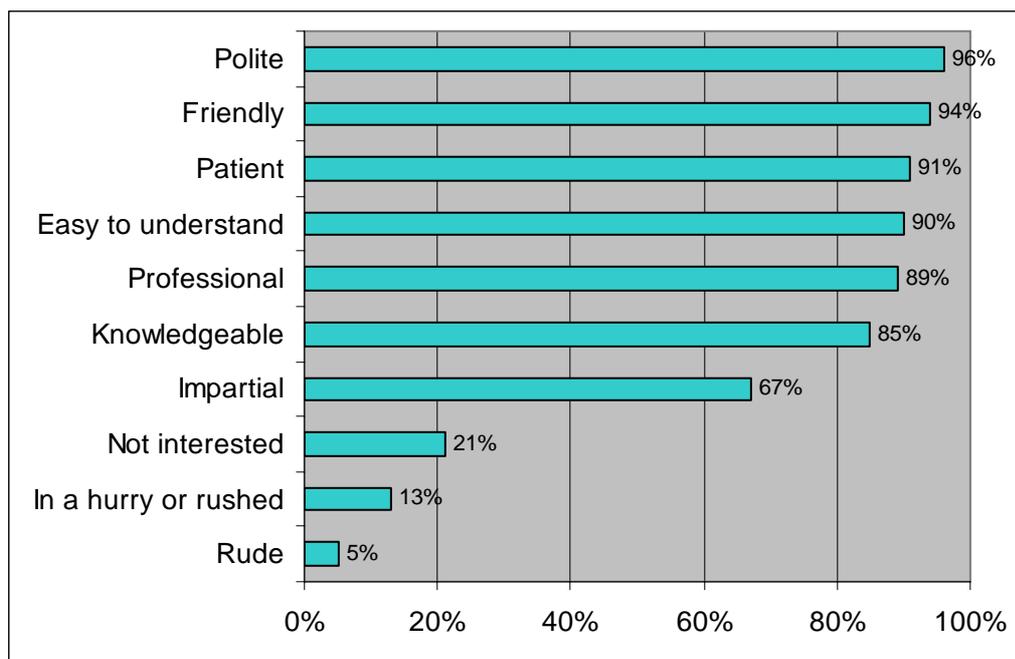


Figure 5: How did staff seem to you?

Overall perceptions of staff were very positive: -

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

Large proportions also felt they were professional and knowledgeable and almost seven out of ten (67%) thought staff were impartial.

Only a minority had negative perceptions of staff:

Thirteen per cent thought staff were in a hurry or rushed, 5% thought they were rude and 21% thought staff seemed disinterested.

Overall perceptions of staff were very similar to last year.

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

Seventy three per cent of respondents thought that they were treated fairly by the Police Ombudsman's Office. This proportion is similar to the level reported in 2007/08 (71%). Further analysis showed women were more likely to think they had been treated fairly than men (82% women compared to 67% of men).

Those who were working were more likely to think they were treated fairly than those who were not working (80% compared to 56%). Those without disabilities were more likely to respond positively - 60% of people with disabilities compared to 79% of those without disabilities thought they were treated fairly).

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.

Several respondents felt that the complaints system was unfairly weighted in favour of police officers:

'The Police Ombudsman although supposedly impartial failed to deal with my complaint in such a manner and sided with the police - although presented with more than enough evidence to warrant disciplinary procedures against the officer involved.'

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

'Documents not properly reviewed. Some documents appear to have been lost. Insufficient attention paid to material. Staff failed to carry out promised actions. Staff failed to understand my perspective and failed to sufficiently explain reasons for decision.'

Other respondents felt that Police Ombudsman staff did not have enough power and complaints should be investigated regardless of time elapsed.

'... I requested help from the police over 2 years ago and I was ignored, the Ombudsman "finalised" my complaint using a common trick of time limits. Illegal acts and criminal acts have been committed and all was and is ignored.'

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.

Seventy four per cent of respondents were satisfied with how long it took the Office to reply. This includes 36% who were very satisfied. (Figure 6). This proportion of respondents who were satisfied is similar to the level reported in 2007/2008 when 77% said they were satisfied.

Again women were more likely to be satisfied than men (81% women compared to 70% of men). Older respondents were more likely to be satisfied than younger respondents (84% of those over 55 compared to 64% of those aged 16-34). Those who were working (78%) were more likely to be satisfied compared to those who were not working (60%).

Those with disabilities were more likely to respond negatively - 22% of people with disabilities were dissatisfied compared to 10% of those without disabilities.

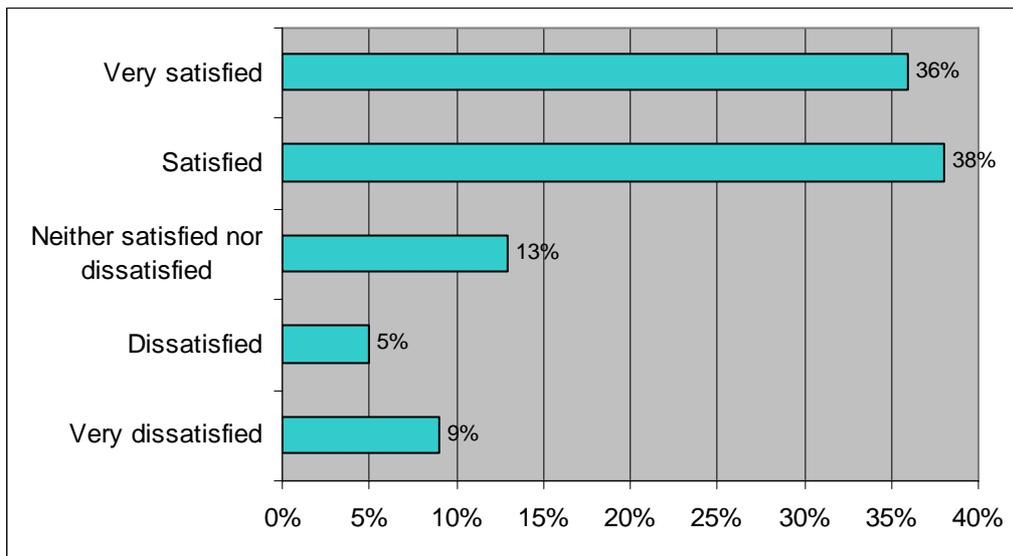


Figure 6: Satisfaction with how long it took for the Office to reply after the incident was first reported

The advice given to you

Sixty eight 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 26% who were very satisfied. This proportion is similar to last year when 66% said they were satisfied with the advice given to them.

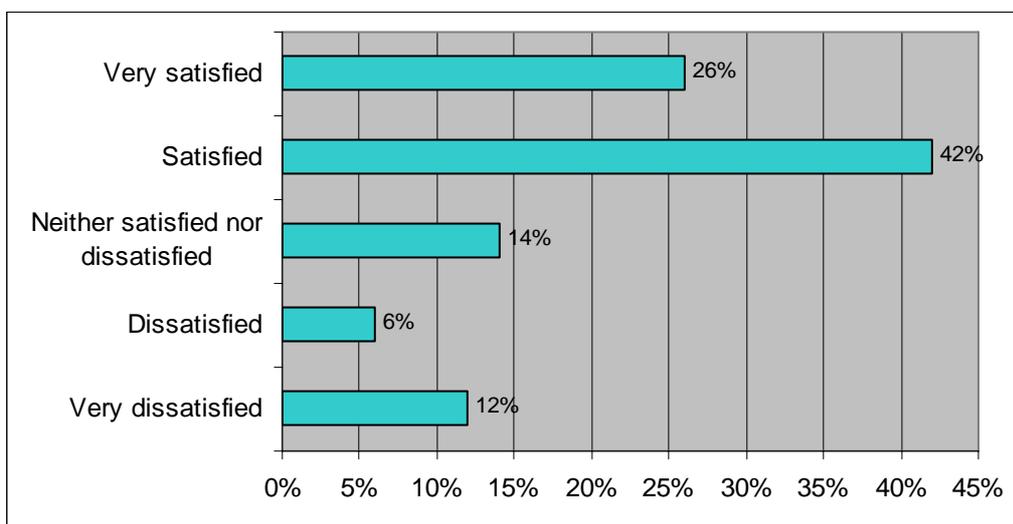


Figure 7: Satisfaction with advice given

Women (77%) were more likely than men (63%) to be satisfied. Older respondents were more likely to be satisfied than younger respondents (71% of those over 55 compared to 61% of those aged 16-34). Unionists (78%) were more likely than

Nationalists (57%) to be satisfied with the advice given to them. Those who were working (74%) were more likely to be satisfied with the advice given compared to those who were not working (56%).

Those with disabilities were more likely to respond negatively - 26% of people with disabilities were dissatisfied compared to 13% of those without disabilities.

How seriously the Office treated your complaint

Overall 61% of respondents were satisfied with how seriously the office treated their complaint. This includes 30% who were very satisfied (Figure 8). This proportion is similar to last year (60% satisfied).

Women were more likely than men to be satisfied (69% compared to 56%). Those who stated they were of an 'Other Religion' (67%) were more likely to be satisfied than Catholics (56%) with how seriously the Office treated their complaint. Those who were working (70%) were more likely to be satisfied than those who were not working (43%).

Those with disabilities were more likely to be dissatisfied (40% of people with disabilities compared to 22% of those without disabilities).

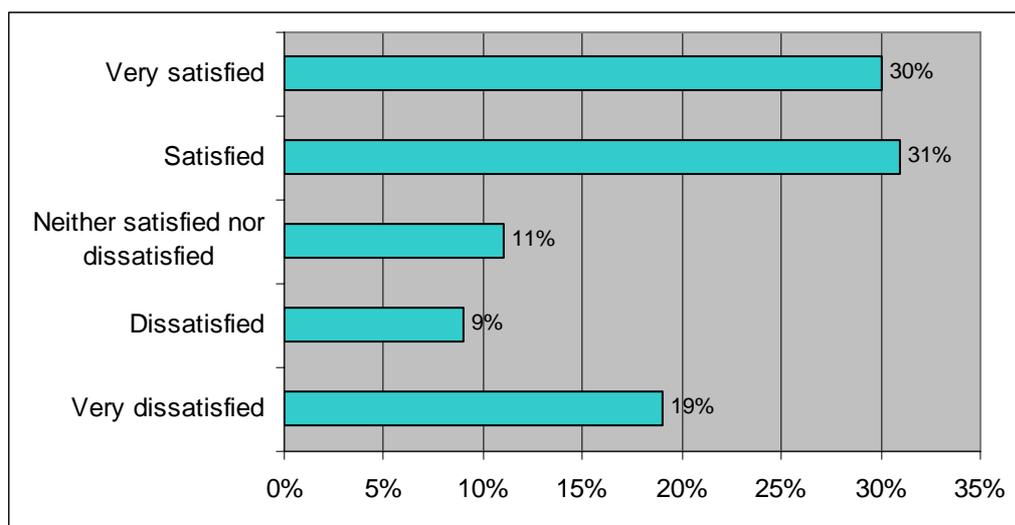


Figure 8: Satisfaction with how seriously the Office treated the complaint

How clearly staff explained the complaint process to you

Sixty eight per cent of respondents were satisfied with how clearly the complaint process was explained to them (Figure 9). This includes 31% who were very satisfied. This satisfaction figure is similar to the 2007/08 level of 72%.

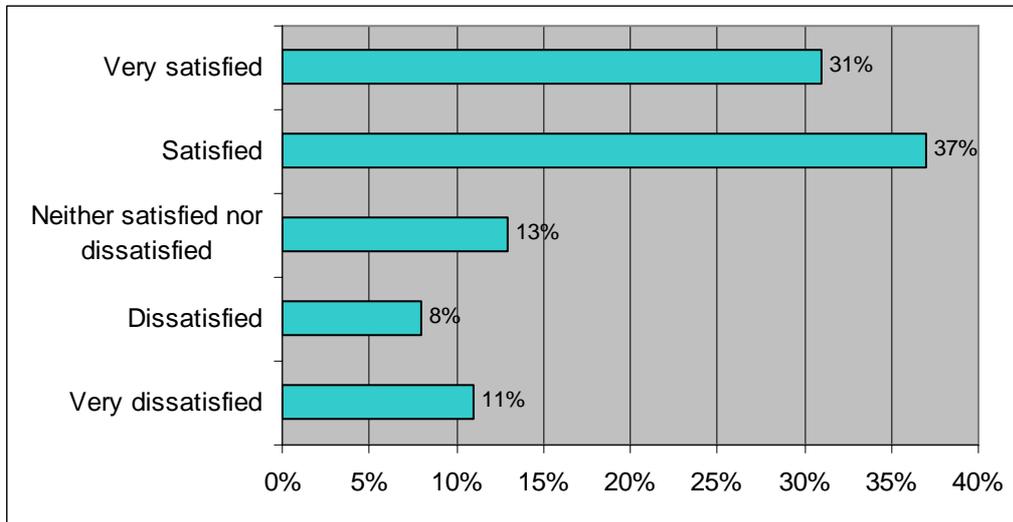


Figure 9: Satisfaction with how clearly the complaint process was explained

Again women (78%) were more likely than men (63%) to be satisfied. Older respondents were more likely to be satisfied than younger respondents (74% of those aged over 55 compared to 60% of those aged under 35). Those who were working (72%) were more likely to be satisfied with how seriously the Office treated their complaint than those who were not working (51%).

Those with disabilities were more likely to be dissatisfied (29% of people with disabilities compared to 14% of those without disabilities).

How often you were told about the progress of your complaint

Overall 65% of respondents were satisfied with how often they were told about the progress of their complaint, including 26% who were very satisfied (Figure 10). This overall satisfaction level is similar to the 2007/08 level of 69%.

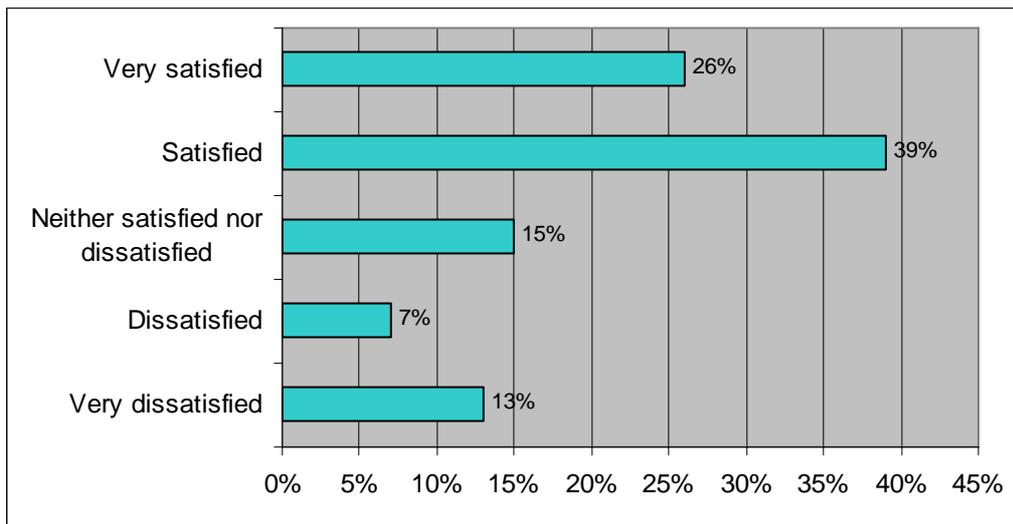


Figure 10: Satisfaction with how often complainant was told of complaint progress

Again women were more likely than men to express satisfaction (74% compared to 60%). Older respondents were more likely to be satisfied than younger respondents (74% of those aged over 55 compared to 56% of those aged under 35). Those who were working (68%) were also more likely to be satisfied compared to those who were not working (47%).

Those with disabilities were more likely to be dissatisfied (30% of people with disabilities compared to 18% of those without disabilities).

How easy to understand any letters written to you were

Eighty one per cent of respondents were satisfied with how easy to understand any letters written to them were, including 36% who were very satisfied (Figure 11). The overall satisfaction level last year was 85%.

Women were more likely than men to be satisfied (89% compared to 76%). Older respondents were more likely to be satisfied than younger respondents (87% of those aged over 55 compared to 73% of those aged under 35). Those who were working (83%) were more likely to be satisfied compared to those who were not working (73%).

Those with disabilities were more likely to be dissatisfied (19% of people with disabilities compared to 8% of those without disabilities).

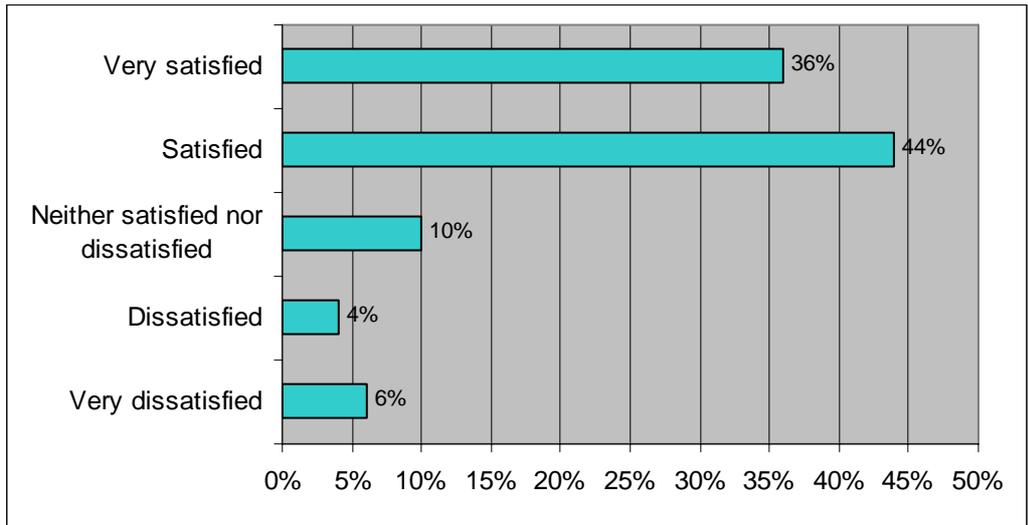


Figure 11: Satisfaction with ease of understanding of letters

The outcome of your complaint

Forty two per cent of respondents were satisfied with the outcome of their complaint, including 15% who were very satisfied (Figure 12). The overall level of satisfaction last year was (37%).

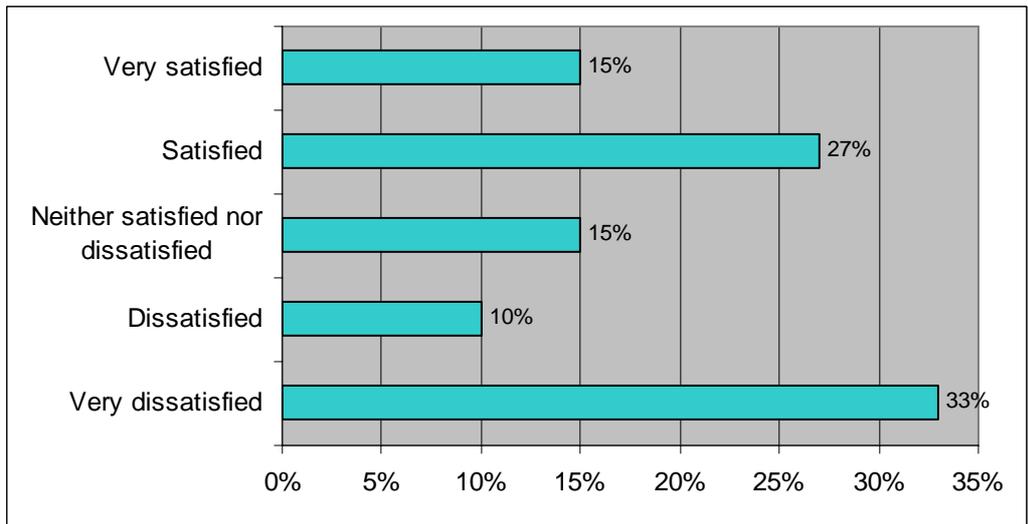


Figure 12: Satisfaction with the outcome of the complaint

Again women were more likely than men to be satisfied (50% compared to 38%). Those who were working (48%) were more likely to be satisfied compared to those who were not working (24%).

Those with disabilities more likely to be dissatisfied (59% of people with disabilities compared to 37% of those without disabilities).

The overall time it took to resolve your complaint

A total of 58% of respondents were satisfied with the overall time it took to resolve their complaint, including 22% who were very satisfied (Figure 13). This overall satisfaction level is similar to the 2007/08 level (60%).

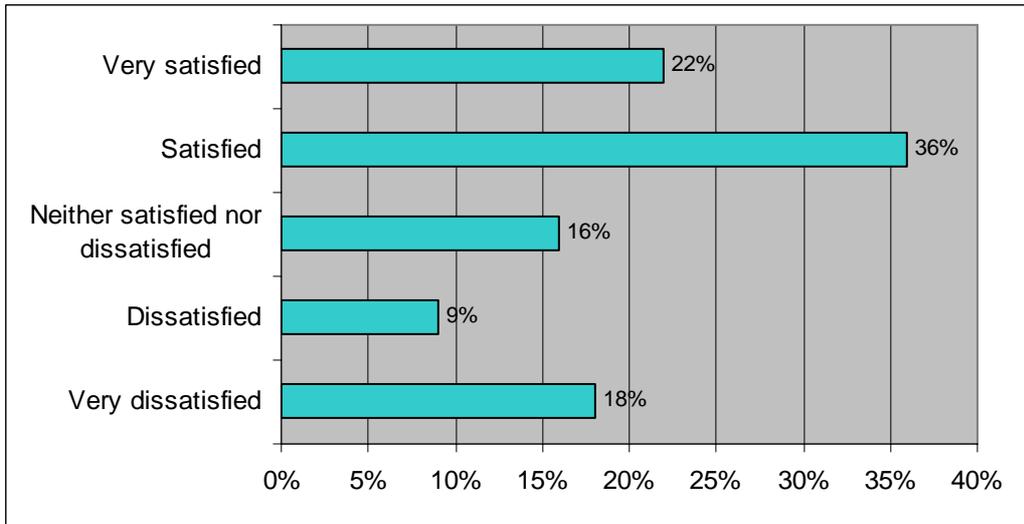


Figure 13: Satisfaction with the overall time it took to resolve the complaint

Women are more likely to be satisfied than men (65% compared to 54%). Older respondents were more likely to be satisfied than younger respondents (66% of those aged over 55 compared to 48% of those aged under 35). Those who were working (61%) were more likely to be satisfied compared to those who were not (39%).

Those with disabilities were more likely to be dissatisfied (37% of people with disabilities compared to 26% of those without disabilities).

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

Overall 59% of respondents were satisfied with the service received from the

Police Ombudsman's Office, including 31% who were very satisfied (Figure 14). This overall level of satisfaction is similar to the satisfaction level reported in the 2007/08 survey (57%).

Women were more likely to be satisfied than men (69% compared to 54%). Those who were working (69%) were more likely to be satisfied compared to those who were not working (43%).

People with disabilities were more likely to be dissatisfied (43%) compared to those without (21%).

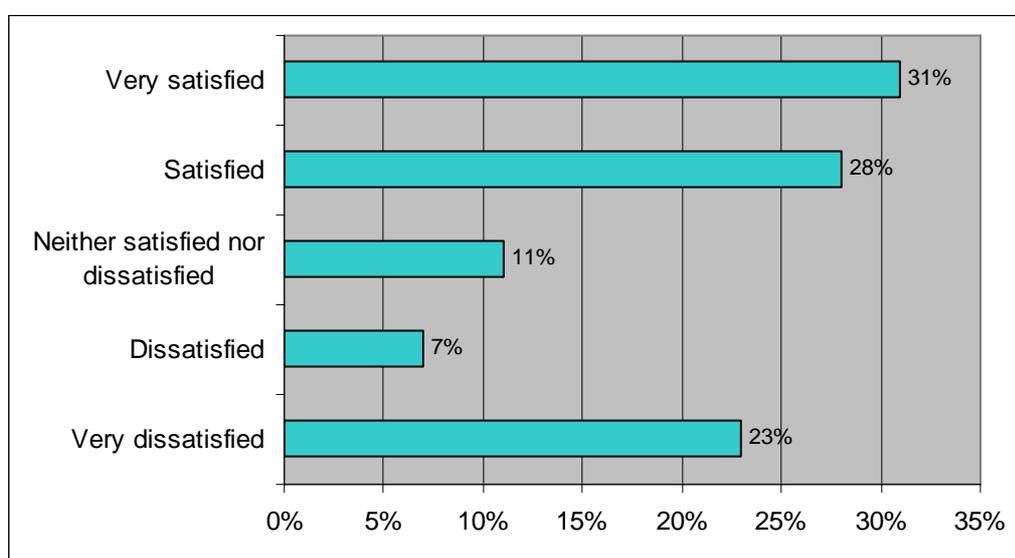


Figure 14: Overall satisfaction with service received

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 69% said they would use the complaint system again – this is similar to last year when 73% said they would use the system again.

Women were more likely to use the system again than males (77% compared to 64%). Also those who were working (76%) were more likely to be use the system again than those who were not working (59%).

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 311 complainants made comments. Although due to the nature of the questions the majority of the comments were negative, over one tenth of the complainants who commented thought that the Office did not need to take any measures to improve its service.

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

'Personally, throughout my complaint the Police Ombudsman were extremely helpful and useful, and if they work like that for every case I can't particularly think of ways they can improve further.'

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

A substantial number of comments that did relate to the system were regarding the length of the investigation, the perceived inaction by the Office or a lack of information on the progress of the complaint.

Some comments were made regarding the fact that Investigation Officers were ex police officers and unlikely to be impartial.

'Yes- employ independent people, not Police etc. They were never trained to be impartial or uphold the law'.

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

'There should not be a time limit for complaint. Many people may like me, not realise for years that the problems they are having are directly due to the inaction of a police officer'.

Appendix 1: Additional Tables, 2007/08, 2008/09 Results

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

	07/08%	08/09%
Yes	86	87
No	14	13
Total	100	100

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

	07/08%	08/09%
Yes	96	96
No	4	4
Total	100	100

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

	07/08%	08/09%
Yes	95	94
No	5	6
Total	100	100

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

	07/08%	08/09%
Yes	87	85
No	13	15
Total	100	100

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

	07/08%	08/09%
Yes	19	21
No	81	79
Total	100	100

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

	07/08%	08/09%
Yes	93	91
No	8	9
Total	101	100

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

	07/08%	08/09%
Yes	92	90
No	8	10
Total	100	100

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

	07/08%	08/09%
Yes	92.0	89
No	8.0	11
Total	100	100

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

	07/08%	08/09%
Yes	8	5
No	92	95
Total	100	100

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

	07/08%	08/09%
Yes	15	13
No	85	87
Total	100	100

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

	07/08%	08/09%
Yes	72	67
No	28	33
Total	100	100

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

	07/08%	08/09%
Yes	71	73
No	29	27
Total	100	100

How satisfied were you with -

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

	07/08%	08/09%
Very satisfied	26	26
Satisfied	40	42
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	21	14
Dissatisfied	4	6
Very dissatisfied	9	12
Total	100	100

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

	07/08%	08/09%
Very satisfied	33	36
Satisfied	44	38
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	11	13
Dissatisfied	4	5
Very dissatisfied	7	9
Total	99	101

Table 15: How seriously the Office treated your complaint?

	07/08%	08/09%
Very satisfied	28	30
Satisfied	31	31
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	16	11
Dissatisfied	9	9
Very dissatisfied	16	19
Total	100	100

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

	07/08%	08/09%
Very satisfied	29	31
Satisfied	43	37
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	13	13
Dissatisfied	7	8
Very dissatisfied	8	11
Total	100	100

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

	07/08%	08/09%
Very satisfied	25	26
Satisfied	44	39
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	13	15
Dissatisfied	8	7
Very dissatisfied	10	13
Total	100	100.0

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

	07/08%	08/09%
Very satisfied	37	36
Satisfied	48	44
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	8	10
Dissatisfied	2	4
Very dissatisfied	6	6
Total	100	100

Table 19: The outcome of your complaint?

	07/08%	08/09%
Very satisfied	15	15
Satisfied	22	27
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	21	15
Dissatisfied	10	10
Very dissatisfied	32	33
Total	100	100

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

	07/08%	08/09%
Very satisfied	19	22
Satisfied	40	36
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	15	16
Dissatisfied	8	9
Very dissatisfied	18	18
Total	100	100

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

	07/08%	08/09%
Very satisfied	28	31
Satisfied	30	28
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	16	11
Dissatisfied	7	7
Very dissatisfied	20	23
Total	100	100

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

	07/08%	08/09%
Yes	73	69
No	27	31
Total	100	100