

Annual Report on
Complainant Satisfaction
with services provided by the
Police Ombudsman's Office in
Northern Ireland
2010/11

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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 annual report presents the data from questionnaires issued to complainants who had complaints closed from April 2010 to March 2011 and also presents trend data for key questions where information is available. Key results from the satisfaction survey have already been published in the 2010/11 Annual Report.

The main findings are given below.

- Overall satisfaction levels remain high although the level of satisfaction has decreased since the level reported in 2009/10.
- The proportion of respondents who said they had been treated fairly has remained consistently high since 2002/03.
- The proportion of respondents who said they would use the system again has remained consistently high since 2004/05.
- The majority of complainants had positive views of Ombudsman staff.
- The highest levels of satisfaction were reported for the following aspects of the complaints process; ease of understanding of any correspondence, the length of time taken to reply after the incident was first reported to the Office and the clarity of the explanation of the complaint's process.

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. Up until September 2005 complainant satisfaction surveys were based on samples of complainants however from September 2005 the Office began surveying all complainants who had a complaint closed.

This report presents the findings from the ninth annual Complainant Satisfaction Survey and includes information collected from complainants whose complaint was closed between April 2010 and March 2011. It also presents trend data for key questions where information is available.

Previous reports can be found on the Police Ombudsman's web-site (<http://www.policeombudsman.org>).

Findings

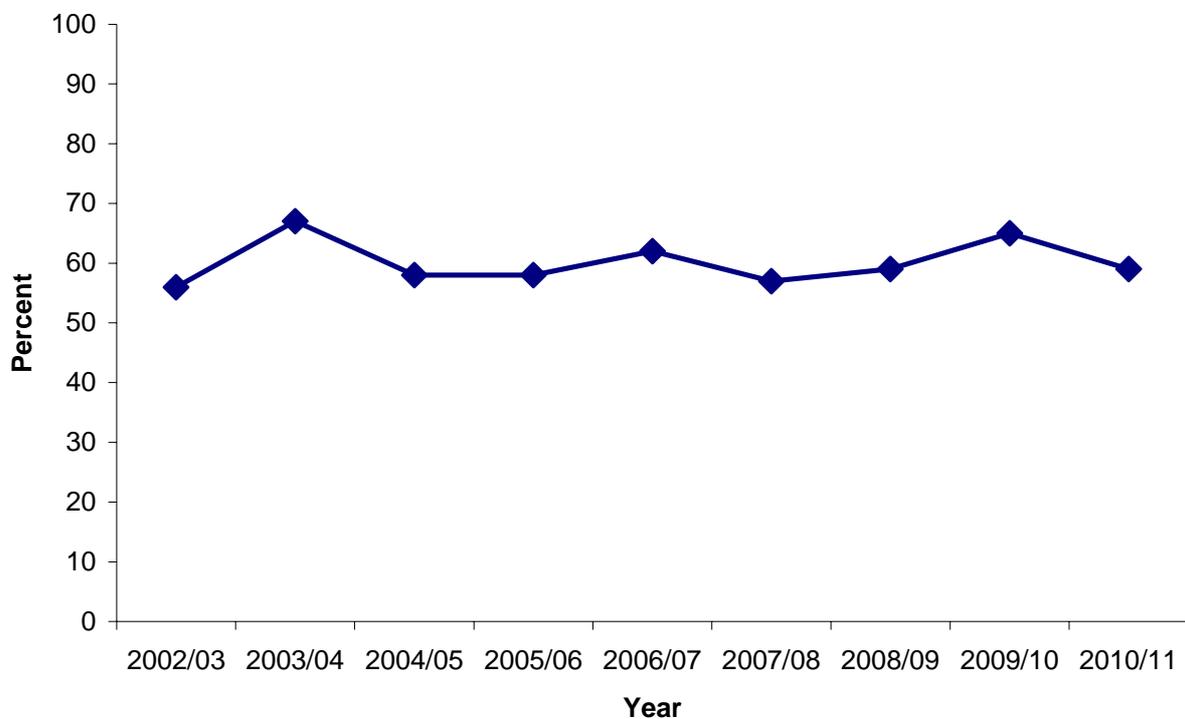
Levels of satisfaction with service received

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

In 2010/11, 59% of respondents stated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the service they received from the Ombudsman’s Office. This level of satisfaction has remained fairly consistent since 2002/03, although the proportion of complainants who were satisfied with the service provided was higher in 2003/04 and 2009/10 than in other years.

Satisfaction levels have decreased from 2009/10;

Figure 1: Overall satisfaction levels with service provided, 2002/03 - 2010/11

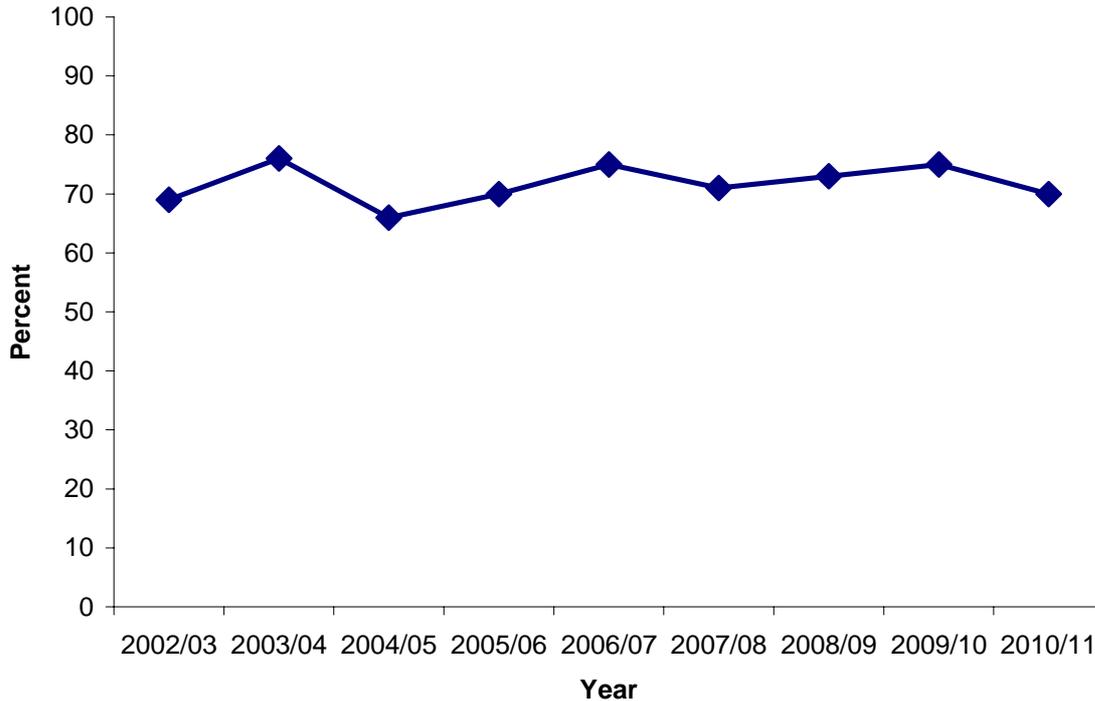


Fairness of treatment

When complainants were asked if they felt they were treated fairly by the Office, 70% of complainants responded positively during 2010/11. This view has remained fairly consistent since 2002/03 (Figure 2).

Complainants continue to feel they are treated fairly;

Figure 2: Fairness of treatment, 2002/03 - 2010/11



In some instances complainants stated that they felt they were not treated fairly. Those respondents were asked to say why this was:

A number of respondents replied that they felt the Ombudsman's Office showed bias towards the police:

"I feel that staff were one-sided to the police and never really looked at my case in-depth."

"The Office seems to take the side of the police i.e. if three or four police officers back each other (which they do), they are listened to and not the complainant. I had no say at all in the outcome of my complaint."

Other complainants felt that the complaints process was a waste of time:

“The initial contact was good, however the last officer in charge of my case made me feel like an inconvenience. My conclusion therefore is that like the PSNI this service is a waste of time.”

“I still have not had any response from the police.... It was a waste of time and I would not be using you again. Again a waste of time.”

Some complainants also commented on the perceived lack of investigation and the outcome of the investigation:

“Case not investigated at all, and when I called to talk to someone I was told I would get a call back and never did.”

“They just read the paperwork and never went any further.”

“I was disappointed by the outcome...made to look like a liar.”

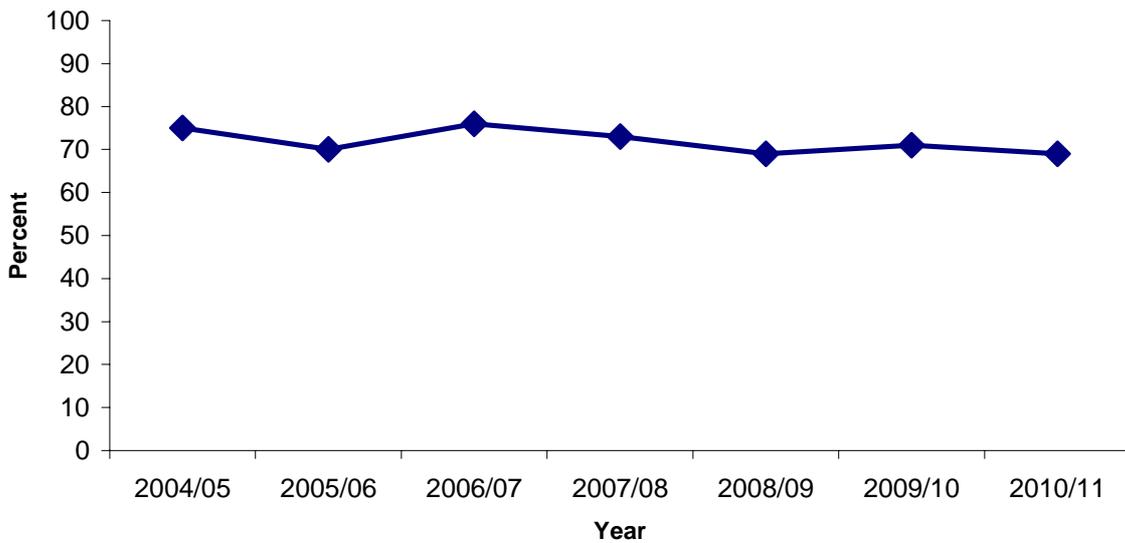
Would complainants use the system again?

Respondents were also asked – If you had a new complaint about the police, would you use the complaints system again?

In 2010/11, 69% of complainants said that they would use the complaints system again. The proportion of complainants who said they would use the system again has remained consistently high since 2004/05 although the 2010/11 level has fallen from 2006/07 when 76% of complainants said they would use the system again - the highest level reported to date (Figure 3).

Complainants would use complaints system again;

Figure 3: If you had a new complaint would you use the complaint system again, 2004/05 - 2010/11

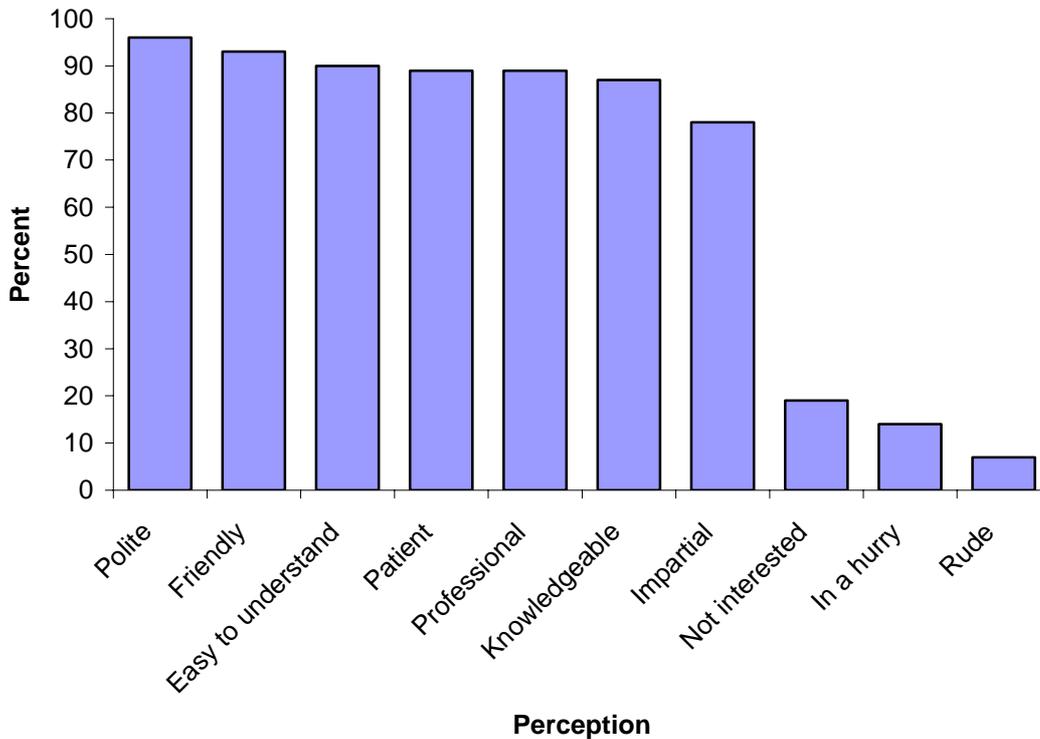


Levels of complainant satisfaction with Ombudsman staff

The majority of complainants said that they had spoken to a member of staff. These respondents were asked how staff had appeared to them in relation to a number of positive and negative characteristics. In 2010/11, the majority of respondents had a positive view of staff with over nine out of ten respondents saying that they thought staff were polite or friendly. A minority of respondents had negative views of staff (Figure 4).

Majority of respondents had positive views of staff during 2010/11;

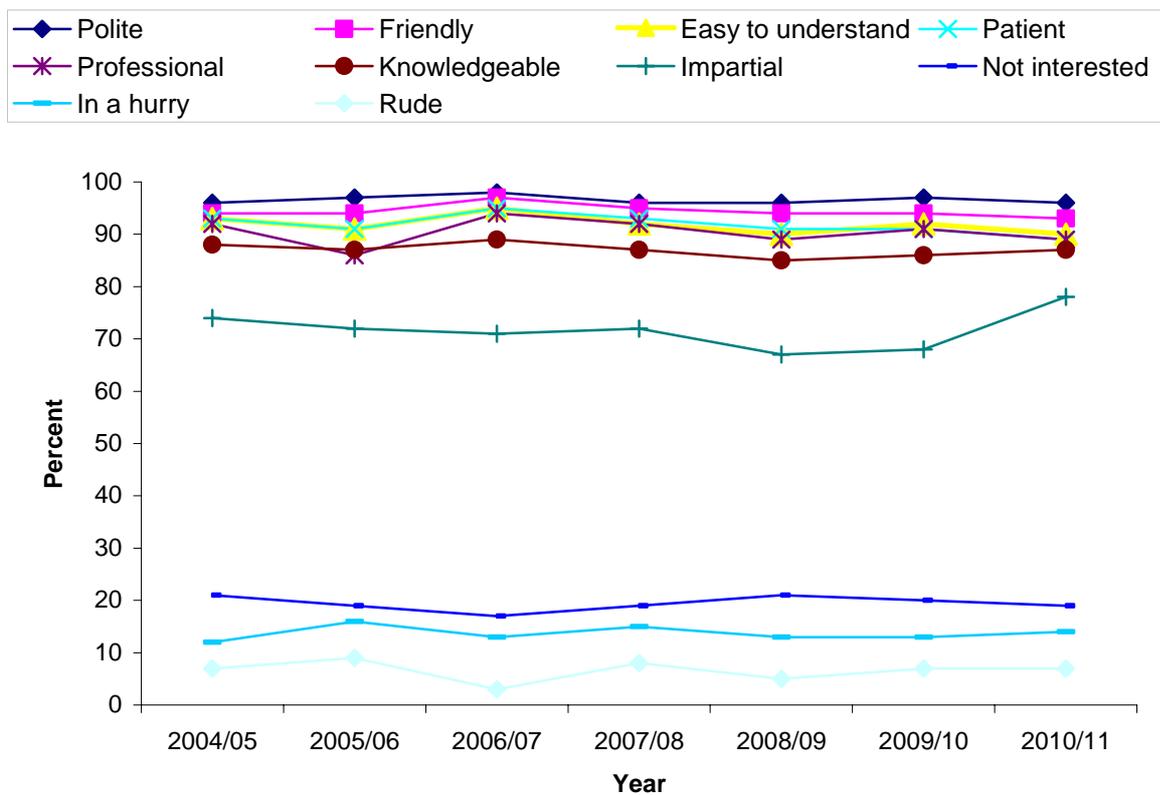
Figure 4: Complainant perception of Ombudsman staff, 2010/11



The proportion of complainants who reported that they had positive views of staff from the Ombudsman's Office has been consistently high since 2004/05 (Figure 5). In 2010/11, 78% of complainants felt that staff from the Ombudsman's Office were impartial. This is the highest level reported to date.

Complainants continue to have positive views of staff;

Figure 5: Complainant perception of Ombudsman staff, 2004/05 - 2010/11



Level of satisfaction with aspects of the complaints process¹

Complainants were asked to comment on how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with aspects of the complaints process. Figure 6 shows the results². The highest levels of satisfaction were reported for the following aspects: how easy the correspondence was to understand, the length of time taken to respond after the incident was reported to the Office and the clarity of the explanation of the process.

In 2010/11, 41% of complainants were satisfied with the outcome of their complaint. Although a lower level of satisfaction was reported for this aspect of service the reader should note the recommendations arising from allegations closed in 2010/11 (See Appendix 3, Table 6).

In 2010/11, lower levels of satisfaction were also reported for the following aspects of service; overall time to resolve the complaint (58% satisfied or very satisfied), frequency of progress updates (63% satisfied or very satisfied) and seriousness in which the complaint was treated (63% satisfied or very satisfied).

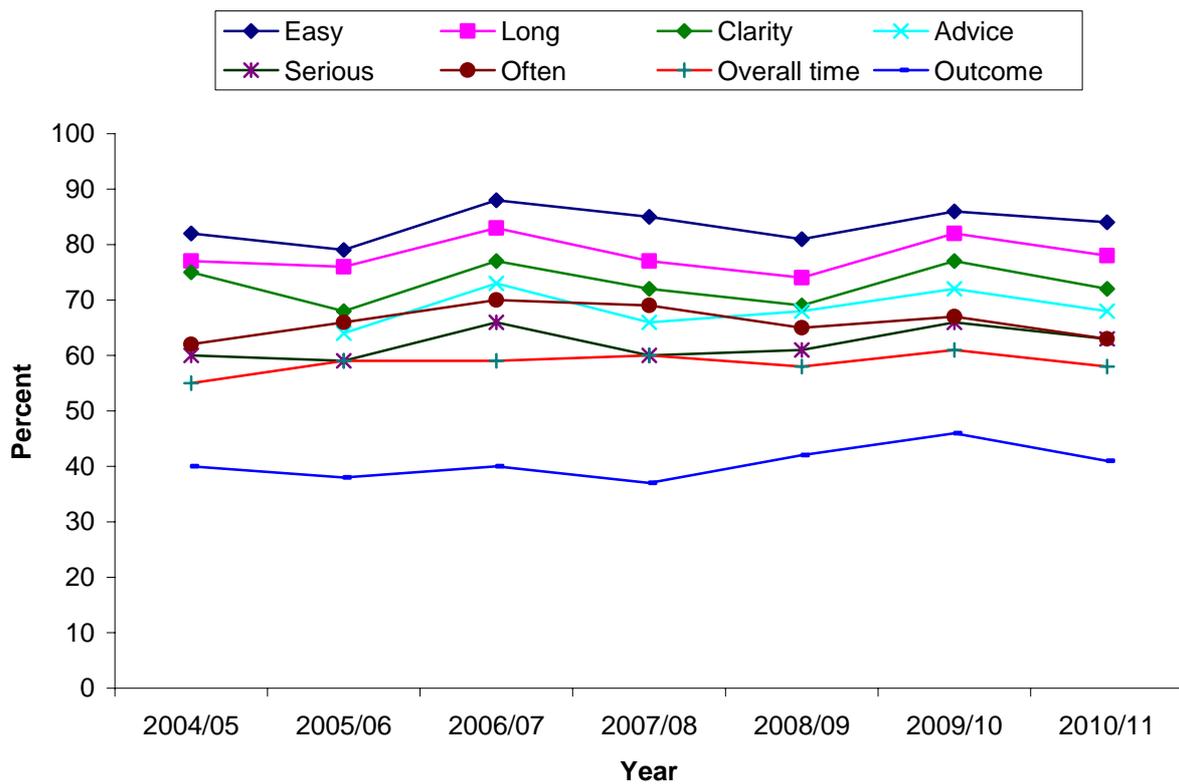
¹ The question relating to the satisfaction levels with the advice provided by staff to complainants at the time of making their complaint, was added to the questionnaire in 2005/06.

² See Appendix 2 Graphical Illustrations.

Figure 6 shows that satisfaction levels with aspects of the complaints process have remained fairly consistent over time.

High levels of satisfaction for most aspects of complaints process over time;

Figure 6: Complainant satisfaction with aspects of the complaints process, 2004/05 - 2010/11



Appendix 1: Methodology and respondent profile

Methodology

Up until September 2005 complainant satisfaction surveys were based on samples of complainants who had their complaint closed. From September 2005, the Office began surveying all complainants who had a complaint closed.

Complainant satisfaction forms are issued by the Research and Performance Directorate of the Office to complainants following closure of a complaint and within seven days from the start of the month (Appendix 4). Once a form is returned to the Research and Performance Directorate of the Office, it is date stamped and the information is input into an SPSS³ document and saved.

In 2010/11 3,259 questionnaires were issued to complainants who had a complaint closed between April 2010 and March 2011. In 2010/11 a total of 589 questionnaires were returned. This represents a response rate of 18%. Details of previous surveys can be accessed at <http://www.policeombudsman.org>.

Figures provided in the tables may not add up to 100% due to the effect of rounding. Figures may also be subject to minor revision and these will be notified in accordance with our revisions policy. The revisions policy can be accessed at <http://www.policeombudsman.org>.

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.

³ SPSS is a statistical software package developed for use by social scientists.

Respondent Profile:

Outcome of complaints: The Case Handling System (CHS) does not record closure types at complaint level but records recommendations for closure made at allegation level and at 'Complained Against Person' (CAP - police officer) level. Thus, the number of recommendations for closure made is a lot greater than the number of complaints closed by the Office (9,893 recommendations for closure were made in 2010/11 against 3,592 complaints closed). This accurately reflects the likelihood that a complaint will have a range of outcomes across each allegation and CAP within the complaint.

Appendix 3 Table 6 shows recommendations arising from allegations closed during 2010/11 and 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 with the investigation process than overall complainants who had a complaint closed during the time period.

Appendix 2: Notes to reader

Official Statistics:

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.

Data use:

The data collected are used by the Office to monitor and evaluate the service provided to complainants who have made a complaint to the Ombudsman's Office and identify any issues that arise in a timely manner. The data are also used by this Office to comply with the key performance indicators whereby the Office aims to maintain:

'a level of 60% complainants being satisfied or very satisfied with service received.' –

In 2010/11, 59% of complainants were satisfied or very satisfied with the service provided by the Office.

'a level of at least 75% of complainants willing to use the service again.' –

In 2010/11, 69% of respondents were willing to use service again.

The data may also be used to answer enquiries from the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Department of Justice, Parliament and the public.

Data quality

OPONI staff carry out regular quality assurance reviews of all data input into the CHS (case handling system). One aspect is to ensure that the appropriate complaint closure details are recorded on the system correctly.

The survey forms are issued by the Research and Performance Directorate of the Office following closure of a complaint. Once the information from the forms has been transferred to an electronic file approximately 10% of the data entries are validated by a Supervisor on a regular basis.

Data limitations:

Questionnaires are normally issued to all complainants when their complaint is closed. However, in some cases forms are not issued, for example when it is impossible to identify the complainant (i.e. the Complaints Officer has recorded the complainant as anonymous), because the complainant's address is not recorded or if only an email address is available. Forms are also not issued if the complainant is recorded as a juvenile.

The Police Ombudsman also investigates matters of public interest and complaints which have been referred to him. In these cases there is not an identifiable complainant and therefore forms are not issued.

In other cases the complainant contacts the Office to ask to be excluded from future surveys. Whilst Office staff aim to persuade the complainant by explaining the background to the survey in some cases the complainant still wishes to be excluded from all future surveys.

Graphical illustrations:

For the purposes of ensuring the clarity of graphical representations of data, the satisfaction measures have been summarised into one, or a few, words within each applicable graph. The key for assessing which element of satisfaction being illustrated us as follows:

- Easy: refers to how easy the correspondence was to understand;
- Long: refers to the length of time taken to replay after the reported incident;
- Clarity: refers to how clearly the process was explained to the complainant;
- Advice: refers to the advice provided by staff at time of making a complaint;
- Serious: refers to how serious the complaint was treated;
- Often: refers to the frequency of progress updates;
- Overall time: refers to the overall time taken to resolve the complaint;
- Outcome: refers to the outcome of the investigation.

Further information

For further information contact:

By Letter:

Research and Performance Directorate
Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland
New Cathedral Buildings
11 Church Street
Belfast BT1 1PG

By Phone:

028 90569905

By Email:

research@policeombudsman.org

Appendix 3: Results

Table 1: Overall satisfaction with service provided 2002/03 - 2010/11

Year	% satisfied
2002/03	56
2003/04	67
2004/05	58
2005/06	58
2006/07	62
2007/08	57
2008/09	59
2009/10	65
2010/11	59

Table 2: Fairness of treatment, 2002/03 - 2010/11

Year	% treated fairly
2002/03	69
2003/04	76
2004/05	66
2005/06	70
2006/07	75
2007/08	71
2008/09	73
2009/10	75
2010/11	70

Table 3: Would use the complaints system again, 2004/05 - 2010/11

Year	% use system again
2004/05	75
2005/06	70
2006/07	76
2007/08	73
2008/09	69
2009/10	71
2010/11	69

Table 4: Complainant perception of Ombudsman staff, 2004/05 - 2010/11

Complainant perception	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Polite	97%	96%	98%	96%	96%	97%	96%
Friendly	94%	94%	97%	95%	94%	94%	93%
Easy to understand	91%	93%	95%	92%	90%	92%	90%
Patient	91%	93%	95%	93%	91%	91%	89%
Professional	86%	92%	94%	92%	89%	91%	89%
Knowledgeable	87%	88%	89%	87%	85%	86%	87%
Impartial	72%	74%	71%	72%	67%	68%	78%
Not interested	19%	21%	17%	19%	21%	20%	19%
In a hurry	16%	12%	13%	15%	13%	13%	14%
Rude	9%	7%	3%	8%	5%	7%	7%

Table 5: Complainant satisfaction with aspects of the complaints process, 2004/05 - 2010/11

Aspect	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
How easy to understand correspondence	82%	79%	88%	85%	81%	86%	84%
Length of time to reply after reported incident	77%	76%	83%	77%	74%	82%	78%
Clarity of explanation of process	75%	68%	77%	72%	69%	77%	72%
Advice provided by staff	N/A	64%	73%	66%	68%	72%	68%
Seriousness in which complaint was treated	60%	59%	66%	60%	61%	66%	63%
Frequency of progress updates	62%	66%	70%	69%	65%	67%	63%
Overall time to resolve complaint	55%	59%	59%	60%	58%	61%	58%
Outcome of complaint	40%	38%	40%	37%	42%	46%	41%

Table 6: Recommendations arising from complaint closures, 2010/11

Type of recommendation	Recommendations arising from all complaints	Recommendations relating to survey respondents
Not Substantiated	42%	39%
Non co-operation by complainant	18%	10%
To PPS no Criminal Charges recommended	10%	6%
Informal Resolution accepted	6%	14%
Outside remit	6%	11%
Withdrawn by complainant	6%	7%
Ill founded	5%	6%
Recommended action	4%	6%
Substantiated - no action recommended	1%	1%
Other	2%	1%

Appendix 4: Questionnaire

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)

2a. 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 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 impartial	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2b. HOW DID THE STAFF SEEM TO YOU?

The staff were not interested	<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"/>

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?

Thank you for completing this form



Additional copies of this and other publications are available from:

Research and Performance Directorate
Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland
New Cathedral Buildings
11 Church Street
Belfast
BT1 1PG

Telephone: 028 9082 8648
Fax: 028 9082 8605
Textphone: 028 9082 8756
Witness Appeal Line: 0800 0327 880
Email: research@policeombudsman.org



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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