

Annual Report on  
Police Officer Satisfaction  
with services provided by the  
Police Ombudsman's Office  
2020/21

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## Introduction

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

The Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland (the Office) 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.

This report presents the findings from the Police Officer Satisfaction Survey conducted over the three week time period 13<sup>th</sup> April 2021 to the 4<sup>th</sup> May 2021. It includes information collected from officers who were subject of an investigation which was subsequently closed during 2020/21 and compares the findings to results obtained for the previous years<sup>1</sup>.

In this report, comparisons have been made between the results for this year's survey and the results obtained for previous years. Trend data is available for the six years that the survey has been carried out in the tables outlined in Appendix 1: Results, page 8. Comparisons for previous year's surveys have already been detailed in reports published in that particular reporting year. These reports are all available on the Office's website (details are on the back page of this report).

At this point it is important to note that due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent closure of the Office to all but essential staff, the Information & Communication Unit were unable to conduct the police officer survey during 2019/20 (see Appendix 2: "Covid-19 impact" for further information).

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<sup>1</sup> This is the sixth year that the police officer satisfaction survey was carried out electronically; therefore comparisons can only be made with the previous five years. The survey was not carried out in 2019/20 due to the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent closure of the Office (See Appendix 2; Covid-19 Impact).

## Main Findings of 2020/21

- The majority of police officers had positive views of Ombudsman staff:
  - 91% felt they were treated with respect,
  - 79% felt they were treated fairly,
  - 88% felt staff were easy to understand, and
  - 74% thought staff were knowledgeable.
- Officers were more likely to be satisfied with the explanation of the process, the manner in which they were treated and the clarity of our correspondence than they were with the frequency of progress updates and the overall time taken to resolve the complaint.
- Just over three quarters of officers surveyed felt their complaint was dealt with independently.
- Less than two thirds of officers felt that the police complaints system makes the police more accountable.

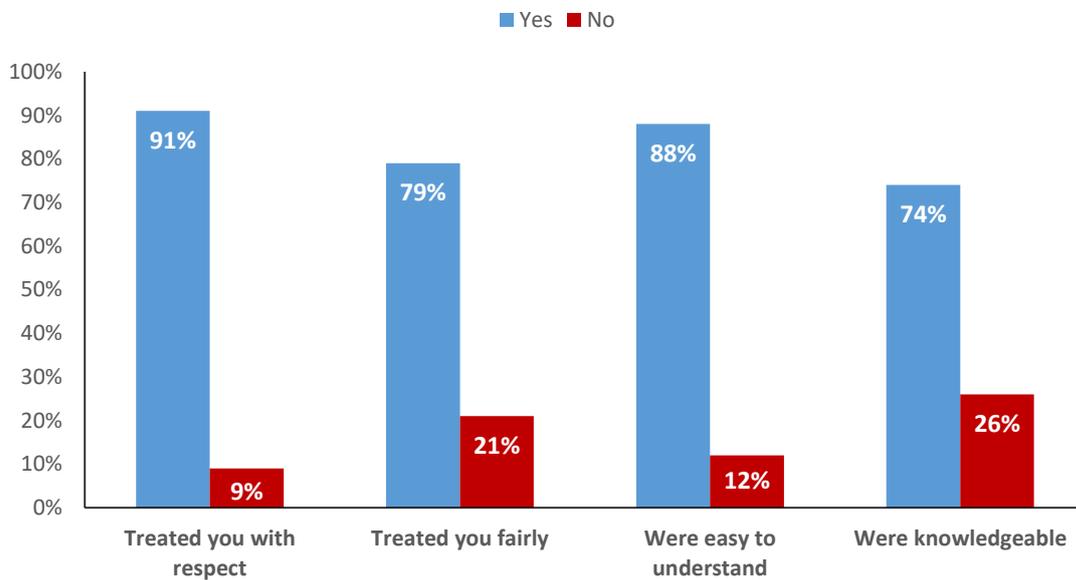
# Results

## Perception of Ombudsman staff

Police officers were asked if they spoke to a member of staff and, if they had, how staff had appeared to them in relation to a number of characteristics. In 2020/21, 59% of officers said that they had spoken to a member of staff and of these:

- 91% thought they were treated with respect,
- 79% thought they were treated fairly,
- 88% thought staff were easy to understand and
- 74% thought staff were knowledgeable (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Police officer perception of Ombudsman staff, 2020/21

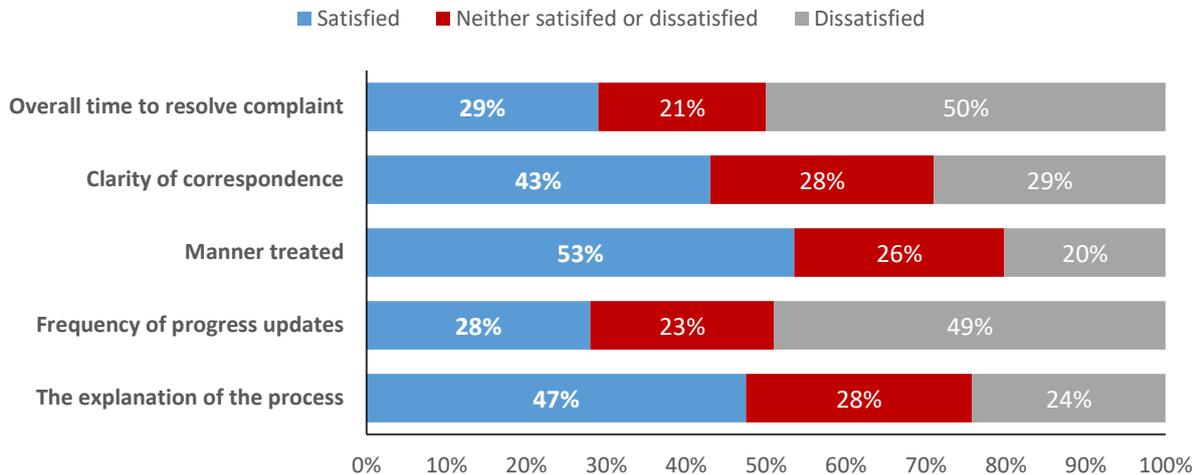


Results showed that the views of police officers in 2020/21, with respect to their perceptions of Ombudsman staff, were similar when compared with the previous five years (see Appendix 1, Tables 1 to 4).

## Level of satisfaction with aspects of the complaints process<sup>2</sup>

In 2020/21, as seen in previous years, a larger proportion of officers were satisfied with the explanation of the process, the manner in which they were treated and the clarity of correspondence than they were with the frequency of progress updates and the overall time taken to resolve the complaint (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Officer Satisfaction with aspects of the complaints process, 2020/21



- A higher percentage of officers were dissatisfied with the explanation of the process in 2020/21 when compared with earlier years (i.e. 2014/15 to 2015/16).
- The percentage of officers that were dissatisfied with the frequency of updates was at its highest in 2020/21 when compared with the previous five years.
- In 2020/21, the percentage of officers who were satisfied with the manner of treatment decreased when compared with 2018/19.
- The views of police officers in 2020/21, with respect to the clarity of the correspondence, is similar when compared with previous years.
- In 2020/21, officers were more dissatisfied with the overall time taken to resolve the complaint than they were when compared with four out of the five previous years (see Appendix 1, Tables 5 to 9).

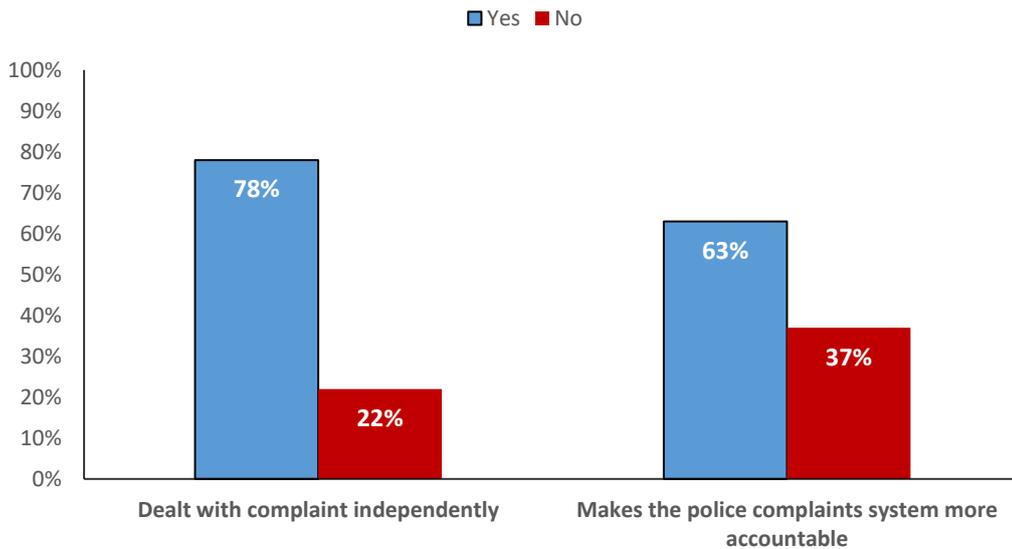
<sup>2</sup>Note: Some of the changes in satisfaction and dissatisfaction levels observed may be as a result of increasing the Likert scale from three to five responses in 2017/18.

## Independence and Accountability

In 2020/21:

- Just over three quarters of officers felt that the Police Ombudsman’s Office dealt with their complaint independently.
- Under two thirds of officers felt that the police complaints system makes the police more accountable (Figure 3).

*Figure 3: Deals with complaints independently and makes police more accountable, 2020/21*



### Independence

In 2020/21, the percentage of police officers who thought the Office dealt with the complaint made against them independently, was similar when compared with previous years (see Appendix 1, Table 10).

### Accountability

The percentage of officers that thought the police complaints system makes police more accountable is similar in 2020/21 when compared with the previous five years (see Appendix 1, Table 11).

## Appendix 1: Results

### Police officer perception of Ombudsman staff

**Table 1: Were you treated with respect, 2014/15 – 2020/21?**

Answer	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Yes	91%	89%	89%	89%	87%	N/A	91%
No	9%	11%	11%	11%	13%	N/A	9%
No. of respondents	454	397	418	238	248	N/A	117

Asked to officers who had spoken to a staff member

**Table 2: Were you treated fairly, 2014/15 – 2020/21?**

Answer	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Yes	81%	80%	80%	78%	78%	N/A	79%
No	19%	20%	20%	22%	22%	N/A	21%
No. of respondents	454	397	418	238	248	N/A	117

Asked to officers who had spoken to a staff member

**Table 3: Were staff easy to understand, 2014/15 – 2020/21?**

Answer	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Yes	92%	90%	89%	87%	90%	N/A	88%
No	8%	10%	11%	13%	10%	N/A	12%
No. of respondents	454	397	418	238	248	N/A	117

Asked to officers who had spoken to a staff member

**Table 4: Were staff knowledgeable, 2014/15 – 2020/21?**

Answer	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Yes	76%	77%	76%	74%	73%	N/A	74%
No	24%	23%	24%	26%	27%	N/A	26%
No. of respondents	454	397	418	238	248	N/A	117

Asked to officers who had spoken to a staff member

## Police officer satisfaction/dissatisfaction with aspects of the complaints process

**Table 5: Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with explanation of the process, 2014/15 – 2020/21.**

Explanation of the process	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Satisfied	56%	54%	55%	58%	55%	N/A	47%
Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied	29%	29%	29%	21%	23%	N/A	28%
Dissatisfied	15%	16%	16%	21%	23%	N/A	24%
No. of respondents	507	461	478	273	279	N/A	197

**Table 6: Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with frequency of updates, 2014/15 – 2020/21.**

Frequency of updates	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Satisfied	30%	32%	29%	38%	37%	N/A	28%
Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied	36%	34%	33%	22%	26%	N/A	23%
Dissatisfied	35%	34%	38%	40%	37%	N/A	49%
No. of respondents	507	461	478	273	279	N/A	197

**Table 7: Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with manner of treatment, 2014/15 – 2020/21.**

<b>Manner of treatment</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2020/21</b>
Satisfied	57%	56%	58%	60%	63%	N/A	53%
Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied	27%	26%	24%	16%	15%	N/A	26%
Dissatisfied	16%	18%	19%	23%	22%	N/A	20%
No. of respondents	507	461	478	273	279	N/A	197

**Table 8: Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with clarity of correspondence, 2014/15 – 2020/21.**

<b>Clarity of correspondence</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2020/21</b>
Satisfied	46%	47%	46%	50%	51%	N/A	43%
Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied	31%	30%	31%	20%	23%	N/A	28%
Dissatisfied	23%	24%	24%	30%	27%	N/A	29%
No. of respondents	507	461	478	273	279	N/A	197

**Table 9: Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with time taken to resolve the complaint, 2014/15 – 2020/21.**

<b>Time taken to resolve complaint</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2020/21</b>
Satisfied	31%	33%	32%	40%	41%	N/A	29%
Neither Satisfied or Dissatisfied	30%	27%	26%	21%	20%	N/A	21%
Dissatisfied	39%	41%	42%	40%	39%	N/A	50%
No. of respondents	507	461	478	273	279	N/A	197

## Police officer Perception of Police Ombudsman Independence and accountability

**Table 10: Did we deal with the complaint independently, 2014/15 – 2020/21?**

Answer	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Yes	80%	79%	76%	71%	75%	N/A	78%
No	20%	21%	24%	29%	25%	N/A	22%
No. of respondents	507	461	478	273	279	N/A	197

**Table 11: Do you feel the police complaints system makes police more accountable, 2014/15 – 2020/21?**

Answer	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Yes	62%	60%	57%	58%	65%	N/A	63%
No	38%	40%	43%	42%	35%	N/A	37%
No. of respondents	507	461	478	273	279	N/A	197

## **Appendix 2: Notes to readers**

### **The survey**

This is the sixth year the Office has carried out an electronic survey of police officers who had been the subject of an investigation which was subsequently closed during the reporting year.

The identity of the officers surveyed at the end of 2020/21 was extracted from the Office's Case handling System (CHS). Officers who had more than one complaint closed during the year, were only asked to complete the survey once.

Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) software was used to carry out the survey with their Statistics Branch facilitating this on our behalf.

A total of 431 officers were emailed a link to the survey and 197 responses were submitted. This represents a response rate of 46%.

The "Satisfied" category in Tables 5 to 9 in Appendix 1, include the categories of "Very satisfied" and "Satisfied", while the category on "Not satisfied" include "Dissatisfied" and "Very dissatisfied".

### **Covid-19 impact**

There are a number of ways in which the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on the police officer satisfaction survey. Firstly, acting on government advice, the Office closed its doors in mid-March 2020 to all but essential staff who carry out essential work. Due to this the Information & Communication Unit within the Office were unable to run the police officer survey during 2019/20. Secondly, the number of forms issued to police officers this year is lower than has been seen in previous years. Although it is not clear as to why the number is lower, it would have to be assumed that the amendments made to working practices last year as a result of the pandemic has impacted on the processing of complaints and the identification of officers associated with those complaints. The pandemic may also have had an impact on the results obtained for this year's survey. For example, due to the limits imposed on staff numbers in the Office there may have been delays updating police officers or delays dealing with the complaints, which in turn may have impacted on officer's perception of staff and aspects of service.

**Data use:**

The data collected are used by the Office to monitor and evaluate the service provided to those police officers who have been subject to a complaint and identify any issues that arise in a timely manner. This allows the Office to fulfil its statutory duty to secure the confidence of the police in the complaints handling process.

## **Appendix 3: Police Officer Satisfaction Survey Questions**

### **Question 1:**

Did you speak to a member of the Police Ombudsman's staff?

*Answer 'Yes' or 'No'*

***If you spoke to a member of staff.....***

### **Question 2:**

Did you think the member of Police Ombudsman's staff...

- Treated you with respect
- Treated you fairly
- Were easy to understand
- Were knowledgeable

*Answer 'Yes' or 'No'*

### **Question 3:**

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

- The explanation of the process given to you
- How often you were updated with progress
- The manner in which you were treated
- The clarity of our correspondence
- The overall time taken to resolve the complaint

*Answer 'Very satisfied', 'Satisfied', 'Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied', 'Dissatisfied' or 'Very dissatisfied'*

### **Question 4:**

Do you think we dealt with your complaint independently?

*Answer 'Yes' or 'No'*

### **Question 5:**

Do you feel the police complaints system makes the police more accountable?

*Answer 'Yes' or 'No'*

**If you have any further comments regarding your contact with the Police Ombudsman's Office, please detail them below.**



**Additional copies of this and other publications are available from:**

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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:** <http://www.policeombudsman.org>