

Annual Report on  
Complainant Satisfaction  
with services provided by the  
Police Ombudsman's Office in  
Northern Ireland  
2017/18

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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 Police Ombudsman's Office is required by law to provide an independent and impartial police complaints system which secures the confidence of both the public and the police.

This report presents the results of the complainant satisfaction survey which was carried out during 2017/18. It includes information from those complainants whose complaints were closed<sup>1</sup> during the reporting year. This year, 2,406 questionnaires were issued and 373 were returned representing a 16% response rate.

The Office aims to maintain or improve performances measured against the Office's Business Plan by surveying complainants and police officers subject of complaint and in particular develop and implement standards for the services we provide<sup>2</sup>.

Due to the changes<sup>3</sup> made to the questionnaire in 2015/16, comparisons with previous years can only be made for certain questions. Within this report, trend data is provided for the last five years. For those questions that can be compared, additional trend data (from 2006/07) is provided in the accompanying excel spreadsheet. The methodology used for the survey changed in 2006/07 therefore direct comparison with earlier years cannot be made.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 2: Additional Information

<sup>2</sup> See Page 5: Performance against targets

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 2: Additional Information

## Main Findings of 2017/18:

- The majority of complainants, who had spoken to a member of staff, felt staff treated them with respect, treated them fairly, were easy to understand and were knowledgeable.
- Complainants were most likely to be satisfied with the length of time taken to respond after the incident was reported to the Office, how clearly the process was explained to them and how easy the correspondence was to understand than for other aspects of the complaints process.
- Almost three fifths (57%) of respondents said they understood the reason we gave for reaching the final decision about their complaint, and of these, three quarters (75%) accepted this decision.
- Over half (54%) of respondents felt that the Office dealt with their complaint independently (i.e. free from influence of others).
- Over three fifths of respondents (64%) said they would contact the Office again if they had a new complaint.

## Performance against Targets:

Information from this survey is used by the Office to measure compliance against four key performance indicators which deal with improving delivery against our published standards. The Office aims to maintain or improve performance against its Service Charter and in particular aims to ensure that:

Target 1: 90% of complainants thought they were treated with respect

***In 2017/18, the Office failed to meet this target as 86% of complainants felt they were treated with respect***

Target 2: 90% of complainants thought staff were easy to understand

***In 2017/18, the Office failed to meet this target as 82% of complainants felt staff were easy to understand***

Target 3: 80% of complainants thought staff were knowledgeable

***In 2017/18, the Office failed to meet this target as 74% of complainants felt staff were knowledgeable***

Target 4: 60% of complainants consider that the Office has dealt with their issue in an independent manner

***In 2017/18, the Office failed to meet this target as 54% of complainants felt that their issue was dealt with independently***

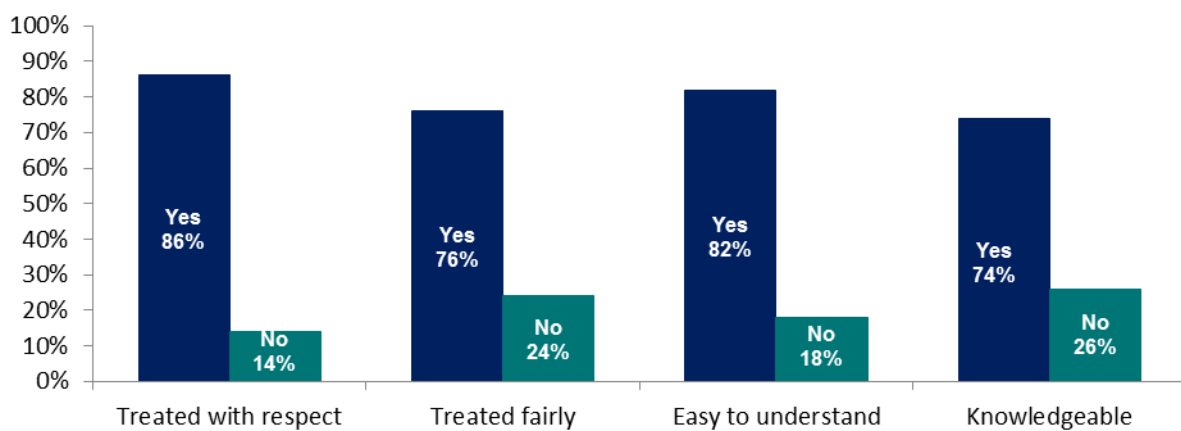
# Results

## Perception of Ombudsman staff

During 2017/18, 87% of complainants said that they had spoken to a member of staff from the Office. Of these:

- 86% felt they were treated with respect,
- 76% felt they were treated fairly,
- 82% felt staff were easy to understand and
- 74% felt staff were knowledgeable (Figure 1, Table 1).

**Figure 1: Complainant perception of Ombudsman staff, 2017/18**

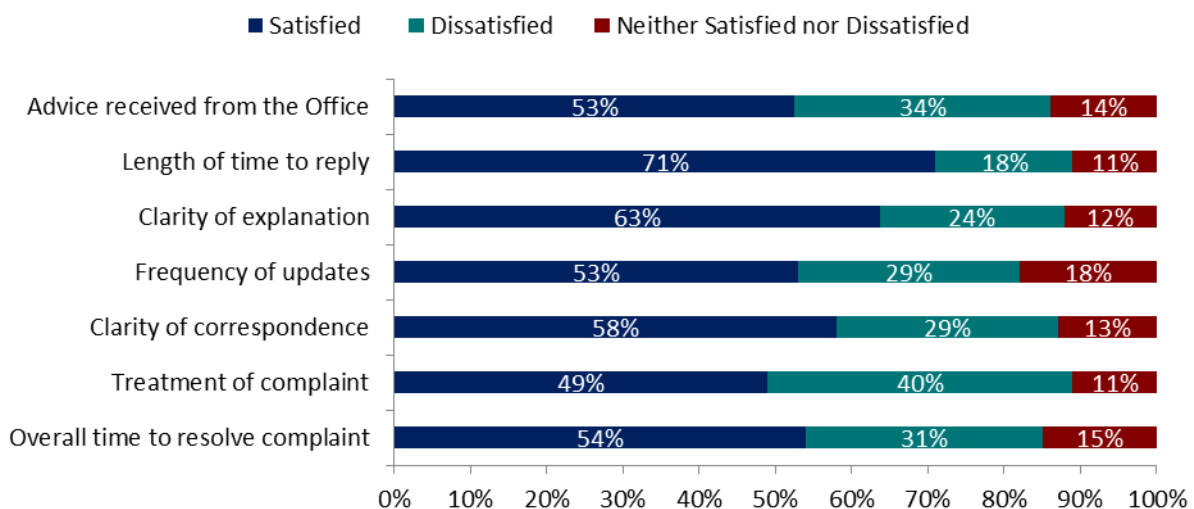


Comparisons can only be made between the last three years for the results obtained for 'treated with respect' and 'treated fairly' as these were added to section two of the questionnaire in 2015/16. Results obtained for the 'treated with respect' and the 'treated fairly' questions show that complainant's perceptions of staff have remained similar over the last three years. Results for the 'easy to understand' and the 'knowledgeable' questions have remained similar over the last four years however they have decreased from 2013/14 when 88% of respondents felt staff were 'easy to understand' and 80% of respondents felt staff were 'knowledgeable' (Table 2).

## Level of satisfaction with aspects of the complaints process

In 2017/18, complainants were most likely to be satisfied with the length of time taken to respond after the incident was reported to the Office, how clearly the process was explained to them and the clarity of correspondence than for the other aspects of the complaints process. Results also show that complainants were more likely to be dissatisfied with the manner in which their complaint was treated and the advice they received from the Office (Figure 2, Table 3).

**Figure 2: Complainant satisfaction with aspects of the complaints process, 2017/18**



### Five year trend results (Tables 4 to 10):

- Respondents were less likely to be satisfied, and conversely more likely to be dissatisfied, with the advice they received from the Office in the last three years when compared with 2013/14 and 2014/15.
- Respondents were more likely to be satisfied, and less likely to be dissatisfied, with the length of time taken to reply after the incident was first reported in 2017/18 when compared with the previous two years.
- Results for 'frequency of updates' show that satisfaction levels have been similar over the last number of years, however, satisfaction levels dipped slightly in 2015/15 and 2016/17. Respondents were more likely to be dissatisfied with the frequency of updates in 2015/16 and 2016/17.
- Similar levels of satisfaction have been recorded over time for:
  - how clearly the complaints process was explained
  - the clarity of our correspondence
  - the manner in which the complaint was treated
  - the overall time to resolve the complaint

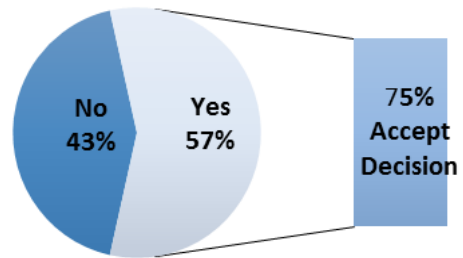
### Final decision

In 2017/18, almost three fifths of respondents understood the reason the Office gave for reaching the final decision about their complaint.

Of those respondents who did understand the reason, three quarters accepted why the Office had reached that decision (Figure 3, Table 11 & 12).

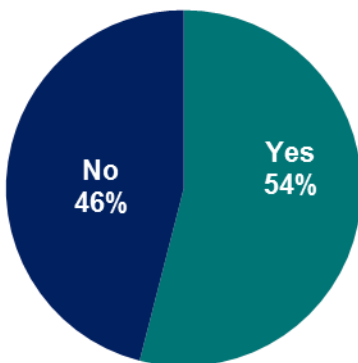
Results show that similar proportions of respondents accepted and understood the reason the Office gave for reaching the final decision about their complaint this year when compared with the previous two years.

**Figure 3: Understanding and accepting the reasons for final decision, 2017/18**



### Dealing with complaints independently

**Figure 4: Dealing with complaints independently, 2017/18**



In 2017/18, over half of respondents felt that the Office had dealt with their complaint independently (Figure 4, Table 13).

The results show that respondents are just as likely to think that the Office dealt with their complaint independently this year when compared with previous years.

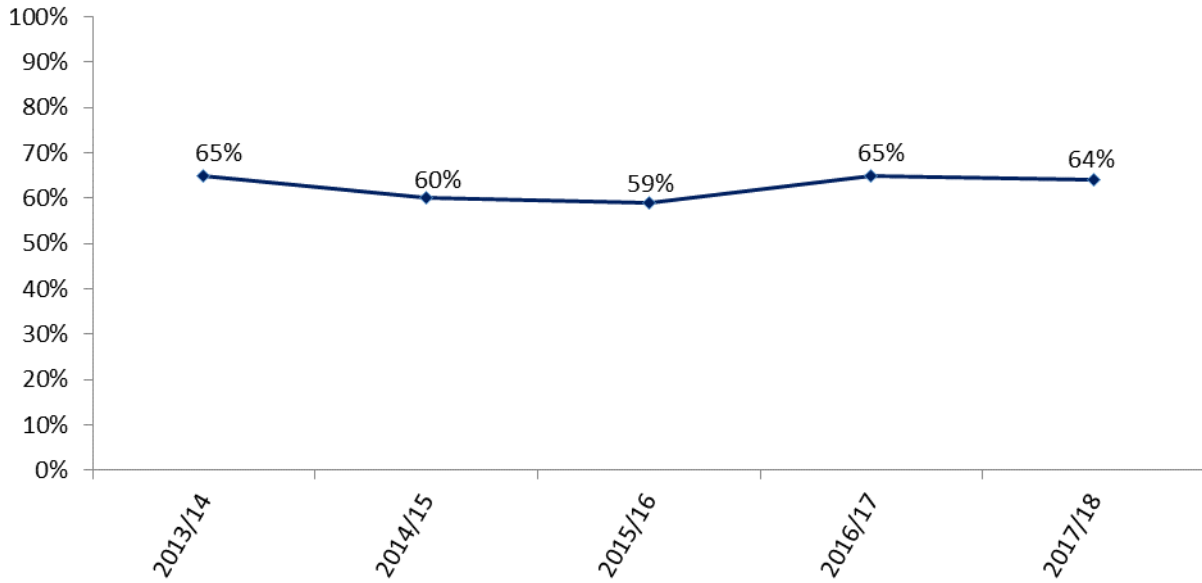


### Contact the Office again

In 2017/18, just over three fifths of complainants said they would contact the Office again if they had a new complaint about the police (Figure 5, Table 14).

Results show that over the last five years similar proportions of respondents have said they would contact the Office again if they had a new complaint about the police.

**Figure 5: Complainants who would contact the Office again, 2013/14 to 2017/18**



## Appendix 1: Results Tables

**Table 1: Perception of Ombudsman staff, 2017/18**

	Yes	No
Treated with respect	86%	14%
Treated fairly	76%	24%
Easy to understand	82%	18%
Knowledgeable	74%	26%

**Table 2: Perception of Ombudsman staff, 2013/14 to 2017/18**

	Treated with respect	Treated fairly	Easy to Understand	Knowledgeable
2013/14	N/A	N/A	88%	80%
2014/15	N/A	N/A	85%	77%
2015/16	85%	78%	83%	78%
2016/17	88%	75%	83%	73%
2017/18	86%	76%	82%	74%

**Table 3: Satisfaction/dissatisfaction with aspects of the complaints process, 2017/18**

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
Advice received from the Office	53%	34%	14%
Length of time to reply	71%	18%	11%
Clarity of explanation	63%	24%	12%
Frequency of updates	53%	29%	18%
Clarity of correspondence	58%	29%	13%
Manner of treatment of complaint	49%	40%	11%
Overall time to resolve complaint	54%	31%	15%

**Table 4: Satisfaction/dissatisfaction with advice received from the Office, 2013/14 to 2017/18**

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
2013/14	60%	22%	18%
2014/15	57%	24%	19%
2015/16	50%	33%	17%
2016/17	52%	34%	14%
2017/18	53%	34%	14%

**Table 5: Satisfaction/dissatisfaction with length of time to reply after initially making complaint, 2013/14 to 2017/18**

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
2013/14	69%	19%	12%
2014/15	67%	21%	12%
2015/16	64%	25%	11%
2016/17	64%	25%	11%
2017/18	71%	18%	11%

**Table 6: Satisfaction/dissatisfaction with how clearly the process was explained, 2013/14 to 2017/18**

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
2013/14	60%	23%	17%
2014/15	62%	22%	16%
2015/16	60%	27%	13%
2016/17	61%	24%	15%
2017/18	63%	24%	12%

**Table 7: Satisfaction/dissatisfaction with frequency of progress updates, 2013/14 to 2017/18**

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
2013/14	54%	27%	19%
2014/15	59%	26%	15%
2015/16	47%	34%	19%
2016/17	48%	32%	20%
2017/18	53%	29%	18%

**Table 8: Satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the clarity of correspondence, 2015/16 to 2017/18**

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
2015/16	57%	29%	14%
2016/17	57%	31%	12%
2017/18	58%	29%	13%

**Table 9: Satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the manner of treatment of complaint, 2015/16 to 2017/18**

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
2015/16	51%	38%	11%
2016/17	51%	37%	12%
2017/18	49%	40%	11%

**Table 10: Satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the overall time to resolve the complaint, 2013/14 to 2017/18**

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied
2013/14	50%	34%	17%
2014/15	50%	35%	16%
2015/16	48%	35%	17%
2016/17	51%	35%	15%
2017/18	54%	31%	15%

**Table 11: Understand the final decision, 2015/16 to 2017/18**

	Yes	No
2015/16	57%	43%
2016/17	59%	41%
2017/18	57%	43%

**Table 12: Accept the final decision, 2015/16 to 2017/18**

	Yes	No
2015/16	79%	21%
2016/17	74%	26%
2017/18	75%	26%

Note: For respondents who stated they understood the reasoning the Office gave for reaching the final decision about their complaint

**Table 13: Was the complaint dealt with independently, 2015/16 to 2017/18?**

	Yes	No
2015/16	53%	47%
2016/17	55%	45%
2017/18	54%	46%

**Table 14: Would you contact us again if you had a new complaint, 2013/14 to 2017/18?**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
2013/14	65%	35%
2014/15	60%	40%
2015/16	59%	41%
2016/17	65%	35%
2017/18	64%	36%

## Appendix 2: Additional Information

### Data use:

The information that is collected from this survey is used to monitor and evaluate the service provided to individuals 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 measure compliance with the targets identified in the Office's business plan detailed in the 2017/18 'Annual Report and Accounts' report, which is available on the Office's web-site ([www.policeombudsman.org](http://www.policeombudsman.org)). The data may also be used to answer enquiries from the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Department of Justice, Parliament and the public.

### Data quality:

The survey forms are issued by the Research and Statistics Team 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.

### Understanding the statistics:

Questionnaires are normally issued to all complainants when their complaint is closed. However, in some cases forms were not issued, for example when it is impossible to identify the complainant, because the complainant's address is not recorded or if only an email address is available. Forms were also not issued in the following circumstances:

- Case has been closed 'Duplicate or Repetitive',
- Complaints where it is known the complainant has died,
- Section 55 referrals or OPONI call ins (non complaint matters) and
- Complaints made by or on behalf of organisations.

In other cases the complainant contacts the Office to ask to be excluded from future surveys. Whilst staff encourage completion of the survey forms by explaining the background to the survey in some cases the complainant still wishes to be excluded.

In 2017/18, the Likert scale for the satisfaction questions was increased back to five responses, while in 2015/16 the Office had reduced this to three responses. Care should therefore be taken when drawing conclusions between these years.

Rather than having one individual question that measures overall satisfaction, the Office agreed to measure satisfaction for each individual aspect of the service charter, therefore, the question 'Overall, how satisfied/dissatisfied were you with the service you received?' was excluded from the survey form going in to 2017/18.

### **Conventions:**

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 [www.policeombudsman.org](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.

### **Further information:**

Additional information showing trends in responses from 2006/07 (where applicable) is available in the accompanying excel spreadsheet. Results from surveys carried out prior to 2006/07 can be found on the Office's website.



# Appendix 3: Questionnaire

## Satisfaction Form

### IN CONFIDENCE

Please take this opportunity to tell us about the service you received.

1. Did you speak to a member of staff?

Yes (Please go to question 2)                      No (Please go to question 3)

2. If yes (i.e. you did speak to a member of staff), did you think they...

	Yes	No
treated you with respect	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
treated you fairly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
were easy to understand	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
were knowledgeable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
the advice you received from the Office	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
the length of time we took to reply after you initially made your complaint	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
how clearly we explained the process to you	<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"/>
the clarity of our correspondence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
the manner in which we treated your complaint	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
the overall time taken to resolve your complaint	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

PLEASE TURN OVER

Thinking about the final closure letter you received...

4. Did you understand the reasons we gave for reaching our final decision about your complaint?

Yes

No

5. Did you accept why we reached this decision?

Yes

No

6. Do you think that we dealt with your complaint independently?  
(i.e. free from influence from others)

Yes

No

7. Would you contact us again if you had a new complaint about the police?

Yes

No

8. If you have any further comments about the service you received please detail them below.

Thank you for completing this form



Additional copies of this and other publications are available from:

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Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland  
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BT1 1PG

**Telephone:** 028 9082 8634  
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**Email:** [info@policeombudsman.org](mailto:info@policeombudsman.org)

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>