

Police Officer Satisfaction Survey 2009/2010

August 2010

Contents

	Page
Executive Summary	2
Introduction	3
Methodology	3
Findings	
Perceptions of Investigating Officer	4
Fairness of treatment	5
Satisfaction with service	6
Impartiality and accountability	8
Measures to improve service	9
Appendix 1	
Police Officer Questionnaire	11

Executive Summary

The Police Officer Satisfaction Survey allows police officers who were subject to investigation by the Police Ombudsman's Office to express their views on services provided by the Office. This report presents the findings from data collected from April 2009 until March 2010.

The main findings are given below:

- The majority of police officers who had spoken to an Investigating Officer from the Police Ombudsman's Office had positive perceptions of staff.
- Eighty two per cent of police officers thought that they were treated fairly by the Police Ombudsman's Office.
- Sixty eight per cent were satisfied with the overall service they received.
- Seventy seven per cent were confident that the Police Ombudsman deals with complaints in an impartial way.
- Sixty eight per cent thought that the Police Complaints System provides for greater accountability of the police.

Introduction

The Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland was established 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 is best calculated to secure the confidence of both the public and the police.

This survey allows police officers subject to investigation by the Office of the Police Ombudsman to express their views on services provided by the Office. The Office began the survey in October 2005. This report contains data concerning officers' views in respect of complaints closed between April 2009 and March 2010.

Methodology

In October 2005 the Office began surveying all police officers subject to Police Ombudsman investigation. Within one month of the complaint being closed a confidential self-completion questionnaire with instructions and a return envelope is sent to the police officer subject to investigation. (Appendix 1). From April 2009 until March 2010 a total of 2,778 questionnaires were issued. By the end of April 2010, 548 questionnaires were returned giving a response rate of 20%.

Findings

This section outlines the findings from satisfaction survey forms returned by police officers subject to Police Ombudsman investigation.

Perceptions of the Investigation Officer (IO) from the Office of the Police Ombudsman

Eighty nine per cent of police officers had spoken to an IO from the Office of the Police Ombudsman. These officers were then asked how they found the IO in relation to a number of both positive and negative characteristics. Figure 1 shows in descending order the proportion of respondents who considered that staff displayed the following characteristics.

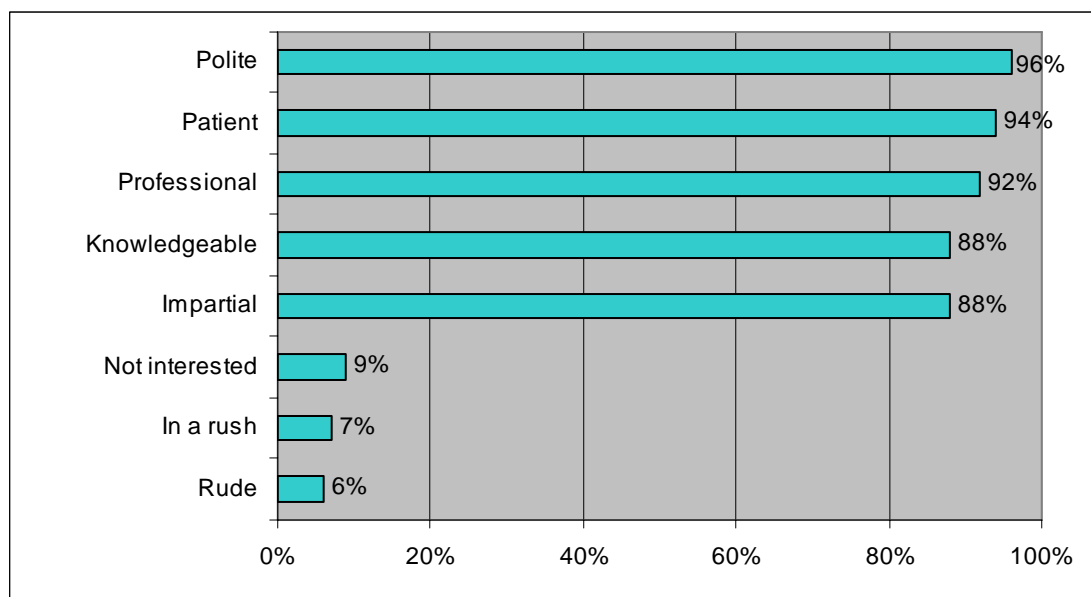


Figure 1: How did you find the Investigating Officer?

Overall perceptions of staff were very positive. Over nine out of ten respondents said they found the IO polite, patient or professional. Eighty eight per cent found the IO knowledgeable and a similar proportion believed that they had acted in an impartial manner.

Only a minority of police officers had negative perceptions of Investigating Officers. Nine per cent of respondents thought they appeared disinterested, seven per cent thought he or she was in a rush and six per cent thought the IO was rude.

Generally perceptions were similar to perceptions held last year. However the proportion of respondents who found staff knowledgeable has decreased since last year (92% thought staff seemed knowledgeable in 08/09 compared to 88% this year).

Fairness of treatment

Eighty two per cent of respondents thought that they were treated fairly by the Office. This is similar to the level reported last year (83%).

Those officers who felt that they had not been treated fairly by the Office were asked to say why this was.

A substantial number of the comments referred to the length of time taken to complete the investigation:

“Bearing in mind I was interviewed at the end of this investigation, I find it hard to understand why it takes so long for the recommendation to be decided upon. I feel the length of time involved is unnecessary and could have delayed transfers to other departments or as may be the case for future retirement.”

Several officers also commented on the stress caused by a slow investigation:

“In the police we have limits and deadlines to submit a file. The Ombudsman’s Office obviously do not adhere to these rules. They can take as much time as they want causing unnecessary stress to the individual being investigated by them.”

Comments were also received concerning the lack of information provided throughout the investigation:

“I received no feedback in relation to the complaint even though there was a criminal element and so would have had serious consequences for me.”

Some officers also reported that they were made to feel like criminals or the investigators treated them as guilty from the start of the investigation. Others commented that the investigation was a waste of time:

“This matter was clearly not illegal. Again it was a waste of your officer’s time and my time.”

Satisfaction with service

Respondents were asked how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with different aspects of the complaints system. Overall respondents displayed a high level of satisfaction with most aspects (Figure 2).

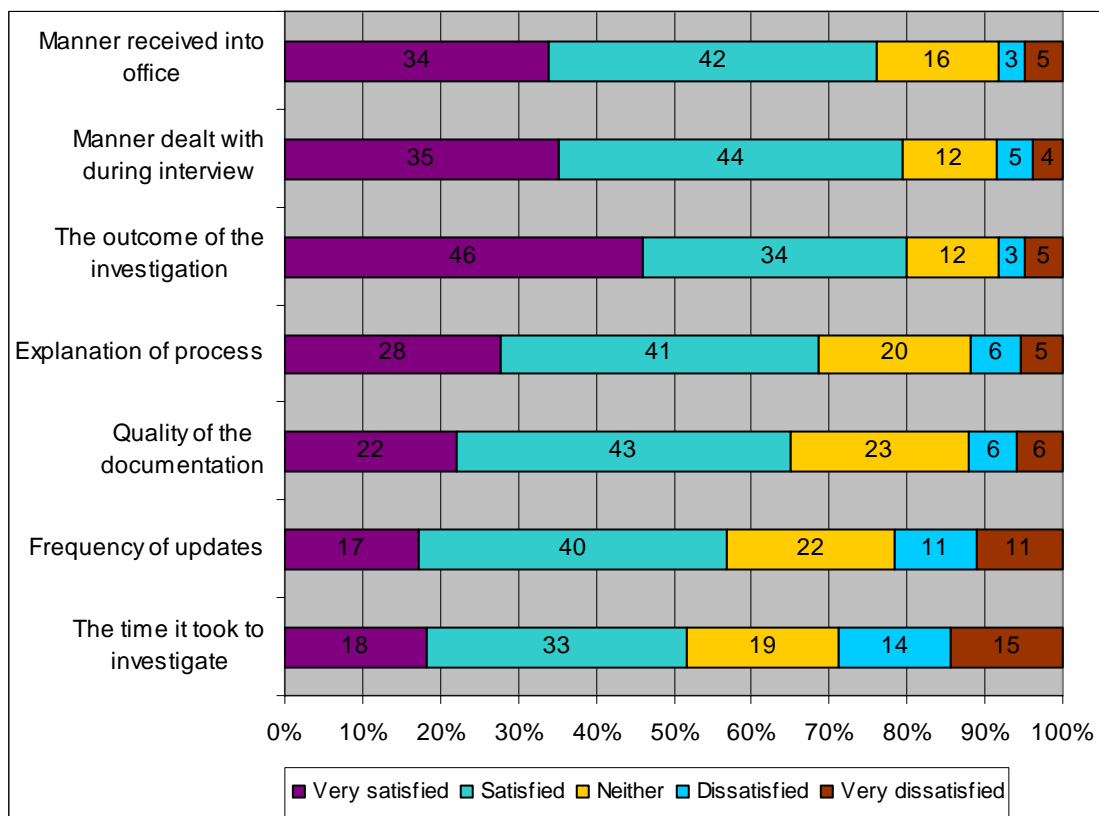


Figure 2: Satisfaction with aspects of complaints system

Seventy six per cent of officers who had visited the Office were satisfied with how they were received by the Police Ombudsman’s Office, including 34% who were

very satisfied. Eighty per cent were satisfied with how they were dealt with during the interview.

Eighty per cent were satisfied with the outcome of the investigation, including 46% who were very satisfied. Sixty nine per cent of officers were satisfied with the explanation of the process given including 28% who were very satisfied. Sixty five per cent were satisfied with the quality of documentation including 22% who were very satisfied.

Lower levels of satisfaction were expressed with the frequency of updates and the time it took to investigate.

Fifty seven per cent of officers were satisfied with the frequency of updates. Fifty two per cent of officers were satisfied with the time it took to investigate.

Again perceptions held regarding individual aspects of the service were similar to perceptions held last year. However, the proportion of staff who were satisfied with the frequency of updates has increased since last year (48% were satisfied with this aspect last year compared to 57% this year).

Respondents were also asked – ‘Overall taking everything into account how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the overall service you received from the Police Ombudsman?.

Sixty eight per cent of officers stated that they were satisfied, including 26% who were very satisfied (Figure 3). As earlier results indicate, satisfaction levels are similar to the rate reported last year (68%).

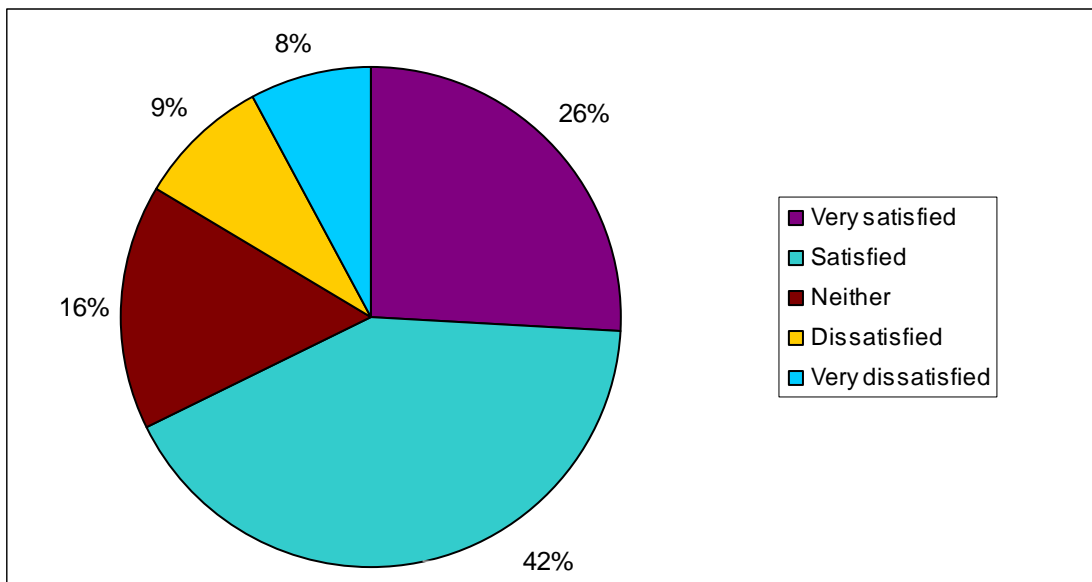


Figure 3: Overall satisfaction with service

Impartiality and accountability

Officers were asked how confident they were that the Police Ombudsman dealt with complaints in an impartial way – 77% said they were confident including 23% who were very confident (Figure 4). This proportion is similar to last year, when 78% of respondents said they were confident.

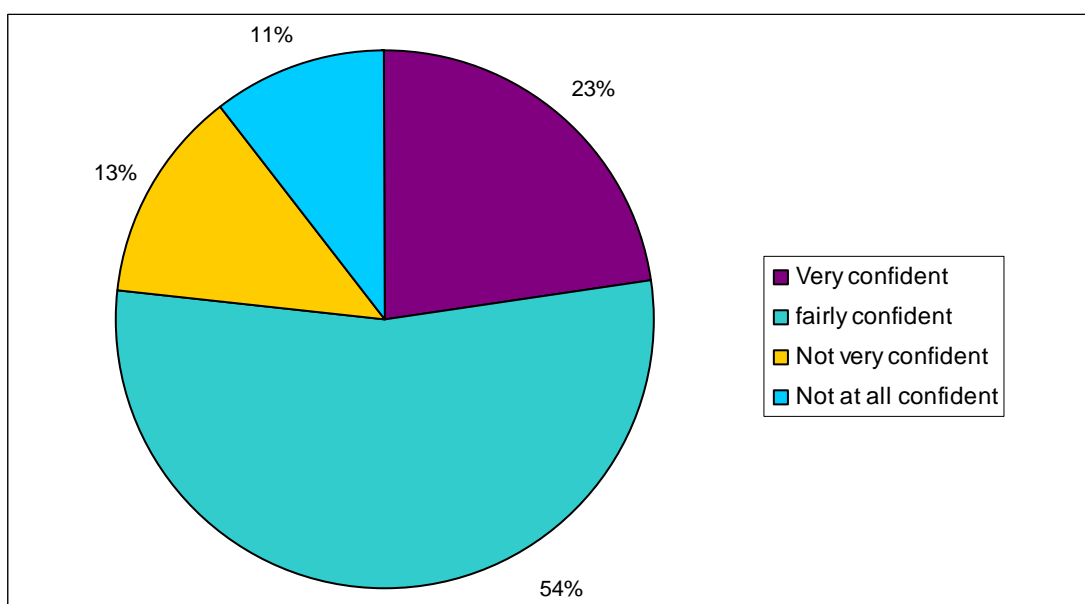


Figure 4: Confidence in impartiality

Sixty eight per cent of officers considered that the Police Complaints System

provides for greater accountability of the police (69% in 08/09).

Measures to improve service

Respondents were asked if there were any measures that the Office of the Police Ombudsman could take to improve its service to police officers.

Around sixty officers made positive comments or indicated that in their opinion there were not any measures that the Office of the Police Ombudsman needed to take to improve service.

A further 262 comments were made by officers.

Over one third of these were that there should be a procedure for dealing with malicious or serial complainers. Some of the officers thought that in certain cases the complainant should be made to pay to make a complaint:

"I believe too much credence is given to disgruntled members of the public who make petty and malicious and unfounded complaints. I believe the system encourages the public to make malicious complaints. I know that I and many colleagues do not deal with some people appropriately for a fear of getting complaints. Police work in an environment whereby they are concentrating all their energy trying to keep themselves right. It's hard to get any Police work done."

Some officers suggested that the Office should build up profiles on individual complainants to the Office, for example how many previous complaints they have made. Others suggested that the mental state of complainants should be considered or that complaints should not be taken from individuals under the influence of alcohol.

As earlier results show, officers were also unhappy with the speed of investigations and the frequency of updates on the progress of their investigation. (Around one fifth of comments were in this area). Several officers commented on the stress caused by a long investigation:

“Investigate matters faster, it’s horrible having these complaints hanging over you.”

Around one tenth of the comments made were regarding the lack of information provided throughout the investigation, particularly at the initial stages:

“Give better explanation to Officers at beginning of the nature of the complaint. Also what the next step is, with a possible time scale so the Officer knows the procedure better”.

Some officers also were concerned about the time wasted investigating trivial complaints:

“In minor complaints, the steps taken appear disproportionate to the actual complaint.”

Other officers commented that investigation staff should carry out more thorough investigation before police officers are interviewed and that the IO should not presume that the police officer is guilty.

POLICE OFFICER SATISFACTION FORM

A Police Ombudsman investigation arising from a complaint by a member of the public (or non-complaint referral), in which you were identified as a member concerned, has recently been closed by this Office. We are now interested in how well you consider this Office dealt with the matter and would be grateful if you would take a few minutes to complete and return the form.

1. DID YOU SPEAK TO AN INVESTIGATING OFFICER FROM THIS OFFICE?

Yes (Please go to Question 2)

No (Please go to Question 3)

2. WHEN YOU SPOKE TO THE INVESTIGATING OFFICER FROM THIS OFFICE DID YOU FIND THE OFFICER:

Please tick the appropriate box.

	Yes	No
Polite?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Knowledgeable?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not interested?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Patient?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rude?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Acted impartially?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Acted professionally?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Was in a rush?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. OVERALL, DO YOU THINK YOU WERE TREATED FAIRLY BY THIS 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 THIS OFFICE PLEASE SAY IN WHAT WAY YOU WERE TREATED UNFAIRLY

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	NOT APPLICABLE
The explanation of the process given to you	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
The frequency with which you were updated	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
The manner in which you were received if you visited the Office of the Police Ombudsman	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The manner you were dealt with during interview	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The time it took to investigate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
The outcome of the investigation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
The quality of documentation received	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

6. 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 overall service you received from the Office of the Police Ombudsman?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. HOW CONFIDENT ARE YOU THAT THE POLICE OMBUDSMAN DEALS WITH COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE POLICE IN AN IMPARTIAL WAY?

Please tick the appropriate box.

	VERY CONFIDENT	FAIRLY CONFIDENT	NOT VERY CONFIDENT	NOT AT ALL CONFIDENT
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

8. DO YOU FEEL THE POLICE COMPLAINTS SYSTEM MAKES THE POLICE MORE ACCOUNTABLE?

Please tick the appropriate box.

Yes No

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

The information contained in this form is strictly confidential and will not be attributed to any individual. It will be used solely for statistical purposes and to contribute to improving the service provided.¹²

Additional copies of this and other publications are available from:

Research and Performance Directorate
Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland
New Cathedral Buildings
St. Anne's Square
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

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



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE