

Annual Report on  
Police Officer Satisfaction  
with services provided by the  
Police Ombudsman's Office  
in Northern Ireland  
2011/2012

October 2012

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# 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. The survey began in October 2005 and this annual report presents the data from questionnaires received during 2011/12. Key results have already been published in the 2011/12 Annual Report.

The main findings are given below:

- Police officers' overall satisfaction level with the service received has remained consistently high since 2007/08 and results show that:
- High proportions of officers were satisfied with at least five out of the seven aspects measured. Although this level of satisfaction was consistent over time, results show that there was a dip in satisfaction levels in 2008/09 for some aspects of service;
- As in previous years, police officers were less likely to be satisfied with the frequency of updates and the length of time it took to investigate a complaint;
- The majority of police officers who spoke to an IO from the Police Ombudsman's Office had positive perceptions of staff;
- The majority of police officers felt that they had been treated fairly, were confident that the Office deals with complaints impartially and that the police complaints system makes for a more accountable police service.

# 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.

The Police Officer Satisfaction Survey allows officers subject to investigation by the Office of the Police Ombudsman to express their views on services provided by the Office. In October 2005, the Office began surveying all police officers subject to Police Ombudsman investigation.

This annual report contains data concerning officers' views in respect of questionnaires received between April 2011 and March 2012. The report outlines police officer satisfaction levels with the investigation process and staff from the Office. The report also compares police officers' satisfaction levels over the last five to six years.

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

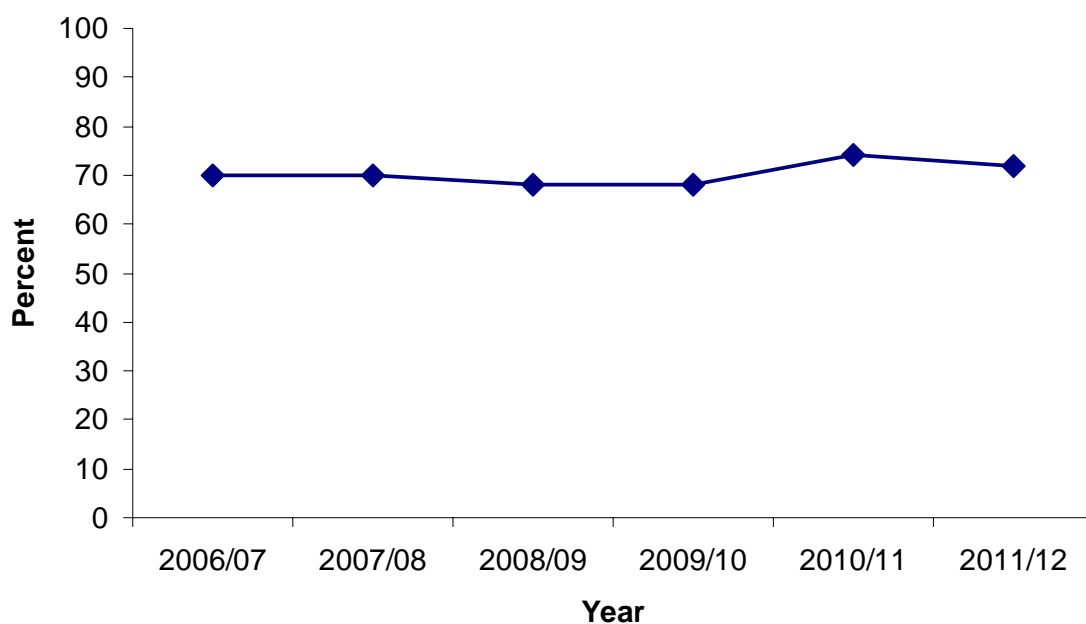
# Findings

## Levels of satisfaction with service received from the Office

Respondents were asked – ‘Taking everything into account how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the overall service you received from the Police Ombudsman?’

Police officers have consistently displayed high levels of satisfaction with the service provided by the Ombudsman’s Office (Figure 1). In 2011/12, 72% of officers stated that they were satisfied with the service provided. Generally, satisfaction levels were similar over the last six years although there was an increase in the satisfaction level from 2009/10 to 2010/11.

**Figure 1: Police officer satisfaction levels with the service provided, 2006/07 – 2011/12**



### Levels of satisfaction with investigation process

Respondents were also asked how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with different aspects of the complaints system. In 2011/12, police officers displayed a high level of satisfaction with most aspects of the investigation process (Figure 2). Lower levels of satisfaction were expressed with the frequency of updates and the time it took for the complaint to be investigated.

**Figure 2: Police officer satisfaction with aspects of the investigation process, 2011/12**

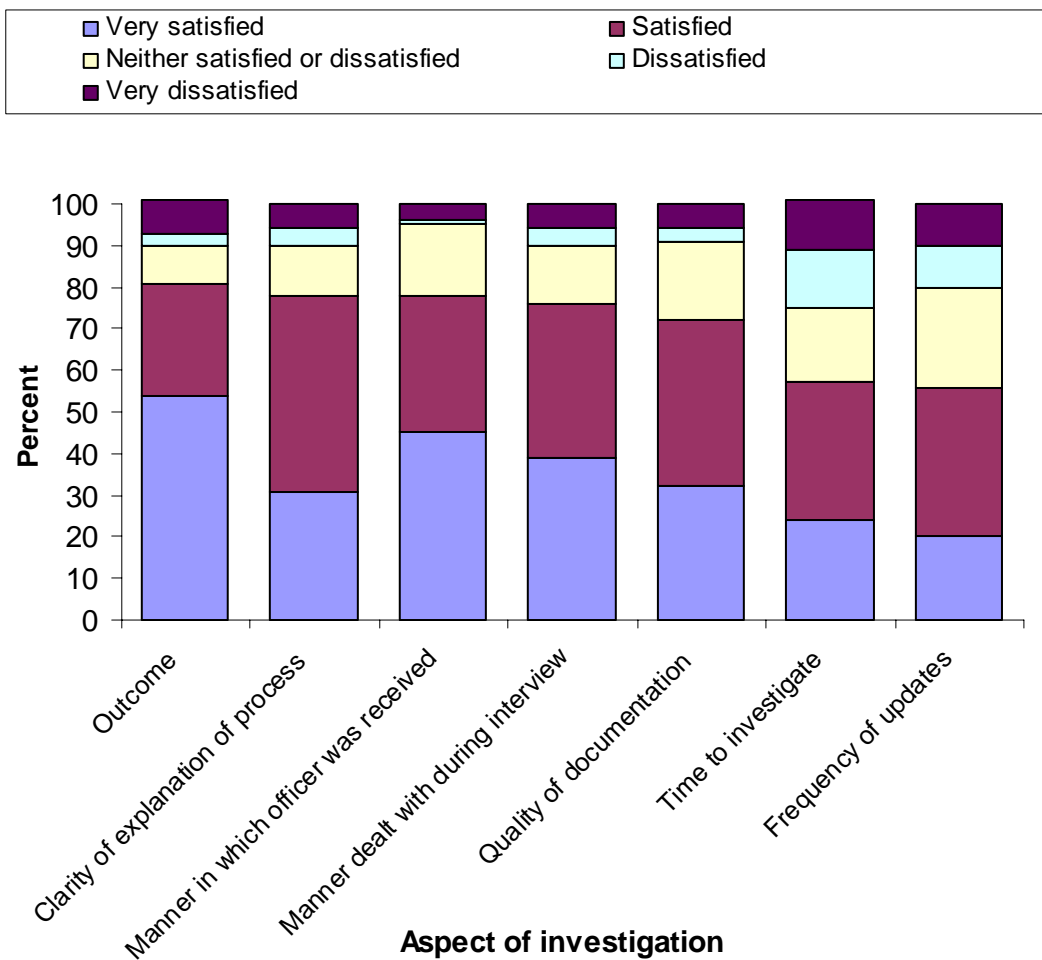
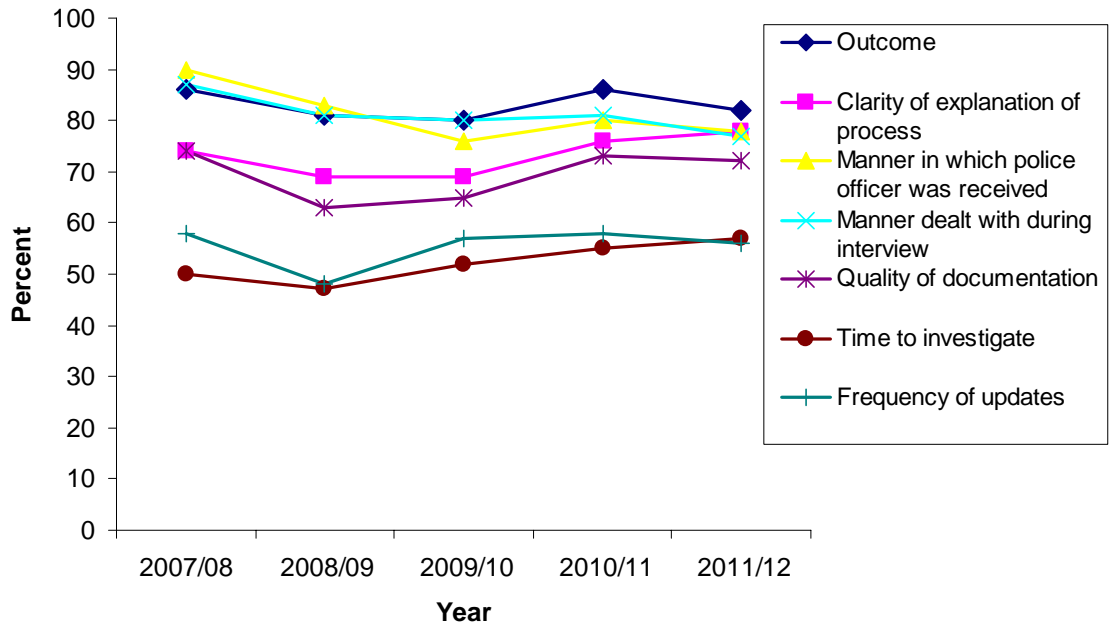


Figure 3 shows the level of satisfaction with each aspect of service since 2007/08.

**Figure 3: Satisfaction levels with aspects of service, 2007/08 – 2011/12**



In 2011/12, 82% of officers stated that they were satisfied with the outcome of the investigation. Generally, police officers' satisfaction with this aspect of service has been consistently high, in particular, during 2007/08 and 2010/11.

In 2011/12, 78% of officers were satisfied with how clearly the investigation process was explained to them by the IO. Generally, police officers' satisfaction has been consistently high with this aspect, although levels of satisfaction dipped in 2008/09 and 2009/10.

Police officers displayed a high level of satisfaction with the manner they were received to the Office. In 2011/12, 78% of officers were satisfied with this aspect of service. Levels of satisfaction have been consistently high, particularly during 2007/08.

In 2011/12, 77% of officers stated that they were satisfied with the manner that staff dealt with them during interview. Police officers have consistently displayed a high level of satisfaction with this aspect; however, current levels are still lower than the level reported in 2007/08.

In 2011/12, 72% of staff were satisfied with the quality of documentation. Levels of satisfaction with this aspect have also remained high, although satisfaction dipped in 2008/09 and 2009/10.

In 2011/12, the level of satisfaction with the length of time taken to investigate complaints (57%) was lower than the levels reported for other aspects of the investigation. However, satisfaction levels have gradually increased over time (47% in 2008/09).

Police officers were also less satisfied with the frequency of updates provided compared with other aspects of the investigation process (56% satisfied in 2011/12). Generally, the satisfaction level with this aspect has been consistently lower than for other aspects since 2007/08 and results show that satisfaction dipped further in 2008/09.

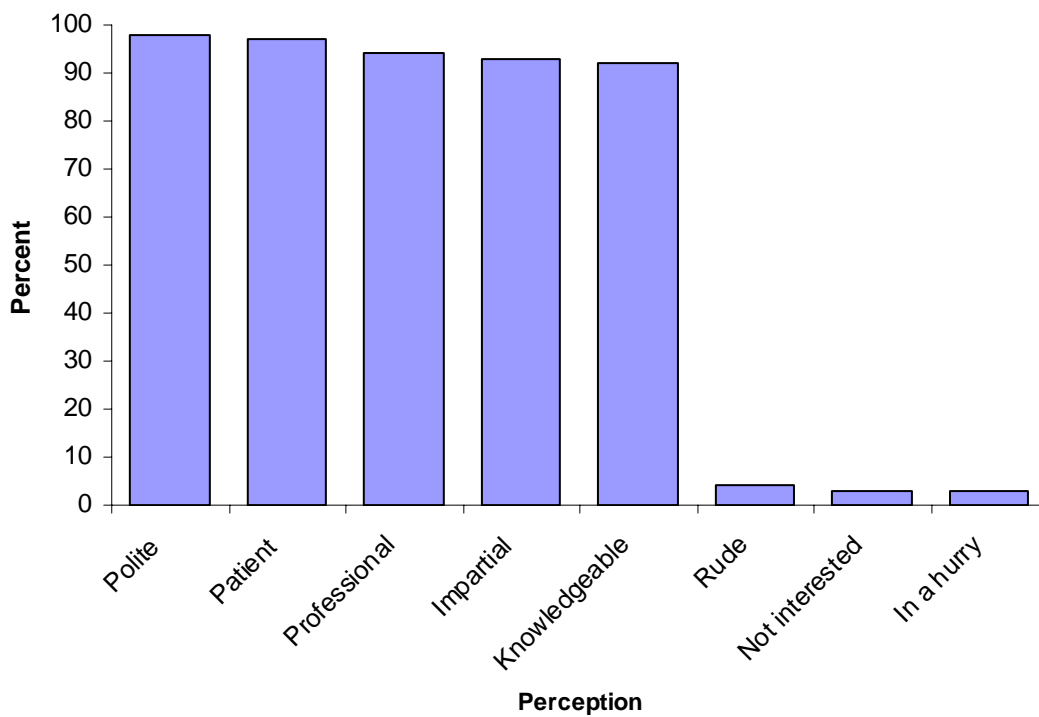
The Office is committed to providing good customer service to both complainants and police officers. As a result of this commitment, the Office sets various 'service commitment' targets, a number of which relate to responsiveness, prompt service and timely processes. One of these targets is that '*85% of police officers are updated every 6 weeks*'. In 2011/12, the Office met this target (85%) despite results from this survey showing that officers' satisfaction with this aspect remains lower than for other aspects of service.



## Levels of police officer satisfaction with Police Ombudsman's investigation staff

Eighty-two percent of police officers had spoken to an IO from the Office of the Police Ombudsman. These police officers were then asked how they found the IO in relation to a number of both positive and negative characteristics. The majority of those police officers held positive views of the investigation staff (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Police officer perception of Ombudsman staff, 2011/12**



Over nine out of ten respondents said they found the IO patient, polite, knowledgeable, professional or impartial. Only a minority of police officers said that they found staff to be rude, not interested or in a hurry.

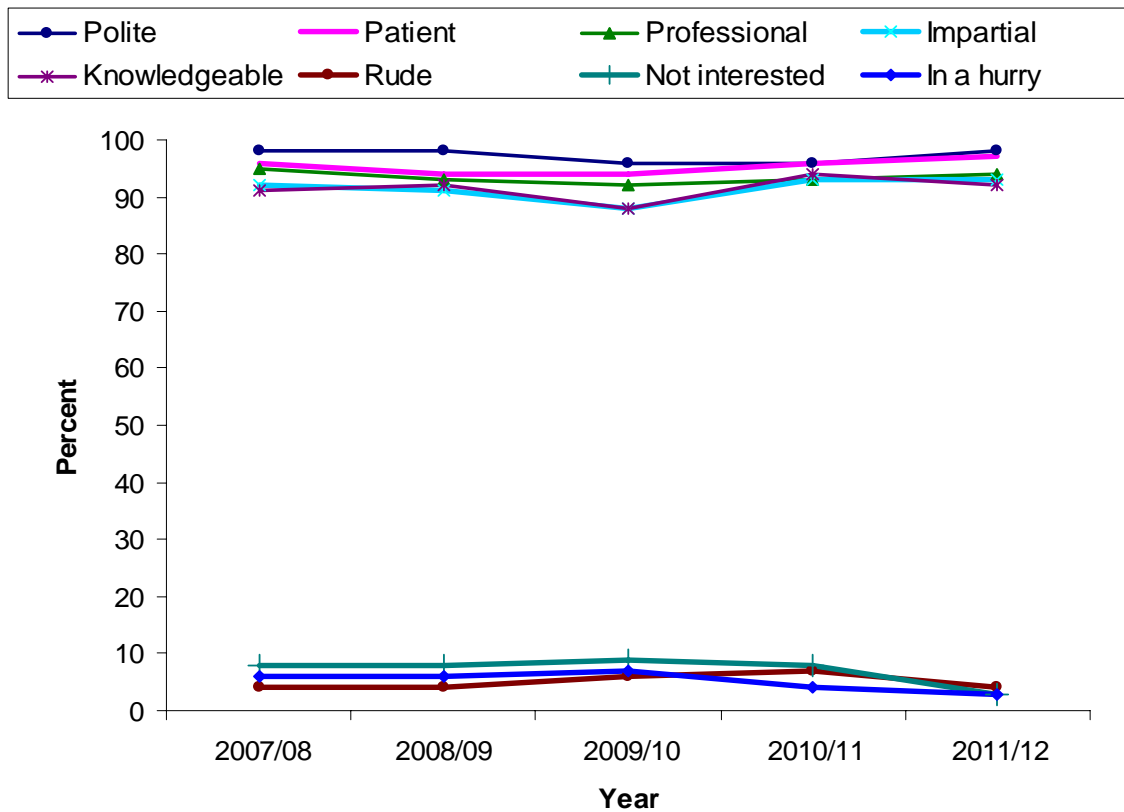
Generally, police officers' perceptions of Ombudsman staff have been consistently positive over the last five years (Figure 5).

In 2011/12, officers were more likely to feel that staff were patient or impartial compared with 2009/10.

During 2010/11, Question 2 of the police officer satisfaction questionnaire was amended in order to separate the positive and negative aspects of the question into two parts – 2a and 2b. These changes were made to make the form more user friendly and easier to understand.

Results show that the proportion of staff who responded in a negative manner, when asked did they think staff were not interested or in a hurry, has decreased since these changes were made. The reader should keep in mind that the change in attitudes may be as a result of changes to the questionnaire.

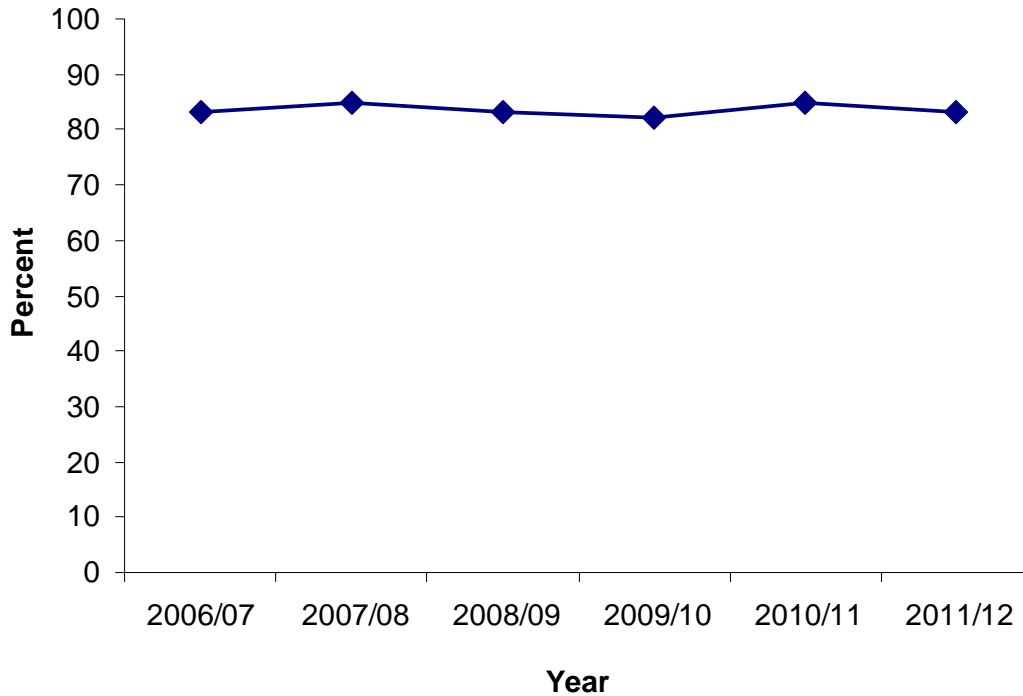
**Figure 5: Police officer perception of Ombudsman staff, 2007/08 – 2011/12**



## Fairness of treatment

Eighty-three percent of respondents thought the Office treated them fairly. This proportion has remained consistently high since 2006/07 (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Fairness of treatment, 2006/07 – 2011/12**



Seventy-six police officers felt that they had not been treated fairly by the Office. These officers were asked to say why this was.

A large number of the comments referred to the length of time taken to complete the investigation and the lack of updates provided during the investigation process:

*“This investigation ran on for a very long time – I received no updates as to its progress and the grounds themselves were not made clear.”*

*“The investigation by the Ombudsman’s Office has taken far too long to be completed.”*

*“Investigation was long and protracted and I was not kept up to date with the investigation.”*

A number of officers also commented on the manner of the IO during interview:

*“Assistant interviewing officer was a disgrace...totally biased against me and treated me/spoke to me like I was a criminal...”*

*“I believe that my account was not listened to and that the investigation officer levelled unfair allegation in relation to my integrity. They were unfounded and I believe the interviewing officer was rude and sharp in their manner despite my full co-operation.”*

*“I found that investigating officer rude. I was only asked question which the interviewer required to know the answers to prove me guilty...was not interested in what actually happened.”*

Other police officers commented that the investigation should never have taken place and was a waste of time:

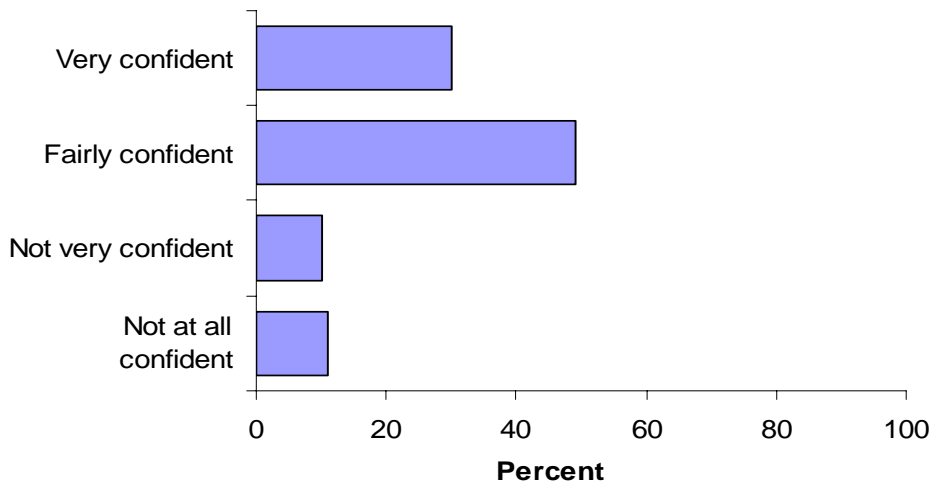
*“The complaint was obviously a malicious one and it was obvious to me, and in my opinion, the investigators, that it should never have gotten to the investigation stage. A waste of time and money.”*

*“I was treated fairly by the investigating officer but the interview should never have taken place as it was clear from the outset of the investigation that the complainant was lying.”*

### Impartiality and accountability

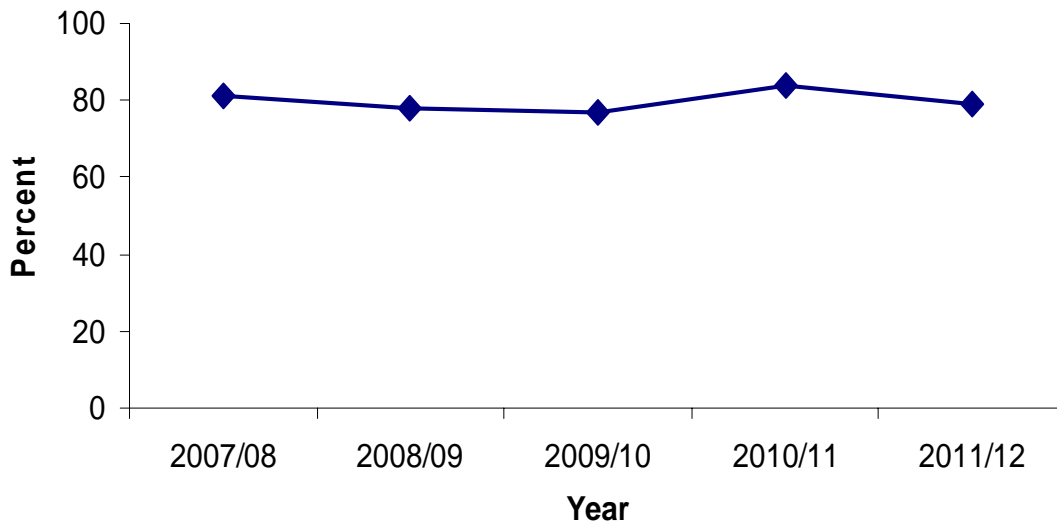
Officers were asked how confident they were that the Police Ombudsman dealt with complaints in an impartial way. In 2011/12, 79% of respondents said they were confident including 30% who were very confident (Figure 7).

**Figure 7: How confident are you that the Police Ombudsman deals with complaints impartially, 2011/12?**



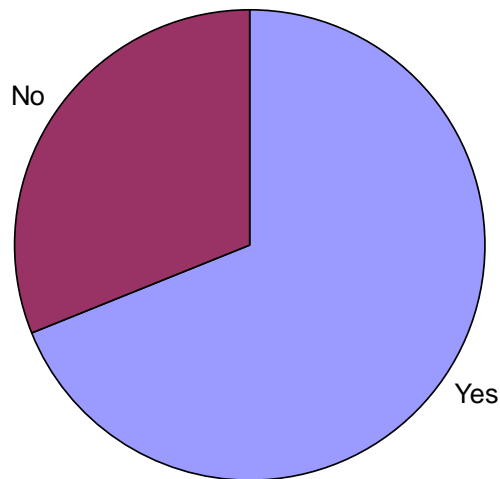
The proportion of police officers who were confident that the Police Ombudsman dealt with complaints in an impartial way has decreased from the level reported in 2010/11, although overall confidence in impartiality remains high (Figure 8).

**Figure 8: Overall confidence in impartiality, 2007/08 – 2011/12**



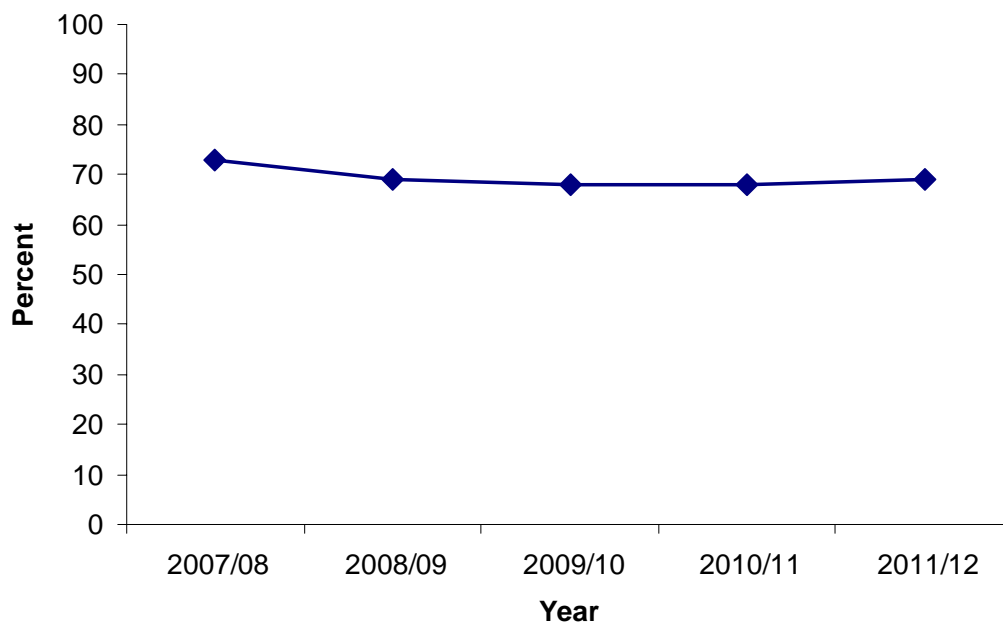
Officers were also asked if they felt the police complaints system makes the police more accountable. In 2011/12, 69% of officers responded positively to this question (Figure 9).

**Figure 9: Do you feel the police complaints system makes the police more accountable, 2011/12?**



Since 2007/08, the majority of police officers' agreed that the police complaints system makes for a more accountable police service (Figure 10).

**Figure 10: Agree that the police complaints system makes police more accountable, 2007/08 – 2011/12**



## 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 35 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.

*"I have dealt with OPONI a number of times and have yet to find any problems/issues."*

*"After my dealings with the Ombudsman in this case, I am left feeling confident with their work. I feel well treated and I feel the investigation was professional throughout."*

A further 197 comments were made by officers.

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

*"I feel the complainant should be held accountable when found to be making false allegations."*

*"Members of the public should have to pay to make a complaint and once the complaint is upheld the money will be refunded."*

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. Officers also commented on the stress caused by the investigation:

*“The time between receiving the initial notice and interview was stressful.”*

*“If I had been updated more frequently I would be more satisfied. I do feel that the investigation took a very long time to come to its conclusion.”*

Some officers commented that investigation staff should carry out more thorough investigation before police officers are interviewed and attempt to deal with ‘spurious’ allegations before progressing through lengthy investigation process:

*“Yes, there should be a facility to assess complaints and when they are obviously not substantiated then deal with it at source and not pursue police when there are no grounds to it.”*

*“Further and more detailed initial investigation to weed out complaints that will not be taken further.”*

A small number of officers felt that staff should provide officers with an explanation of the process:

*“Perhaps inform the police officer the steps the investigating officer will be taking to get a rough time frame.”*

While others felt that staff should be better trained on interview techniques:

*“Retraining for interviewers on interview techniques. I do not feel that the oppressive behaviour of the interviewer to be acceptable.”*



# Appendix 1: Methodology

In October 2005, the Office began surveying all police officers subject to Police Ombudsman investigation. When a complaint is closed or when the investigation involving a particular officer is closed, the IO issues a confidential self-completion questionnaire with instructions and a return envelope to the police officer subject to investigation (Appendix 4). From April 2011 until March 2012 a total of 2,292 questionnaires were issued. By the end of April 2012, 445 questionnaires were returned giving a response rate of 19%.

Once a form is returned to the Research and Performance Directorate of the Office, it is date stamped, given a unique sequential number for filing purposes and the information is input into a SPSS<sup>1</sup> document and saved. Only staff who are directly involved in the processing of the data have data access permissions. Officers involved in the handling and investigation of the complaint do not, at any time, have access to these data. The database is analysed using a combination of Microsoft Excel and SPSS packages.

The 2011/12 figures in this statistical release are based on information from questionnaires received from April 2011 to March 2012. 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.

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<sup>1</sup> SPSS is a statistical software package developed for use by social scientists.

# Appendix 2: Notes to reader

## Official Statistics

This is an Official Statistics publication. Official Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out on 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 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.

The data are also used by this Office to comply with the key performance indicator whereby the Office maintains:

***‘a level of at least 75% of police officers subject to investigation to be satisfied with the service provided by the Office<sup>2</sup>.’***

**- 72% achievement**

Data from the survey is also used by a working group, which looks at how the Office can continue to improve its performance in relation to particular aspects of the investigation process e.g. the low level of satisfaction reported by police officers around frequency of updates and the time taken by the Office to investigate complaints.

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

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<sup>2</sup> As from 01 April 2012, the Office target for overall service has been changed to 65%.

## **Data quality**

Whilst the survey forms are issued by the IO, research staff ensure that forms are issued to appropriate police officers in a timely manner. The CHS (case handling system) is used to extract details of police officers who were subject to investigation during the time period. CHS data quality is considered high. OPONI staff carry out regular quality assurance reviews of all data input into the CHS. One aspect is to ensure that the appropriate police officer details, who are subject to investigation, are recorded on the system correctly.

After forms are returned and information input to the SPSS file, approximately 10% of the data entries are validated to ensure transfer of the information is accurate.

## **Data limitations**

In some cases forms are not issued, for example, to retired officers, to officers that have left the service, to officers who are currently on sick or long-term leave or to officers who have been suspended from the police service.

The Police Federation agreed to support the survey on the condition that that all police officer satisfaction questionnaires would be issued anonymously. This means that it is not possible to issue reminders to police officers in order to increase the overall response rate. This also means that it is not possible to carry out further analysis e.g. satisfaction levels by rank or by gender.

## **Further information**

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# Appendix 3: Results

**Table 1: Overall satisfaction with level of service provided, 2006/07 - 2011/12**

Satisfaction level	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Very satisfied	23%	22%	20%	26%	29%	30%
Satisfied	47%	48%	48%	42%	45%	42%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	15%	15%	15%	16%	12%	10%
Dissatisfied	7%	7%	8%	9%	6%	10%
Very dissatisfied	7%	7%	8%	8%	8%	8%

**Table 2: Police officer satisfaction with investigation process, 2007/08 - 2011/12**

Year	Aspect of investigation	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
2007/08	Outcome	48%	38%	8%	2%	4%
	Clarity of explanation of process	23%	52%	15%	5%	6%
	Manner in which officer was received	36%	54%	6%	2%	2%
	Manner dealt with during interview	37%	49%	8%	3%	3%
	Quality of documentation	24%	50%	15%	6%	6%
	Time to investigate	12%	38%	22%	10%	18%
	Frequency of updates	13%	45%	16%	13%	13%
2008/09	Outcome	43%	37%	12%	3%	5%
	Clarity of explanation of process	24%	45%	18%	6%	6%
	Manner in which officer was received	34%	49%	14%	1%	3%
	Manner dealt with during interview	32%	48%	10%	5%	5%
	Quality of documentation	21%	42%	24%	8%	6%
	Time to investigate	14%	33%	19%	17%	17%
	Frequency of updates	15%	34%	25%	14%	13%
2009/10	Outcome	46%	34%	12%	3%	5%
	Clarity of explanation of process	28%	41%	20%	6%	5%
	Manner in which officer was received	34%	42%	16%	3%	5%
	Manner dealt with during interview	35%	44%	12%	5%	4%
	Quality of documentation	22%	43%	23%	6%	6%
	Time to investigate	18%	33%	19%	14%	15%
	Frequency of updates	17%	40%	22%	11%	11%
2010/11	Outcome	54%	32%	7%	1%	6%
	Clarity of explanation of process	30%	47%	16%	2%	5%
	Manner in which officer was received	37%	43%	10%	1%	10%
	Manner dealt with during interview	39%	42%	8%	2%	9%
	Quality of documentation	28%	44%	17%	5%	6%
	Time to investigate	24%	32%	19%	12%	14%
	Frequency of updates	21%	36%	24%	10%	8%
2011/12	Outcome	54%	27%	9%	3%	8%
	Clarity of explanation of process	31%	47%	12%	4%	6%
	Manner in which officer was received	45%	33%	17%	1%	4%
	Manner dealt with during interview	39%	37%	14%	4%	6%
	Quality of documentation	32%	40%	19%	3%	6%
	Time to investigate	24%	33%	18%	14%	12%
	Frequency of updates	20%	36%	24%	10%	10%

**Table 3: Police officer perception of Ombudsman staff, 2007/08 - 2011/12**

Police officer perception	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Polite	98%	98%	96%	96%	98%
Patient	96%	94%	94%	96%	97%
Professional	95%	93%	92%	93%	94%
Impartial	92%	91%	88%	93%	93%
Knowledgeable	91%	92%	88%	94%	92%
Rude	4%	4%	6%	7%	4%
Not interested	8%	8%	9%	8%	3%
In a hurry	6%	6%	7%	4%	3%

**Table 4: Fairness of treatment, 2006/07 - 2011/12**

Treated fairly	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Yes	83%	85%	83%	82%	85%	83%
No	17%	15%	17%	19%	15%	17%

**Table 5: Confidence that the Police Ombudsman deals with complaints impartially, 2007/08 - 2011/12**

Confidence level	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Very confident	22%	21%	23%	31%	30%
Fairly confident	32%	58%	54%	53%	49%
Confident	27%	–	–	–	–
Not very confident	13%	13%	13%	8%	10%
Not at all confident	7%	9%	10%	9%	11%

**Table 6: Agree that the Police Complaints System makes police more accountable, 2007/08 - 2011/12**

Accountable	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Yes	73%	69%	68%	68%	69%
No	27%	31%	32%	33%	31%

# Appendix 4: Questionnaire

## 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)

### 2a. 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"/>
Patient?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Acted impartially?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Acted professionally?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### 2b. DID YOU FIND THE INVESTIGATING OFFICER:

Not interested?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rude?	<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.





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