



Annual Statistical Bulletin  
of the Police Ombudsman for  
Northern Ireland,  
2014/15

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## INTRODUCTION

This Statistical Bulletin presents information on complaints and allegations received by the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland in 2014/15, as well as showing trend information over the last five years.

It was produced independently by Statisticians from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) who are seconded to the Police Ombudsman's Office and work alongside Police Ombudsman personnel. It has been produced in accordance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

### Why publish statistics?

The information presented in this bulletin has been produced to meet the needs of a variety of individuals and organisations who have a particular interest in the issue of police complaints.

The Police Ombudsman's Office uses these statistics to monitor trends in complaints and allegations received and how they were dealt with. It also uses this information to monitor performance against key performance indicators.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) have an interest in knowing about the trends and patterns in complaints made against their officers and use this information to help identify and address particular problems.

The Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB) use this material in developing an understanding of what aspects of police conduct are attracting public concern and whether these concerns are of substance.

The Police and Community Partnerships (PCSPs) also use the data to monitor police performance in their areas and to identify any particular concerns.

The general public have a right to know how both their police service and their police complaints service are performing.

## Understanding the information in this bulletin

We hope this report will provide readers with a clear understanding of the trends and patterns in complaints and allegations received by the Police Ombudsman's Office over the last five years.

We have provided information on what we believe would be the main questions asked by readers: how many complaints and allegations have we received, what were they about and how were they resolved, for example.

Commentary has been provided throughout, which aims to provide some context and explanation or interpretation of the emerging trends.

However, a concise document like this can only ever provide part of that context. Other factors may be at play which cannot be reflected in this bulletin. Readers may also want to consider issues as varied as the levels of the police budget and the service it can provide, as well as the level of awareness of the police complaints system itself.

Similarly, making comparisons across geographical areas may not always be straightforward. Areas have different levels of population. Even that distinction can have further categories. Whether people travel to an area during normal office hours for their work or move into it in the evening to socialise can have an effect on the number of complaints we receive.

It is also difficult to make valid comparisons between the number of complaints and allegations received across Northern Ireland, England and Wales, and Scotland as each area operates a different system.

## Terminology

For those with less knowledge of the Police Ombudsman's Office, we have provided an explanation of the police complaints process in the glossary in the appendices of this report. We have tried to keep the terminology used in this bulletin 'jargon' free, but where this has not been possible we have provided a glossary with an explanation of those terms.

## Could we improve this bulletin?

From the wealth of detailed information within the Police Ombudsman's Office, we have tried to produce a bulletin which focuses on the key issues which we believe would be of interest to the public and the police. We have also tried to make that information as clear and easily understood as possible. Have we succeeded? We would be keen to hear any views you have on this bulletin.

If you wish to provide any feedback or comments on this publication please see our contact details on the back page or email us via [info@policeombudsman.org](mailto:info@policeombudsman.org).

## Conventions

Percentages in the tables and text are rounded to the nearest whole number, and thus may not always add up to 100.

## A SUMMARY OF THE KEY TRENDS IN COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE POLICE

- The Police Ombudsman's Office received more than 3,300 complaints during 2014/15. This is a 10% decrease in complaints from the previous year when the Office received the highest number of complaints since it opened in November 2000.
- Seven of the eight former police districts saw a decrease in the number of complaints made against them.
- Criminal Investigation was the most common situation which gave rise to complaints, as it was in four of the last five years.
- The most frequent allegations received during the year were allegations of a Failure in Duty, of Oppressive Behaviour, and of Incivility.
- The Police Ombudsman's Office closed more than 3,500 complaints, an increase on the numbers closed in the three previous years.
- Nearly four out of ten complaints dealt with by the Police Ombudsman's Office were subject to a full investigation. In 28% of these complaints the Office found evidence to substantiate all or part of the complaint, or identified another concern during the investigation.
- On 12 occasions during the year the Police Ombudsman recommended that the Director of Public Prosecutions should prosecute an officer, this is a similar number to the previous year.
- The Police Ombudsman recommended on 380 occasions that a police officer should be disciplined or should receive additional training or supervision. This is a 66% increase from 2013/14 when he made these recommendations on 229 occasions.



# COMPLAINTS

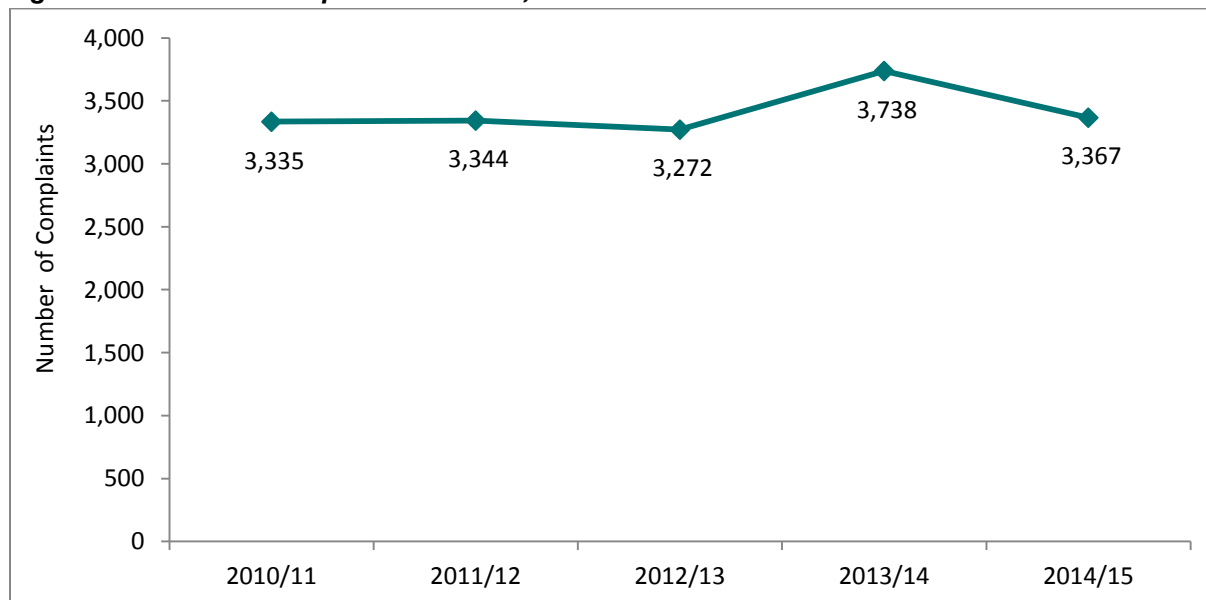
## The volume of complaints and matters received

The number of complaints received by the Police Ombudsman’s Office in 2014/15 and matters referred for independent investigations was 3,367. This was a decrease of 10% from the previous year when the Office received the highest number of complaints since it opened (Figure 1, Table 5).

The vast majority of these matters (98%) were complaints from members of the public. The remaining 2% were matters referred to the Police Ombudsman’s Office from the PSNI or from another organisation<sup>1</sup> or matters in which the Police Ombudsman exercised his power to initiate investigations (Table 6).

For the purpose of clarity of reporting, this statistical bulletin will refer to all its incoming work by the term ‘complaints’.

**Figure 1: Number of complaints received, 2010/11 to 2014/15**



The number of complaints the Police Ombudsman’s Office received has remained fairly stable over the last five years. There is one exception to this however: during the business year 2013/14 complaints rose. That increase has been attributed in part to the policing of the flag protests and public disorder at the time. Also during that year a

<sup>1</sup> Public Prosecution Service (PPS), Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB) and the Department of Justice (DOJ).

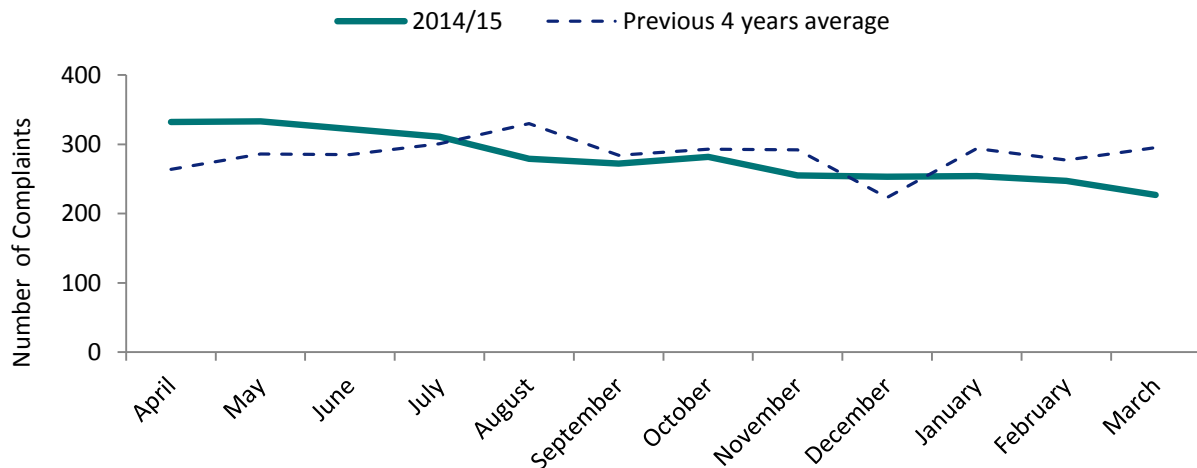
processing issue at a custody suite in one police station may have led to a rise in the overall number of complaints recorded.

The increase in complaints in 2013/14 was most noticeable in the two Belfast police districts. It appeared to be linked to complaints arising from police arrests and at parades or demonstrations; and to allegations about Oppressive Behaviour of officers and in particular the use of handcuffs.

## Complaints received each month

The number of complaints received each month declined gradually during 2014/15 (Figure 2, Table 7)

**Figure 2: Number of complaints received by month, 2010/11 to 2014/15**



This decline was in contrast to what would usually be expected. Traditionally the number of complaints received tends to peak during the summer months of July and August and be at their lowest in December.

The number of complaints received at the start of the year, between April and June was higher than in previous years, but then decreased to more usual levels. This increase at the start of the year may have been a continuation of the high number of complaints received in 2013/14.

## Who people were complaining about

The Police Ombudsman's Office has the remit to investigate complaints about officials from a number of bodies. These include police officers and 'designated civilians' within the PSNI, police officers with the Northern Ireland Airport Constabulary and Belfast Harbour Police, and from 16<sup>th</sup> March 2015 officials within the UK Border Force. More recently in 2015/16 the Office's remit has been extended to include officers from the National Crime Agency (from 20<sup>th</sup> May 2015), although this bulletin covers complaints received in 2014/15 and the four previous years.

During 2014/15 the vast majority of complaints (98%) made to the Police Ombudsman's Office were about PSNI officers. This is a similar trend to the previous five years (Tables 1 and 8).

**Table 1: Complaints received by organisation, 2014/15**

	No. of complaints received	Percentage
PSNI	3,306	98%
Designated Civilians	38	1%
Harbour Police	2	< 0.5%
NI Airport Constabulary	1	< 0.5%
Other / Unknown	20	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,367</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Where people initially made their complaints

Although the Police Ombudsman's Office is the only body which can by law deal with complaints about the conduct of police officers, people do not always make their complaints directly to us. Sometimes their complaint is made in the first instance to the PSNI itself or to someone such as a solicitor or a political representative.

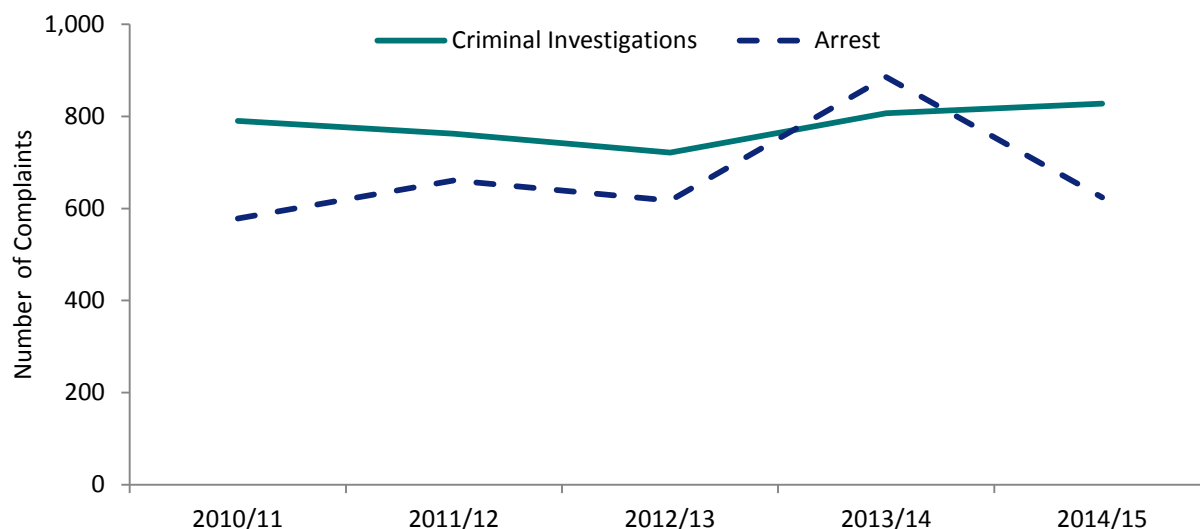
Most of the complaints received (68%) in 2014/15 were made directly to the Police Ombudsman's Office without the use of an intermediary. This has been the trend in each of the last five years (Table 9).

## Situations which gave rise to complaints

In order to try and get a better understanding of what sorts of interactions might give rise to complaints about the police or police conduct, the Police Ombudsman's Office collect information on the background or context to the complaint.

Criminal investigations were the most common situations giving rise to complaints received in 2014/15 (Figure 3, Table 10). The second most frequent situation giving rise to complaints were Arrests.

**Figure 3: Complaints arising from Criminal investigations and Arrests, 2010/11 to 2014/15**



Criminal investigations were also cited as the most frequent situation giving rise to complaints in all but one of the last five years. The exception was in 2013/14, when Arrests were the most common situation resulting in a complaint.

Complaints about incidents during parades or demonstrations were at their highest between 2012/13 and 2013/14. This coincides with the timing of the public disorder regarding flag protests, the protests at Twaddle Avenue in Belfast and a protest at Royal Avenue in Belfast.

Over the last five years the number of complaints regarding historical matters increased. These are complaints that are investigated by the History Team within the Police Ombudsman's Office and relate to the 'Troubles'.

There has also been an increase in complaints arising from domestic incidents over the last two years.

During the last five years there has been a decrease in the number of complaints received from traffic related incidents and from police enquiries. In addition to this, in 2014/15 complaints received from traffic related incidents and from police searches are at their lowest levels in the last five years.

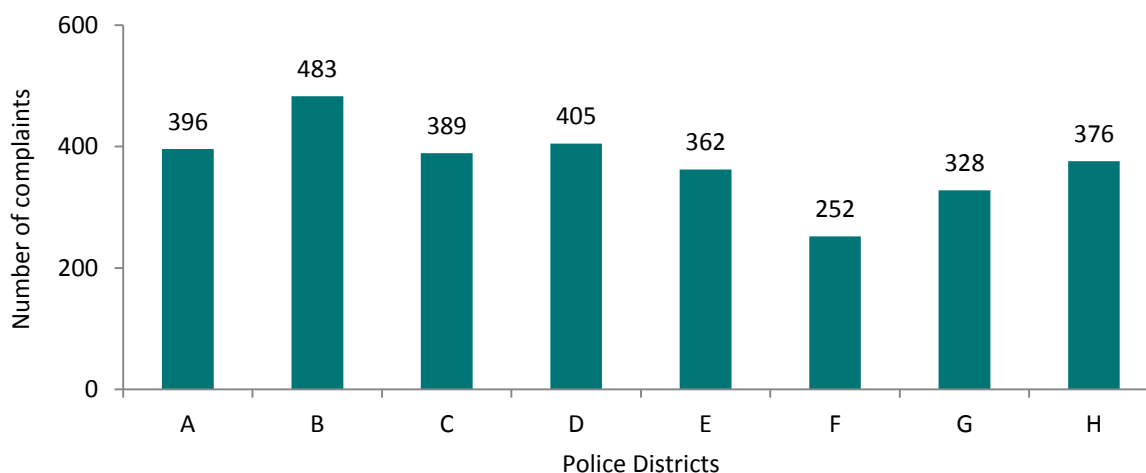
## Complaints received by police district

This bulletin covers the period 2014/15 and the period prior to the reorganisation of police boundaries<sup>2</sup>. During this period policing in Northern Ireland was divided into eight police districts. This section refers to complaints made against PSNI officers only.

The police district which received the most complaints in 2014/15 was B District. This district received more than 480 complaints during this year, and covers the areas South and East Belfast (Figure 4, Table 11). It is not always possible to directly compare complaints received between districts for a number of reasons. Such as the number of officers assigned to each district will vary, and the level and type of interactions with the police will differ between districts.

The only other district that received more than 400 complaints was D District. This district borders Belfast and covers Antrim, Carrickfergus, Lisburn and Newtownabbey.

**Figure 4: Complaints received by police district, 2014/15**



Seven out of the eight police district in 2014/15 had a decrease in complaints received from the previous year. B District had the largest decrease in complaints (21%)

<sup>2</sup> On the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015 the PSNI district and area boundaries were changed to reflect the new council boundaries in Northern Ireland. For more details on these changes see the PSNI [website](#).

followed by A District (18%). H District was the only police district to have an increase in complaints; this increase was mainly in Ballymoney and Coleraine police areas.

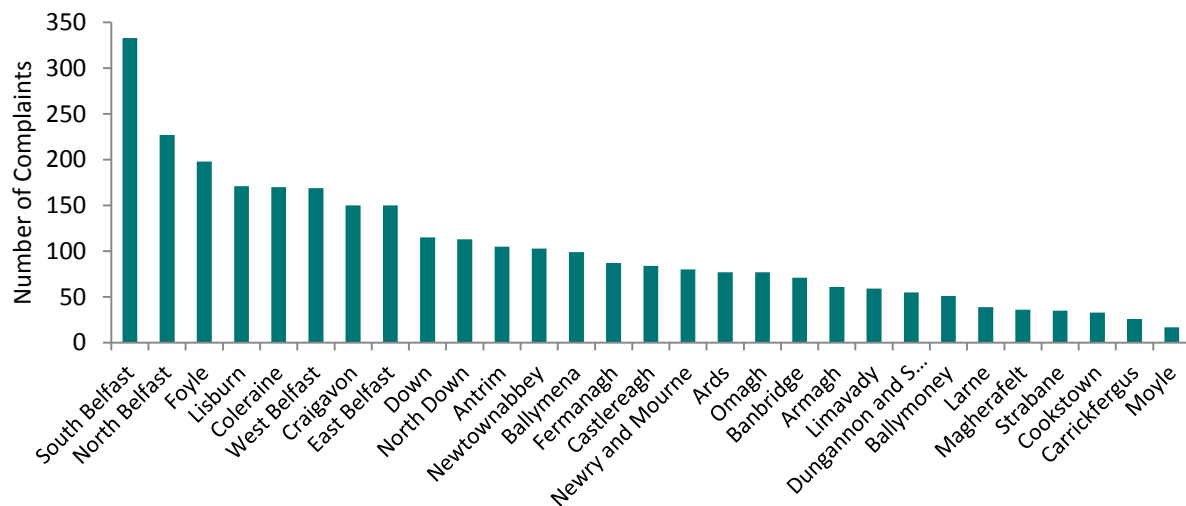
When looking at ‘District’ complaints over a five year period, F District, which covers the areas of Dungannon, South Tyrone, Fermanagh and Omagh, is the only district which saw a decrease in complaints each year.

### Complaints received by police area

During 2014/15 policing in Northern Ireland was divided into 29 police areas. This section refers to complaints made against PSNI officers only and refers to the period prior to the restructuring of police boundaries.

The policing areas which received the largest number of complaints in 2014/15 were South and North Belfast. Carrickfergus and Moyle were the two police areas with the fewest number of complaints (Figure 5, Table 11).

**Figure 5: Complaints received by police area, 2014/15**



As mentioned above, South and North Belfast received the most complaints in 2014/15 but both these areas had nearly 100 fewer complaints made against them this year when compared with 2013/14.

In taking a five year view, the number of complaints received for most police areas have fluctuated over the years. In Newtownabbey, Castlereagh, Ards, Dungannon and South Tyrone there has generally been a decrease in the number of complaints received. Ballymoney, however, has seen an increase in complaints.

Note: In previous years this bulletin provided a geographical breakdown of its incoming work in terms of both complaints and allegations received. Following feedback from some of our key users and for the purpose of clarity of reporting, we have limited our reporting this year to 'complaints' only.

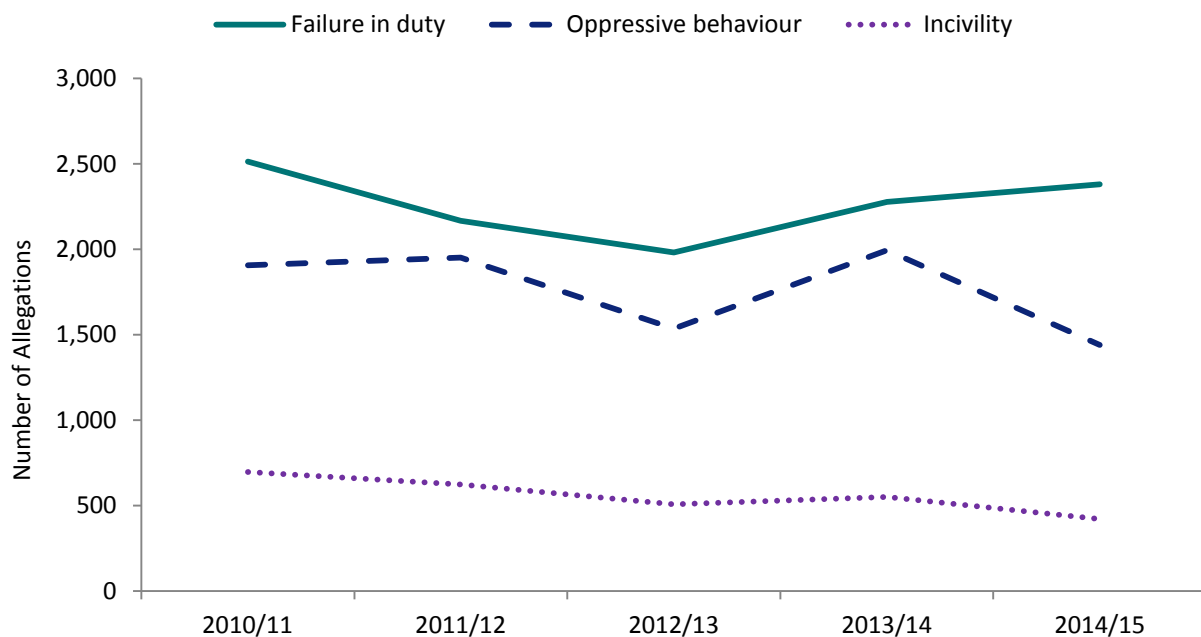
## ALLEGATIONS

A person who makes a complaint may express a number of different concerns about the exchange they have had with a police officer. The Police Ombudsman's Office will record this as one complaint broken down into a number of 'allegations'.

In 2014/15 the Police Ombudsman's Office received 5,587 allegations (Table 12).

The most frequent allegations received during the year were allegations of a Failure in Duty, of Oppressive Behaviour, and of Incivility. (Figure 6, Table13).

**Figure 6: Types of allegations received, 2010/11 to 2014/15**



### Failure in Duty allegations

In 2014/15, 2,381 allegations received by the Police Ombudsman's Office alleged a Failure in Duty by a police officer. This was an increase of 5% on the number of allegations received in the previous year.

More than half (53%) of the Failure in Duty allegations received in 2014/15 related to the conduct of police investigations or police response to incidents (Table 14).

The 2015/16 Policing Plan has a target for the PSNI to reduce Failure in Duty allegations by 2% from the number recorded in 2014/15.



## Oppressive Behaviour allegations

There were 1,440 Oppressive Behaviour allegations received in 2014/15. This was a decrease of 28% on the number of such allegations received in the previous year.

Almost half (48%) of the Oppressive Behaviour allegations received in 2014/15 alleged unjustified force or violence (excluding serious or sexual assault)<sup>3</sup>. Allegations of serious assault or sexual assault made up 4% of all the Oppressive Behaviour allegations received (Table 15).

The target in the 2014/15 Policing Plan was met, which had been to reduce these allegations for PSNI officers by 10%.

The 2015/16 Policing Plan has a target to reduce Oppressive behaviour allegations by PSNI officers only by a further 2% from the number received in 2014/15.

## Incivility allegations

In 2014/15 there were 421 Incivility allegations received. This was a 23% decrease from the previous year.

One in four (25%) of the Incivility allegations occurred at a domestic residence.

The 2014/15 Policing Plan had a target to reduce allegations of Incivility by 1% for PSNI officers. This was achieved. The number of Incivility allegations received has been decreasing over the last five years (Table 16).

The 2015/16 Policing Plan has a target for PSNI officers only to reduce these allegations by a 2% from the number received in 2014/15.

## Other allegations<sup>4</sup>

The number of allegations about discriminatory behaviour of police officers decreased in 2014/15. Following a rise in the previous year, this reduction brought the number of those allegations back to a level similar to that in previous years (Table 13).

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<sup>3</sup> Referred to as 'other assault' in Table 15.

<sup>4</sup> A further breakdown of allegations are available on the Police Ombudsman's website in the accompanying excel tables, [link](#).

There has been an increase in allegations regarding searches over the last three years. These are mainly about irregularities in searches of premises.

### **Allegations regarding the use of police equipment**

Over the last five years a small proportion of allegations, typically around 5%, were about the use of police equipment (Table 17).

During this period the number of allegations regarding the use of CS spray has halved, from 69 in 2010/11 to 33 in 2014/15.

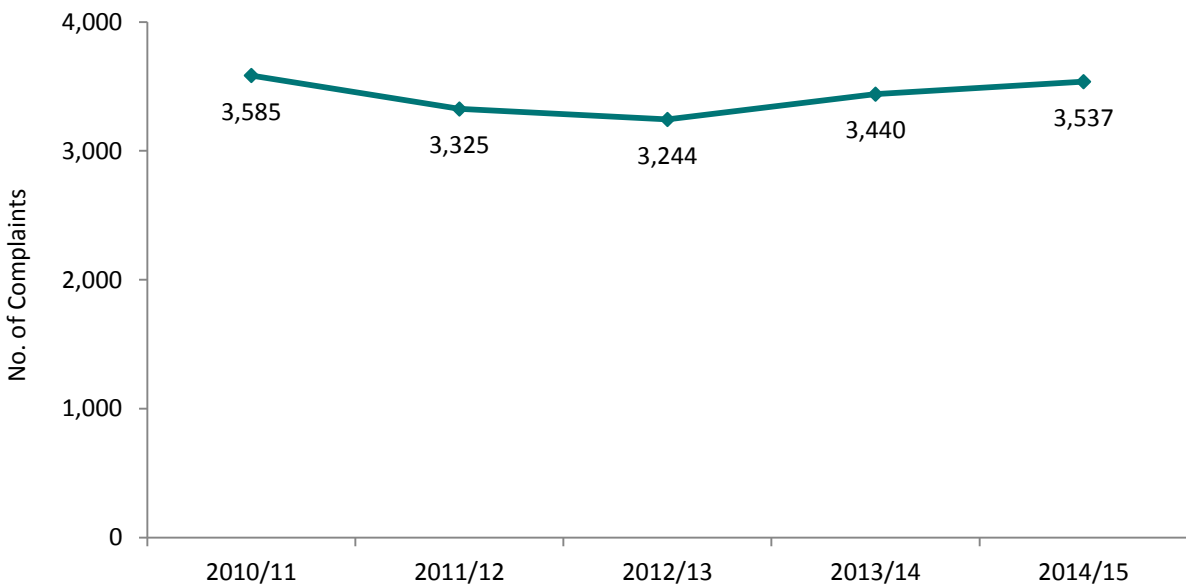
In 2014/15 there has been a decrease in the number of allegations about the use of firearms, AEPs and batons compared with the previous year.

## COMPLAINT CLOSURES

Complaints will be closed when the Police Ombudsman's Office has reached a view on the matter involved, when the complainant and the police officer have reached a level of agreement on the contested matter or when the person who made the complaint no longer wishes to engage with the process.

The Police Ombudsman's Office closed more than 3,500 complaints in 2014/15 (Figure 7, Table 18).

**Figure 7: Number of complaints closed by year, 2010/11 to 2014/15**



The number of complaints closed by the Office has increased over the last two years. This reflects the larger caseload within the Office over this time period due to the increase in complaints received in 2013/14.

## Types of complaint closures

There are four main stages as to when complaints will be closed (Table 2).

**Table 2: Complaint closures, 2014/15**

<b>Complaints Closed in 2014/15</b>		<b>3,537</b>
<b>Complaints closed following initial assessment</b>		<b>423</b>
Complaint was not a matter for the Police Ombudsman		361
Call in/Call out – no further action		25
Other		37
<b>Complaints closed following initial inquiries</b>		<b>1,564</b>
Complainant did not fully engage with the police complaints system		1,085
Ill-founded		310
Withdrawn		152
Other		17
<b>Complaints resolved informally/locally</b>		<b>219</b>
Informally Resolved		191
Locally Resolved		28
<b>Complaints fully investigated</b>		<b>1,331</b>
Complaint not substantiated or no issue of concern identified		963
Complaint substantiated or an issue of concern identified		368

Around one in ten (12%) complaints closed in 2014/15 were closed after the initial assessment. These complaints tend to be closed fairly quickly, and often involve issues which are not a matter for the Police Ombudsman's Office.

A larger proportion of complaints (44%) were closed after initial inquiries. Initial inquiries can occur prior to an investigation commencing or at the start of an investigation. It involves getting more information from the complainant, looking for evidence regarding the matter complained about or making initial contact with the police officer(s) involved. Complaints closed at this stage are normally those where the complainant ceases to engage with the Office.

Complaints that were informally or locally resolved accounted for 6% of all complaints closed. This is an alternative way to resolve less serious complaints e.g. rudeness or incivility.

Nearly four in ten (38%) complaints closed were fully investigated. This is when a Police Ombudsman's Investigator looks into each allegation within the complaint and reaches a conclusion about it. The Office found evidence to substantiate all or part of the complaint, or identified another concern during the investigation in 28% of these complaints in 2014/15.

### **Trends in the types of complaint closures**

As mentioned earlier over the last two years there has been an increase in the number of complaints closed. So too has the number of complaints that have been fully investigated. While the number of complaints closed following initial assessment and following initial inquiries decreased over the last year (Table 18).

Note: Following representation from key stakeholders and in order to make the reporting clearer, it has been decided to report our closures at complaint level. To do this, each of the closures within a complaint have been ranked, and the closure with the highest ranking used as the most representative of the overall complaint closure.

The highest ranking closure is also used to determine at which stage in the complaints process the complaint was closed: after initial assessment, initial inquiries, informal resolution, or following a full investigation. While this method will provide a clear and largely accurate picture in the majority of cases, there will be a few instances when this will not be the case. These discrepancies will only occur between initial assessment and initial inquiries stages.

# RECOMMENDATIONS TO PPS AND POLICE

## Public Prosecution Service (PPS)

Where the Police Ombudsman investigates a matter and identifies that a criminal offence may have been committed, legislation requires that the matter is reported to the PPS. A file will be sent to the PPS that sets out the information which has been established and makes a recommendation as to whether or not the police officer(s) should face a criminal charge. Irrespective of the Police Ombudsman’s recommendation, it will be for the PPS to decide if an officer should be prosecuted.

In 2014/15, on 12 occasions the Police Ombudsman recommended that the Director of Public Prosecutions should prosecute an officer (Tables 3).

**Table 3: Occasions Police Ombudsman recommended prosecution /no prosecution for an officer, 2014/15**

	2014/15
No prosecution recommended for an officer	364
Prosecution recommended for an officer	12

Over the last five years, the number of times the Police Ombudsman recommended prosecution for an officer has remained fairly similar. While over the same period the number of occasions when no prosecution was recommended has nearly halved (decreased by 46%) (Table 19).

## Recommendations made to the Chief Constable or Chief Officer

Following the conclusion of any criminal proceedings or investigations which relate to misconduct matters, the Police Ombudsman may make a recommendation to the Chief Constable or the Chief Officer, who will consider whether action should be taken against the police officers who were the subject of the complaint.

In 2014/15 the Police Ombudsman’s Office recommended on 380 occasions that an officer should receive a discipline sanction or should receive additional training or supervision (Table 4). As with previous years most of these recommendations were for Advice and Guidance.

**Table 4: Discipline sanction or training/supervision recommended for officers, 2014/15**

	2014/15
Management Discussion/Training	65
Advice and Guidance	226
Superintendent's Written Warning	85
Formal Disciplinary Proceedings	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>380</b>

There was a 66% increase in the number of occasions where the Police Ombudsman recommended that an officer should receive a discipline sanction or should receive additional training or supervision in compared with 2013/14. This was most noticeable for Superintendents written warnings where more than twice as many were recommended in 2014/15 than in 2013/14.

In addition to these recommendations made about officers, the Police Ombudsman made 67 police recommendations to the Chief Constable in the PSNI. These included recommendations that would help ensure people's safety in custody suites, help ensure the safety of police vehicles, and about policing of public order situations.

## INFORMAL AND LOCAL RESOLUTION

Complaints made against PSNI officers that are of a less serious nature, usually about incivility or certain types of failure in duties, may be considered for Informal Resolution. This involves a senior police officer speaking to both the officer(s) and the complainant with a view of reaching a satisfactory resolution. Prior to proceeding with this process the consent of the complainant must be obtained.

In 2014/15, 14% of complaints were considered for Informal Resolution and for more than half of these complaints the person making the complaint agreed for it to be dealt with through Informal Resolution. This is a similar situation to the previous three years (Table 21).

There were 200 complaints finalised through the Informal Resolution process in 2014/15 and more than 160 of them were successfully resolved (Table 22).

In addition to the Informal Resolution process, in D District which includes the areas of Antrim, Carrickfergus, Lisburn and Newtownabbey a process for resolving complaints known as Local Resolution is offered instead of Informal Resolution. In 2014/15, 33 complaints were referred for Local Resolution.



## PSNI OFFICERS

Approximately 60% of the complaints recorded by the Police Ombudsman's Office have an identified officer associated with them.

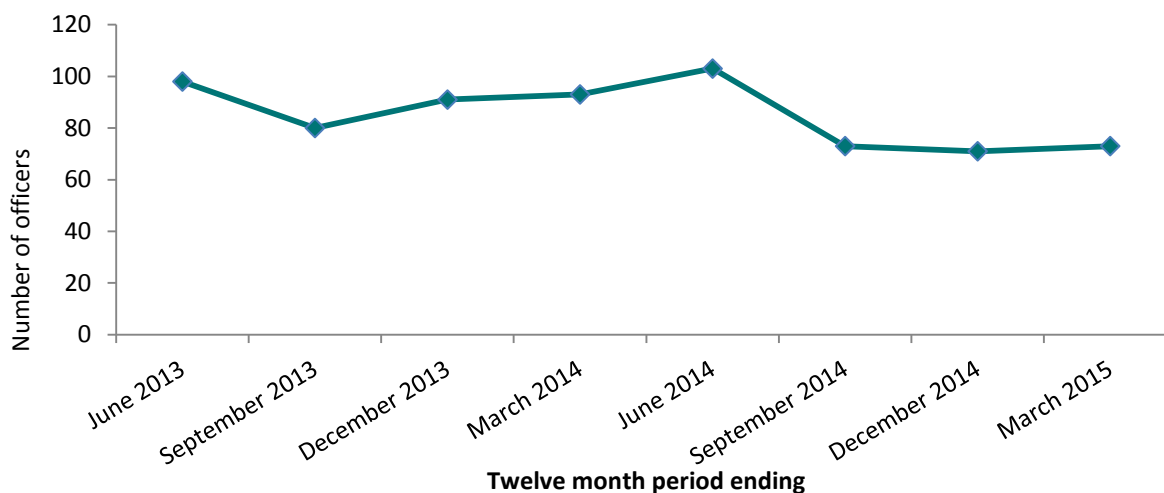
The other complaints which do not identify an officer tend to be those which have been closed at an early stage, such as those which were not a matter for the Police Ombudsman to investigate and those where the complainant did not fully engage with the Police Complaints System.

Most of the officers (80%) identified within complaints were constables, while fewer complaints were received about officers of higher ranks (Table 23). This is a similar profile to that of the composition of officers within the police service.

Information on officers identified within a complaint is shared with the Service Improvement Department within the PSNI. In April 2013 the PSNI amended the stage at which they initiate management intervention. From that date, officers who received three or more complaints that were formally investigated or dealt with by way of Informal or Local Resolution in the previous 12 months are subject of such intervention.

From April 2014 to March 2015, 73 officers reached that stage. This is a decrease from the previous 12 month period ending in March 2014 (Figure 9, Table 24).

**Figure 9: Officers that received three or more complaints that were formally investigated or dealt with by way of Informal or Local Resolution, 2013/14 to 2014/15**



Note: During the course of an investigation, officers associated with the complaint can vary; as evidence is gathered more officers can be linked to the complaint and some

may be removed. For this reason, to allow direct comparison across time, the information that was reported at the end of each quarter is not updated.

## APPENDIX 1: STATISTICAL TABLES

**Table 5: Complaints received, 2010/11 to 2014/15**

Year	Complaints
2010/11	3,335
2011/12	3,344
2012/13	3,272
2013/14	3,738
2014/15	3,367

**Table 6: Complaints and matters, 2010/11 to 2014/15**

Complaints/Other Matters	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Complaints from members of the public	3,290	3,293	3,214	3,690	3,312
Matters referred to the Office	42	44	48	39	45
Matters the Police Ombudsman has chosen to investigate	3	7	10	9	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,335</b>	<b>3,344</b>	<b>3,272</b>	<b>3,738</b>	<b>3,367</b>

**Table 7: Complaints received by month, 2010/11 to 2014/15**

Month complaint received	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
April	281	246	248	281	332
May	276	295	264	309	333
June	288	272	262	316	322
July	330	280	237	356	311
August	290	337	329	362	279
September	283	285	266	302	272
October	285	274	295	317	282
November	289	295	268	315	255
December	167	208	232	284	253
January	237	315	326	298	254
February	278	272	285	273	247
March	331	265	260	325	227
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,335</b>	<b>3,344</b>	<b>3,272</b>	<b>3,738</b>	<b>3,367</b>

**Table 8: Complaints received by organisation, 2010/11 to 2014/15**

Organisation	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)	3,316	3,289	3,216	3,651	3,306
Designated Civilian	10	34	36	64	38
G.B Officers <sup>5</sup>	0	0	0	2	0
G8 <sup>5</sup>	0	0	0	1	0
Northern Ireland Airport Constabulary	0	2	2	1	1
Harbour Police	4	4	2	1	2
Serious and Organised Crime Agency (SOCA) <sup>6</sup>	1	0	0	0	0
Other / Unknown	4	15	16	18	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,335</b>	<b>3,344</b>	<b>3,272</b>	<b>3,738</b>	<b>3,367</b>

**Table 9: Complaints received by where the initial complaint was made, 2010/11 to 2014/15**

Source of complaints	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Directly with Police Ombudsman's Office	2,289	2,103	2,124	2,247	2,288
Directly with the PSNI	402	571	500	831	495
Via Representative	638	667	645	655	579
Other	6	3	3	5	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,335</b>	<b>3,344</b>	<b>3,272</b>	<b>3,738</b>	<b>3,367</b>

**Table 10: Main situations giving rise to complaints, 2010/11 to 2014/15**

Main situation	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Criminal investigation	790	762	721	807	828
Arrest	578	661	617	885	624
Search	330	339	317	362	287
Traffic incident	360	313	251	264	241
Domestic incident	182	168	164	236	238
Police enquiries	310	237	184	235	199
Historic Investigation	7	35	73	68	88
Parade/ Demonstration	41	20	170	132	23
Other	643	681	663	650	689
Unknown	94	128	112	99	150
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,335</b>	<b>3,344</b>	<b>3,272</b>	<b>3,738</b>	<b>3,367</b>

<sup>5</sup> These are complaints about officers from other UK police authorities regarding their conduct whilst they were serving in Northern Ireland under the mutual aid arrangement (section 60 of the Police (N.I) Act 1998).

<sup>6</sup> On the 7<sup>th</sup> October 2013 SOCA was replaced by the National Crime Agency (NCA). The NCA did not operate in Northern Ireland until the 20<sup>th</sup> May 2015.

**Table 11: Complaints received by police district and police area, 2010/11 to 2014/15**

Police districts and areas	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
North Belfast	308	204	251	322	227
West Belfast	172	182	176	163	169
<b>A District</b>	<b>480</b>	<b>386</b>	<b>427</b>	<b>485</b>	<b>396</b>
East Belfast	142	140	144	180	150
South Belfast	242	238	305	430	333
<b>B District</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>378</b>	<b>449</b>	<b>610</b>	<b>483</b>
Ards	99	86	76	82	77
Castlereagh	108	95	91	90	84
Down	104	93	119	117	115
North Down	127	114	108	128	113
<b>C District</b>	<b>438</b>	<b>388</b>	<b>394</b>	<b>417</b>	<b>389</b>
Antrim	108	120	116	107	105
Carrickfergus	48	26	27	35	26
Lisburn	160	186	170	197	171
Newtownabbey	127	111	107	112	103
<b>D District</b>	<b>443</b>	<b>443</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>451</b>	<b>405</b>
Armagh	71	84	63	77	61
Banbridge	80	92	58	69	71
Craigavon	132	175	129	151	150
Newry & Mourne	91	137	97	120	80
<b>E District</b>	<b>374</b>	<b>488</b>	<b>347</b>	<b>417</b>	<b>362</b>
Cookstown	43	50	48	31	33
Dungannon & South Tyrone	71	82	67	68	55
Fermanagh	118	87	76	99	87
Omagh	100	87	91	76	77
<b>F District</b>	<b>332</b>	<b>306</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>274</b>	<b>252</b>
Foyle	191	185	178	209	198
Limavady	59	68	37	48	59
Magherafelt	34	43	36	48	36
Strabane	43	34	33	35	35
<b>G District</b>	<b>327</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>284</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>328</b>
Ballymena	100	115	97	116	99
Ballymoney	29	33	32	35	51
Coleraine	202	161	165	142	170
Larne	41	32	42	48	39
Moyle	12	13	6	18	17
<b>H District</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>342</b>	<b>359</b>	<b>376</b>
Other organisations/Unknown	173	271	327	385	376
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,335</b>	<b>3,344</b>	<b>3,272</b>	<b>3,738</b>	<b>3,367</b>

**Table 12: Number of allegations received, 2010/11 to 2014/15**

Year	Allegations
2010/11	6,331
2011/12	6,007
2012/13	5,284
2013/14	6,171
2014/15	5,587

**Table 13: Types of allegations<sup>7</sup>, 2010/11 to 2014/15**

Types of Allegations	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Failure in Duty	2,513	2,167	1,981	2,278	2,381
Oppressive Behaviour	1,906	1,952	1,536	1,994	1,440
Incivility	696	623	508	550	421
Police Searches	295	271	258	312	308
Unlawful/ Unnecessary Arrest/ Detention	245	224	204	232	250
Mishandling of Property	105	107	105	156	126
Malpractice	115	124	110	144	103
Discriminatory Behaviour	74	81	77	107	73
Traffic Related	71	65	69	47	50
Section 55 Referrals	45	51	58	48	55
Other	266	342	378	303	380
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,331</b>	<b>6,007</b>	<b>5,284</b>	<b>6,171</b>	<b>5,587</b>

**Table 14: Failure in Duty allegations, 2010/11 to 2014/15**

Failure in Duty allegations <sup>8</sup>	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Conduct of Police Investigations/incident response	n/a	n/a	n/a	1,166	1,267
Failures in contact	n/a	n/a	n/a	277	307
Failure in record management	n/a	n/a	n/a	229	217
Conduct in custody suite	n/a	n/a	n/a	178	128
Failure to act impartially	n/a	n/a	n/a	73	88
Failure in duty of care	n/a	n/a	n/a	86	75
Other Failure in duty	n/a	n/a	n/a	269	299
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,513</b>	<b>2,167</b>	<b>1,981</b>	<b>2,278</b>	<b>2,381</b>

<sup>7</sup> A full breakdown of allegations types are available in the accompanying excel spreadsheet

<sup>8</sup> New Failure in Duty allegations were introduced in April 2013, this decision was made in conjunction with our key stakeholder. Thus it is not possible to provide a meaningful five year trend data, where comparison data is not available these cells have been denoted with n/a.

**Tables 15: Oppressive Behaviour allegations, 2010/11 to 2014/15**

Oppressive Behaviour allegations	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Other Assault	858	887	708	986	687
Oppressive Conduct (not involving assault)	742	755	580	711	541
Harassment (series of like incidents)	243	241	184	226	158
Sexual Assault	35	36	36	40	38
Serious non-sexual assault	28	33	28	31	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,906</b>	<b>1,952</b>	<b>1,536</b>	<b>1,994</b>	<b>1,440</b>

**Table 16: Incivility allegations, 2010/11 to 2014/15**

Incivility allegations	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Incivility At Domestic Residence	132	137	98	124	106
Incivility By Officer On The Telephone	98	92	76	91	93
Incivility At Police Station	91	73	63	69	60
Incivility When Stopped For A Traffic Offence	98	58	46	57	40
Incivility To Person Under 18 Years	14	15	8	14	6
Other incivility	263	248	217	195	116
<b>Total</b>	<b>696</b>	<b>623</b>	<b>508</b>	<b>550</b>	<b>421</b>

**Table 17: Allegations regarding the use of police equipment, 2010/11 to 2014/15**

Police equipment	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Handcuffs	130	165	115	213	145
Baton	41	57	51	62	34
CS Spray	69	51	42	48	33
Taser	13	9	13	17	16
Misuse/Discharge of Firearm	15	12	7	12	2
AEP/Baton Round/Riot Gun	9	12	12	14	2
Other	18	10	18	17	10
No weapon involved	6,036	5,691	5,026	5,788	5,345
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,331</b>	<b>6,007</b>	<b>5,284</b>	<b>6,171</b>	<b>5,587</b>

**Table 18: Complaint closures, 2010/11 to 2014/15**

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Complaints closed	3,585	3,325	3,244	3,440	3,537
Complaint closed following initial assessment	490	489	519	472	423
Not a matter for the Police Ombudsman	423	413	442	406	361
Call in/Call out - no further action	20	31	36	26	25
Other	47	45	41	40	37
Complaints closed following initial inquiries	1,390	1,512	1,462	1,702	1,564
Complainant did not fully engage	942	1,119	1,057	1,310	1,085
Ill-founded	221	187	219	221	310
Withdrawn	204	169	155	160	152
Other	23	37	31	11	17
Complaints resolved informally	369	250	250	211	219
Informally resolved	321	213	213	179	191
Locally resolved	48	37	37	32	28
Complaints fully investigated	1,336	1,074	1,013	1,055	1,331
complaint not substantiated or an issue of concern identified	1,054	812	789	842	963
complaint substantiated or an issue of concern identified	282	262	224	213	368

**Table 19: Occasions Police Ombudsman recommended prosecution/no prosecution for an officer, 2010/11 to 2014/15**

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
No prosecution recommended for Officer	669	669	467	434	364
Prosecution recommended for Officer	11	6	9	13	12



**Table 20: Discipline sanction or training/supervision recommended for an officer, 2010/11 to 2014/15**

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Management Discussion/Training	49	51	67	34	65
Advice and Guidance	177	247	127	154	226
Superintendent's Written Warning	34	55	51	34	85
Formal Disciplinary Proceedings	6	6	5	7	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>266</b>	<b>359</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>380</b>

**Table 21: PSNI Complaints suitable for Informal Resolution with consent obtained, 2010/11 to 2014/15**

Complaints suitable for IR	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Number of complaints received (PSNI)	3,316	3,289	3,216	3,651	3,306
Complaints suitable for IR	619	502	461	478	477
Consent for IR obtained	384	309	273	292	277
Consent for IR not obtained	235	193	188	186	200

**Table 22: Outcome of informally resolved complaints, 2010/11 to 2014/15**

Outcome	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Successful	313	208	208	170	166
Failed	97	64	66	38	34
Withdrawn	4	5	1	3	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>414</b>	<b>277</b>	<b>275</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>200</b>

**Table 23: Rank of officer complained about, 2010/11 to 2014/15**

Rank	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Constable	2,831	2,788	2,372	2,874	2,375
Sergeant	557	572	472	532	431
Inspector and Above	112	102	118	144	129

**Table 24: Number of officers with three or more complaints that were formally investigated or dealt with by way of informal or local resolution, 2013/14 to 2014/15**

Twelve month period ending	Number of officers
June 2013	98
September 2013	80
December 2013	91
March 2014	93
June 2014	103
September 2014	73
December 2014	71
March 2015	73

## APPENDIX 2: UNDERSTANDING THE COMPLAINTS PROCESS

To help understand the information in this report, we have provided this short summary of the police complaints service in Northern Ireland and how it works.

### What we do

The Police Ombudsman's Office provides for the independent and impartial investigation of complaints about the police in Northern Ireland. The Police Ombudsman is committed to providing a police complaints service in the way he thinks best suited to secure the confidence of the public and the police. He believes that for such confidence to be forthcoming, it is essential that people are informed about the nature of his work.

The Police Ombudsman has the remit to investigate the conduct of officers within the following organisations which operate in Northern Ireland:

- Police Service of Northern Ireland including Designated Civilians;
- Belfast Harbour Police;
- Belfast International Airport Police;
- Ministry of Defence Police;
- Border Force; and
- National Crime Agency

The Office deals primarily with complaints made by members of the public about the conduct of police officers. It also deals with matters referred to it by the PSNI Chief Constable. The following are incidents that the Chief Constable is required to refer to the Police Ombudsman:

- Any discharge of a police firearms (including those used in riot situations);
- Any fatal road traffic collisions involving police officers;
- Any death which may have occurred as a result of the actions of a police officer; and
- Any other serious allegation.

It also deals with matters referred to it by the NIPB, the DoJ and the PPS.

The Police Ombudsman also has the power to initiate an investigation without a complaint having been made if it appears to him to be desirable and in the public interest.

In most circumstances the Police Ombudsman can only investigate incidents which have occurred in the previous 12 months. However, there is no time limit on the investigation of grave matters, or where exceptional circumstances exist. Many of the investigations the Office is undertaking into incidents which happened between 1968 and 1998 (the period known as the Troubles) are matters the Police Ombudsman viewed as grave or exceptional.

The Police Ombudsman does not investigate complaints against officers whose conduct has been the subject of disciplinary or criminal proceedings; or complaints about off-duty police officers, unless the fact that he or she is a police officer is relevant to the complaint. The Office also does not investigate matters relating to the direction and control of the police service by the Chief Constable.

### How we deal with complaints

All complaints are recorded on our Case Handling System, even where they are later determined to be outside the remit of the Office.

A complaint from a member of the public will invariably include a number of allegations. For example, if a person alleges a police officer pushed them *and* was rude to them, it would be recorded as one complaint with two allegations on the system.

Once a complaint has been received, it will become subject of an initial assessment. This will involve logging it onto our system and making an assessment as to whether the matter is something the Police Ombudsman's Office can deal with and if so, how best to do so.

If the complaint is something we deal with, the Office will consider if the matter can be resolved informally rather than being sent straight for investigation. Before we decide to take the Informal Resolution approach, the person who made the complaint must agree. If this proves unsuccessful, the Police Ombudsman will refer the complaint for investigation.

When a matter is suitable for investigation, a complaints officer or an investigation officer will set about making the initial inquiries necessary before an investigation commences. This will involve getting more information from the complainant, such as an official statement of complaint.

When a formal investigation has been completed, if the evidence indicates that police officers may have committed a criminal offence or breached the police Code

of Ethics, the Police Ombudsman can recommend that they are prosecuted and/or disciplined.

Where the Police Ombudsman considers that a criminal offence may have been committed by a member of the police, he must send a copy of the investigation report to the PPS, making appropriate recommendations. The PPS then decides whether or not to prosecute the police officer under investigation.

If the Police Ombudsman decides that no criminal offence has been committed, he is required to consider whether it is appropriate to recommend disciplinary proceedings. If the Chief Constable is unwilling administer the recommended discipline, the Police Ombudsman may, direct him to do so.

## APPENDIX 3: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

This glossary has been designed to assist users of our statistical information to understand the terms which we use to describe data contained in the statistical bulletin. The terms are listed in alphabetical order.

### **Advice and Guidance**

This is an informal discipline sanction for officers.

### **Allegation**

Each complaint can be broken down into one or more allegations. These are all the individual behaviours or issues being complained about. For example, if a person alleges a police officer pushed them *and* was rude to them, it would be recorded as one complaint with two allegations on the system.

### **Call in/Call out (no further action)**

These are situations where the Police Ombudsman's Office is 'called in' to consider an incident but determines at an early stage that there is no requirement for any further investigation.

### **Conduct in custody suite**

This is a Failure in Duty allegation category. It includes incidents where the complainant was denied access to legal advice or medical attention whilst they were detained in custody. In addition it covers instances where it is alleged the officer did not inform the detained person of their rights and entitlements, or the officer did not keep accurate custody records.

### **Conduct of police investigations / incident response**

This is a Failure in Duty allegation category and includes allegations where the complainant has alleged that the unsatisfactory conduct of either ongoing or completed police investigations, including the inappropriate disclosure of information. Also included would be allegations that the police failed to carry out any investigation into an incident, or were excessively slow to respond to an incident.

### **Complaint**

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by or on behalf of a member of the public about a member of the police service or an officer of another service over which the Office has jurisdiction.

For the purpose of clarity of reporting, the term complaints refers to complaints made by members of the public, matters referred to the Office from other organisation, and matters that the Police Ombudsman has decided to investigate.

### **Failure in contact**

This is a Failure in Duty allegation. It includes incidents where the complainant has alleged a police officer; failed to keep arranged appointments, return telephone calls, or reply to correspondence. It also includes incidents when an officer failed to keep the complainant updated with progress of an investigation or police enquiries.

### **Failure in duty of care**

This is a Failure in Duty allegation. Where it is alleged that the police officer failed to take appropriate action to ensure the safety or well-being of the complainant or third party for whom they have responsibility.

### **Failure in record management**

This is a Failure in Duty allegation. It involves a failure of police to keep accurate, complete or up to date police records. It also includes the failure of officers to provide information or documentation relating to the complainant or a third party.

### **Failure to act impartially**

This is a Failure in Duty allegation. The complainant alleges an officer failed to adopt an independent approach and/or failed to act in a fair and impartial manner.

### **Historical Investigation**

This is an investigation (potentially criminal and /or misconduct) into the actions of police where the allegation(s) made are considered Grave or Exceptional, "Troubles" related (1969-1998) and predates the establishment of the Good Friday Agreement, 10 April 1998.

### **Ill-founded**

This is a type of complaint closure. These are cases where it became clear during initial inquiries that an allegation was without bases or foundation.

### **Incivility**

This is a category within allegations. It refers to allegations such as the police officer being rude, showing a lack of respect, being abrupt or displaying a general lack of sensitivity.

### **Informally / locally resolved (Informal / Local Resolution)**

This is a process offered to complainants who have made less serious allegations, e.g. rudeness or incivility. It involves a senior police officer speaking to both the officer(s) involved and the complainant with a view to reaching a satisfactory resolution of the complaint. It requires that a record of the outcome has been obtained from police confirming that the matter has been resolved. Local Resolution process currently operates in D District only.

## **Malpractice**

These allegations can include any allegation in relation to perjury, other allegations of falsehood, any allegation that evidence was obtained in an irregular manner or under duress and allegations of concealment or tampering with evidence.

## **Management Discussion/Training:**

Management Discussion is an informal discipline sanction. It involves a discussion between the officer concerned and a more senior officer regarding the allegation. This category also includes a small number of recommendations that the officer concerned receives additional training or operational supervision based on the nature of the allegation.

## **Mishandling of property**

This allegation category includes any allegation involving theft or loss of property (including money), unreasonable retention of property, damage to property, failure to account for money or property and improper disposal of property.

## **Oppressive Behaviour**

This is an allegation type and includes situations where the complainant alleged that the officer has behaved in an oppressive manner. They can include allegations of oppressive conduct, harassment, and assault, including sexual assault.

## **Residual matters**

A small number of residual matters are included in the number of allegations (usually 1-2% of allegations each year). A residual matter is one identified by the Office's Investigator, which has not been previously complained of by the complainant. Examples include failure to complete notebook records, anomalies in custody record, and failure to supervise situations adequately.

## **Section 55 referral**

Not all matters the Police Ombudsman deals with come to us as complaints from members of the public. Certain public bodies, including the PSNI, the Policing Board, the Department of Justice and the Public prosecution Service can refer matters to us for consideration. This is done under section 55 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998.

## **Superintendent's written Warning**

This is a formal written warning from a police officer's Superintendent.



## APPENDIX 4: DATA AVAILABILITY AND QUALITY

Statistical information on complaints and allegations is derived from the CHS, an integrated and comprehensive ICT system that covers all key aspects of receiving and processing a complaint. It captures data about the complainant, the complained against parties, the incident and allegations made. Data can be downloaded and exported to a number of commonly used software packages for analysis (Excel, Access, SPSS<sup>9</sup>). In addition the Office uses the DI Diver reporting tool and the CHS has a number of management reports run directly from a menu on the system.

### Data quality

CHS data quality is considered to be high. The system has been designed to limit the incidence of inaccurate data through the use of measures such as logical validation checks, drop down menus for data input and a minimum of free text input. The Police Ombudsman has a dedicated team who assure the quality of CHS content. All data input is completely auditable and allows for an effective quality control procedure to review and, where necessary, amend key data for the purposes of accurate reporting. When considered necessary, focused data cleansing exercises of key fields are also conducted. Additionally, complete audits of fields with small numbers associated are conducted.

As stated above, substantial validation and quality control procedures are in place to ensure that the data derived from CHS are of high quality. However, there is still the possibility of a small number of errors arising from data input, missing data, failure to update data and errors in communication. The Police Ombudsman estimates that the level of this error is so small that it has no impact on the quality of statistical reporting. However, where errors are identified, corrections are made to reports as soon as practicable. Further details are set out in the Police Ombudsman [statement of revision and errors strategy](#) .

### Revisions

The statistics included in this bulletin are taken from a live system, and may be subject to future revisions. This means that total number of complaints and allegations may change slightly between those published in previous bulletins.

Revisions can be made for a number of reasons but are mainly due to more information coming to light during the natural course of the Office's work, and the system being updated accordingly. This includes the identification of residual matters; allegations identified by the Investigator that were not previously complained about by the member of the public, such as, the failure of a police officer to complete their notebook, anomalies in custody records or failure to

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<sup>9</sup> SPSS is a statistical software package developed for use by social scientists.

supervise adequately. They typically account for fewer than 2% of all allegations (approximately between 60 to 100 residual allegations annually).

The table below shows the scale of revisions made between statistics in this bulletin and those in the previous bulletin in June 2014. It demonstrates that the revisions have little impact on the overall trends presented in this bulletin.

**Table 25: Revisions made to the number of complaints and allegations received between this publication and the previous publication in June 2014.**

	Previously Published Figures (June 14)	Current Published Figures (June 15)	Scale of Revision (number)	Scale of Revision (%)
<b>Total number of complaints</b>				
2010/11	3,335	3,335	0	0.00%
2011/12	3,344	3,344	0	0.00%
2012/13	3,272	3,272	0	0.00%
2013/14	3,734	3,738	+ 4	0.11%
<b>Total number of allegations</b>				
2010/11	6,330	6,331	+ 1	0.02%
2011/12	6,005	6,007	+ 2	0.03%
2012/13	5,284	5,284	0	0.00%
2013/14	6,089	6,171	+82	1.35%

The Office's full strategy for revisions and errors can be found within the publications section of the [Office's website](#).

## Data limitations

Because of the nature of some of the highly sensitive material handled by the Police Ombudsman in the investigation of cases, a small proportion of cases will have only limited information available on the CHS. On balance, the Police Ombudsman considers that the assurance of the privacy of the information and individuals associated with this small number of sensitive cases outweighs the need for full access to the data. In practice, the number of cases is so small that the restriction has no impact on the quality of statistical reporting.

## Publication

This is an annual statistical bulletin, and publishes information in accordance with the obligation for the Police Ombudsman's Office to report performance on a financial year basis.

As the statistics were taken from a 'live' case handling system, the figures in this report supersede those previously published.

The next annual statistical report is due to be published in June 2016, the exact date will be announced on the website at least four weeks prior to publication.

In addition to the annual bulletin, quarterly updates are published throughout the year. They provide top level information on the number of complaints and allegations received, as well as monitoring the relevant targets within the 2015/16 Policing Plan.

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This publication and other information about the work of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland are also available on the Internet at:

Website: [www.policeombudsman.org](http://www.policeombudsman.org)



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