

Annual Report on  
Complainant Satisfaction  
with services provided by the  
Police Ombudsman's Office in  
Northern Ireland  
2014/15

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## Key Trends:

In 2014/15:

- The majority of complainants had positive perceptions of staff with over 80% feeling that staff were polite, friendly, easy to understand, patient and professional,
- Fifty-nine percent of complainants thought they had been treated fairly,
- Complainants continue to be least satisfied with the outcome of their complaint than with other aspects of the complaints process,
- Sixty percent of complainants said they would use the complaints system again. This has decreased from 2010/11 when 69% said they would use the system again, and
- Fifty percent of complainants were satisfied with the service they received from the Police Ombudsman's Office. This has remained fairly stable over the last four years.

## Introduction

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

The Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland (the Office) was set up by the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998 in order to provide an independent system for investigating complaints against the police in Northern Ireland. The Police Ombudsman is committed to providing an independent and impartial investigation process of the highest quality, which is timely and secures the confidence of both the public and police.

The Complainant Satisfaction Survey allows complainants to express their views on services provided by the Office. Up until September 2005 complainant satisfaction surveys were based on samples of complainants. From September 2005 however the Office began surveying all complainants who had a complaint closed. This report presents the findings from the 2014/15 annual Complainant Satisfaction Survey and includes information collected from those whose complaint was closed between April 2014 and March 2015. A total of 3,052 questionnaires were issued and 497 questionnaires were returned. This represents a response rate of 16%.

The information that is collected from the survey is used to monitor and evaluate the service provided to people who have made a complaint to the Ombudsman's Office and identify any issues that arise in a timely manner. The data are also used by this Office to comply with the Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) detailed in the 'Annual Report and Accounts Report, 2014/15', which is available on the Office's web-site ([www.policeombudsman.org](http://www.policeombudsman.org)). The data may also be used to answer enquiries from the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Department of Justice, Parliament and the public.

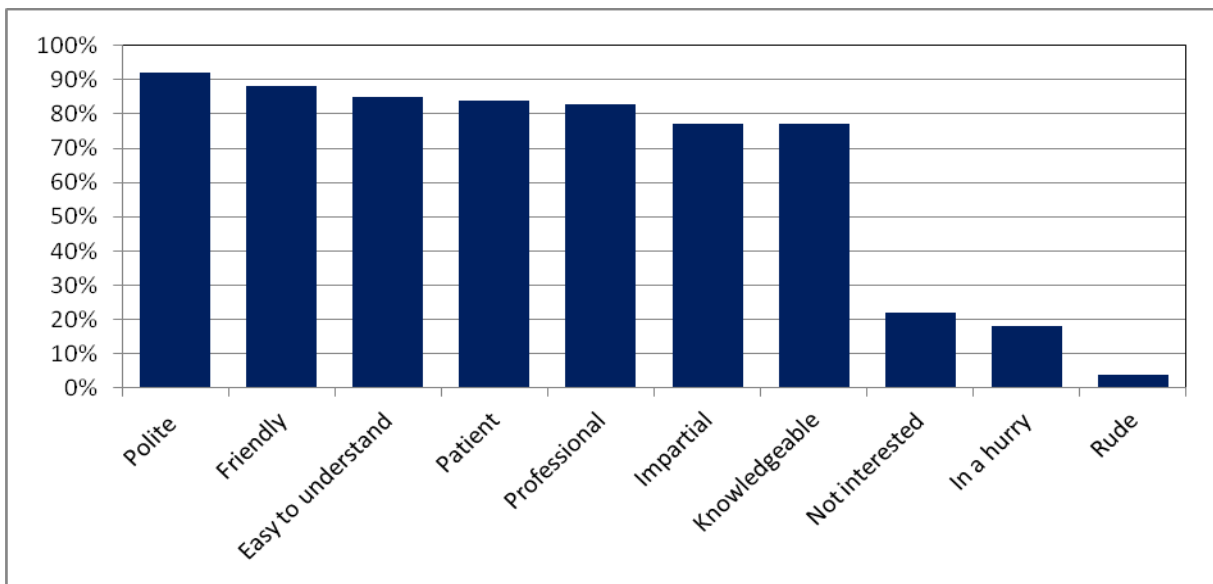
# Trends

## Perception of Ombudsman staff

During 2014/15, 92% of complainants said that they had spoken to a member of staff from the Office. These respondents were asked how staff had appeared to them in relation to a number of positive and negative characteristics.

The majority of respondents had positive views with over 80% of respondents, who had spoken to a member of staff, saying that staff were polite, friendly, easy to understand, patient and professional (Figure 1, Table 2).

**Figure 1: Complainant perception of Ombudsman staff, 2014/15**

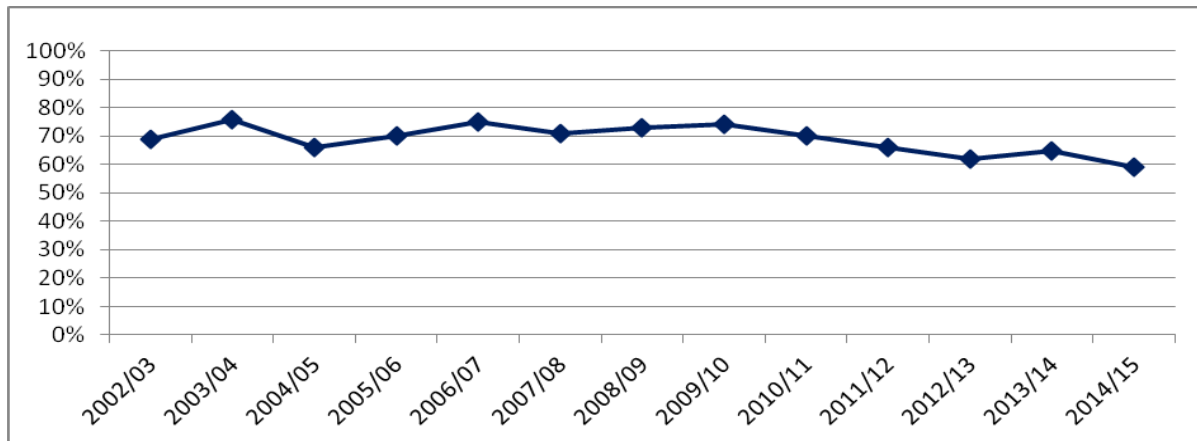


Results from the satisfaction surveys consistently show that the majority of complainants view staff from the Office in a positive manner. Fewer than 20% of respondents felt that staff are not interested, in a hurry or are rude. The proportion of respondents that felt that staff were rude has decreased from 9% in 2013/14 to 4% in 2014/15.

### Fairness of treatment

When complainants were asked if they felt they were treated fairly by the Office, 59% responded positively during 2014/15 (Figure 2, Table 3). This proportion has been fairly consistent over the last three years but it has decreased from the levels seen prior to 2012/13.

**Figure 2: Fair treatment of complainants by Ombudsman staff, 2002/03 to 2014/15**

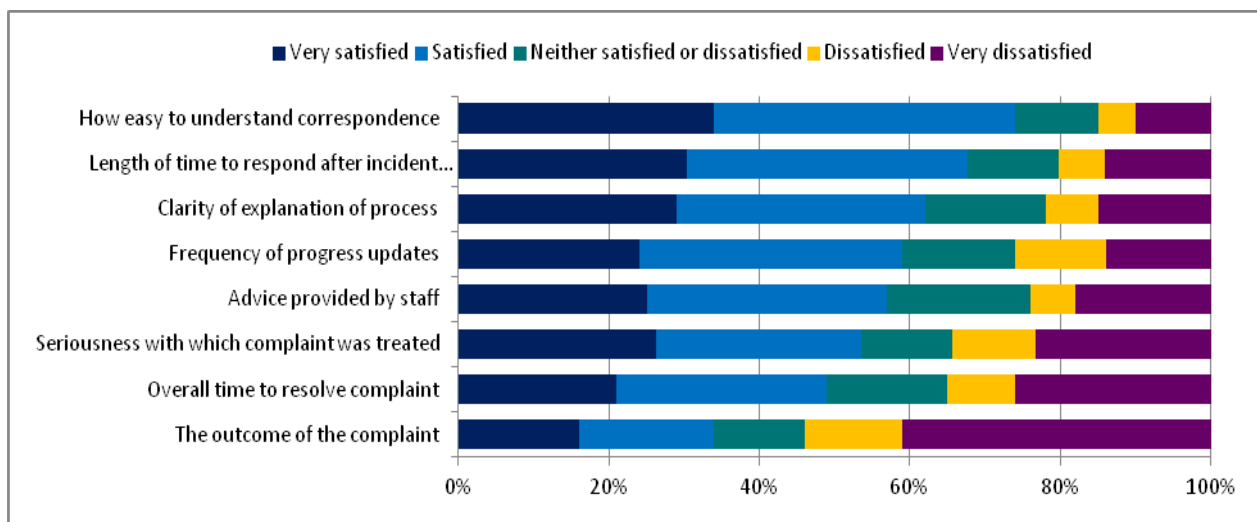


### Level of satisfaction with aspects of the complaints process

Complainants were asked to comment on how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with aspects of the complaints process.

Complainants were most likely to be satisfied with how easy the correspondence was to understand and the length of time taken to respond after the incident was reported to the Office (Figure 3, Table 4). Complainants were least likely to be satisfied with the outcome of their complaint.

**Figure 3: Complainant satisfaction with aspects of the complaints process, 2014/15**



Satisfaction levels for almost all aspects of the complaints process have generally stabilised over the last four years, despite decreasing for most aspects between 2010/11 and 2011/12.

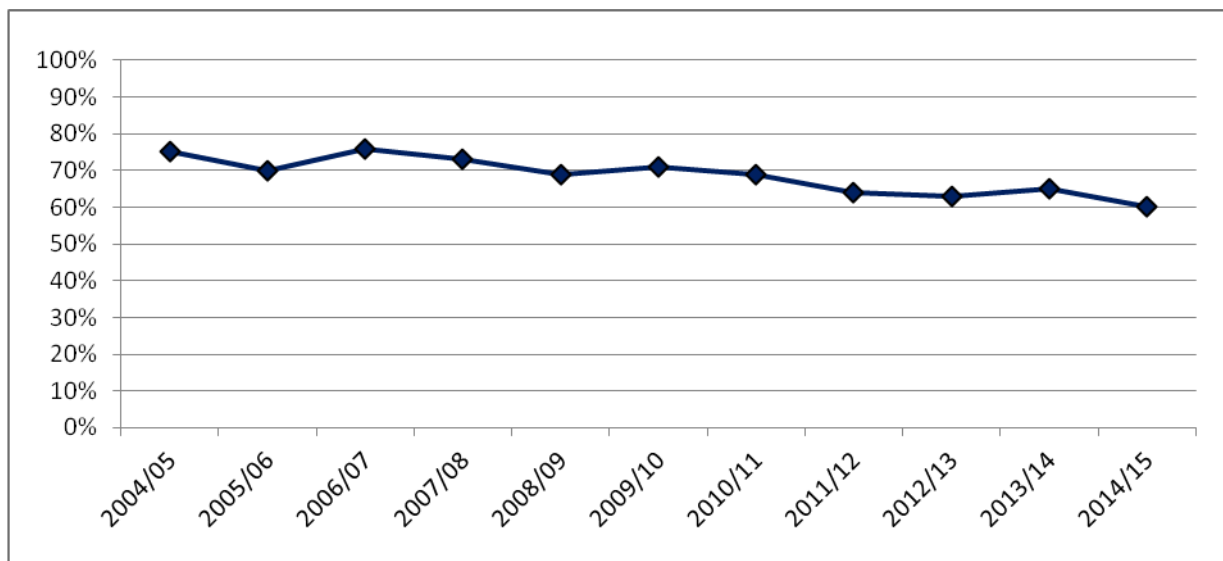
As seen in previous years, complainants continue to be least satisfied with the outcome of their complaint than for other aspects of the complaints process.

### Would complainants use the system again?

Respondents were also asked – ‘If you had a new complaint about the police, would you use the complaints system again?’

In 2014/15, 60% of complainants said that they would use the complaints system again. The proportion is similar to the level seen over the last four years, but it has fallen since 2010/11 when 69% of complainants said they would use the system again (Figure 4, Table 5).

**Figure 4: Complainants who would use the system again, 2004/05 to 2014/15**



Information from this survey is used by the Office to measure compliance against a number of KPI's some of which relate to ‘the quality and effectiveness of investigations, levels of satisfaction and confidence in the police complaints system’. One of these KPI's states that the Office will aim:

*‘to maintain a level of at least 75% of complainants willing to use the service again.’*

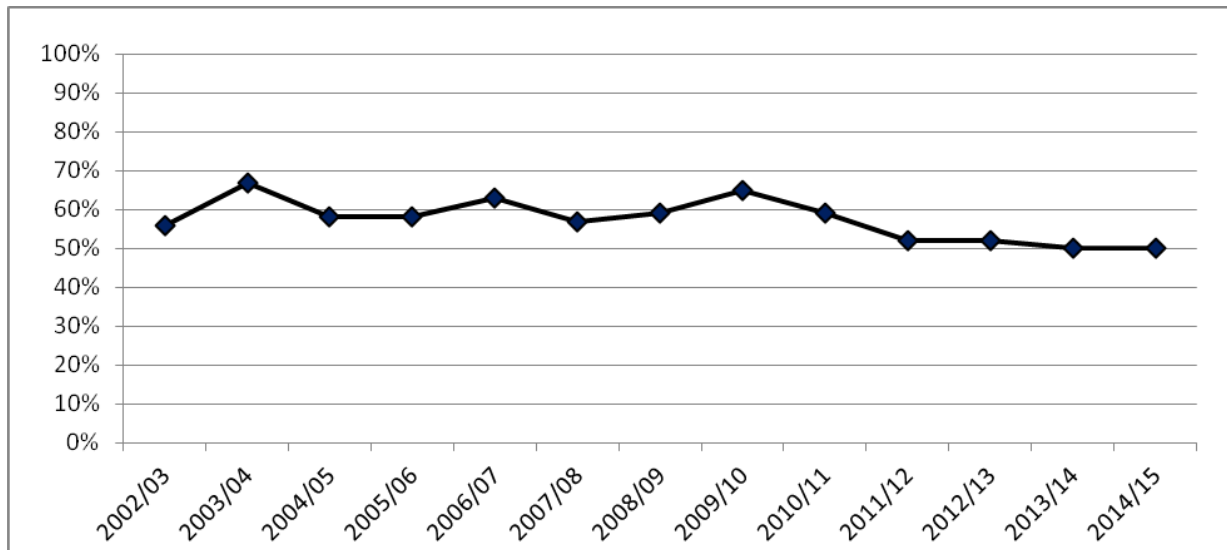
In 2014/15, the Office failed to meet this target with 60% of respondents willing to use the service again.

## Levels of satisfaction with service received

Finally, respondents were asked – ‘Overall taking everything into account, how satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the service you received from the Police Ombudsman’s Office?’

In 2014/15, 50% of respondents stated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the service they received from the Ombudsman’s Office. Although the overall satisfaction level decreased in 2011/12, it has remained virtually unchanged over the last four years (Figure 5, Table 6 & 7).

**Figure 5: Overall complainant satisfaction levels with service provided, 2002/03 - 2014/15**



The Office has also made a commitment:

*‘to maintain a level of 60% of complainants being satisfied or very satisfied with the service received.’*

In 2014/15, the Office failed to meet this target, with 50% of respondents satisfied or very satisfied with the service received.

When considering the level of satisfaction the reader should also be aware of the way in which complaints were closed<sup>1</sup>. In 2014/15, of those respondents who were satisfied with the service received from the Office, most of their complaints were closed as a result of Informal Resolution. However, for respondents who were not satisfied with the service most of their complaints were closed as ‘not substantiated or no issue of concern identified’ (Table 1).

<sup>1</sup> Refer to ‘Complaint Closures’ in the Annual Statistical Bulletin of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, 2014/15. This is available on our website.



**Table 1: Complaint closures by 'Satisfied with service' and 'Not satisfied with service', 2014/15**

Closure Type	Satisfied with service	Not satisfied with service
Complaints closed following initial assessment	36	37
Complaint was not a matter for the Police Ombudsman	36	37
Call-in/Call-out - no further action	0	0
Complaints closed following initial inquiries	62	78
Ill-founded	9	36
Withdrawn	25	7
Complainant did not fully engage with the police complaints system	27	32
Other	1	3
Complaints resolved informally/locally	60	6
Informally Resolved	52	6
Locally Resolved	8	0
Complaints fully investigated	70	112
Complaint not substantiated or no issue of concern identified	36	83
Complaint substantiated or an issue of concern identified	34	29

## Appendix 1: Results

**Table 2: Complainant perception of Ombudsman staff, 2010/11 - 2014/15**

Perception	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Polite	96%	95%	94%	92%	92%
Friendly	93%	92%	90%	87%	88%
Easy to understand	90%	90%	91%	88%	85%
Patient	89%	89%	86%	85%	84%
Professional	89%	89%	84%	87%	83%
Impartial	78%	76%	75%	80%	77%
Knowledgeable	87%	83%	80%	80%	77%
Not interested	19%	20%	24%	23%	22%
In a hurry	14%	18%	17%	17%	18%
Rude	7%	7%	8%	9%	4%

**Table 3: Overall, do you think you were treated fairly by the Office?, 2002/03 - 2014/15**

Year	% Treated Fairly
2002/03	69%
2003/04	76%
2004/05	66%
2005/06	70%
2006/07	75%
2007/08	71%
2008/09	73%
2009/10	74%
2010/11	70%
2011/12	66%
2012/13	62%
2013/14	65%
2014/15	59%

**Table 4: Complainant satisfaction with aspects of the complaints process, 2010/11 - 2014/15**

Aspect	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
How easy to understand correspondence	84%	73%	75%	74%	74%
Length of time to respond after incident reported	78%	72%	71%	69%	67%
Clarity of explanation of process	72%	63%	66%	60%	62%
Frequency of progress updates	63%	55%	58%	54%	59%
Advice provided by staff	68%	61%	59%	60%	57%
Seriousness with which complaint was treated	63%	55%	55%	54%	53%
Overall time to resolve complaint	58%	53%	51%	49%	50%
The outcome of the complaint	41%	40%	37%	39%	34%

**Table 5: Would you use the complaints system again?, 2004/05 - 2014/15**

	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Yes	75%	70%	76%	73%	69%	71%	69%	64%	63%	65%	60%
No	25%	30%	24%	27%	31%	29%	31%	36%	37%	35%	40%

**Table 6: Satisfaction levels with the service provided by the Office, 2002/03 - 2014/15**

Satisfaction level	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Very satisfied	32%	37%	31%	29%	31%	28%	31%	36%	30%	23%	31%	23%	25%
Satisfied	14%	30%	28%	29%	31%	30%	28%	29%	29%	29%	21%	27%	25%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	10%	9%	11%	14%	15%	16%	11%	8%	10%	12%	9%	12%	10%
Dissatisfied	10%	4%	8%	8%	6%	7%	7%	9%	10%	14%	8%	13%	10%
Very dissatisfied	24%	20%	22%	20%	17%	20%	23%	18%	22%	23%	31%	25%	31%

**Table 7: Overall complainant satisfaction with the service provided by the Office, 2002/03 - 2014/15**

<b>Year</b>	<b>% Satisfied</b>
2002/03	56%
2003/04	67%
2004/05	58%
2005/06	58%
2006/07	63%
2007/08	57%
2008/09	59%
2009/10	65%
2010/11	59%
2011/12	52%
2012/13	52%
2013/14	50%
2014/15	50%

## Appendix 2: Data Availability and Quality

### Data quality:

Police Ombudsman staff carry out regular quality assurance reviews of all data input into the Case Handling System (CHS). One aspect is to ensure that the appropriate complaint closure details are recorded on the system correctly.

The survey forms are issued by the Research and Statistics Team of the Office following closure of a complaint. Once the information from the forms has been transferred to an electronic file approximately 10% of the data entries are validated by a supervisor on a regular basis.

### Data limitations:

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

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

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

### Conventions:

Figures provided in the tables may not add up to 100% due to the effect of rounding. Figures may also be subject to minor revision and these will be notified in accordance with our revisions policy. The revisions policy can be accessed at [www.policeombudsman.org](http://www.policeombudsman.org).

Statistical significance tests have been carried out on the findings and differences are only reported where they have been found to be statistically significant at the 5% ( $p < 0.05$ ) level of probability (two tailed). This means that for any observed result that is found to be statistically significant one can be 95% confident that this has not happened by chance.

**For the future:**

Going forward into 2015/16, and beyond, the complainant satisfaction survey form has been amended. The changes were made to simplify the way in which the questions were asked. It was also amended to ensure that the questions were aligned with the Office's Service Charter. This charter came into effect in the latter half of 2014/15 and is based on the principles of being independent, impartial, accountable and treating people respectfully and professionally.

## Appendix 4: Questionnaire

# COMPLAINANT SATISFACTION FORM

### IN CONFIDENCE

You made a complaint about the police to the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland. We are interested in how well you think the Office dealt with your complaint, and would be grateful if you could take a few minutes to complete this form.

#### 1. DID YOU AT ANY TIME SPEAK TO THE STAFF FROM THE POLICE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE?

Please tick the appropriate box.

Yes (Please go to Question 2)

No (Please go to Question 3)

#### 2a. IF YOU DID SPEAK TO STAFF FROM THE OFFICE, HOW DID THEY SEEM TO YOU?

Please tick the appropriate box.

	Yes	No
The staff were polite	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The staff were friendly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The staff were knowledgeable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The staff were patient	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The staff were easy to understand	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The staff were professional	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The staff were impartial	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

#### 2b. HOW DID THE STAFF SEEM TO YOU?

The staff were not interested	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The staff were rude	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The staff were in a hurry or rushed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

#### 3. OVERALL, DO YOU THINK YOU WERE TREATED FAIRLY BY THE 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 THE OFFICE PLEASE SAY WHY.

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	COMPLAINT ONGOING
If you made your complaint directly to the Office the advice given to you at this time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
The length of time it took for the Office to reply to you after you first reported the incident	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
The seriousness with which the Office treated your complaint	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
How clearly the complaint process was explained to you by staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
How often you were told about the progress of your complaint	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
How easy it was to understand letters written to you	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
The outcome of your complaint	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The overall time it took to resolve your complaint	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**6. IF YOU HAD A NEW COMPLAINT ABOUT THE POLICE, WOULD YOU USE THE COMPLAINTS SYSTEM AGAIN?**

Please tick the appropriate box.

Yes  No

**7. OVERALL, 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 service you received from the Police Ombudsman's Office?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

Thank you for completing this form



Additional copies of this and other publications are available from:

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

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