



Annual Report on  
Complainant Satisfaction  
with services provided by the  
Police Ombudsman's Office,  
2020/21

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## **Introduction**

This statistical report presents the results from the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland (*the Office*) complainant's survey. The survey has been conducted in one form or another since 2001 and the results have been used by the Office to determine how complainants felt about the service they received and how they felt they were treated by the staff who dealt with their complaint.

The results in this report are based on the 188 survey forms that were returned to the Office during 2020/21. Data have been compared with the previous four years i.e. 2016/17 to 2019/20, however care should be taken when interpreting results due to the low response rate for the survey observed over the last two years (see Appendix 2, COVID-19 Impact for details).

Data for all years is available in the 'Accompanying Excel Spreadsheet 2020/21' which is published alongside this report in the statistics section of our [website](#). The data for this year is also included in this report in the results tables in Appendix 1.

## **Official Statistics**

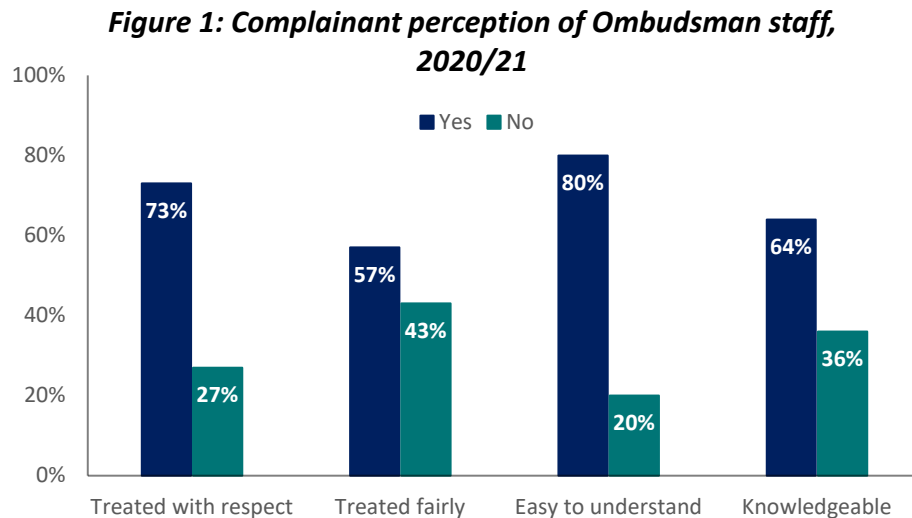
This is an Official Statistics publication. Official Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Statistics. Compliance with the Code gives confidence that the statistics are of public value, are of high quality and that they can be trusted. They are also produced free from any political interference.

## Results

### Complainant's Perceptions of Ombudsman Staff

In 2020/21, 71% of respondents reported that they had spoken to a member of staff. Of these:

- Almost three quarters felt they were treated with respect,
- Just under three fifths felt they were treated fairly,
- Four out of five respondents thought staff were easy to understand and
- Just over three fifths felt staff were knowledgeable (Figure 1).



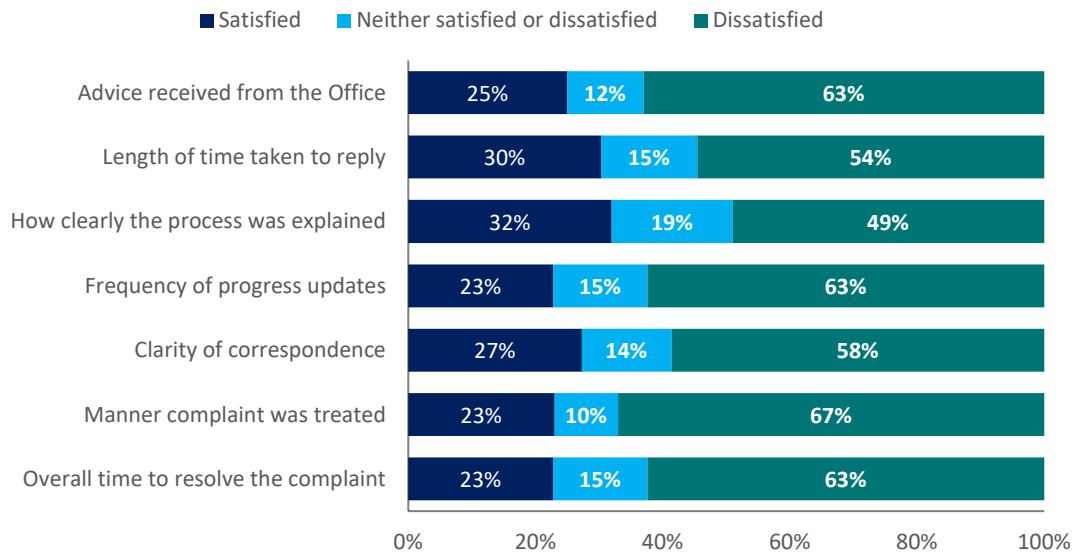
Results showed that the percentage of complainants who felt they had been treated with respect or treated fairly in 2020/21 is similar to last year, however this has decreased when compared with earlier years. The percentage of complainants that felt Ombudsman staff were easy to understand and were knowledgeable in 2020/21 is similar to that reported in the previous four years.

**From this point forward the results are based on all respondents and not just those who had spoken with a member of staff.**

## Complainant’s satisfaction/dissatisfaction with aspects of the complaints process

During 2020/21, complainants were more satisfied with the length of time taken to reply after initially making their complaint, how clearly the process was explained to them and the clarity of our correspondence than they were for other aspects of the process. Complainants were more dissatisfied with the manner in which we treated their complaint, the overall time taken to resolve the complaint, the advice they received from us and the frequency of progress updates (Figure 2).

*Figure 2: Complainant satisfaction/dissatisfaction with aspects of the complaints process, 2020/21*

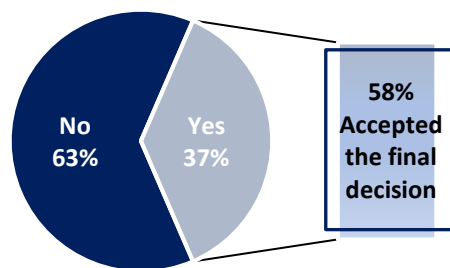


The results obtained in 2020/21 show complainants were less satisfied, and therefore more dissatisfied, for all aspects of the complaints process this year than they were when compared with each of the previous for years.

## Complainant's understanding and acceptance of the final decision

In 2020/21, less than four in ten complainants (37%) reported that they understood the reason the Office gave for reaching the final decision about their complaint. Of those who did understand the reason we gave, almost three fifths accepted this decision (Figure 3).

*Figure 3: Proportion of complainants that accepted and understood the final decision about their complaint, 2020/21*

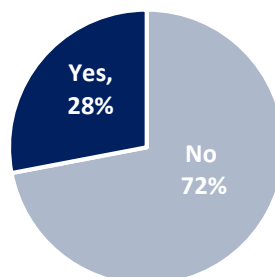


Results show that in 2020/21 complainants were less likely to understand the reason the Office gave for reaching the final decision about their complaint when compared with the previous four years. In 2020/21, complainants were also less likely to accept this decision than previous years.

## Complaint dealt with independently

During 2020/21, just over a quarter of complainants thought that the Office had dealt with their complaint independently and almost three quarters thought it had not been (Figure 4).

*Figure 4: Proportion of complainants that thought the Office dealt with their complaint independently, 2020/21*

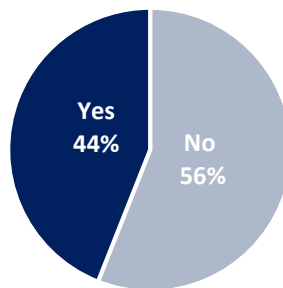


Results show that the percentage of complainants that felt the Office dealt with their complaint independently decreased in 2020/21 when compared with the previous four years. Similarly, the percentage that thought their complaint wasn't dealt with independently increased this year when compared with the previous years.

### Contact the Office again

Over two fifths of complainants in 2020/21 reported that they would contact the Office again if they had a new complaint about the police (Figure 5).

*Figure 5: Proportion of complainants that would contact the Office again if they had a new complaint about the police, 2020/21*



Results show that the percentage of complainants that would contact the Office again if they had a new complaint about the police decreased in 2020/21 when compared with the previous four years. Similarly, the percentage that would not contact the Office again increased this year when compared with the previous years.

## Appendix 1: Results Tables

**Table 1: Perceptions of Ombudsman staff, 2020/21<sup>1</sup>**

Perception	Yes	No	Number of respondents
Treated with respect	73%	27%	122
Treated fairly	57%	43%	124
Easy to understand	80%	20%	119
Knowledgeable	64%	36%	112

**Table 2: Satisfaction / dissatisfaction with aspects of the complaints process, 2020/21**

Aspect of the complaints process	Satisfied	Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Number of respondents
Advice received from the Office	25%	12%	63%	179
Length of time to reply	30%	15%	54%	181
Clarity of explanation	32%	19%	49%	178
Frequency of updates	23%	15%	63%	179
Clarity of correspondence	27%	14%	58%	180
Manner of treatment of complaint	23%	10%	67%	180
Overall time to resolve complaint	23%	15%	63%	177

**Table 3: Final decision, 2020/21**

Final decision	Yes	No	Number of respondents
Understand the final decision	37%	63%	179
Accept the final decision*	58%	42%	67

\* Of those who understood the reason the Office gave for reaching the final decision about the complaint

**Table 4: Dealt with independently & use the Office again, 2020/21**

Independent & Use again	Yes	No	Number of respondents
Dealt with independently	28%	72%	172
Use again	44%	56%	173

<sup>1</sup> Questions asked to complainants who reported they had spoken to a member of staff.



## **Appendix 2: Additional Information**

### **Data Use**

The results of this survey are used to monitor and evaluate the service provided to those who have made complaints to the Office and identify any issues that arise in a timely manner. The data may also be used to answer enquiries from members of the public, key stakeholders and any other departmental body.

### **Data quality**

The survey forms are processed and posted out by the Information & Communication Unit following the closure of a complaint. The information on returned forms is entered into a dataset and stored electronically. A minimum of a 10% check of the data is carried out by a supervisor to ensure accuracy. The data is considered to be of high quality.

During 2020/21, 1,693 questionnaires were issued and 188 were returned representing an 11% response rate. The return rate seen for this year is lower than previous years; 11% this year, 13% in 2019/20 and upwards of 15% in earlier years, and as such care should be taken when interpreting the results.

### **Understanding the statistics**

Questionnaires are normally issued to all complainants when their complaint has been closed. However, in some cases forms are not issued, for example when the complainant did not provide their address. Questionnaires are not issued in the following circumstances:

- Complaints that have been closed as 'duplicate' or 'repetitive'
- Complaints where it is known that the complainant has died
- When the investigation was a not a complaint from a member of the public (Section 55 referral, Call-Ins, notifications or a complaint made on or behalf of an organisation)
- Complaints that were dealt with by the History Directorate (complaints about the 'Troubles')
- When the complainant is under 18 years of age

Sometimes a complainant will request to not be included in future surveys, whilst staff will try to encourage them to complete the survey, if they still do not wish to be included then no questionnaire will be sent.

## **Changes to the Survey**

No amendments have been made to the questions during 2020/21.

During 2015/16, several changes were made to the survey to reflect the new service charter produced by the Office. New questions were added and some of the previous questions removed. Also during this year the Likert scale used for the 'satisfaction' question (Question 3) was reduced from five categories to three and from 2017/18 this reverted to five categories. Therefore, care should be taken when comparing trend information across this time period.

## **Conventions**

Statistics provided in the tables may not add up to 100% due to the effect of rounding.

Statistical significance tests have been carried out on the results and any difference 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.

Figures may be subject to minor revisions and these will be notified in accordance with our revisions policy which can be accessed via the Police Ombudsman's website. Details of which can be found on the back page of this report.

The category of "Satisfied" in this report includes "Very Satisfied" and "Satisfied". The category of "Dissatisfied" includes "Very Dissatisfied" and "Dissatisfied".

## **Covid-19 Impact**

Acting on government advice, the Office closed in mid-March 2020 to all but essential staff. This resulted in survey forms not being issued for February 2020 and March 2020 closures. This resulted in the low response rate observed for the 2019/20 survey. Although the Information & Communication Unit issued all survey forms for this year, due to the restrictions on staff numbers in the Office, we were unable to issue reminders for all of 2020/21. Reminders are normally issued to anyone who has not returned a survey form approximately two weeks after the initial survey form has been sent out. Issuing reminders is an important way to increase response rates to a survey and as can be seen for this year, if not done, can negatively impact on response rates. In 2020/21, response rates were the lowest they have been in recent years.

It would have to be assumed that the amendments made to working practices last year as a result of the pandemic has impacted on the processing of complaints. This in turn may have had an impact on the results obtained for this year's survey. For example, due to the limits imposed on staff numbers in the Office there may have been delays updating complainants or delays dealing with the complaints, which in turn may have impacted on complainant's perception of staff and aspects of service.

## **Further information**

Information showing trends from 2006/07 (where applicable) are available in the accompanying excel spreadsheet. Results from surveys prior to 2006/07 can be found on the Office's website.

## Appendix 3: Questionnaire

### SATISFACTION FORM

#### IN CONFIDENCE

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

#### 1. Did you speak to a member of staff?

YES (please go to question 2)

NO (please go to question 3)

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

Treated you with respect                      Yes or No

Treated you fairly                                Yes or No

Were easy to understand                      Yes or No

Were knowledgeable                            Yes or No

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

*(Using the following answer categories on a Likert scale: very satisfied, satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, dissatisfied or very dissatisfied)*

The advice you received from the Office

The length of time we took to reply after you initially made your complaint

How clearly the process was explained to you

How often you were told about the progress of your complaint

The clarity of our correspondence

The manner in which we treated your complaint

The overall time taken to resolve your complaint

Thinking about the final closure letter you received:

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

Yes or No

**5. Did you accept why we reached this decision?**

Yes or No

**6. Do you think that we dealt with your complaint independently?**

Yes or No

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

Yes or No

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

THANK-YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY FORM





**Additional copies of this and other publications are available from:**

Information and Communication Unit  
Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland  
New Cathedral Buildings  
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Belfast  
BT1 1PG

**Telephone:** 028 9082 8634

**Textphone:** 028 9082 8756

**Witness Appeal Line:** 0800 0327 880

**Email:** [info@policeombudsman.org](mailto:info@policeombudsman.org)

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

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