



**Report on Complainant Satisfaction with  
services provided by the Office of the Police  
Ombudsman for Northern Ireland**

**Annual Survey  
2023/24**

**Published June 2024**

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# INTRODUCTION

This statistical report presents the results from the 2023/24 'Complainant Satisfaction Survey' carried out by the Police Ombudsman's Office (the Office). 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 information supplied in the complainant satisfaction questionnaires that were issued to complainants whose complaints were closed during 2023/24.

During the year, the Information and Communication Unit issued 2,817 questionnaires and 360 were returned representing a 13% response rate. This has slightly decreased from last year when we saw a 14% response rate. Response rates were higher in previous years (except in 2021/22; 11%) therefore care should be taken when interpreting the overall trend results.

Care should also be taken when comparing results to the 2020/21 survey. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, limits were placed on staff numbers in the Office which may have resulted in delays updating complainants or when dealing with complaints. This may have had a negative impact on the perception of staff and aspects of the service we provide.

This year's data have been compared with the previous eight years i.e. 2015/16<sup>1</sup> to 2022/23. Data for all years is available in the 'Accompanying Excel Spreadsheet 2023/24' which is published alongside this report in the statistics section of our [website](#).

## 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.

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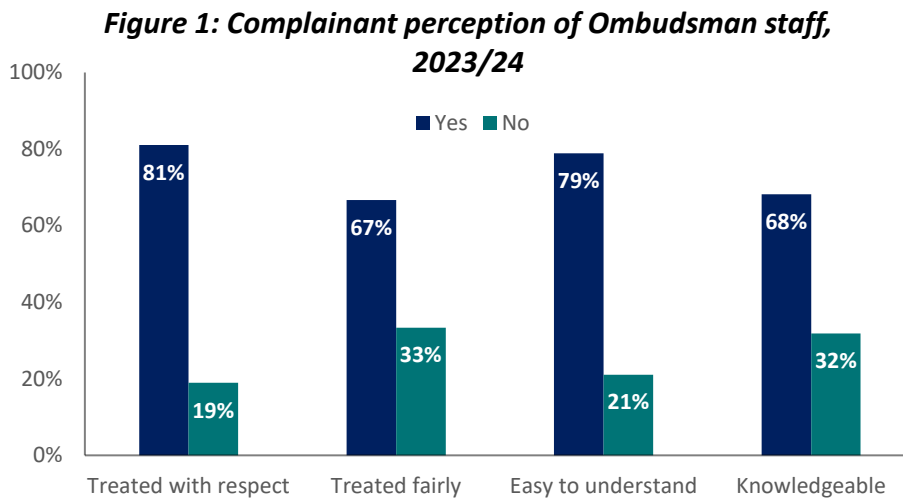
<sup>1</sup> Comparison made from 2015/16 due to changes in the survey from. See pg. 11.

## Survey Findings

### Complainant's Perceptions of Ombudsman Staff

In 2023/24, 75% of respondents reported that they had spoken to a member of staff. Of these:

- Over four fifths felt they were treated with respect,
- Over two thirds felt they were treated fairly,
- Just under four fifths thought staff were easy to understand and
- Over two thirds felt staff were knowledgeable (Figure 1).



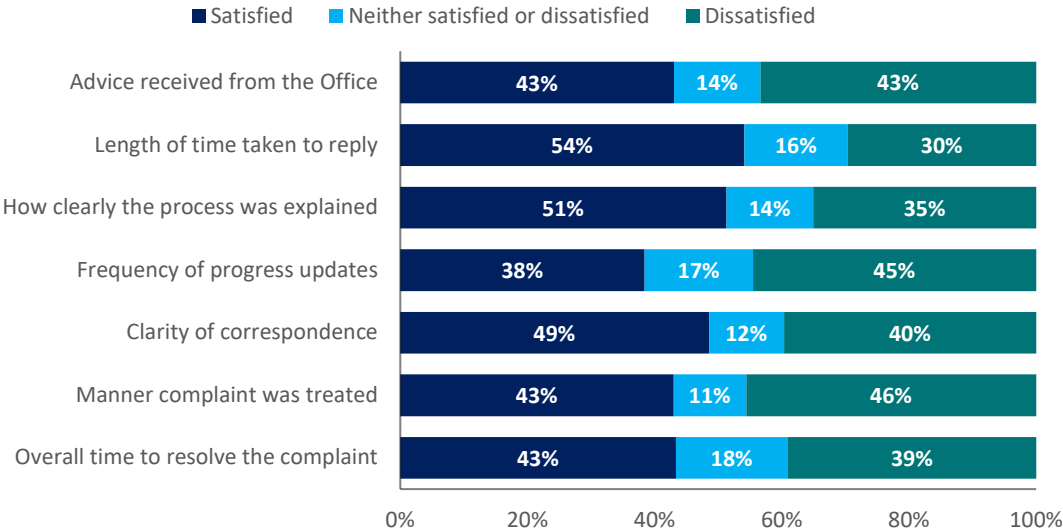
This year's survey results largely showed that complainant's perception of Ombudsman staff, when asked if they were treated with respect, treated fairly, easy to understand and if staff were knowledgeable, are similar to the results seen in previous years. However, results also show that in most cases complainants perception of staff was higher in earlier years i.e. 2017/18 and before, than they were this year.

**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 2023/24, complainants were more satisfied with the length of time taken to reply after initially making their complaint, how clearly the process was explained and the clarity of correspondence than they were for other aspects of the process. Complainants were more dissatisfied with the manner in which their complaint was treated, the frequency of progress updates and the advice they received from the Office (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Complainant satisfaction/dissatisfaction with aspects of the complaints process, 2023/24**



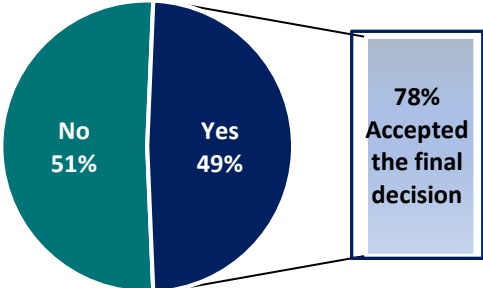
Satisfaction levels have generally fluctuated over time with higher levels being recorded in earlier years.

For almost all aspect of the complaint process, the results obtained in the 2023/24 survey have increased from last year & 2020/21; these 2 years saw some of the lowest satisfaction levels recorded in recent years.

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

In 2023/24, just under a half of complainants 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, over three quarters accepted this decision (Figure 3).

*Figure 3: Proportion of complainants that accepted and understood the final decision about their complaint, 2023/24*



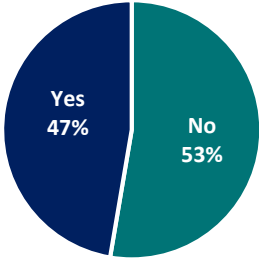
Results show that in 2023/24 complainants were more likely to understand the reason the Office gave for reaching the final decision about their complaint when compared with 2020/21 & 2022/23. They were less likely to understand the decision this year than they were in the years between 2015/16 and 2018/19.

Results also show that the proportion of complainants who accepted the final decision about their complaint has remained fairly consistent in seven out of the last eight years and has ranged from 72% to 79%. The exception to this is 2020/21 when results showed that complainants were less likely to accept the decision.

## Complaint dealt with independently

During 2023/24, just under half of complainants thought that the Office had dealt with their complaint independently (Figure 4).

*Figure 4: Proportion of complainants that thought the Office dealt with their complaint independently, 2023/24*

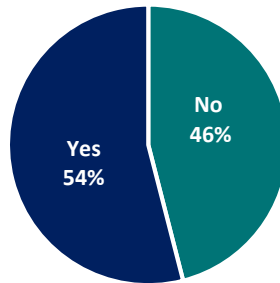


The proportion of complainants that felt the Office dealt with their complaint independently is similar when compared with almost all other years. It has increased in 2023/24 when compared with last year and is lower than the result reported in 2016/17. However, when compared with 2020/21 results showed that complainants were more likely to feel their complaint was dealt with independently.

## Contact the Office again

Over half of complainants in 2023/24 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, 2023/24*



Results show that the proportion of complainants that would contact the Office again if they had a new complaint about the police is similar when compared with every year since 2015/16, the only exception is 2020/21.



## Appendix 1: Results Tables

**Table 1: Perceptions of Ombudsman staff, 2023/24<sup>2</sup>**

Perception	Yes	No	Number of respondents
Treated with respect	81%	19%	243
Treated fairly	67%	33%	234
Easy to understand	79%	21%	223
Knowledgeable	68%	32%	217

**Table 2: Satisfaction / dissatisfaction with aspects of the complaints process, 2023/24**

Aspect of the complaints process	Satisfied	Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Number of respondents
Advice received from the Office	43%	14%	43%	353
Length of time to reply	54%	16%	30%	351
Clarity of explanation	51%	14%	35%	351
Frequency of updates	38%	17%	45%	346
Clarity of correspondence	49%	12%	40%	348
Manner of treatment of complaint	43%	12%	46%	349
Overall time to resolve complaint	43%	18%	39%	346

**Table 3: Final decision, 2023/24**

Final decision	Yes	No	Number of respondents
Understand the final decision	49%	51%	339
Accept the final decision*	78%	22%	160

\* 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, 2023/24**

Independent & Use again	Yes	No	Number of respondents
Dealt with independently	47%	53%	336
Use again	54%	46%	337

<sup>2</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. In some instances there is only an email address provided for the complainant. This year we developed a digital copy of the form and sent this to complainants with and email only contact. Of the 173 emails sent we received four returns (2% response). The information that is detailed in the returned forms is entered into a dataset and stored electronically. Supervisors undertake a 10% data quality check to ensure the data has been recorded accurately. The data is considered to be of high quality however there is a possibility of a small number of errors arising from data input for example due to missing fields, inaccurate data recording due to human error etc. It is estimated that the level of error is so small as to have no impact on the quality of the statistical reporting.

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, however the Information & Communication Unit issued all survey forms for 2020/21, due to the restrictions on staff numbers in the Office, as a result of COVID we were unable to issue reminders. Issuing reminders is an important way to increase response rates to a survey and as can be seen for 2021/22, if not done, can negatively impact on response rates. In 2020/21, response rates were the lowest they have been in recent years.

## 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 2023/24.

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, the reader should exercise caution 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 signification 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".

## **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 Communications Unit  
Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland  
New Cathedral Buildings  
11 Church Street  
Belfast  
BT1 1PG**

**Telephone: 028 9082 8634  
Witness Appeal Line: 0800 0327 880  
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