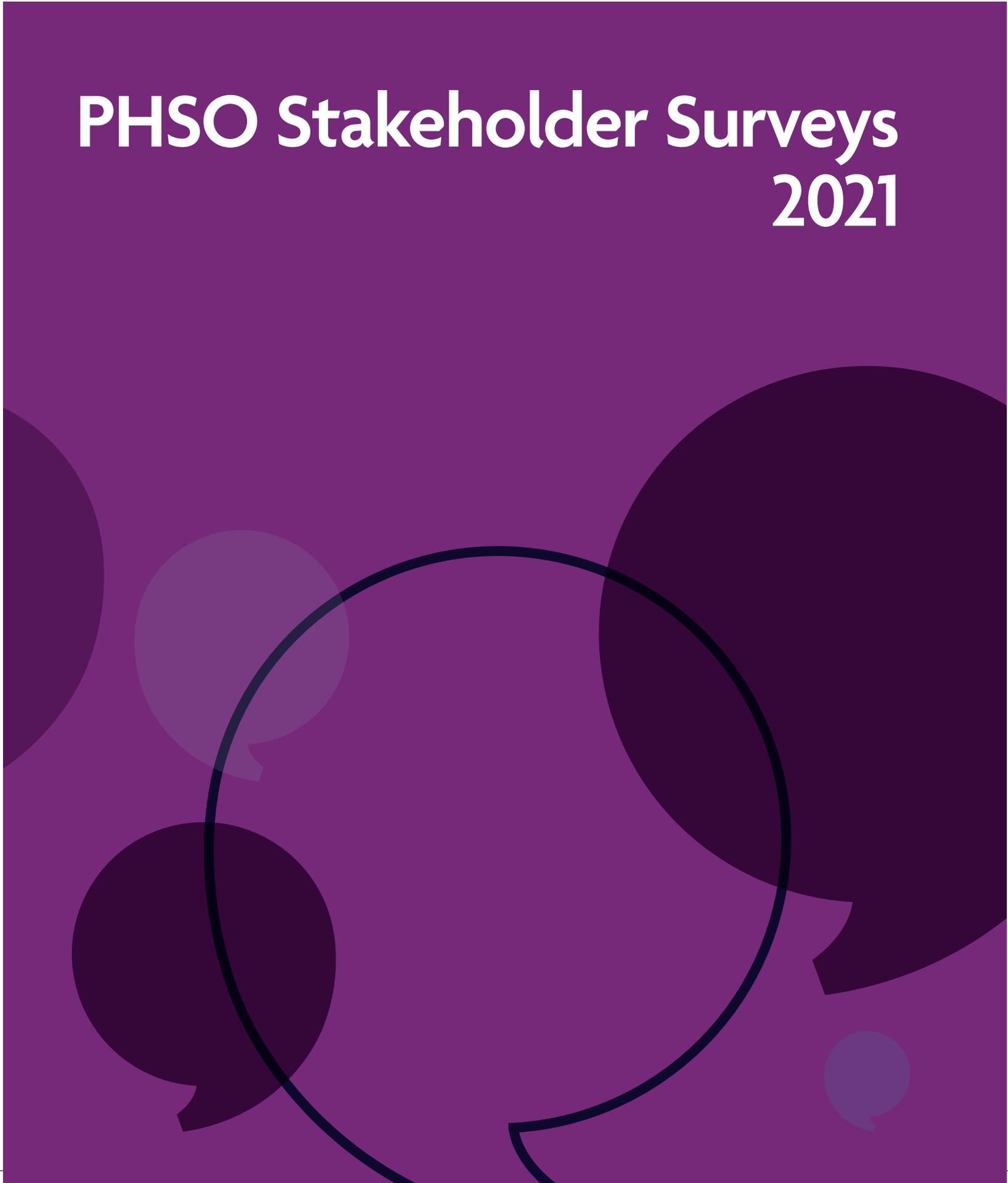


PHSO Stakeholder Surveys 2021



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Executive summary

The results of PHSO's stakeholder surveys 2021 are based on responses from over 4,000 members of the public, over 100 MPs and 36 external stakeholders (e.g. heads of other ombuds services or advocacy groups).

Knowing how to complain

- The results indicate that members of the public are more confident in knowing how to complain about health-related organisations (such as GPs or hospitals) than government bodies. Confidence levels are highest for GP practices (47% were very confident or fairly confident in knowing how to complain).

Attitudes towards complaining

- Although respondents sometimes lack confidence about how to complain, 90% stated they have a right to complain about a public service if they're unhappy with it. In addition, 87% agree that people should complain about public services if they're unhappy with the service they receive.
- 57% of those surveyed said they would feel confident to speak up about their complaint but around a third (31%) would be worried that raising a complaint might lead the organisation to treat them differently. Furthermore, only 30% felt their complaint would be listened to and understood, and less than one in five (19%) thought their complaint would make a difference.

Awareness of PHSO

- 17% of individuals in our public awareness survey had heard of PHSO but around two fifths (42%) had never heard of an Ombudsman before.
- Levels of awareness are higher in older age groups.
- External stakeholders in our survey have a more positive perception of PHSO than MPs; 58% of stakeholders had a positive view of PHSO compared to 41% of MPs.

PHSO's values

- Across the various survey cohorts, values such as independence, fairness, impartiality, and authoritativeness tended to be more closely associated with PHSO than transparency, influence and excellence. There were, however, differences across the survey groups. The highest rated value for external stakeholders and MPs, for example, was independence but members of the public rated fairness the highest.

Experience of complaining

- Around a third of respondents to the public awareness survey were not happy with the service they received from recent contact with an organisation under PHSO's jurisdiction. For those who had a negative experience, the majority didn't complain. However, this differed slightly depending on the organisation. People who were unhappy with the service

received from a hospital, for example, were more likely to complain (32%) than individuals unhappy with their dentist (16%).

Strengths and weaknesses of PHSO

- Two thirds of external stakeholders (66%) consider ‘resolving and investigating complaints’ to be a strength for PHSO.
- Also highly rated were ‘working with others to improve the accessibility and effectiveness of the complaints system’ (64%) and ‘making recommendations that help organisations to learn and improve services’ (63%).
- 93% of external stakeholders rated PHSO’s insight reports as good or very good. There was less knowledge of PHSO outputs/publications amongst MPs but our published case summaries were rated highest (34%), followed by published reports (33%) and website information/materials (32%).

PHSO reform

- 46% of MPs support PHSO being given statutory responsibility to become a Complaint Standards Authority.
- 48% support reform for PHSO to launch ‘own initiative’ investigations.
- And 50% support reform to allow constituents to complain directly to PHSO about government department and agencies.

Introduction

This report outlines the findings from 3 related surveys commissioned by PHSO. The fieldwork for these took place between September and November 2021.

The largest of these surveys was the PHSO public awareness survey 2021, conducted on our behalf by YouGov via an online survey with 4,017 respondents.

The MP survey 2021, also conducted by YouGov, secured 103 responses from MPs via an online survey.

Finally, the External Stakeholders survey was undertaken by Survation (partly by online questionnaire, and partly by telephone interview) with 36 stakeholders.

Please note that the results in this report have been calculated using unrounded data to ensure maximum accuracy. In some circumstances this will mean that, for example, the summed percentage of two or more response categories may not appear to match with the individual percentages from those response categories.

Section 1: Public attitudes to complaining

1.1 Knowing how to complain

Key messages

- Members of the public are more confident in knowing how to complain about health organisations than government organisations

NHS Organisations

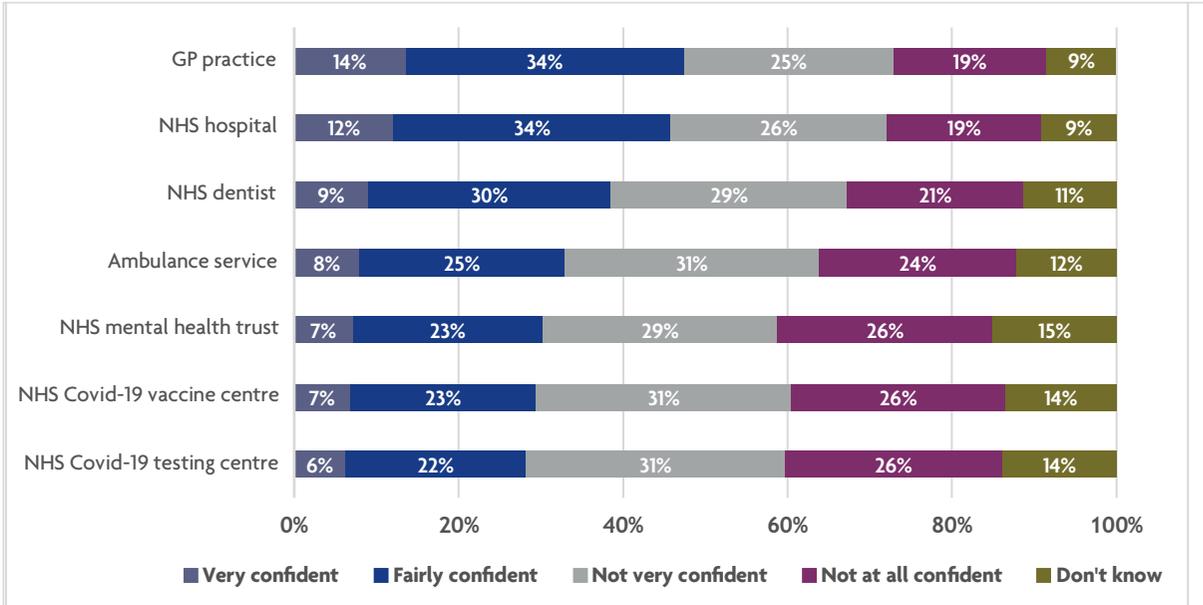
We asked survey participants how confident they feel about knowing how to complain about different NHS organisations.

Of the organisations listed, fewer than half of respondents said they felt confident (i.e. selected 'very confident' or 'fairly confident' as their answer).

Confidence levels were highest for GP practices (47%) and NHS hospitals (46%). In comparison to 2016 (when PHSO last conducted a Public Awareness survey), 2021's results for GP practices were slightly lower (49%) but slightly higher for NHS hospitals (45%).

Results were at their lowest for Covid vaccination centres (29%) and Covid testing centres (28%).

Figure 1: If you found yourself in a situation where you wanted to complain about each of the following NHS organisations, how confident, if at all, would you feel about knowing how to complain?



Source: PHSO public awareness survey 2021

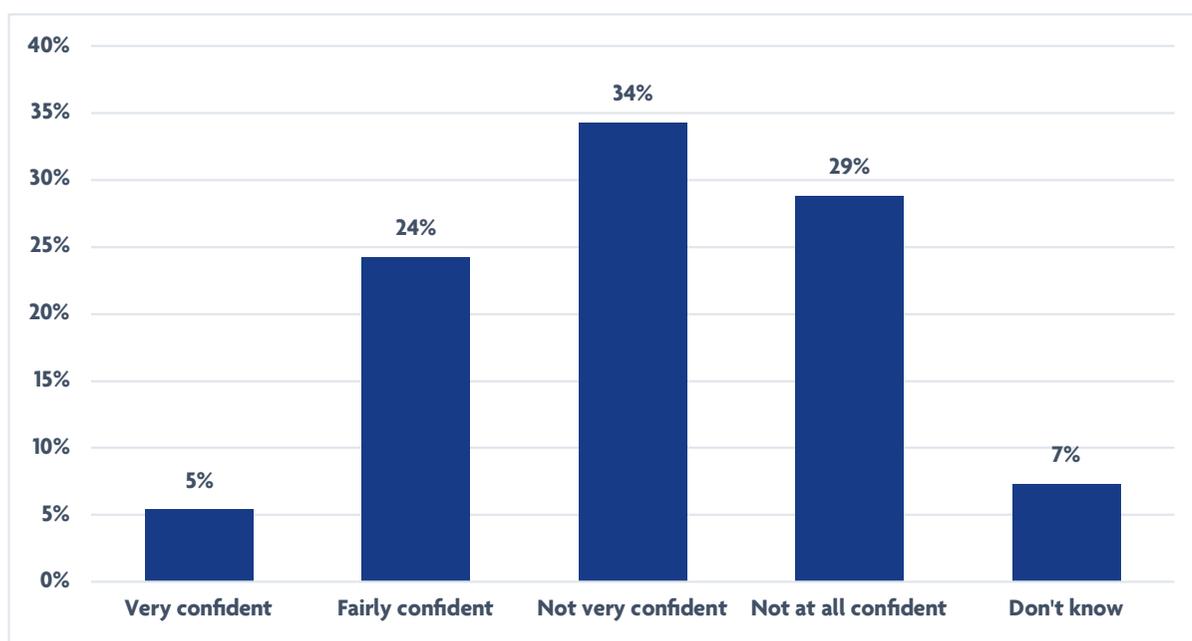
Government departments/organisations

Members of the public were less confident in knowing how to complain about government organisations. 30% stated they felt confident but the majority (63%) did not, compared to GP practices (47%) and NHS hospitals (46%).

In comparison to NHS organisations, confidence levels are therefore around the same as NHS mental health trusts, slightly higher than NHS Covid facilities but lower than ambulance services, NHS dentists, NHS hospitals and GP practices.

29% of respondents also stated they were ‘Not at all confident’ in knowing how to complain about government organisations. This was higher than any of responses for NHS organisations.

Figure 2: if you found yourself in a situation where you wanted to complain about a government organisation or department how confident, if at all, would you feel about knowing where to go to complain?¹



Source: PHSO public awareness survey 2021

There were also some variations in confidence levels across different demographic groups.

Demographic variations

Ethnicity

- Respondents from a Black, Black British, Caribbean or African ethnic background were consistently most confident about knowing how to complain about NHS services
- Respondents from an Asian or Asian British background were most confident about knowing where to complain about government organisations (43%). White respondents (29%) and those from a Mixed/Multiple ethnic background (29%) were less confident

¹The government organisations/departments listed as examples for participants were: Her Majesty’s Revenues and Customs (HMRC), The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA), The Jobcentre, The Child Support Agency, The Department for Work and Pensions, UK Visas and Immigration (formerly the Border Agency), The Environment Agency, HM Courts and Tribunal Service, Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS), The Home Office, and The Student Loans Company

Sex

- Women are more likely to lack confidence regarding how to complain about NHS organisations than men. For example:
 - NHS dentists – 54% of women were 'not very confident' or 'not confident at all' compared to 46% of men
 - Ambulance services – 59% of women compared to 50% of men
 - NHS Covid-19 vaccine centres – 61% of women compared to 52% of men
- Men report higher confidence levels than women in knowing how to complain about government organisations (33% compared to 26%)
- 67% of women report that they are not confident in knowing how to complain about government organisations compared to 58% of men

Age

- 40% of 55-64 year olds are confident in knowing how to complain about ambulance services compared to 20% of 18-24 year olds
- 53% of 65-75 year olds are confident in knowing how to complain about NHS hospitals compared to 36% of 18-24 year olds

Disability

- Respondents who are severely limited by their disability are more confident (35%) about knowing how to complain about NHS mental health trusts than those without disabilities (29%)
- Respondents who are severely limited by their disability are more confident (38%) about knowing how to complain about ambulance services than those without disabilities (32%)

Geographical location

- For all NHS organisations (except ambulance services), London based respondents have the highest confidence levels about knowing how to complain

Social grade

- Middle class respondents (ABC1) consistently report being more confident about knowing how to complain about NHS organisations than working class respondents (C2DE)

Working status

- For all NHS organisations, students have the lowest confidence levels about knowing how to complain

Technological awareness

- Respondents who are confident in navigating the internet tend to be more confident in knowing how to complain about NHS organisations

Urban, town or rural

- Those living in rural settings (34%) are more confident than those in town/fringe (26%) or urban settings (29%) about how to make a complaint about a government organisation

Religion

- Respondents who stated they have 'no religion' were less confident about knowing how to complain about NHS services and government organisations

1.2 Attitudes towards complaining

Key messages

- Members of the public overwhelmingly agreed that individuals have a right to complain about public services and that individuals should complain about public services if they are unhappy with the service they receive
- Over half of respondents to the public awareness survey would feel confident to speak up about their complaint, but less than a fifth believed their complaint would make a difference

Despite a lack of confidence about how to complain, the vast majority of respondents (90%) agreed they have a right to complain about a public service if they're unhappy with it, and 87% agree that people should complain about public services if they're unhappy with the service they receive.

This was slightly lower than in 2016 when 92% of respondents agreed they have a right to complain about a public service if they're unhappy with it, and 90% agreed that people should complain about public services if they're unhappy with the service they receive.

Demographic variations

Ethnicity

- White respondents were most likely to agree that they have a right to complain about a public service if they're unhappy with it (92%), and that people should complain about public services if they're unhappy with the service they receive (88%)
- Respondents from an Asian or Asian British ethnic background were least likely to agree that they have a right to complain about a public service if they're unhappy with it (73%), or that people should complain about public services if they're unhappy with the service they receive (76%).

Age

- 77% of 18-24 year olds agree they have a right to complain about a public service compared to 95% of 65-74 year olds and 95% of respondents aged 75+
- In line with this, 95% of retired respondents agreed they have a right to complain
- 79% of 18-24 year olds agree that people should complain about public services if they're unhappy with the service they receive, compared to 93% of 65-74 year olds and 93% of respondents aged 75+
- Similarly, 92% of retired respondents agree

Disability

- For those who had made a complaint, a lower proportion of those with severely limiting disabilities agreed they have a right to complain (85%) than those with no disabilities (94%)
- They were also less confident to speak up about their complaint (70% compared to 81% of those with no disabilities)

Technological awareness

- Respondents who were confident in using the internet were more likely to agree they have a right to complain about a public service if they're unhappy with it (93%), and that people should complain about public services if they're unhappy with the service they receive (89%)

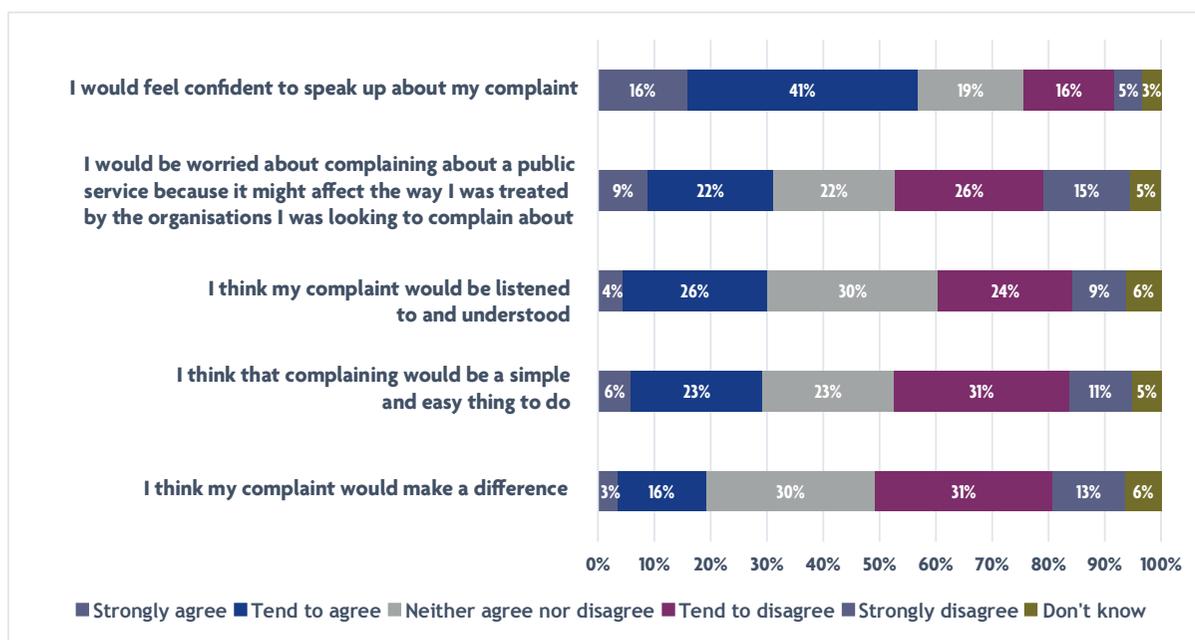
Religious beliefs

- Respondents whose religious beliefs are Judaism/Hinduism/Sikhism/Buddhism were less likely to agree they have a right to complain about a public service if they're unhappy with it (78%), and that people should complain about public services if they're unhappy with the service they receive (79%)

To assess attitudes towards complaining further, we asked all participants in the public awareness survey to respond to a series of statements. We also asked similar questions of those at different stages of the complaint process.

- 57% said they would feel confident to speak up about their complaint and just under a third (31%) would be worried that raising a complaint might lead the organisation to treat them differently. This latter concern was even higher (48%) amongst those who had actually raised a complaint.
- A minority (30%) agree their complaint would be listened to and understood. This was slightly lower (27%) for those that had made a complaint.
- Overall, 29% thought that it would be simple to make a complaint. For those that had actually made a complaint, this rose to 39%.
- Less than one in five (19%) believed their complaint would make a difference although this rose slightly to 23% for those with a complaint that had been settled.

Figure 3: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



Source: PHSO public awareness survey 2021

Demographic differences

Ethnicity

- White respondents would feel most confident to speak up about their complaint (58%) but are amongst the least likely to think their complaint would make a difference (18%)
- Black, Black British, Caribbean or African respondents were most confident that their complaint would be listened to and understood (40%), most confident that their complaint would make a difference (40%) and most confident that complaining would be a simple and easy thing to do (39%). However, they also agreed more than any other group that they would be worried about complaining about a public service because it might affect the way they were treated by the organisations they were looking to complain about (37%)
- Despite being amongst the least confident to make a complaint (49%) and the amongst the least confident that complaining would be a simple and easy thing to do (28%) Asian or Asian British complainants were the second most confident that complaining would make a difference (38% compared to 18% White)

Sex

- 35% of women are worried that complaining might affect how they were treated by the organisation compared to 27% of men
- 62% of men would feel confident to speak up about their complaint compared to 52% of women
- 34% of men think that complaining would be simple and straightforward compared to 25% of women

Age

- Levels of confidence to speak up about a complaint increase as the respondents' age increases [e.g. 18-24 (39%) compared to 45-54 (57%) and 75+ (70%)]
- A lower than average proportion of those aged 75+ felt that complaining would be simple and straightforward (23%)

Disability

- Those with a severely limiting disability are more worried that raising a complaint would affect the way the organisation treats them (49% compared to 27% of those with no disabilities)
- Confidence levels to speak up about a complaint are lower for those with severe disabilities (52%) compared to those with no disabilities (59%)
- Those with a severely limiting disability are more confident that their complaint would be listened to and understood (39%) than those with no disabilities (32%)

Geographical location

- London based respondents are most confident about speaking up about their complaint (62%). Those in the Midlands are least confident (51%).
- Respondents in the East of England are most likely to disagree their complaint will make a difference (50%)

Working status

- Students are more likely to be worried that making a complaint might affect how they were treated by the organisation (36% compared to average of 31%)
- Students are least likely to think their complaint would be listened to and understood (19% compared to average of 30%)
- Students are least likely to think their complaint would make a difference (19% compared to average of 13%)
- Retired respondents are more confident about speaking up about their complaint (65% compared to average of 57%)

Technological awareness

- Respondents who were confident in navigating the internet had higher levels of confidence to speak up about a complaint

Section 2: Accessing information on complaining

2.1 Accessing information about the complaints process

Key messages

- Members of the public mainly use online searches to access information about making a complaint about an NHS or government department, and use email to make complaints
- Online searches are higher amongst younger age groups

In the event that respondents wanted to complain about an NHS service or government department/organisation, we asked where they would look first for information. We also asked where they would look for information on what to do next if the organisation in question had not addressed a complaint to their satisfaction.

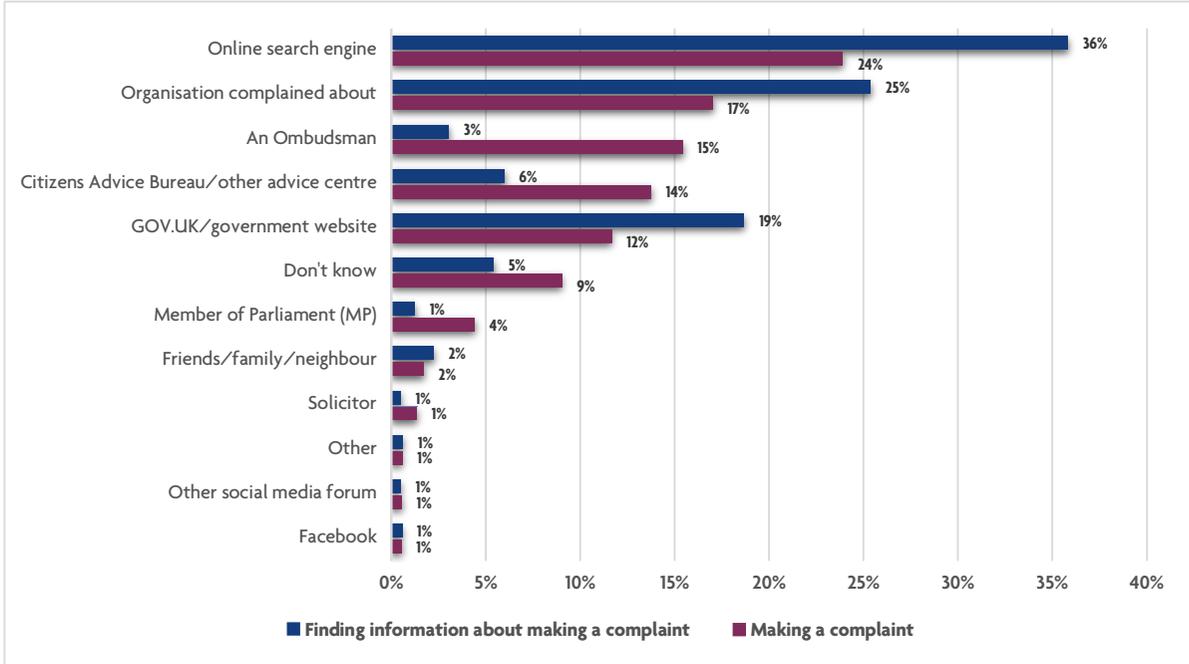
The results of this are displayed in figure 4 below.

Online searches would be the most commonly used source of information, both for finding information about the complaint process (36%) and also finding information about how to take a complaint forward (24%).

Many would also seek information from the organisation complained about or from a government website.

Some respondents would look to an Ombudsman (15%) or the Citizens Advice Bureau (14%) for further details about taking their complaint forward.

Figure 4: Sources of information about complaint process and making a complaint.



Source: PHSO public awareness survey 2021

Demographic variations

Ethnicity

- Those from an Asian/Asian British or Mixed/multiple ethnic groups were less likely to use the internet or an online search engine (18% and 17% respectively) compared to White, and Black, Black British, Caribbean or African respondents (25% for both)

Age

- 25-34 year olds are more likely to use an online search engine (41%) when looking for information about the complaint process
- Similarly, if taking a complaint forward, using an online search engine to find more information decreases with age [i.e. 18-24 (32%), 25-34 (31%), 35-44 (26%), 45-54 (24%), 55-64 (23%), 65-74 (14%), 75+ (15%)]
- Those in the age brackets 55-64, 65-74 and 75+ are more likely to approach an Ombudsman for information on how to take their complaint forward (21% compared to an average of 15%)

Disability

- Respondents who are severely limited by disability are less likely to ask the organisation complained about (19%) than those without disabilities (27%)
- Respondents who are severely limited by disability are more likely to seek advice from the Citizens Advice Bureau or similar (18% compared to 12% of non-disabled respondents)

Urban, town or rural

- Respondents from a rural background are less likely than average to use an online search engine (18%) but more likely to approach an Ombudsman (20%)
- Respondents living in town/fringe locations are more likely to ask the organisations complained about (32%) compared to their rural (26%) or urban based (24%) counterparts.

Technological awareness

- Those who lack confidence using the internet were most likely to use a Citizens Advice Bureau (19%) to look for information on the complaint process

Contact and communication

In terms of respondents' preferences for how they would make a complaint, the majority selected email (71%), followed by letter (32%), telephone (23%) then online (20%).

Those in older age groups are more likely than average to send a letter (65-74 – 44%, 75+ - 43%).

Respondents with severe disabilities are less likely to use email (65% compared to 76% of non-disabled respondents) but more likely to complain via letter (38% compared to 30% of non-disabled respondents).

Figure 5: Preferred mode of making a complaint

Method of complaining	Percentage
By e-mail	71%
By letter	32%
By telephone	23%
Online (excluding social media)	20%
In person	11%
Don't know	7%
Social media	2%
Other	1%

Source: PHSO public awareness survey 2021

2.2 Awareness of PHSO and other organisations

Key messages

- 17% of the public were aware of PHSO
- Those who had heard of PHSO tended to have a fairly accurate understanding of its role and function
- A third of these respondents had heard of PHSO (or an NHS/Government Ombudsman) via a newspaper, news source or television
- Around two fifths (42%) of respondents had never heard of an Ombudsman before

Awareness of PHSO is slightly lower than in 2016 (18%). This is, however, a similar level of awareness to a comparable ombudsman (16%).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given that PHSO deals with health-related complaints, awareness of the organisation is notably higher amongst those aged 55 and over (23%), and the retired (24%),

who are more likely to use public health services more frequently. Respondents aged between 18-24 (6%) were less familiar with PHSO.

Demographic differences

- White respondents were more likely to have heard of PHSO (18%) compared to Black, Black British, Caribbean or African respondents (14%), Mixed or multiple ethnic groups (13%), and Asian or Asian British respondents (8%)
- Awareness levels of PHSO increase as the respondents' age increases (e.g. 18-24 – 6% compared to 45-54 – 16%, and 75+ - 24%)
- Similarly, awareness levels are highest amongst retired respondents (24%)
- Respondents in the Midlands had the lowest levels of awareness (15%)
- Respondents whose religious belief is Christian (other) had highest levels of awareness of PHSO (23%), while respondents whose religious belief is Judaism/Hinduism/Sikhism/Buddhism had the lowest levels of awareness (9%)

To check if individuals may not have heard of PHSO but have heard of an Ombudsman for the NHS or a Government Ombudsman, we asked an additional question.

At 20% awareness levels for both 'NHS Ombudsman' and 'Government Ombudsman', the results were slightly improved but not notably so. This was also slightly lower than in 2016 when 23% and 22% were aware of an 'NHS Ombudsman' and 'Government Ombudsman' respectively.

Similar to awareness of PHSO, awareness of an NHS/Government Ombudsman increases as the respondents' age increases. Linked to this are the high levels of awareness of the NHS Ombudsman (30%) and Government Ombudsman (28%) amongst retired respondents.

Figure 6: Awareness of NHS/Government Ombudsman

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+
NHS Ombudsman	11%	15%	17%	16%	23%	30%	32%
Government Ombudsman	11%	15%	18%	16%	22%	29%	30%

Source: PHSO public awareness survey 2021

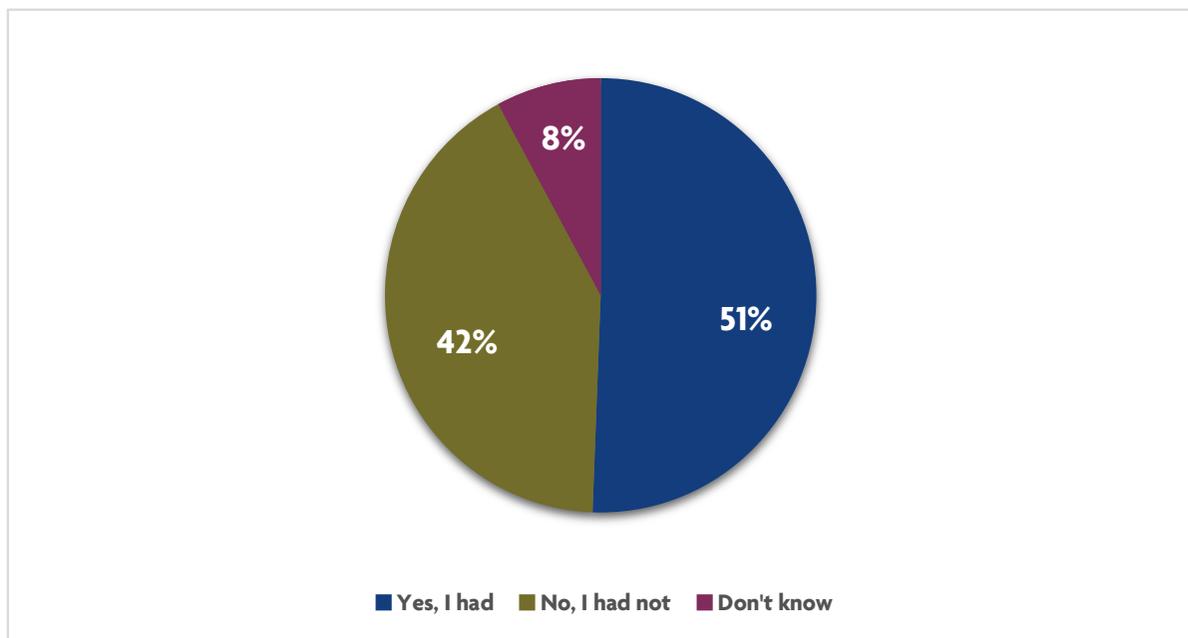
Turning to those participants who had not heard of PHSO (or an NHS/Government Ombudsman), we asked if they had ever heard of an Ombudsman before.

Just over half (51%) had but a sizeable proportion of around two fifths (42%) had not.

Demographic differences

- Women are more likely to have heard of an ombudsman than men (55% compared to 46%)
- Awareness levels are also much lower than average in London (39%)
- Those with severe disabilities have higher awareness levels (62% compared to 51% of non-disabled respondents).
- There were also some differences in location whereby 66% of town and fringe dwellers had heard of an ombudsman compared to 49% of urban based respondents

Figure 7: Before taking this survey, had you ever heard of an Ombudsman before?



Source: PHSO public awareness survey 2021

When asked how confident respondents were about their understanding of what an Ombudsman does, only 7% said 'very confident' although 50% were 'fairly confident'. A total of 41% said they were 'not very confident' or 'not at all confident'.

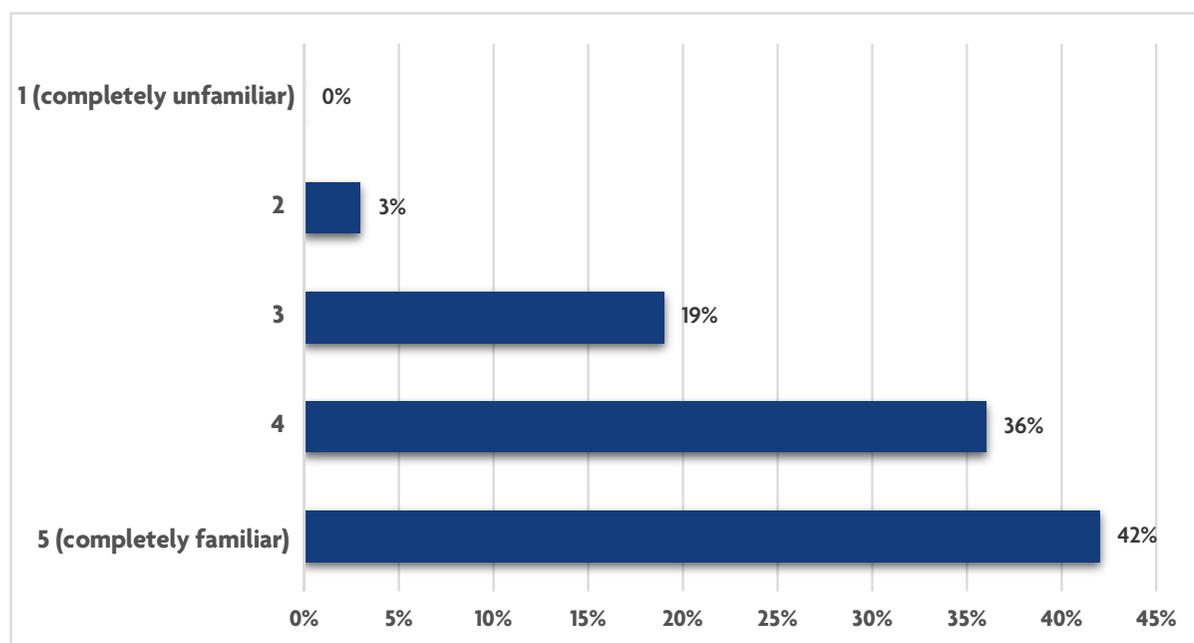
Those who felt confident were asked to describe what an Ombudsman does. In most cases, these descriptions were fairly accurate:

- A ombudsman is the very top when it comes to complaints and to hold certain bodies such as the NHS or the government to account
- Deals with complaints not resolved by the organisation which your complaint is about to a satisfactory standard
- Reviews all documents objectively to make a decision

Amongst the stakeholders we surveyed, familiarity with PHSO's role was considerably higher.

Respondents here were asked to rate how familiar or unfamiliar they are with PHSO's role. Over three quarters (78%) provided a rating of 4 or 5 to this question.

Figure 8: How familiar or unfamiliar are you with PHSO's role?



Source: PHSO external stakeholder survey 2021

For members of the public who had heard of PHSO (or an NHS/Government Ombudsman), a third (33%) stated that this was via newspaper/news source/television although around a quarter (23%) don't know or can't remember.

All other sources are relatively low but interesting to see that our published reports are higher (8%) than our website (3%) or presence on Twitter (2%).

Figure 9: How did you first hear about this organisation?

Source	Percentage
Newspaper/news source/television	33%
Don't know/can't remember	23%
Through my job	12%
Online search engine	12%
Family/friend/neighbour	10%
PALS (Patient Advice and Liaison Service)	8%
Seeing/reading published report(s) by the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman	8%
Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) or other advice centre	7%
Health organisation or government body	6%
Through a media campaign/poster/advertisement/video	5%
Other	4%
Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's website	3%
Other social media forum (excluding Twitter)	2%
By making a complaint to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman	2%
Twitter	2%
Independent Health Complaints Advocacy	2%

Source: PHSO public awareness survey 2021

Section 3: Stakeholder and public perceptions of PHSO

3.1 Stakeholder and MP awareness of PHSO

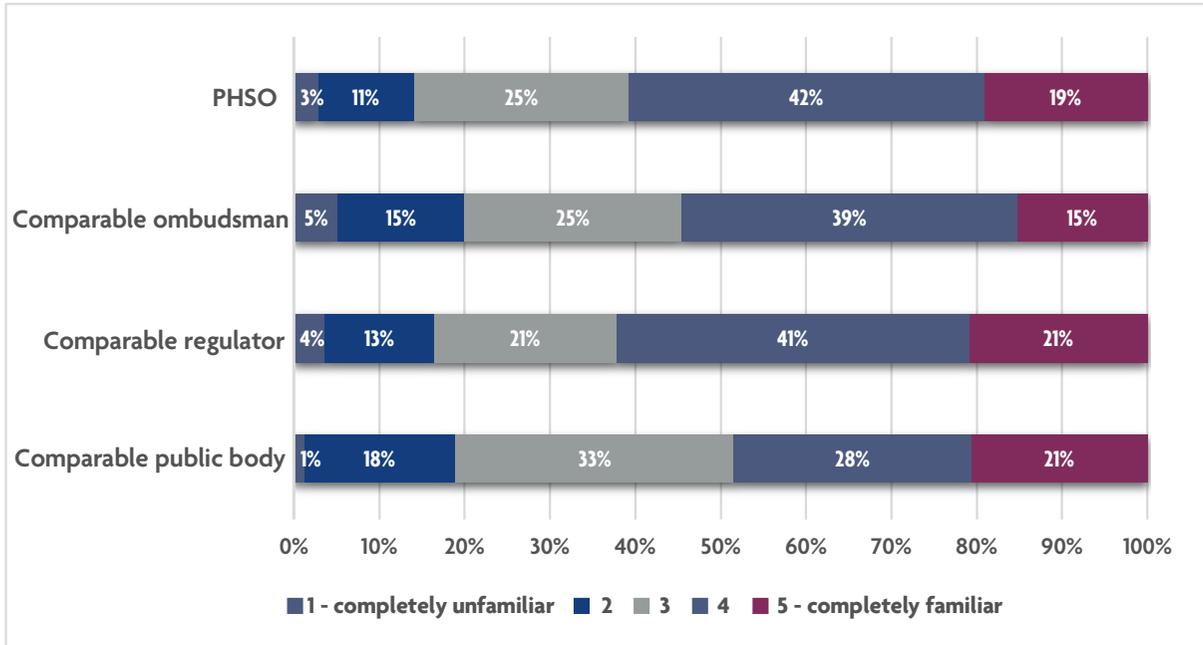
Key messages

- Stakeholders have a more positive perception of PHSO than MPs
- Labour MPs tend to be more familiar with PHSO, and rate PHSO more favourably than Conservative MPs

Stakeholders were asked how positively or negatively they felt about PHSO. 58% gave a positive response, 42% gave a neutral response but none gave a negative response. We also asked MPs about their perceptions of PHSO.

This indicated that 61% of MPs are familiar with PHSO (14% were unfamiliar with PHSO, 25% were neither familiar or unfamiliar). This is slightly less than a comparable regulator (62%), but more than a comparable ombudsman (59%) or a comparable public body (49%)

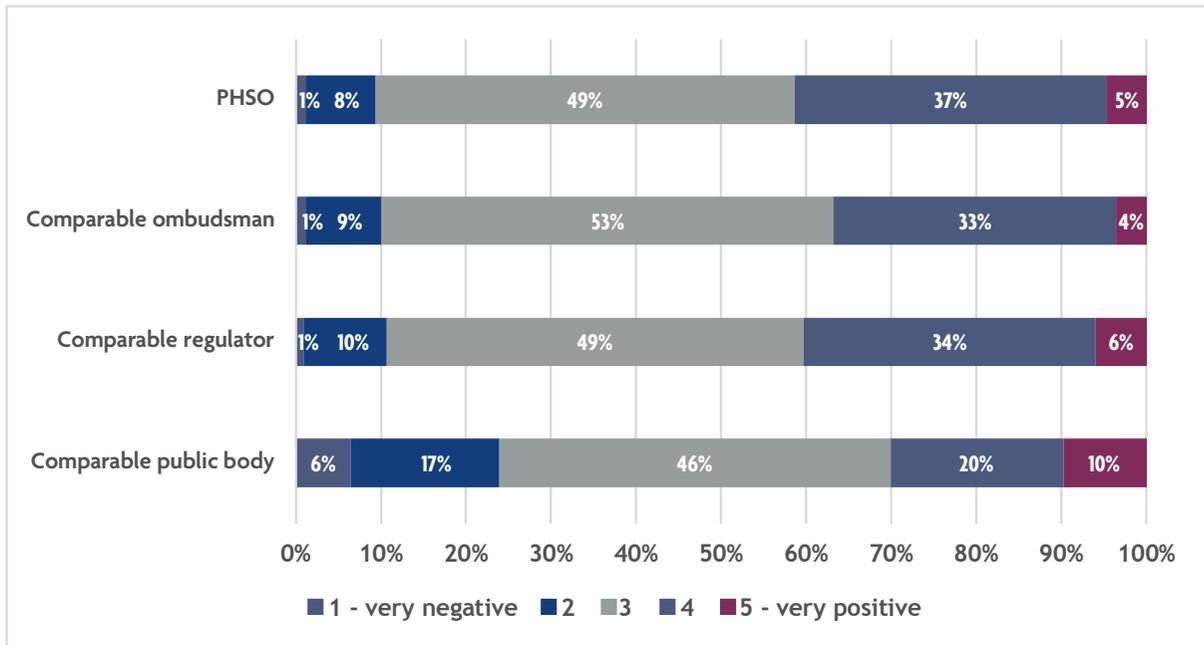
Figure 10: MP’s level of familiarity with PHSO and comparable organisations



Source: PHSO MP survey 2021

Around two fifths (41%) of MPs have a positive view of PHSO (9% had a negative view of PHSO, 49% were neither positive or negative). This is slightly less than a comparable regulator (62%), but more than a comparable ombudsman (55%) or a comparable public body (49%)

Figure 11: MP's level of positivity towards PHSO and comparable organisations



Source: PHSO MP survey 2021

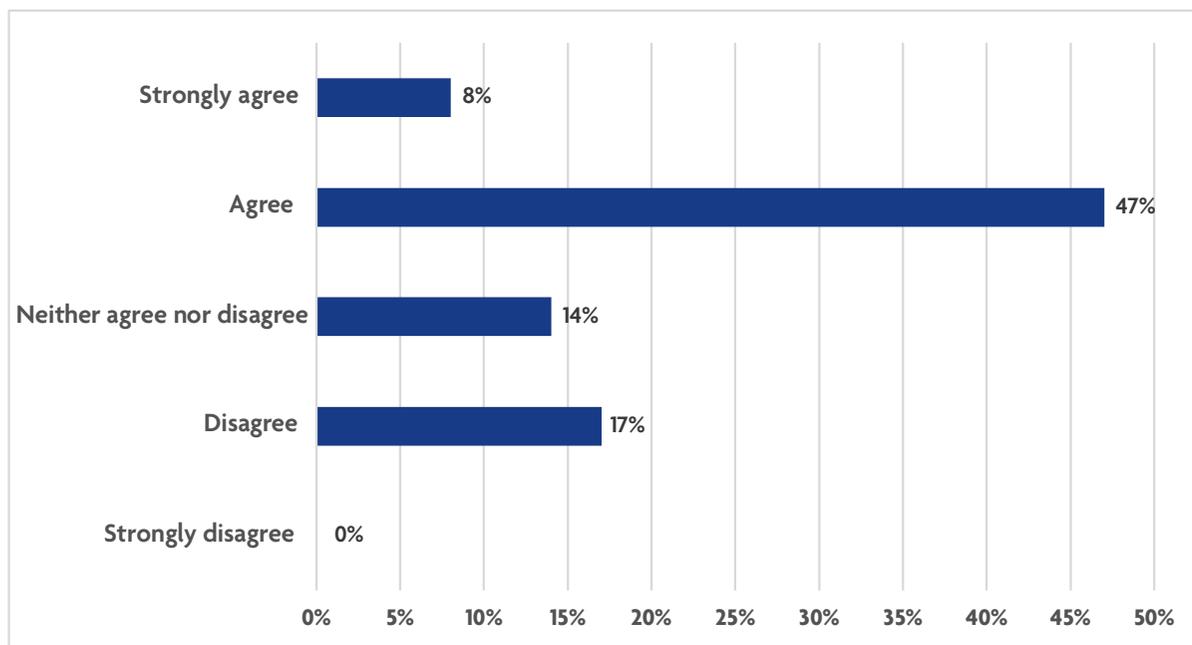
Overall, Labour MPs tended to be more familiar with PHSO and rated PHSO more favourably than Conservative MPs. For example:

- 81% of Labour MPs are familiar with PHSO compared to 50% of Conservative MPs
- 57% of Labour MPs have a positive view of PHSO compared to 36% of Conservative MPs
- 51% of Labour MPs rated PHSO's contact with them as 'good' compared to 41% of Conservative MPs

We also asked stakeholders if they agree with the statement 'PHSO communicates its role and work effectively to the general public'.

Cumulatively, 56% agreed with the statement compared to just 17% who disagreed.

Figure 12: PHSO communicates its role and work effectively to the general public



Source: PHSO external stakeholder survey 2021

3.2 Perceptions of PHSO’s values

Key messages

- Stakeholders and MPs tend to associate PHSO most with the values of independence, fairness and impartiality
- Members of the public tend to associate PHSO most with the values of fairness, followed by authoritative, independence and impartial

Participants across all cohorts were presented with a selection of words and asked to what extent they associated each one with PHSO (on a scale from ‘1 – not at all’ to ‘5 – completely’).

Respondents to the public awareness survey were also given the option of responding with ‘don’t know’; the proportion of people answering ‘don’t know’ was relatively high at 31% on average. To enhance comparability with the MP and external stakeholder results, the ‘don’t know’ responses in the public awareness survey have been removed.

For respondents in the public awareness survey almost half (48%) provided positive answers (i.e. selected a rating of 4 or 5) for ‘fairness’. At the other end of the scale, the lowest positive ratings were received for ‘excellence’ (36%).

The results for stakeholders differed considerably. First, there were very few ratings of 1 or 2 (i.e. indicating that respondents didn’t associate PHSO with the word presented) and therefore much higher ratings at the positive end of the scale.

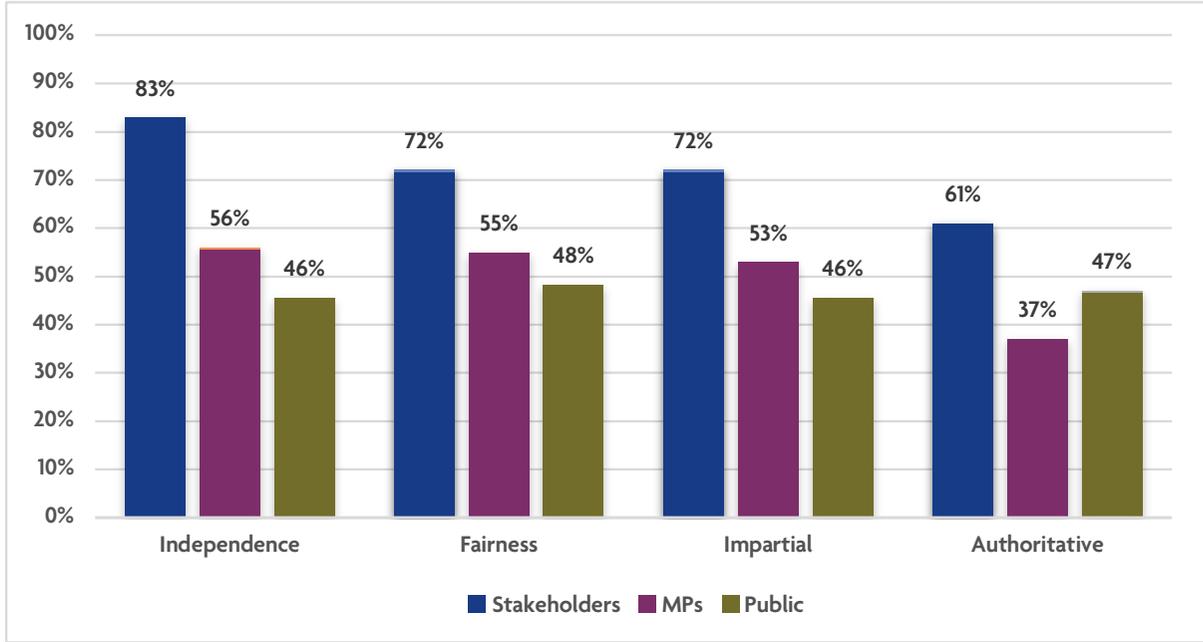
Independence came out top where 83% of stakeholders provide a rating of 4 or 5, followed by fairness (72%) and impartial (72%). At the other end of the scale were transparency and influential (both 50%).

Independence was also the highest rated amongst MPs, albeit at a much lower level than for stakeholders (56%). Fairness and impartial were also highly rated amongst MPs (55% and 53% respectively).

However, excellence and transparency were given less favourable ratings (30% and 32% respectively).

Stakeholders and MPs tended to associate PHSO most with the values of independence, fairness and impartiality, while members of the public tended to associate PHSO most with fairness, followed by authoritative, independence and impartial.

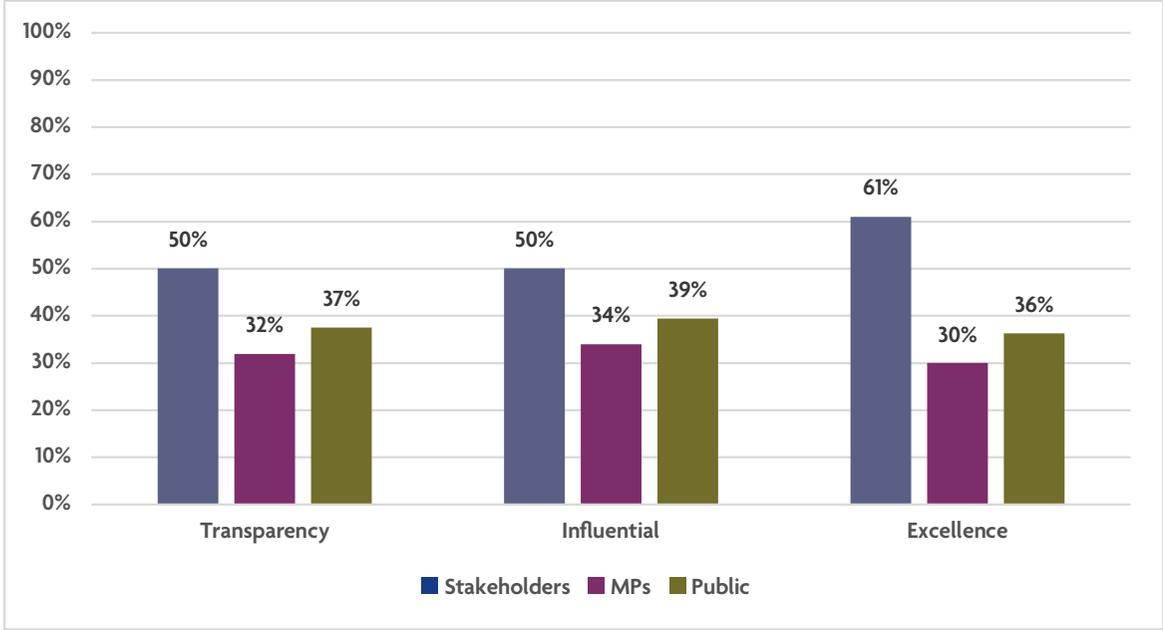
Figure 13: To what extent to you associate the following words with PHSO (most positively rated)?



Source: PHSO public awareness survey 2021, PHSO external stakeholder survey 2021, PHSO MP survey 2021

Stakeholders associated PHSO least with transparency and influential (50% each), while MPs and members of the public associated PHSO least with excellence (30% and 36% respectively).

Figure 14: To what extent to you associate the following words with PHSO (least positively rated)?



Source: PHSO public awareness survey 2021, PHSO external stakeholder survey 2021, PHSO MP survey 2021

Section 4: Experience of complaining

4.1 Contact with organisations in PHSO's jurisdiction

Key messages

- 58% of respondents had been in contact with a GP practice within the previous 12 months
- 35% had been in contact with an NHS hospital with mixed views on the experience; for example, only 50% of those with a severely limiting disability were happy with the service they'd received

Participants in the public awareness survey were asked, from a list of selected NHS organisations, government agencies/departments, which they'd had recent contact with.

Around a fifth (22%) said they had not had contact with any of the organisations listed.

Of the remaining participants, the highest proportion said they'd been in contact with a GP (58%), followed by an NHS hospital (35%) and NHS dentist (28%). These figures were lower than in 2016 when 66% of respondents had recently contacted a GP practice, an NHS hospital (45%) or an NHS dentist (44%). It's likely that these lower levels are due to the impact of Covid.

The government organisations that were most frequently used by respondents in the last 12 months were The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) (19%) and Her Majesty's Revenues and Customs (HMRC) (17%)

Figure 15: Proportion of survey respondents in contact with organisations under PHSO’s jurisdiction

Organisation	Percentage of respondents in recent contact
A GP practice	58%
An NHS hospital	35%
An NHS dentist	28%
Not applicable (no contact with organisations listed)	22%
The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA)	19%
Her Majesty’s Revenues and Customs (HMRC)	17%
The Department for Work and Pensions	11%
The Student Loans Company	8%
Other NHS services	5%
An NHS mental health trust	5%
The Jobcentre	4%
HM Courts and Tribunal Service	3%
Don’t know/can’t recall	3%
UK Visas and Immigration (formerly the Border Agency)	2%
Other government agency or department	2%
The Home Office	2%
The Child Support Agency	1%
The Environment Agency	1%
Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS)	0%

Source: PHSO public awareness survey 2021

Demographic differences

- 61% of White respondents had used a GP practice in the previous 12 months compared to 35% of Asian or Asian British respondents
- 37% of White respondents had used an NHS hospital in the previous 12 months compared to 23% of Asian or Asian British respondents (and 22% of respondents who preferred not to state their ethnicity).
- 70% of those with mild disability limitations had been in contact with a GP. This was also high for those with severely limiting disabilities (66%) compared to those without disabilities (54%)
- With regard to NHS hospitals, 50% of those with mild disability limitations had been in contact and 48% of those with severe limitations had. Only 30% without disabilities had.
- Only 50% of those with a severely limiting disability were happy with the service they'd received
- A higher proportion of those with severely limiting disabilities were unhappy with the service they'd received from a GP (23%). This proportion stood at 22% for those with less limiting disabilities compared to only 14% for those with no disabilities

4.2 Making a complaint

Key messages

- Less than half (40%) of individuals who complained about the service they experienced then went on to make a formal complaint
- Respondents were less likely to complain about the service they received from primary care health organisations
- Although 58% of respondents who made a formal complaint stated they would have liked help or support with their complaint, only 25% received any

Around a third of respondents to the public awareness survey were not happy with the service they received when they were in contact with the listed organisations:

- For those that had a negative experience, the majority did not complain about the service they were offered. This differed slightly depending on the organisation.
- People who were unhappy with the service received from a hospital, for example, were more likely to complain (32%) than those that were unhappy with their dentist (16%).

Figure 16: Did you ever complain about the service you received?

	Yes, I did	No, I did not
NHS hospital	32%	66%
The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA)	26%	73%
Her Majesty's Revenues and Customs (HMRC)	26%	74%
The Department for Work and Pensions	25%	71%
NHS mental health trust	24%	74%
GP practice	21%	78%
NHS dentist	16%	84%

Source: PHSO public awareness survey 2021

Demographic differences

- With regard to NHS hospitals, 43% of retired respondents complained compared to just 17% of unemployed respondents
- For GP surgeries, only 10% of those from London complained compared to 28% of respondents from the Midlands
- Only 40% of individuals followed this complaint up with an official or formal complaint about the organisation
- This rose to 46% for individuals with a severely limiting disability
- This proportion dropped in older age groups (e.g. 65-74 – 26%) and was also lower amongst women (37%) than men (44%)

For those that complained, the vast majority (84%) did so directly to the organisation concerned (12% complained to somebody else and the remaining 4% didn't know/couldn't remember).

40% of individuals who complained about the service they experienced then went on to make a formal complaint.

For those making a formal complaint, participants were asked if the organisation they complained about offered any advice or support to make the complaint. Only a quarter (25%) said they did, lower than in 2016 (31%). And only 21% got advice from elsewhere (e.g. another organisation or individual).

Despite these low proportions, 58% said they would have liked help or support with their complaint.

For those that did receive support, the Citizens Advice Bureau was the top source of information (22%), followed by family members/friends (19%).

None of the participants in the survey selected 'an ombudsman' as the source from which they gained further advice or support.

Figure 17: which of the following did you get advice or support from?

	Percentage
The Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) or other advice centre	22%
Family member or friend	19%
Another support group	17%
NHS advocacy support	16%
My local council/councillor	13%
A solicitor	13%
A Member of Parliament	13%
Don't know/can't remember	11%
Another regulator	4%
An ombudsman	0%

Source: PHSO public awareness survey 2021

Section 5: Stakeholder and MP feedback

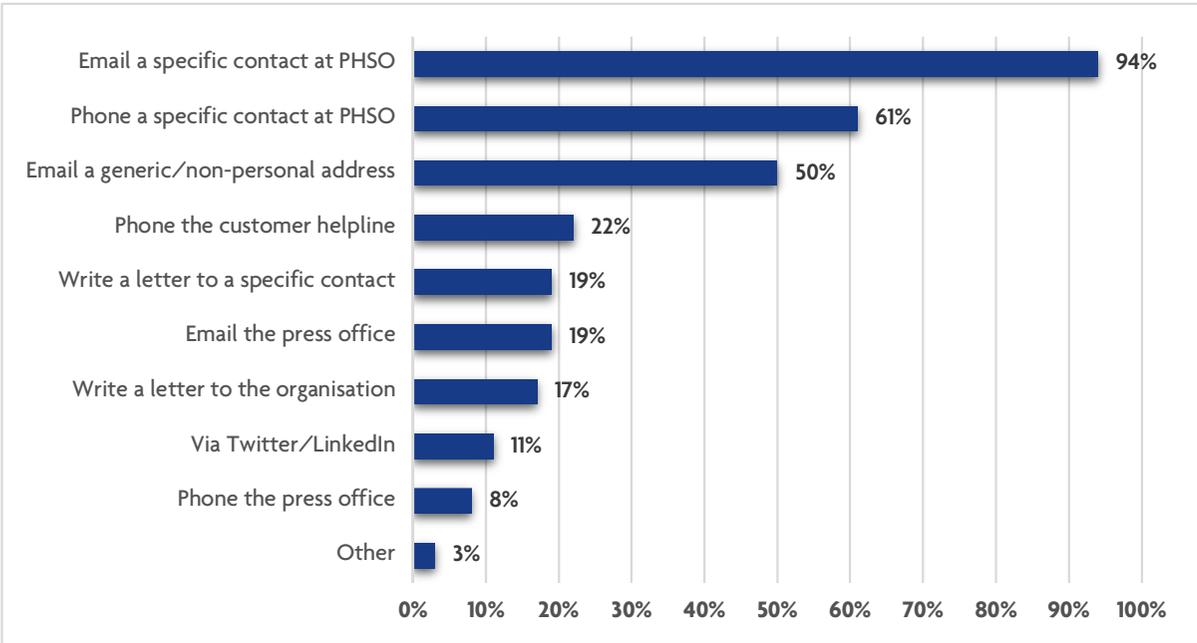
5.1 Contact and communication

Key messages

- External stakeholders rated PHSO’s contact and communication more favourably than MPs
- External stakeholders felt PHSO could improve its contact and communication by providing more regular and tailored feedback

For external stakeholders, the vast majority (94%) would get in touch with PHSO by emailing a specific contact.

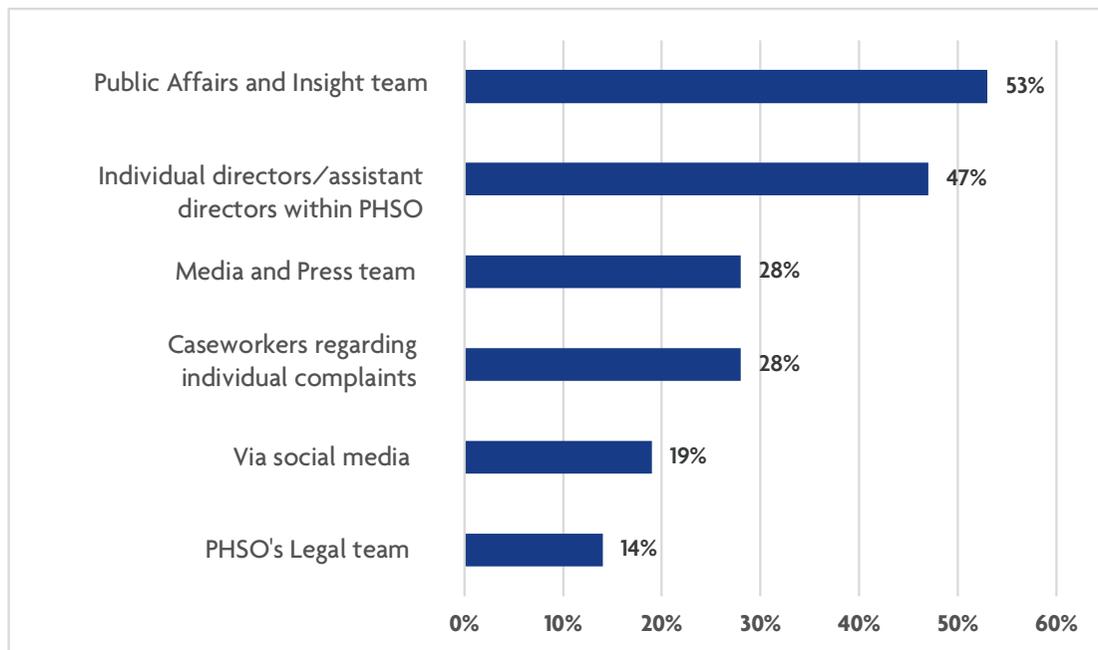
Figure 18: If you need to contact PHSO directly, how would you typically do this?



Source: PHSO external stakeholder survey 2021

For external stakeholders, the most common form of contact they’ve had with PHSO recently was via PHSO’s Public Affairs and Insight team.

Figure 19: What sort of contact have you personally had with PHSO over the past 12 months?



Source: PHSO external stakeholder survey 2021

They also mainly rated PHSO's contact and communication with them and their organisation as either 'very good' (33%) or 'good' (42%).

Furthermore, 78% said they would like the same level of contact in the future.

In response to the question 'PHSO is effective in sharing insight and learning with my organisation', 61% agreed, and only 8% disagreed (28% were neutral, 3% didn't know).

Qualitative feedback from stakeholders on improvements PHSO could make included more updates and communication:

- If possible in the investigation process provide a timeline or regular updates of where we are in the process. Be clear where action is outstanding and who is leading i.e. complaint, government dept or PHSO
- In cases where an organisation disagrees with a provisional views report or recommendations within that report that the organisation is contacted for further discussions/dialogue prior to the final report being issued rather than just issuing the final report

42% of MPs surveyed rated PHSO's contact and communication with them as 'good' (42% rated PHSO's contact as neither good or bad, 9% as poor and 8% had not had any contact or communication with PHSO).

MPs were asked what steps PHSO could take to improve its relationships with MPs. Feedback suggested that more clarity on PHSO's role, process and expected timelines would improve their relationship, along with more tailored communications:

- Perhaps a training session on how best to approach, which cases, and the best way to present info.
- Direct meeting would help to set clear parameters on which cases will be progressed.
- Regular updates customised to issues I'd previously raised with them

5.2 Strengths and weaknesses of PHSO

Key messages

- External stakeholders consider 'resolving and investigating complaints' to be a key strength for PHSO
- External stakeholders would like more opportunities for collaboration with PHSO

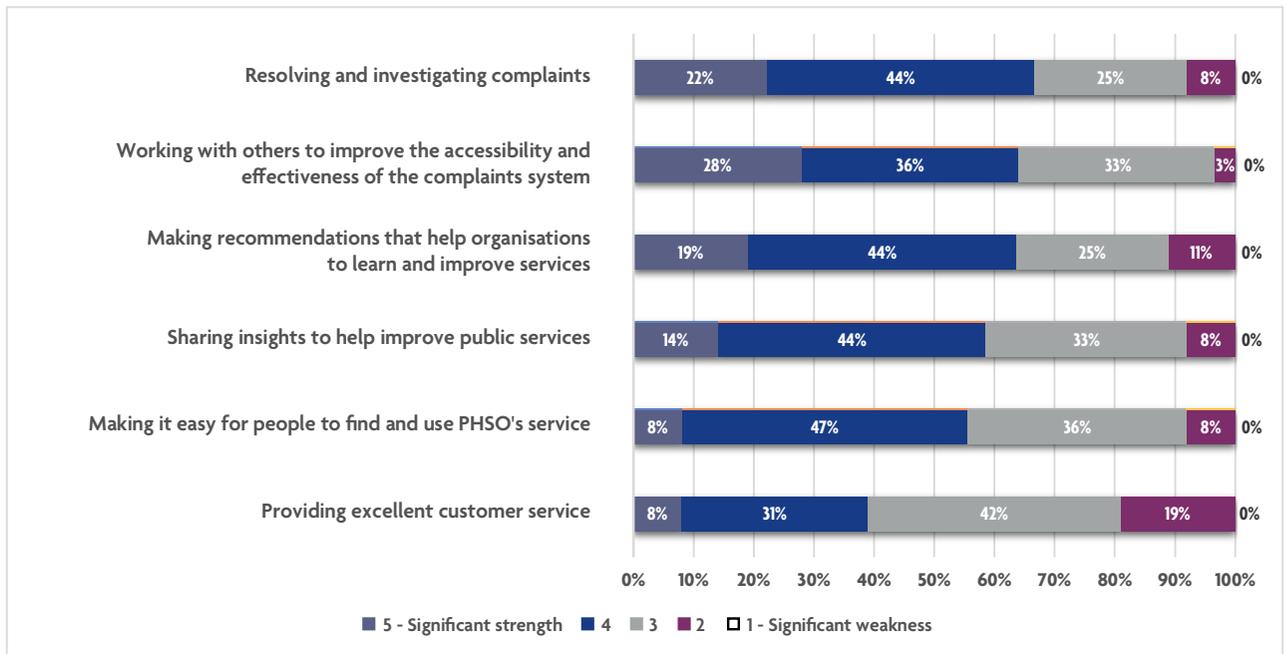
Stakeholders were presented with a series of statements and asked to indicate whether they thought each one was a strength or weakness for PHSO.

Two thirds (66%) considered 'resolving and investigating complaints' to be a strength (i.e. selected a rating of 4 or 5 as their response).

This was closely followed by 'working with others to improve the accessibility and effectiveness of the complaints system' (64%) and 'making recommendations that help organisations to learn and improve services' (63%).

Perhaps understandably, some stakeholders appeared to struggle to place themselves in the position of a complainant; 42% stated 'don't know' in response to 'providing excellent customer service'.

Figure 20: Please indicate to what extent you think each area is a strength or weakness for PHSO



Source: PHSO external stakeholder survey 2021

Qualitative feedback from stakeholders regarding improvements included more collaboration:

- I think in-conjunction with all Ombudsman offices the bigger impact is made by sharing the learning, creating links across jurisdictions on shared issues and engaging with political representatives to demonstrate the reason for having an Ombudsman
- Government departments could learn from one and another (including mistakes), the PHSO possibly could do more to share lessons across govt departments from issues they have noted from complaints (without attributing this to any department).

5.3 Awareness of PHSO outputs and publications

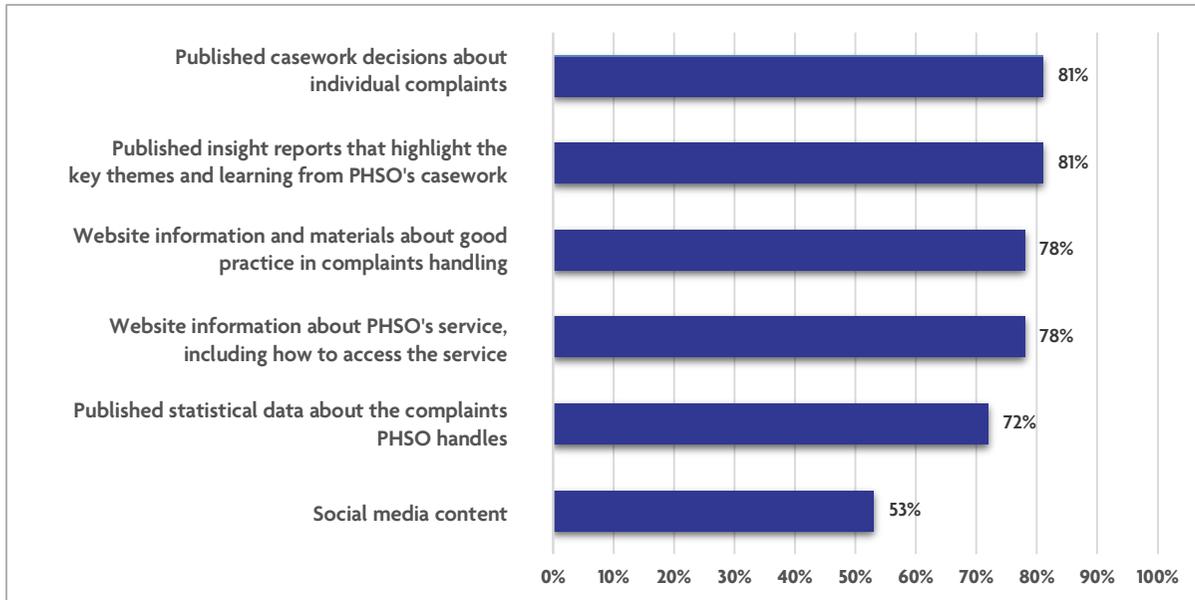
Key messages

- External stakeholders and MPs are most aware of PHSO's published case summaries about individual complaints
- MPs would like PHSO to share its work more widely and streamline its complaints process

Amongst stakeholders, awareness of PHSO's outputs and publications is high. For example, 81% were aware of our published casework decision and insight reports.

At just over half (53%), awareness of our social media content was lower.

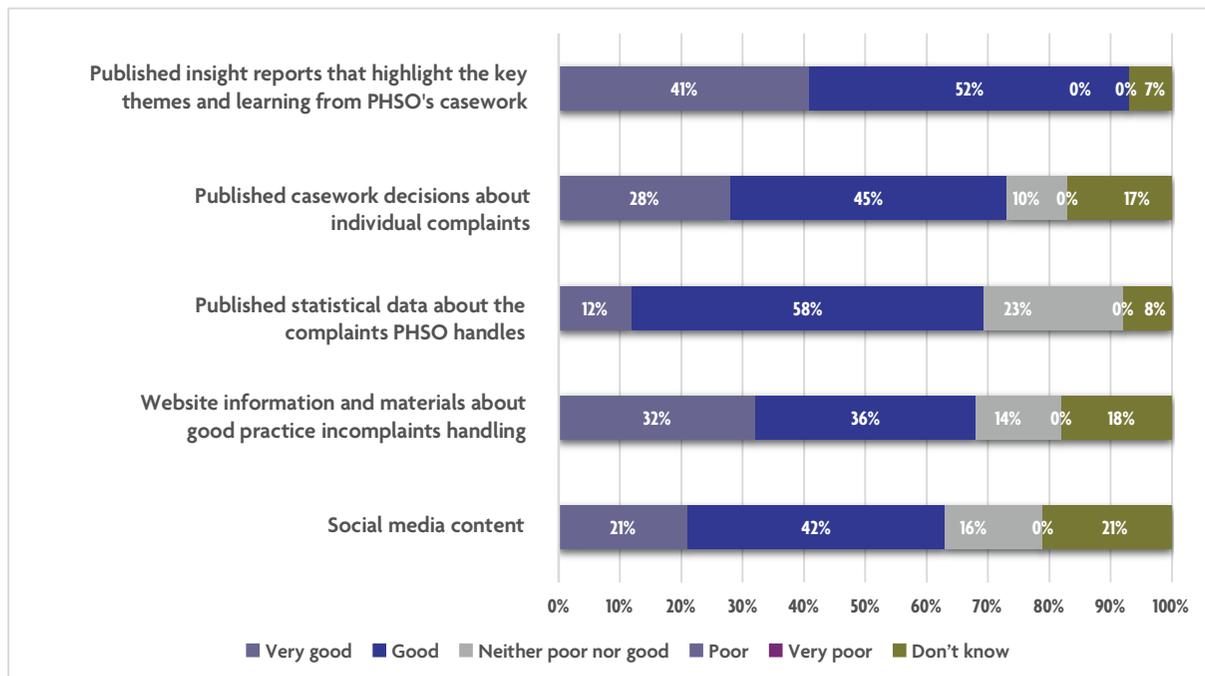
Figure 21: Which of the following PHSO outputs and publications are you aware of?



Source: PHSO external stakeholder survey 2021

Our insight reports were rated highest amongst these outputs/publications; 93% of stakeholders rated them as good or very good.

Figure 22: How would you rate the following PHSO outputs and publications?

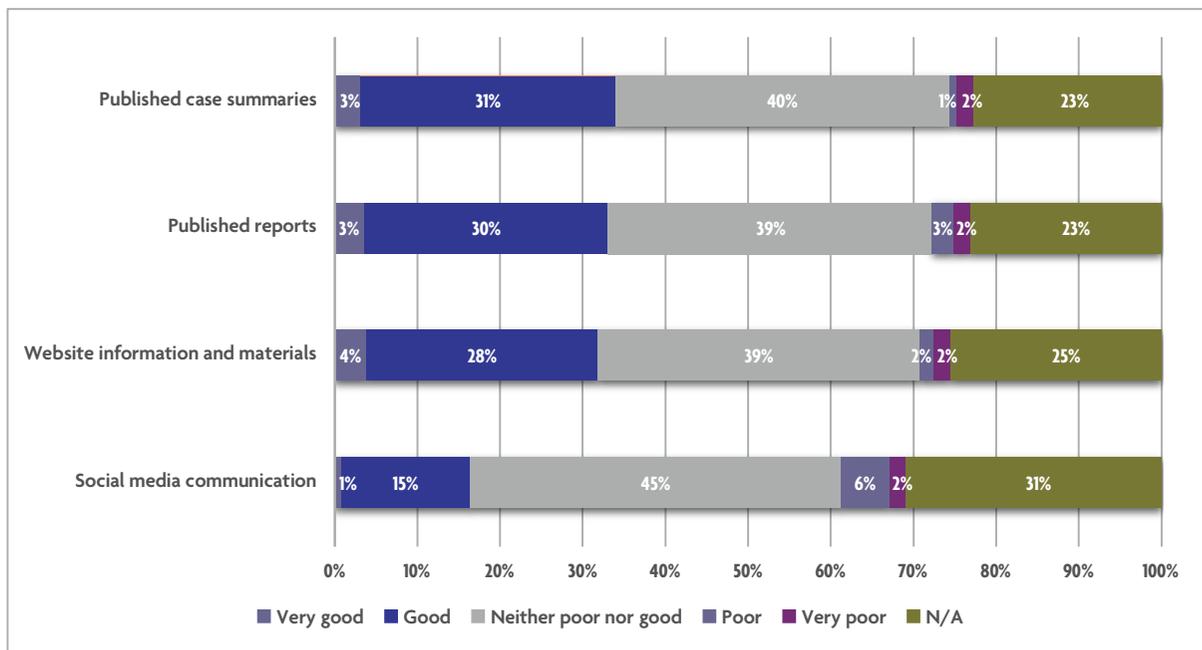


Source: PHSO external stakeholder survey 2021

We also asked MPs for their opinion on a range of our publications and outputs.

As figure 24 below indicates, published case summaries were the highest rated (34%) followed by published reports (33%) and website information/materials (32%).

Figure 23: How would you rate the following PHSO outputs?



Source: PHSO MP survey 2021

In line with other feedback, Labour MPs rated PHSO's published work more highly than Conservative MPs.

- 51% of Labour MPs rated PHSO's published reports as good compared to 24% of Conservative MPs
- 53% of Labour MPs rated PHSO's published case summaries as good compared to 24% of Conservative MPs
- 45% of Labour MPs rated PHSO's website information and materials as good compared to 24% of Conservative MPs
- 33% of Labour MPs rated PHSO's social media communication as good compared to 4% of Conservative MPs (51% of Conservative MPs responded neither poor nor good for this question)

When asked how they felt PHSO could have more of an impact working with others to improve public services MPs also thought that wider publicity, along with extended powers and a streamlining of the complaints process could help PHSO have more of an impact:

- Provide better information to the public about its role; proactively promote its work. People who my office forwards to the PHSO do not always know it exists.
- I suspect public awareness of their work is low. Higher awareness would increase their influence.

- Be cleared of the chain of escalating complaints - use each level first before progressing, unclear what an MP's role / value added is in the process.
- Working with other organisations at complaint level so they don't have to be escalated.

5.4 PHSO's Complaint Standards

Key messages

- The majority of PHSO's external stakeholders are aware of, and support the aims of the Complaint Standards but less than half believe they will help improve complaint handling

We asked stakeholders who are part of or connected to the NHS about their perceptions of PHSO's Complaint Standards:

- Two thirds of these stakeholders (67%) stated they were aware of the Complaint Standards and supported the aims of PHSO's Complaint Standards for NHS organisations
- 60% agreed that the Complaint Standards clearly explain what organisations and individuals can expect from the NHS when it looks into a complaint
- Just under half (47%) agreed that PHSO's Complaint Standards for NHS Organisations will help improve complaint handling

Qualitative feedback from stakeholders about the Complaint Standards was extremely positive:

- They have taken the lead on the complaints standard framework which was needed by health care system and they have stepped up and taken leadership and done really good work to bring people together.
- Interactions with the PHSO as part of the Complaints Standards Framework Working Group have been constructive. We share a desire to ensure that patient concerns are dealt with by the right people at the right time at the right tier of the health service.
- We have had positive engagement with the PHSO, particularly around the complaints standards framework.

Given the clear support for the Complaint Standards and its aims, the results indicate that implementing the Complaint Standards to ensure they improve Complaint Standards across the NHS will be a key challenge for PHSO.

Qualitative feedback from the survey also indicated that stakeholders would welcome an impact report outlining how Complaints Standards have improved how complaints are handled, and for the findings from the report to be shared and communicated to stakeholders.

Section 6: MP feedback – PHSO reform

Key messages

- Around half of MPs support legislative reform of PHSO's role and powers
- Labour MPs are more supportive of legislative reform of PHSO's role and powers than Conservative MPs

6.1 Legislative reforms

Qualitative feedback from the Stakeholder survey indicated support for reform to PHSO's powers. When asked how PHSO could have greater impact on public services, qualitative responses included:

- Existence of MP filter severely limits PHSO's ability to improve public services by acting as a deterrent to complainants. It has reached the stage where PHSO need to more aggressively pursue approaches to nullify it e.g. proactively approach MPs to ask for referrals if issues raised in Parliament / the press are not reflected in their casework (i.e. Windrush etc); identify an MP who is willing to have their signature added as a default to every compliant submitted online; or simply ignore the need for an MP referral entirely...
- It deserves to have own initiative powers
- By having more powers and having legislation that makes them more accessible

Qualitative feedback from PHSO's MP survey also indicated support for reform to PHSO's powers:

- I think the PHSO needs to have stronger legislative powers to hold gov to account.
- They (expanded powers) could include the whistleblowing services that currently no-one knows about, like the national guardians.
- ... self referral for constituents would be good.

PHSO's MP survey asked respondent whether they would support legislative reforms to PHSO's role and powers. The results indicated that just under half of MPs would support reforms for PHSO to be given Complaint Standards Authority (CSA) power and to launch 'own initiative' investigations, while half would support removal of the MP filter for parliamentary complaints:

- 46% of MPs support PHSO being given statutory responsibility to become a Complaint Standards Authority (10% were opposed, 43% stated 'Don't know')
- 48% of MPs would support reform for PHSO to launch 'own initiative' investigations (21% opposed, 31% stated 'Don't know')
- 50% of MPs support reform to allow constituents to complain directly to the PHSO about government departments and agencies (26% were opposed, 24% stated 'Don't know')

Just under half of MPs stated 'Don't know' when asked about CSA powers, a higher proportion than for the two other questions regarding legislative reform of PHSO's role and powers. However those that did respond were mainly supportive of proposals, suggesting that MPs may lack awareness and require more information on the issue of CSA powers.

6.2 Analysis of MP feedback

Further demographic analysis of MPs responses also highlighted that Labour MPs are more supportive of PHSO reform than Conservative MPs, particularly on the issue of Complaint Standard Authority powers:

- 70% of Labour MPs would support PHSO being given statutory responsibility to become a Complaint Standards Authority, compared to 34% of Conservative MPs
- 65% of Labour MPs would support reform for PHSO to launch 'own initiative' investigations compared to 35% of Conservative MPs
- 58% of Labour MPs would support reform to allow constituents to complain directly to the PHSO about government departments and agencies compared to 42% of Conservative MPs

Female MPs are also more supportive of PHSO reform than male MPs on the issue of Complaint Standard Authority powers

- 63% of female MPs would support PHSO becoming a Complaint Standards Authority, compared to 38% of male MPs.
- 52% of female MPs would support reform for PHSO to launch 'own initiative' investigations compared to 46% of male MPs
- 60% of female MPs would support reform to allow constituents to complain directly to the PHSO about government departments and agencies compared to 45% of male MPs

Appendix one

PHSO stakeholder survey 2021 – list of responding organisations

The table below indicates which area/sector type the 36 responding organisations belong to.

PHSO external stakeholder survey 2021, responding organisations

Organisation sector	Number of respondents
Advocacy group or charity	8
Regulator or Non-Departmental Public Body	8
Professional and/or membership organisation	7
Government Department or Agency	5
Ombuds organisation	4
Academic, Policy or other organisation	3
Other	1
Total	36

A number of participants also stated they were happy for their responses to be attributed to their organisation when provided to PHSO. These were:

- Academy of Medical Royal Colleges
- Driver & Vehicle Licensing Agency
- General Dental Council
- Health Watch
- International Ombudsman Institute
- NHS Resolution
- Ombudsman Association
- Public Services Ombudsman for Wales
- Student Loans Company
- The Cabinet Office
- UK Sepsis Trust

Parliamentary and Health Service
Ombudsman

Citygate
Mosley Street
Manchester
M2 3HQ
United Kingdom

Telephone: 0345 015 4033

Textphone: 0300 061 4298

Fax: 0300 061 4000

Email: phso.enquiries@ombudsman.org.uk

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