

# Complainant Feedback Survey 2015-16

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# 1. Executive summary

## Background

Throughout the year we ask people who have complained to us about the NHS in England, a government department or another public organisation to tell us about their experience of using our service<sup>1</sup>.

We used an independent research organisation, IFF Research, to gather this feedback through a survey. IFF Research surveyed people 3-8 weeks after their contact with us had finished. This report outlines the findings of this survey.

The survey covers the period from April 2015 to March 2016. Where appropriate, comparisons are made with the findings of the 2014-15 and 2013-14 surveys.

The survey gathers feedback on a number of areas, including:

- Overall satisfaction with customer service and outcome.
- Views on our complaint handling process, understanding of our role and perceptions of our staff.
- Making recommendations and showing impact.

Not all the issues that people contact us about are complaints that we can investigate. For example, many people contact us before they have complained to the organisation they are unhappy with, but we can give them advice on how to go about making a complaint. More information about how we deal with complaints, and the different steps in our process, is available on our website<sup>2</sup>.

In 2015-16, IFF Research surveyed 2,158 people who had used our service: of those, 902 people were those whose complaints we had investigated, and 1,256 people were those whose contact with us did not result in an investigation.

## Overall satisfaction with our customer service

We ask people to give us an overall indication of how satisfied they are with the customer service we provide. We ask people to try to do this independently of any decision we make regarding their complaint.

We have a three-step process for looking into complaints. In 2015-16, the survey found that 65% of people whose complaints we did not investigate and whose

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<sup>1</sup> We were set up by Parliament to provide an independent and partial complaint handling service. We make final decisions on complaints that have not yet been resolved by the NHS in England and UK government departments and other public organisations. For further details about our role and processes, please see our most recent [annual report](#).

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ombudsman.org.uk/>.

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complaints were closed at step one in our process<sup>3</sup> were satisfied<sup>4</sup> overall with our service, this compared to 70% in 2014-15.

Among those whose complaints we did not investigate and whose complaints were closed at step two in our process, following a more detailed assessment of their complaint, 53% were satisfied overall with our service, this compared to 51% in 2014-15.

58% of people whose complaints we investigated (step three in our process) were satisfied with our customer service. Although we ask people to indicate their level of satisfaction independently of the decision we made on their complaint, satisfaction with our service appears to be linked to the result of their complaint to us:

- among people whose complaints we agreed with (upheld), 92% were satisfied with our service;
- among people whose complaints we agreed with in part (partly upheld), 69% were satisfied with our service; and
- among people whose complaints we did not agree with (not upheld), 41% were satisfied with our service.

There has been a small decline with satisfaction with our service among those whose complaints we did not uphold, down from 49% in 2014-15. Among those whose complaints we fully upheld or did not uphold, overall satisfaction has remained comparable to the previous year.

### **Overall satisfaction with outcome**

We also ask people to indicate their overall satisfaction with the outcome of their complaint to us.

Among people whose complaints we closed at step one, 36% said they were satisfied with the outcome of their complaint.

Among those whose complaints we closed at step two, 32% were satisfied with the outcome of their complaint.

Among people whose complaints we investigated, a quarter (26%) overall were satisfied with the outcome. Again this appears to be linked to the decision we reached:

- among people whose complaints we upheld, 84% were satisfied with the outcome;

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<sup>3</sup> A full explanation of our complaint handling process can be found in section 2 of this report.

<sup>4</sup> Note that 'satisfied' is a combined measure of people who answered 'very satisfied' and 'fairly satisfied'. This applies throughout the report.

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- among people whose complaints we partly upheld, 38% were satisfied with the outcome; and
  - among people whose complaints we did not uphold, 3% were satisfied with the outcome.

Satisfaction with outcome has increased from 30% since 2014-15 among those whose complaints we partly upheld while it has declined slightly from 7% among those whose complaints we did not uphold.

### **Accessing our service and contact with our staff**

Around two thirds (68%) of all our complainants agreed that our complaints process was easy to understand. Slightly higher proportions - almost three quarters of complainants - agreed that when they first got in touch with us, staff clearly explained our complaints process (73%) and what we can and can't do (74%).

The majority of people were also largely positive about the contact they had with our staff. Among those whose complaints we closed at step one, 88% agreed that our staff were polite and considerate, there was a similar level of agreement among those whose complaints we closed at step two and step three (84% for both groups).

Among people whose complaints we closed at step one, there was also a high level of agreement that staff were 'professional' (85%) and 'easy to get hold off' (80%). While the majority of people whose complaints were closed at step two also agreed with each of these statements, levels of agreement were slightly lower (71% and 62%). This was true among people whose complaints were closed following an investigation (75% and 72%).

Across all groups, there were lower levels of agreement that our staff had kept them informed and updated (step one: 47%; step two: 54%; step 3: 69%). There were also lower levels of agreement that our staff had fully understood their complaint, particularly among those whose complaints were closed at step two and step three (step one - 71%, step two - 55%, step 3 - 58%). Among those whose complaints were closed following an investigation (step three), agreement that our staff had fully understood the complaint appeared linked to the decision we had made:

- for those whose complaints we fully upheld, agreement was 87%;
- partly upheld - 62%; and
- not upheld - 37%.

Among those whose complaints we fully upheld, 82% had confidence in the system handling their complaint and 89% said our final report made them feel the decision followed an independent fair and unbiased assessment of their complaint. Among those whose complaints we partly upheld, the figures were 63% and 46% respectively. Finally, among those whose complaints we didn't uphold, the figures were 36% and 15%.

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## **Making recommendations and demonstrating impact**

60% of the people whose complaints we investigated and fully or partly upheld were satisfied with the recommendations we made, which is similar to the results of our 2014-15 survey.

39% were confident that our investigation would result in things being put right by the organisation they had complained about. This was also in line with last year's findings.

Among those who thought the investigation would not or had not made a difference, the reasons most commonly given for this were thinking that they hadn't had a proper investigation (32%), or because the organisation's services were still not up to standard (27%). Others said that this was because they had no confidence in the organisation complained about implementing changes (24%).

Among people who thought the investigation would or had already made a difference, two thirds (66%) believed that the organisation's services would be or had already been improved.

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## What is working well?

In summary those areas of our service that complainants tell us are working well are as follows:

- The majority of our complainants continue to agree we are clearly explaining our role, and our complaints process, with the majority of our complainants finding our complaints process easier to understand.
- Most complainants were happy with the communication they had with our office, and there continues to be an overall feeling that our staff are easy to get hold of.
- It is also particularly positive that the majority of those who use our service say they find our staff polite and considerate, professional, and helpful and approachable. This is an area of our service that has remained particularly well regarded by complainants over the course of 2014-15 and 2015-16.

## What do we need to focus on?

The research has highlighted a number of areas our complainants are concerned about:

- A significant proportion of our complainants feel that their cases are taking too long. This was particularly true of those whose cases we closed at step two in our process, where 56% felt it took longer than expected to handle their complaints.
- Despite our complaints process being understood by a majority of our complainants, it is still the case that many complainants tell us they would like greater clarity on the decisions we have made, particularly where we do not investigate or do not uphold people's complaints. Similarly, although the vast majority of our complainants agree our reports and decision letters are easy to understand, a significant number of complainants failed to agree that our decision letters dealt with the important aspects of their complaint, and provided evidence to support decisions. Again, this view was more prevalent among those whose complaints we did not uphold.
- In those instances where we have upheld people's complaints and made recommendations for the organisation's concerned, despite the majority of complainants being satisfied with our recommendations, less than half were confident that our investigation would result in things being put right. This was often a result of complainants having little confidence that organisations were capable of implementing our recommendations.

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## What have we done with the feedback we receive?

This survey covers the period from April 2015 to March 2016.

In autumn 2015 we started to introduce significant changes to the service we offer, through the implementation of a new service model. This sets out the specific process we follow for each complaint brought to us. Following this, in July 2016 we launched our Service Charter<sup>5</sup>, which sets out what people can expect from our service when they bring their complaint to us. The feedback from our complainants, collected through our survey, has been crucial in helping us to develop both of these.

Following feedback from our complainants, our new service model has an increased emphasis on keeping people updated throughout the complaints process, with a focus on keeping people informed of the emerging findings of our investigations. We have revised our report, letter and email templates to improve their accessibility and make them easier to understand. We have also produced a series of straightforward guides that explain our role and our complaint handling process. This was in direct response to feedback that showed how some complainants struggled to understand our role.

We have invested greater resources in the assessment part of our complaints process in order to reduce the amount of time it takes us to reach a decision on people's complaints.

From autumn 2016, we significantly changed the way we gathered complainant feedback. Future measures of customer satisfaction will reflect the commitments in the Service Charter and allow us, through measurement at different stages of an investigation rather than only at the end, to better understand the reasons why perceptions of our service might have changed.

We have started to survey complainants while their investigation is taking place. This means that we'll be gathering feedback in 'real time', and we will be able to understand how complainants' feedback changes at different points in our process. We believe this will make our complainant feedback survey even more valuable as a tool that helps us to improve our service.

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<sup>5</sup> [www.ombudsman.org.uk/about-us/our-service-charter#Our%20Service%20Charter](http://www.ombudsman.org.uk/about-us/our-service-charter#Our%20Service%20Charter).



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## 2. Introduction

This report sets out the results of our Complainant feedback survey for the year 2015-16. Throughout the year we undertook an independent survey of people who used our service to understand their attitudes towards, and experiences of, our service. This is part of our commitment to continually develop and improve our service.

The insight from this survey has also helped us develop our service model and Service Charter. Our Charter sets out what people can expect from our service when they bring a complaint to us. Our service model sets out the specific process we follow for each complaint brought to us.

### **Our complaints process**

The complainant feedback survey was undertaken with a sample of people who used our service in 2015-16. People who come to us with their complaints experience our service in different ways, depending on the level of contact they have with us. The following table explains how we deal with complaints, and shows the various stages at which people's contact with us may come to an end. This is the point at which we asked people to take part in the survey.

The range of questions we asked people as part of our survey varied, depending on the level of contact we had with them.

## Step 1. Accessing our service - initial checks

- **At the first step we carry out some initial checks to see if the complaint is one we can look into; if it is not, we give people information on what they can do next.**
- We usually expect people to try to get their problem resolved by the organisation they are unhappy with before we become involved. Many people who contact us haven't done this, but we can help them get started by telling them who to complain to and giving details of advocacy organisations that can help people make complaints.

## Step 2. Deciding whether to investigate - assessment

- **At the second step we take a closer look and decide if we should investigate it.**
- We look at several things, including:
  - when the person complained to us (or to an MP, if about a government department),
  - whether they have the option of taking legal action instead, and
  - whether there are signs that the organisation complained about potentially got things wrong that have had a negative effect that hasn't been put right.

If we decide not to investigate, we will explain why.

## Step 3. Investigation

- **At the third step we make a final decision on the complaint following an investigation.**
- At the start of our investigations we discuss the scope of what we are going to look at with the person who made the complaint. We gather relevant information from them and the organisation the complaint is about. Sometimes we take specialist advice from doctors and other professionals who are not connected to the organisation we are looking into. We compare what happened with what should have happened, and we look at how that has affected the person concerned so that we can make a final decision on the complaint. If we find that the organisation didn't act correctly and it hasn't already resolved this, we can make recommendations on how it can put things right.

## Survey methodology and interpretation

A ‘complainant’ is the term we use to describe someone who uses our service. The following table sets out the different types of complainant and the numbers for each type who contacted us in 2015-16. It highlights how many of these complainants we surveyed, and presents a measure of how representative our results are of all of those who complained (known as a ‘confidence interval’<sup>1</sup>).

Type of complaint	Total numbers	Total interviewed	Confidence interval*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>People whose complaints we didn’t investigate:</b> This includes both those whose complaints were closed following our <i>initial checks</i> (step 1) and those whose complaints were closed following our <i>assessment</i> (step 2). </li> </ul>	25,517 of which:	1,256 of which:	+/-2.7%
	Initial checks: 21,330	Initial checks: 981	+/- 3.1%
	Assessment: 4,187	Assessment: 275	+/-5.9%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>People whose complaints we investigated</b> </li> </ul>	3,861	902	+/-2.9%

\*Based on a findings of 50% at the 95% confidence level.

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<sup>1</sup> The confidence interval indicates the maximum amount of variance we can expect for each response to the survey, given the number of complainants we sampled. For instance, a confidence interval of 2.9% means that for a question where 50% of our sample of complainants answered in a certain way, if we had repeated the survey with a different sample of complainants we would not expect the results to vary by more than plus or minus 2.9 percentage points (that is, 47.1% - 52.9%). The confidence interval gets smaller as the size of the sample being surveyed increases.

The confidence level is a measure of how often we would expect the responses from our sample of complainants to fall within the bounds of our confidence interval. A confidence level of 95%, means that we would expect a question where 50% of respondents answered in a certain way to vary by no more than plus or minus 2.9%, 95% of the time (or 19 times out of 20).

The survey was conducted via telephone interviews with 2,158 complainants. These interviews were undertaken with a random sample of complainants whose contact with us finished in 2015-16. Interviews were conducted using computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) technology. All interviews were done on our behalf by IFF Research, an independent research organisation that invited people to take part in the survey once they had received our final decision on their complaint. People are typically surveyed 3-8 weeks after their contact with us has finished. The interviews took place between 26 May 2015 and 9 May 2016.

The results of our survey are broken down and reported in line with our complaint handling process. Section 3 of this report includes responses from all our complainants; sections 4 and 5 mainly focus on responses from people whose complaints we did not investigate (this includes both those whose complaints we closed after our initial checks, and those whose complaints we closed following our assessment); and section 6 includes only responses from people whose complaints we investigated.

Throughout this report we have used a range of charts to highlight our complainants' responses. The 'base' size for each question is presented underneath the relevant chart. The base size figure represents the number of complainants who responded to that particular question. All base sizes and charts in this report exclude those complainants who responded 'don't know' to a question.

We only comment on changes from year to year where these are statistically significant.

### 3. Overall satisfaction

#### Key findings

- People whose complaints we closed at step one, following our initial checks: satisfaction with our service has declined (70% to 65%, year on year), and satisfaction with outcome has declined (50% to 36%).
- People whose complaints we closed at step two following an assessment: satisfaction with our overall service has remained steady. There has been a significant increase in satisfaction with outcome (16% to 32%).
- People whose complaints we investigated and upheld: satisfaction with our service and with the outcome has remained steady.
- People whose complaints we investigated and partly upheld: satisfaction with our service has remained stable since 2014-15, while satisfaction with outcome has increased significantly (30% to 38%) and is approaching 2013-14 levels (43%), following a decline the previous year.
- People whose complaints we investigated and did not uphold: satisfaction with our service and declined since 2014-15 (49% to 41%), along with satisfaction with outcome (7% to 3%).

We asked all complainants who took part in our survey to indicate their overall satisfaction with the decision we made on their complaint, and also with the level of customer service received.<sup>2</sup>

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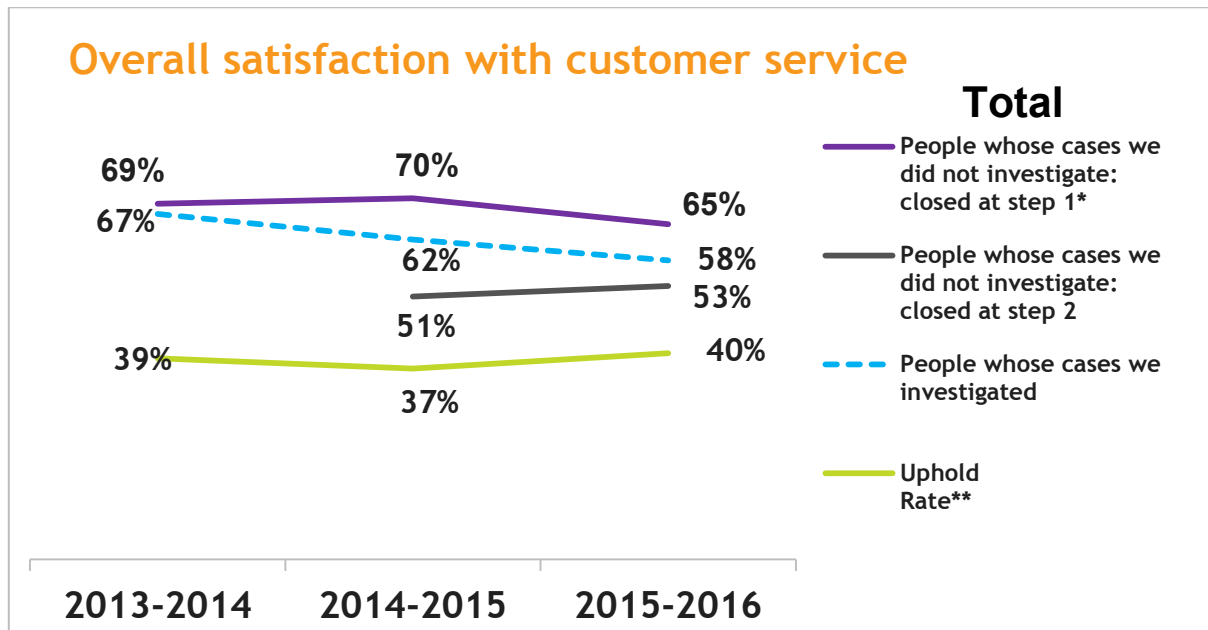
<sup>2</sup> At various points in this report comparisons are made between the 2015-16, 2014-15 and 2013-14 findings. Our processes for investigating complaints changed significantly in 2013-14. Previously we had only formally investigated complaints if we were fairly sure that something had gone wrong and had not yet been put right for the individual concerned; now we investigate if we think that something may have gone wrong. These changes to our service in 2013-14, and a subsequent ten-fold increase in the number of investigations we carried out, means we are unable to draw comparisons with complainant feedback data collected earlier than 2013-14.

## Trends in satisfaction with customer service

Among those whose complaints we closed at step one, satisfaction with customer service has declined slightly, with 65% reporting satisfaction compared to 70% satisfied in previous years.

Satisfaction among those whose complaints we closed at step 2 has remained stable.

Among those whose complaints we did investigate, satisfaction with customer service has remained stable.



Q: Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the level of customer service you received? Are you...<sup>3</sup>

2015-2016 Base: 1,230 people whose complaints we did not investigate, 898 people whose complaints we investigated

2014-2015 Base: 1,066 people whose complaints we did not investigate, 891 people whose complaints we investigated

2013-2014 Base: 2,350 people whose complaints we did not investigate, 738 people whose complaints we investigated

\*The 2013-14 survey did not separate out step 1 and step 2 complainants

\*\*This is the average uphold rate for people whose complaints we investigated (including both partly or fully upheld)

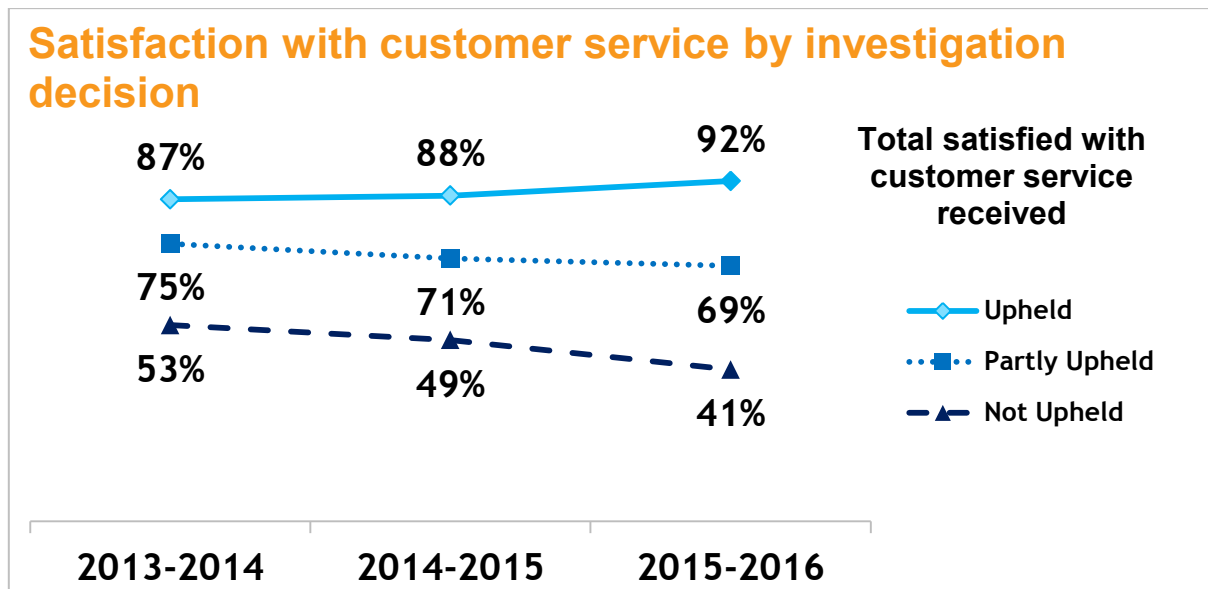
<sup>3</sup> The wording of this question in 2015-16 has altered slightly from 2014-15 and previous years, from "Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the complainant service you received?"

The following chart demonstrates year on year change in satisfaction with customer service for people whose complaints we did investigate, broken down by investigation outcome.

Overall satisfaction with customer service has continued to remain steady for those individuals whose complaints we upheld, with around nine in ten (92%) stating that they were satisfied with our service overall, a similar proportion to 2013-14 and 2015-16.

Among those whose complaints we investigated and partly upheld, satisfaction with customer service has remained stable at around seven in ten (69%).

There has been a decrease in satisfaction among those individuals whose complaints we investigated and did not uphold (41% in 2015-16 from 49% in 2014-15 and 53% in 2013-14).



Q: Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the level of customer service you received? Are you...<sup>4</sup>

2015-2016 Base: 898 people whose complaints we investigated

2014-2015 Base: 891 people whose complaints we investigated

2013/2014 Base: 738 people whose complaints we investigated

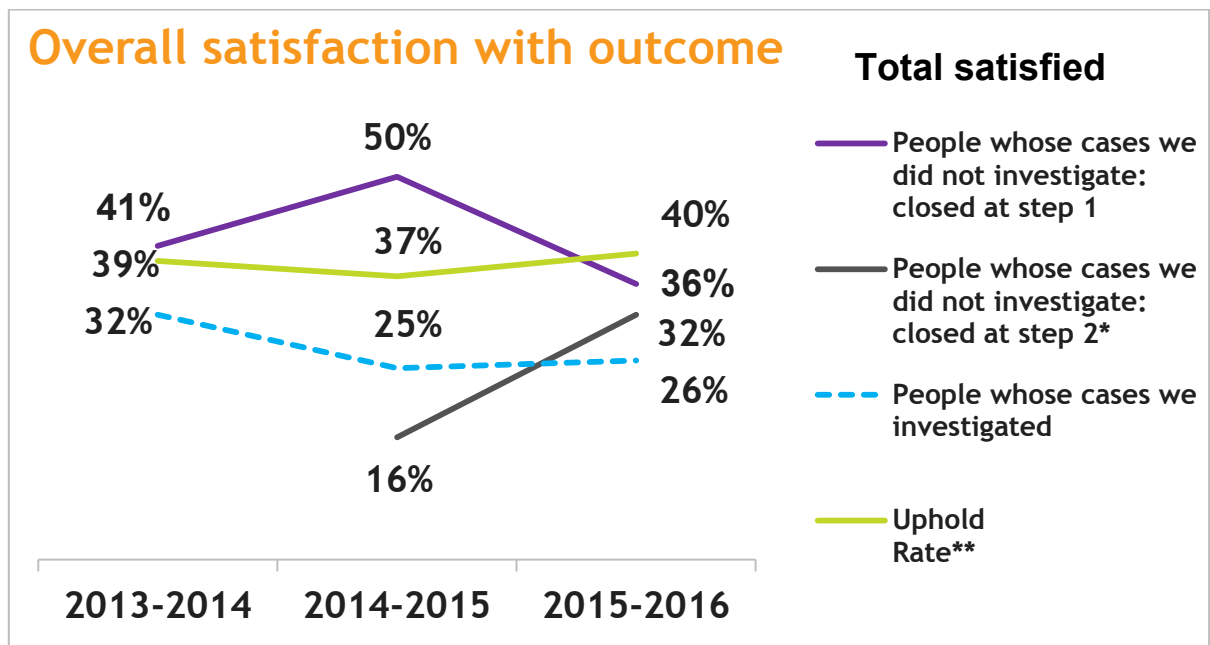
<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

## Trends in satisfaction with outcome

A quarter of those whose complaints we did investigate (26%), a third (36%) of those whose complaints we closed at step one and a third (32%) of individuals whose complaints we closed at step two, reported satisfaction with the outcome of their complaint.

As with satisfaction with service, satisfaction with outcome has declined among people whose complaints we closed at step one, while satisfaction with outcome has increased among those whose complaints we closed at step two.

People whose complaints we investigated were as satisfied with the outcome of their complaint as in 2014/15. Satisfaction levels have remained below the high seen in 2013-14 (which was linked to us upholding a greater proportion of complaints).



*Q. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with this decision - I mean just the final decision, not the overall way in which your complaint was dealt with by the Ombudsman's Office?*

*2015-2016 Base: 360 people whose complaints we did not investigate, 877 people whose complaints we investigated*

*2014-2015 Base: 297 people whose complaints we did not investigate, 854 people whose complaints we investigated*

*2013-2014 Base: 903 people whose complaints we did not investigate, 704 people whose complaints we investigated*

*\*The 2013-14 survey did not separate out step one and step two complainants.*



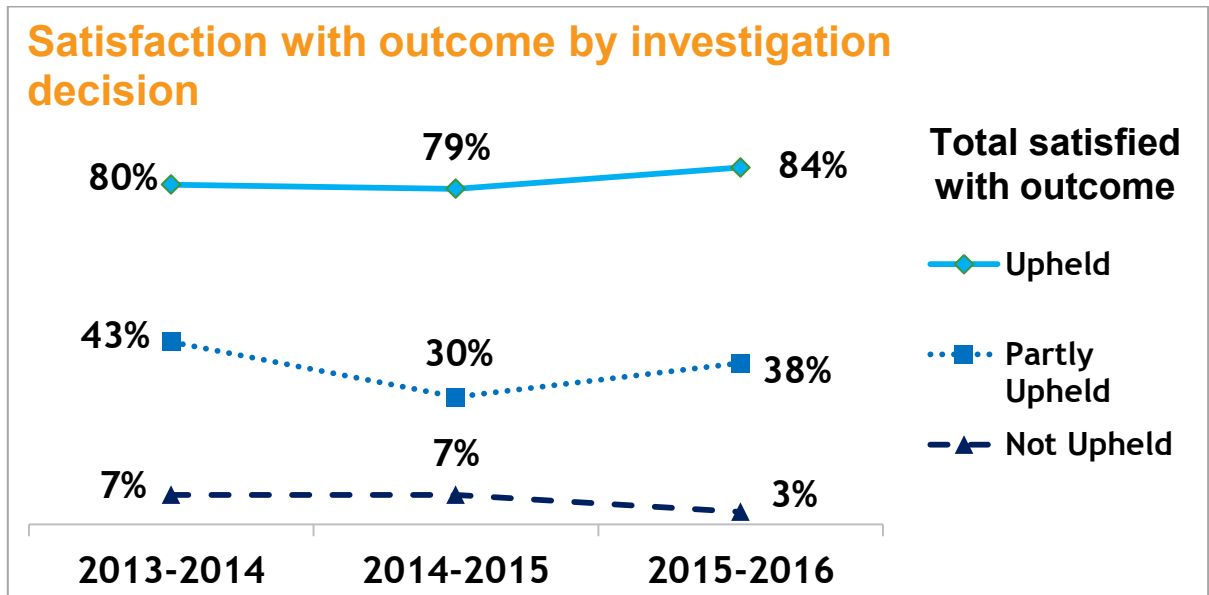
*\*\*This is the average uphold rate for people whose complaints we investigated (including both partly or fully upheld.)*

Between 2013-14 and 2014-15, satisfaction with outcome remained static for those whose complaints were upheld, and those whose complaints were not upheld.

In 2015-16, satisfaction with outcome among those whose complaints were upheld has continued this trend, remaining virtually unchanged at around eight in ten (84%).

There has been a significant increase (30% in 2014-15 to 38% in 2015-16) in satisfaction for those whose complaints were partly upheld, reversing the decline seen in the previous year.

However, among those whose complaints were not upheld there has been a significant decrease in satisfaction with outcome from 7% in 2014-15 and 2013-14, to 3%, as shown in the following chart.



*Q. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with this decision - I mean just the final decision, not the overall way in which your complaint was dealt with by the Ombudsman's Office?*

*2015-2016 Base: 877 people whose complaints we investigated*

*2014-2015 Base: 854 people whose complaints we investigated*

*2013-2014 Base: 704 people whose complaints we investigated*

## 4. First getting in touch

### Key findings

- Three quarters of people whose complaints we did not investigate were happy with the form of communication they had with us.
- Around three quarters of people whose complaints we closed following our initial checks (step one), and also those whose complaints we investigated, agreed our staff gave clear information about what we can and can't do and the complaints process.
- People whose complaints we closed following our assessment (step two) were generally less likely than those whose complaints we closed following our initial checks (step one) or those whose complaints we investigated (step three) to agree that they were given clear information by our staff about our role and the complaints process.
- Similar proportions of people (around two thirds) across all three steps in our process agreed that our complaints process was easy to understand.

This section of the report covers complainants' initial contact with us. Here we explore:

- the extent to which people understand the service we provide;
- whether people feel able to complain in a way that suits them, and how we help people to access our service; and
- the extent to which people feel the complaints process is simple, straightforward, easy to understand and makes sure the complainant understands the process.

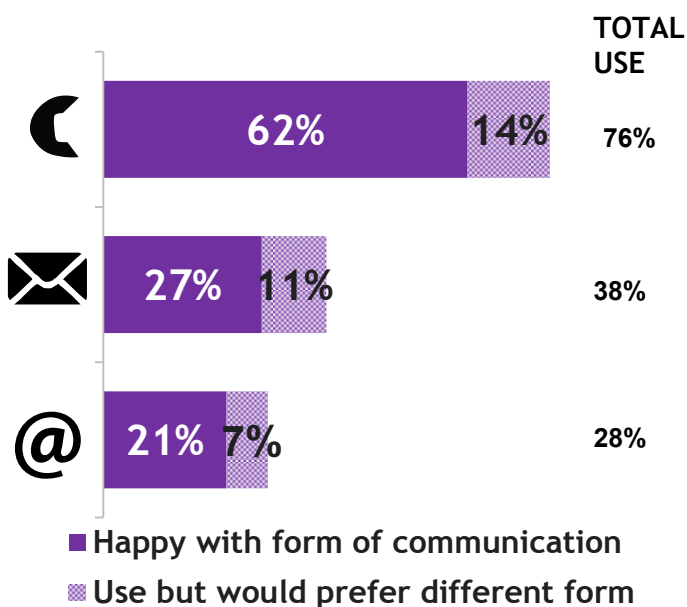
## Meeting complainants' communication preferences

The following chart shows the types of communication complainants whose complaints we did not go on to investigate, experienced when they contacted us in 2015-16.

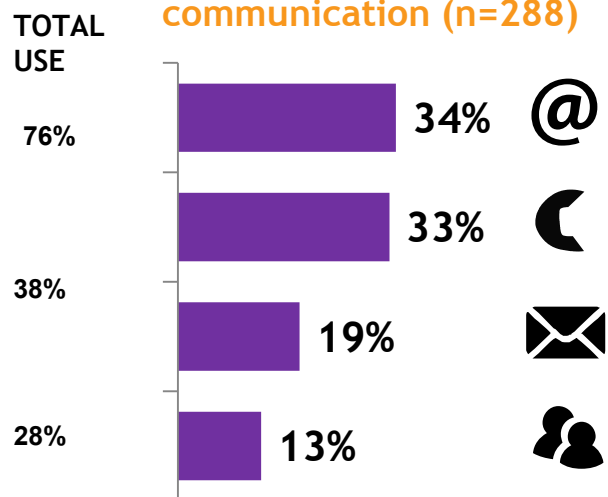
People who communicated with us on more than one occasion while we handled their complaint may have had more than one type of contact with us. We asked people to tell us about all of them.

The chart also shows the proportion of people who were happy with the type of communication we used, and those who would have preferred an alternative form of communication. Where complainants said they would have preferred a different form of communication, we show their preferences.

### Type of communication used



### Preferred communication (n=288)



@ Email     
 ☎ Phone     
 ✉ Letter     
 👤 Face to face

*Q: How did staff at the Ombudsman's office communicate with you? Base: 1,255 people whose complaints we did not investigate*

*Q: Would you have preferred any other form of communication with the Ombudsman's staff? Base: 1,160 people whose complaints we did not investigate*

*Q: How would you have preferred the Ombudsman's staff to communicate with you? Base: 288 people whose complaints we did not investigate*

Three quarters (75%) of all people whose complaints we did not investigate were happy with the form of communication that they had with us, with those communicating by phone (75%) and email (74%) the most satisfied and those communicating by letter least satisfied (69%).

Among those individuals who would have preferred a different form of communication, email (34%) and phone (33%) were the most frequently mentioned.

## Explaining what we do, what to expect, and the information we need

The following table shows complainant levels of agreement with a series of statements about their understanding of our complaints process, and the clarity of information we provide about our service. The results are broken down by complainant type.

	People whose complaints we did not investigate		People whose complaints we investigated
	Closed following initial checks	Closed following assessment	
	Agree	Agree	Agree
When I first contacted the Ombudsman, staff clearly explained what the Ombudsman can and can't do <i>(Base; Initial checks: 921, Assess: 260, Inv: 868)</i>	73%	64%	77%
When I first contacted the Ombudsman, staff clearly explained the complaints process <i>(Base; Initial checks: 905, Assess: 258, Inv: 876)</i>	71%	66%	77%
The complaints process was easy to understand <i>(Base; Initial checks: 906, Assess: 263, Inv: 885)</i>	68%	67%	68%

Overall, the majority of complainants agreed that we gave them clear information about our role and our complaints process when they first got in touch, and that the complaints process was easy to understand.

Around three quarters of people whose complaints were closed following our initial checks, and whose complaints we investigated, agreed that we gave them clear information about what we can and can't do, and about our complaints process when they first got in touch.

Levels of agreement were slightly lower for people whose complaints were closed following assessment. Around two thirds of people in this group agreed that staff clearly explained what we can and can't do and about the complaints process.

On the point of whether the complaints process was easy to understand, levels of agreement were much more similar across all three types of complainants.

## 5. Deciding whether to investigate

### Key findings

- The majority of people whose complaints we closed following our initial checks were positive in most respects about the contact they had with our staff; those whose complaints we closed following assessment were a little less positive.
- People whose complaints we closed following our initial checks were more likely to agree that they had confidence in our process for handling their complaint than those whose complaints we closed following assessment.
- While four fifths of all complainants whose complaint was closed without an investigation agreed that the contact informing them of our final decision was easy to understand, they were much less likely to agree that their final contact with us had explained the reasons behind the decision, dealt with the most important aspects of their complaint or provided evidence to support the decision.
- People whose complaints we closed after our initial checks were significantly more likely to say that they were given advice about how to take their complaint forward, than those whose complaints we closed following an assessment.
- The majority of those who had not received advice about how to take their complaint forward would have liked to have done so.
- Both types of complainants were more likely to say it took longer than expected for us to look into their complaint. For those whose complaints we closed at assessment, the difference was more pronounced, with over half of these complainants feeling it took longer than they expected to handle their complaint. Among both types of complainants around a third felt the time taken to handle their complaint was as expected.

This section of the report is concerned with the stage in our process where we look at the complaint more closely to decide whether a case is one we should investigate.

We explore the extent to which we:

- demonstrate that we fully understand people's complaint;
- offer a polite and professional service;
- explain the reasons behind the decisions we make;

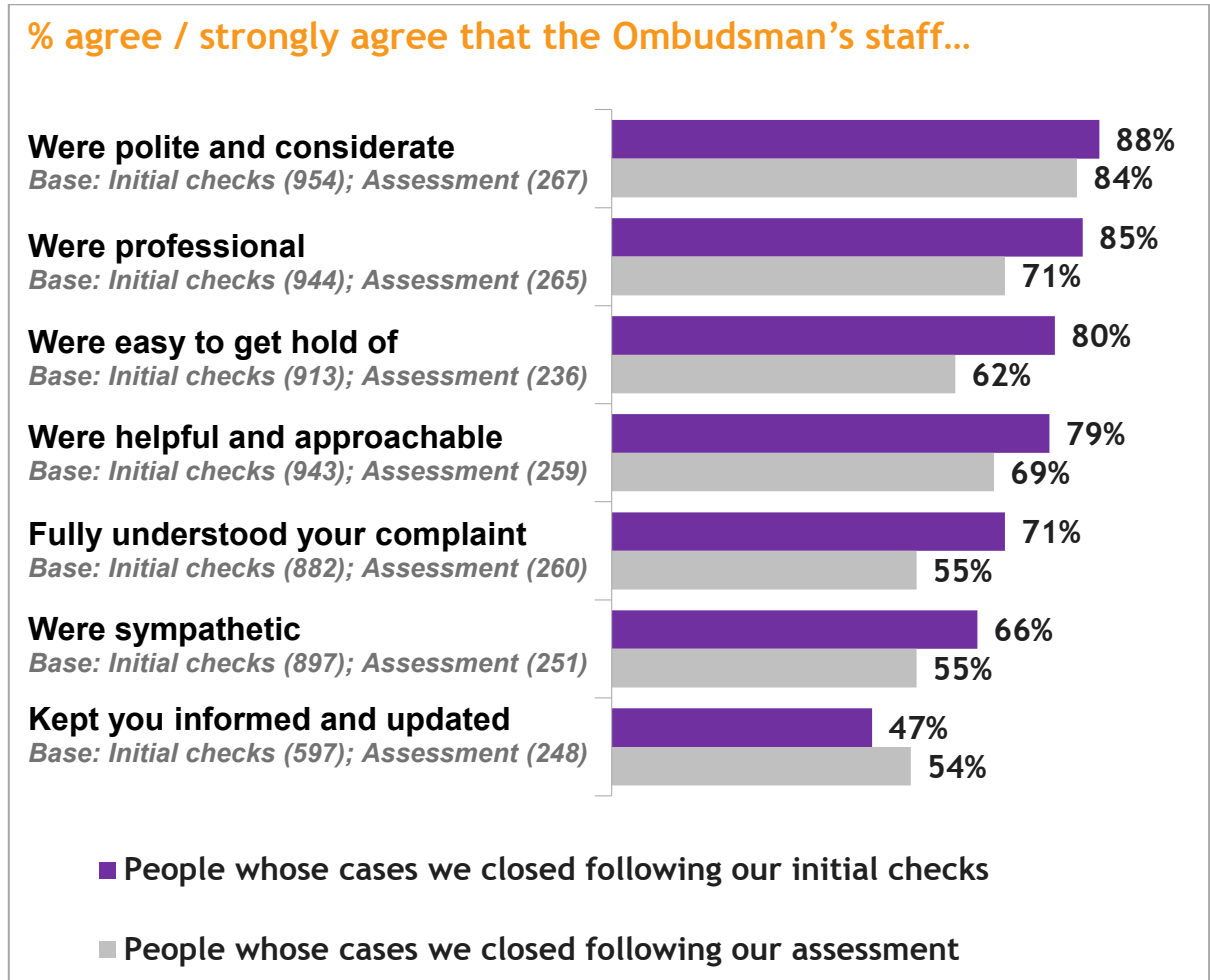
- explain what happens next and provide advice on where to go with the complaint if we are unable to investigate it; and
- offer an efficient service for complainants moving through the assessment process, making sure people are kept updated and given realistic timescales.

Responses in this section are only taken from those whose complaints we did not investigate.



## Views towards our staff

We asked people whose complaints we did not investigate to tell us whether they agreed with a series of statements about the staff they had contact with. The following chart shows their response.



*Q: And how much do you agree or disagree that the Ombudsman's staff you dealt with...?*

*Variable bases, shown in brackets underneath statements.*

Overall, the majority of people whose complaints we did not investigate were, in most respects, positive about their interactions with our staff.

There are differences in the views of those whose complaints were closed following our initial checks, and those whose complaints were closed following our assessment. For all statements but one, a higher proportion of people whose complaints were closed following our initial checks were positive about the contact they had with our staff, compared to those whose complaints were closed following assessment. The latter tended to be slightly less inclined to agree that they had experienced positive contact with staff. The difference in

views between the two complainant types was statistically significant in regard to the perception that our staff were:

- professional;
- easy to get hold of;
- helpful and approachable;
- fully understood the complaint; and
- sympathetic.

Both complainant types demonstrated similar levels of agreement that staff kept them informed and updated. For both complainant types, this statement had the lowest levels of agreement. However, this question is not necessarily relevant to all of those complainants whose complaints we closed following our initial checks, as they may have only had one contact with us.

## Confidence in our service and our impartiality

We asked people whose complaints we did not investigate to tell us how confident they were in the service we provide, and its impartiality. They were more likely to agree they had confidence in the system handling their complaint than to agree that they felt the decision had been reached following an assessment that was independent, fair and unbiased, and thorough.

**% agree/ strongly agree that...**

**I had confidence in the system handling my complaint**

*Base: Initial checks (722), Assessment (256)*



**% agree/ strongly agree that the final contact informing you of the decision**

**made you feel the decision followed an independent, fair and unbiased assessment**

*Base: Initial checks (143), Assessment (173)*



**made you feel that the outcome followed a thorough assessment**

*Base: Initial checks (151), Assessment (169)*



- People whose cases we closed following our initial checks
- People whose cases we closed following assessment

*Q: Thinking back to your contacts with the Ombudsman, how much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?*

*Q: Now I would like to ask you about the contact informing you of the decision to [accept/ reject] your complaint for investigation. How much would you agree or disagree that the contact...?*

*Variable bases, shown in brackets underneath statements.*

Confidence in our complaints system was broadly similar among those whose complaints we closed following our initial checks and those whose complaints we closed following our assessment.

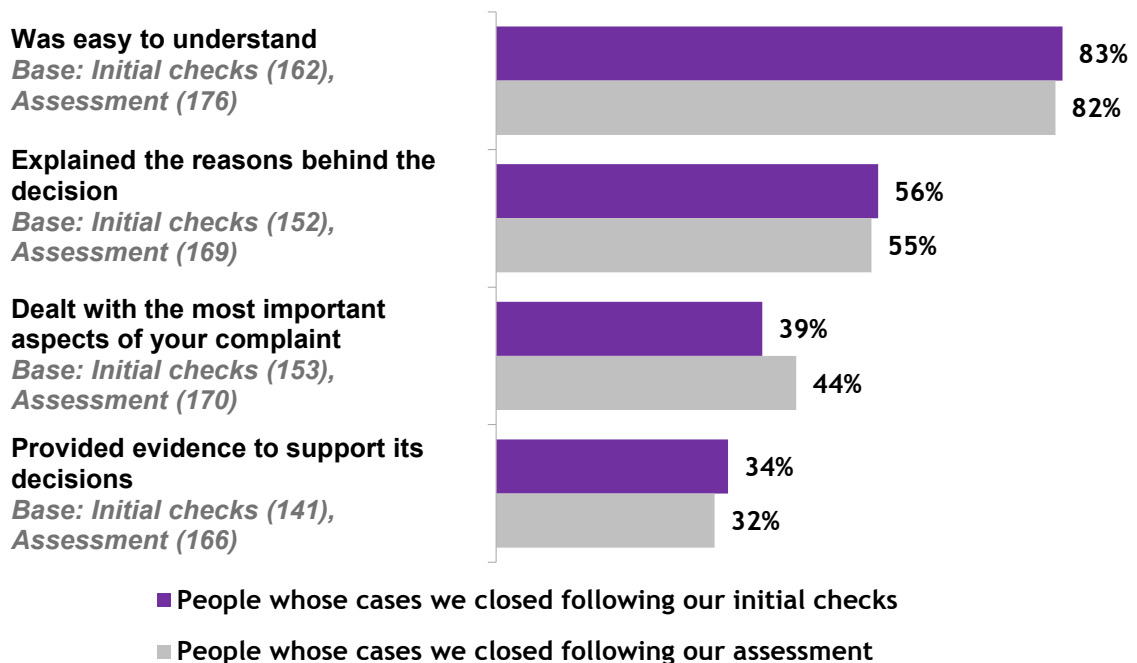
The views of these two types of complainants were also aligned regarding the final contact informing them of the decision of whether or not to investigate their complaint. Similar proportions of those whose complaints were closed following our initial checks and those whose complaints were closed following

assessment felt that this decision was the result of a thorough assessment and one which was independent and fair.

### Satisfaction with the way we told them of our decision not to investigate their complaint

We asked people to tell us how satisfied they were with the way we had communicated our decision not to investigate their complaint. Many complainants did not answer this question as they contacted us for advice on how to complain rather than to lodge a specific complaint with us, therefore the question was not relevant. For those who felt able to answer, the following chart shows their responses.

**% agree / strongly agree that the final contact informing you of the decision...**



*Q: Now I would like to ask you about the contact informing you of the decision to [accept/ reject] your complaint for investigation.*

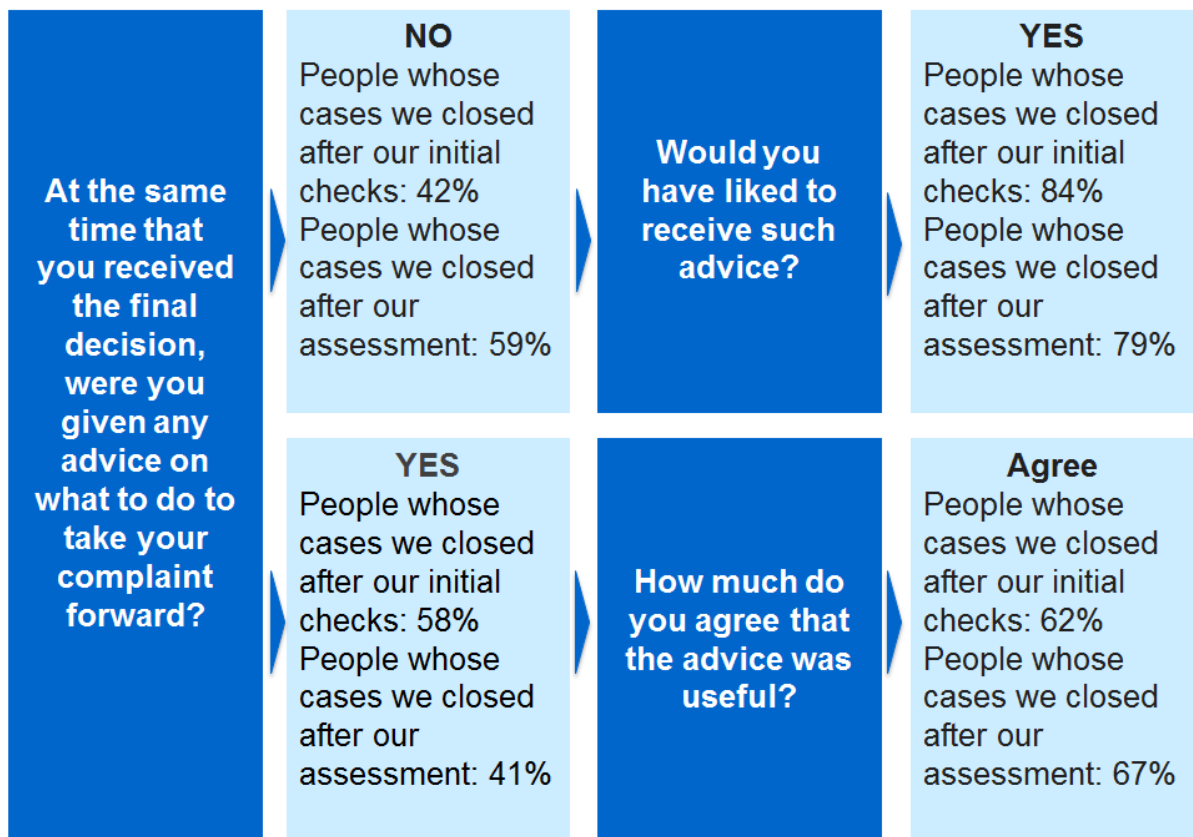
*Variable bases, shown in brackets underneath statements.*

The views of people whose complaints were closed following our initial checks and people whose complaints we closed after assessment were broadly the same, with similar proportions agreeing that their final contact was easy to understand, that in our final communications we had explained the reasons behind the decision, and that we had provided evidence to support the decision.

The highest level of agreement for both types of complainant was that our final communications with them were easy to understand. Both types of complainant were much less likely to agree that their final contact with us had explained the reasons behind the decision, dealt with the most important aspects of their complaint or provided evidence to support the decision.

**Providing advice to those complainants whose complaints we did not investigate**

We asked complainants if they felt we gave them advice about how to take their complaint forward, and if we did give advice, whether they found it useful. The following chart shows their response.



Q: *At the same time that you received the final decision, were you given any advice on what to do to take your complaint forward?*

Base: closed at assessment: 167; closed following initial checks: 204

Q: *Would you have liked to receive such advice?*

Base: closed at assessment: 95; closed following initial checks: 83

Q: *How much do you agree that the advice was useful?*

Base: closed at Assessment: 67, closed following initial checks: 111

People whose complaints we closed after our initial checks were more likely to say that they were given advice about how to take their complaint forward, than those whose complaints we closed following an assessment. Six in ten (58%) of those whose complaints we closed after our initial checks agreed that they had been given advice as to how to proceed, compared with four in ten (41%) of those whose complaints we closed following an assessment. These figures were comparable to those seen in 2014-15. Similar proportions of both types of complainant - around two thirds - agreed that the advice they had received was useful (62% of people whose complaints we closed after our initial checks, and 67% of people whose complaints we closed after our assessment).

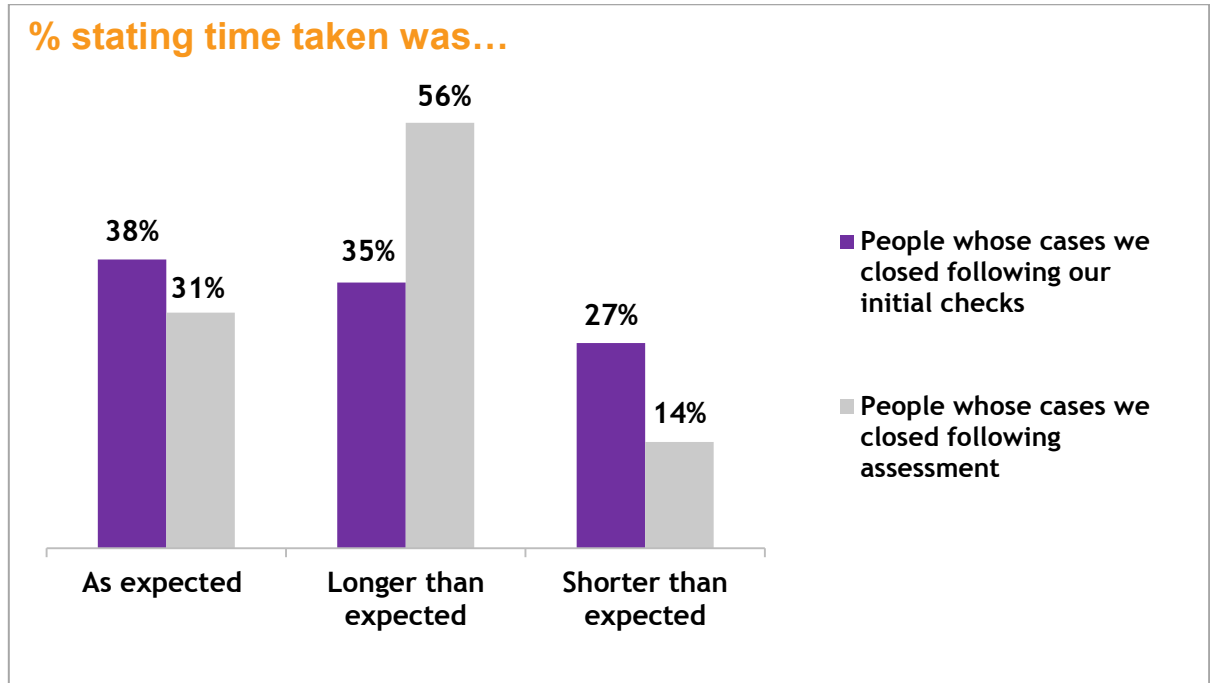
Most of those who had not been given advice would have liked to have received it: 84% of those whose complaints we closed after our initial checks, and 79% of those whose complaints we closed following an assessment, who were not provided with advice, would have liked to have received this.

Complaints we close after our initial checks tend to be closed because there is more that can still be done to resolve the complaint before it is brought to us, and this is normally the fastest way to resolve a complaint. On these occasions we provide advice to people on what they need to do to get their complaint looked at.

However, as we are at the last stage of the complaints process, if we assess a case but do not take it forward for investigation, there may be less advice we can offer on next steps. Assessment complainants who do not go on to have a formal investigation include those individuals complaining about an organisation's service where there has been no indication of injustice, or where there has been a failing, but the complainant has gone through the organisation's complaints system and the injustice has already been put right. In these circumstances, there is nothing further that can be achieved with the complaint.

## Views on the length of time the assessment took

We asked people whose complaints we did not investigate whether the time we took to handle their complaint was longer, shorter or about the same as they initially expected.



*Q: Thinking about the time that was actually taken to deal with your complaint and taking into account any information about timescale that you were provided with by the Ombudsman's Office, would you say that the time taken was...?*

*Base: Initial checks: 217, Assessment: 185*

The time we took to handle their complaint was less than expected for 21% of all people whose complaints we did not investigate. This compares to 31% in 2014-15 who felt that their contact with us was shorter than expected.

A shorter than expected time scale was generally seen positively by those whose complaints we closed following our initial checks, with 54% stating that the short time scale was a good thing, 29% stating that it was a bad thing and 17% feeling that the shorter time scale was neither good nor bad.

People whose complaints we closed following assessment tended to view the shorter-than-expected timescale more neutrally: 38% viewed this as a good thing, whereas 46% viewed this as neither good nor bad.

45% of people whose complaints we did not investigate felt that their complaint took longer than they expected, with those whose complaints we closed following our assessment (56%) significantly more likely to feel this than those whose

complaints we closed following our initial checks (35%). However both groups viewed this similarly negatively, with 70% of those whose complaints we closed following our initial checks, and 76% of those closed following our assessment, seeing this as a bad thing.

35% of those whose complaints we did not investigate felt that the time we took to deal with their complaint was as expected. Just under half considered this to be a good thing (45%) and about half (52%) felt that this was neither good nor bad, with no statistical differences between those whose complaints we closed following our initial checks and those whose complaints we closed after assessment.



## 6. Investigation

An investigation is the final step in our complaints process. The following section refers only to responses from people whose complaints we investigated.

We completed 3,861 investigations in 2015-16, compared with 4,159 investigations in 2014-15. Of these, 676 (17.5%) were about UK government departments and some other UK public service organisations, and 3,185 (82.5%) were about the NHS in England.

We have broken down this section into three main parts to reflect the structure of our investigation process. These are:

- Part 1 - Communication with complainants about the process;
- Part 2 - Communicating our final decision; and
- Part 3 - Demonstrating the impact of our decisions.

## Our communication

### Key findings

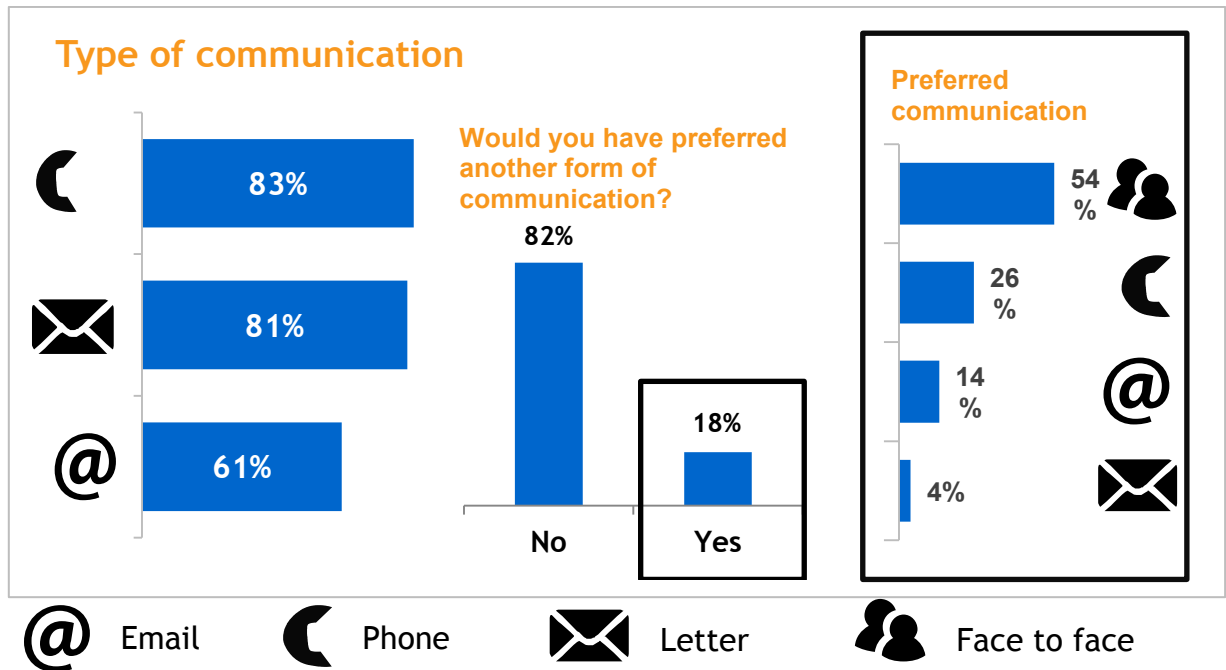
- The majority of people whose complaints we investigated agreed we communicated with them in the way that they preferred.
- People whose complaints we investigated were largely positive about their contact with our staff. In particular they felt our staff were polite, considerate, professional, helpful and approachable. However, just under half disagreed that the staff they dealt with had fully understood their complaint, and just over two fifths disagreed that our staff had been sympathetic.
- We sent most complainants information in writing via letter or email before we sent them our final decision. Most customers thought this communication from us was easy to understand.
- Two thirds of complainants told us that our investigation of their complaint had taken longer than expected to complete, and people tended to view this negatively. Investigations that were shorter than expected were equally likely to be viewed as a good or a bad thing. Although individuals were significantly more likely to view a short investigation negatively if their complaint was not upheld, most often because they interpreted the short investigation as a sign it had not been dealt with thoroughly.

This section also explores how we communicate with people whose complaints we investigated. This includes:

- making sure we communicate with people whose complaints we investigated in the way they would prefer;
- showing that we fully understand people's complaint;
- offering a polite and professional service;
- giving an indication of how long things will take;
- maintaining regular communication; and
- investigating sensibly with a full understanding of the issues.

## How people communicated with us

We asked people to indicate all the various types of communication they had with us over the course of their investigation. The following chart shows the types of communication complainants whose complaints we investigated had with us. It also shows the proportion of people who were happy with the type of communication from us, and those who would have preferred an alternative type of communication. Where complainants said they would have preferred a different type of communication, we show their preferences.



Q: How did staff at the Ombudsman's office communicate with you?

Base: 902 people whose complaints we investigated

Q: Would you have preferred any other form of communication with the Ombudsman's staff?

Base: 898 people whose complaints we investigated.

Q: How would you have preferred the Ombudsman's staff to communicate with you?

Base: 159 people whose complaints we investigated.

Most people were contacted by telephone (83%) and/or letter (81%), with almost two thirds contacted by email (61%).

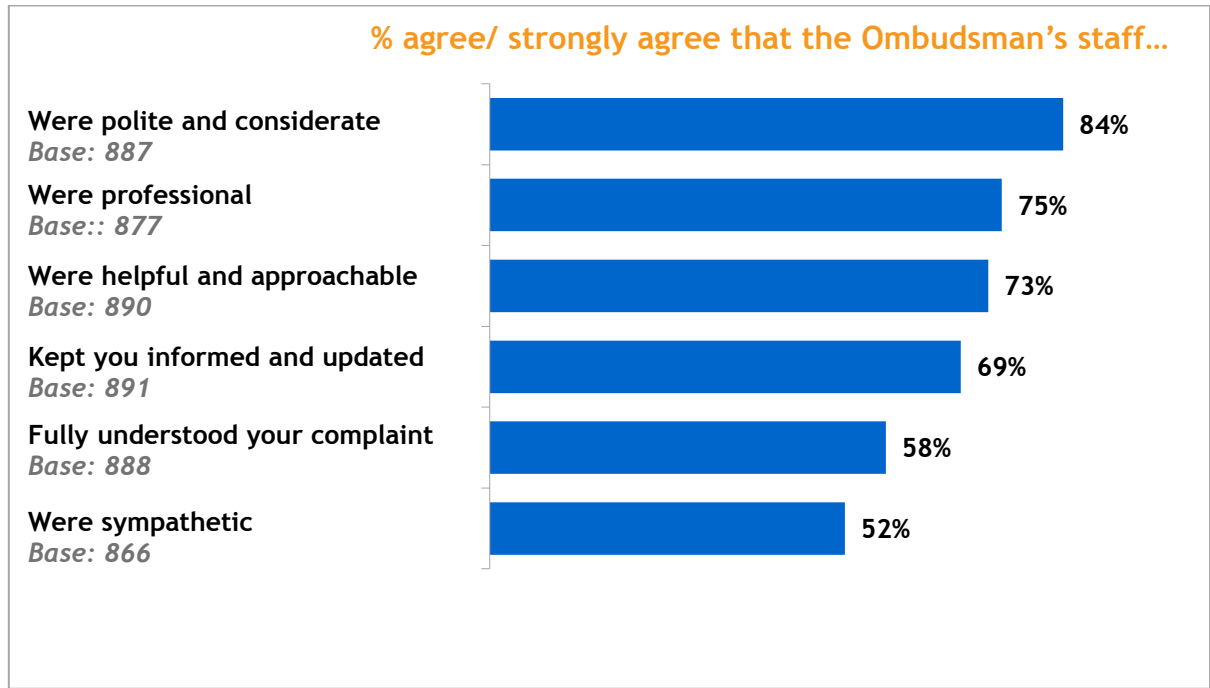
The majority (82%) of complainants felt we communicated with them in the way that they preferred. Of those who preferred we communicate with them in a different way, over half said they would have preferred face to face communication (54%) and a quarter preferred we communicate with them via

telephone (26%). Only small proportions said they would rather be contacted via email (14%) or letter (4%).

## Views on their contact with our staff

We asked people to tell us the extent to which they agreed with a series of statements about our staff who they had contact with.

The following chart shows their response.



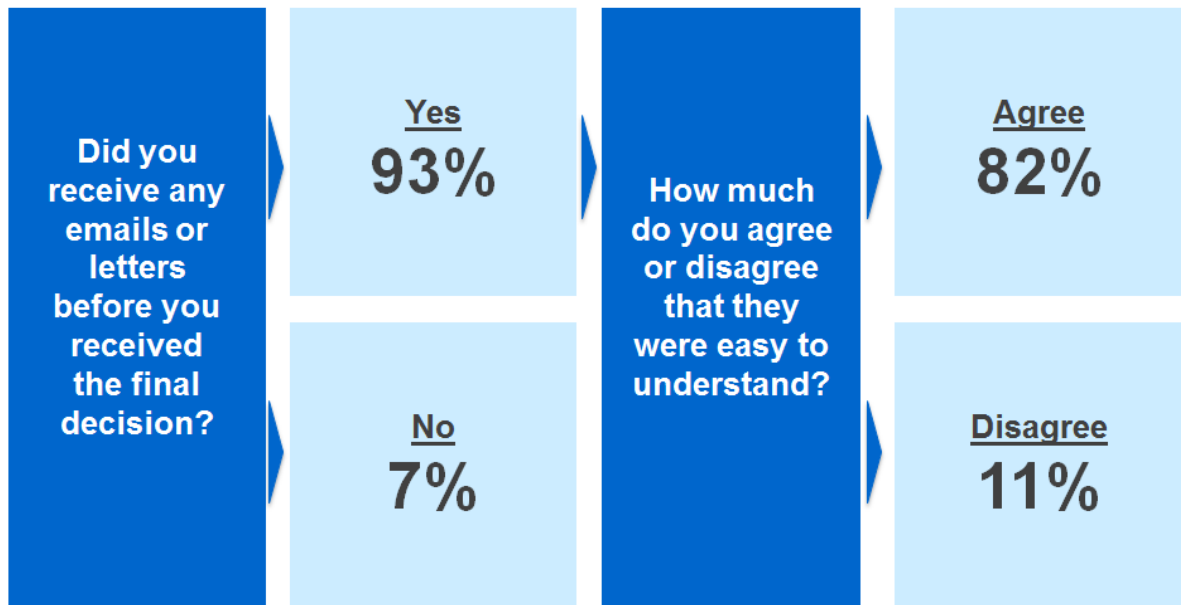
*Q: And how much do you agree or disagree that the Ombudsman's staff you dealt with...? Variable bases, shown in brackets underneath statements.*

The majority of people whose complaints we investigated were largely positive about their contact with our staff. In particular, most complainants felt our staff were polite and considerate (84%), professional (75%), and helpful and approachable (73%).

They were less in agreement, however, that the staff they dealt with had been sympathetic (58%) or had fully understood their complaint - only half (52%) agreed with this statement.

## Views on our communication before the final decision

We asked people to tell us whether they received anything in writing from us before we shared our final decision. We also asked complainants who had received information, to say whether they felt this was easy to understand. The following chart shows the results.



*Q: Did you have any letters/emails from the Ombudsman in the time BEFORE you received the final decision?*

*Base: 880.*

*Q: And thinking about these letters/emails how much would you agree or disagree that they were easy to understand?*

*Base: 815.*

Positively, we wrote to the majority of people whose complaints we investigated (93%) before the final decision, and most customers receiving these communications (82%) considered these to be easy to understand.

## Views on the length of time the investigation took

We asked people if they felt the time we took to handle their complaints was longer, shorter or about the same as they initially expected. The following chart shows the results.



*Q: Thinking about the time that was actually taken to deal with your complaint and taking into account any information about timescale that you were provided with by the Ombudsman's Office, would you say that the time taken was...?Base: 877.*

The time taken to handle the complaint tended to take longer than complainants expected, and this has remained steady compared with the previous year. Almost two thirds (64%) of complainants said that the time taken to handle the complaint was longer than expected, compared with 63% in 2014-15.

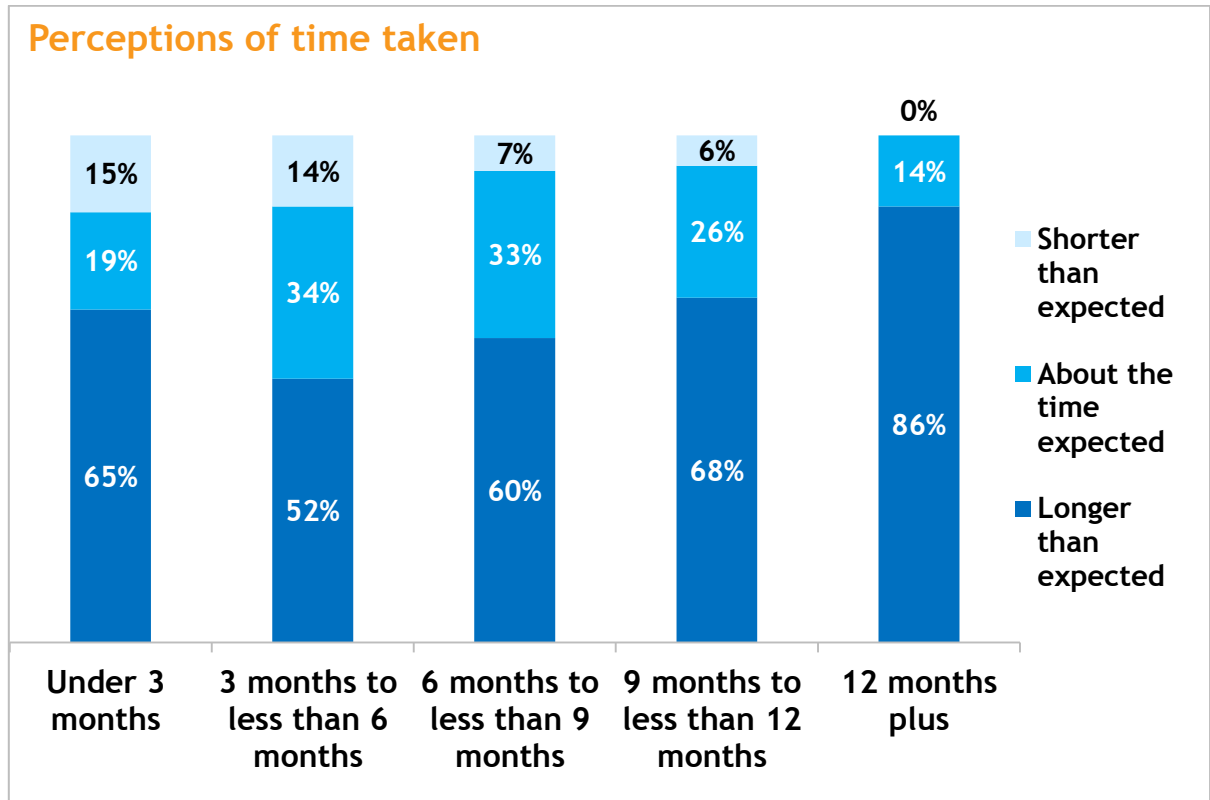
Complaints that take longer than expected tend to be viewed negatively: 63% of complainants who felt things took longer than expected said it was a bad thing.

However, complainants did not necessarily view shorter investigations positively either, with similar proportions considering this to be a good thing (38%) and a bad thing (36%). Satisfaction with shorter than expected investigations seems to be influenced by the outcome of the investigation. 80% of complainants whose complaints were upheld said that the shorter than expected investigation was a positive, while half (49%) of those whose complaints were not upheld said the short investigation was a negative. The latter were significantly more likely to consider the short investigation to be a negative thing, than people whose complaints we investigated overall. These complainants were significantly more likely to view the shorter than expected investigation as evidence that the case had not been dealt with properly (83% compared to 27% of people whose complaints we investigated overall). People whose complaints took longer than expected to investigate, were significantly less likely to feel this way (22%).

## Relationship between actual case length and expectations

The following chart shows the relationship between the perception of the time taken for us to reach a decision on peoples' complaint and the actual time taken.

As the chart shows, broadly speaking, the longer we take to reach a decision, the more likely people are to feel their complaint took longer than they expected to complete.



*Q: Thinking about the time that was actually taken to deal with your complaint and taking into account any information about timescale that you were provided by the Ombudsman's Office, would you say the time taken was...?Base: 877.*



## Communicating our final decision

### Key findings

- Complainants whose complaints were upheld were more than twice as likely as those whose complaints were not upheld to have confidence in our complaints process and its impartiality and thoroughness.
- Satisfaction with how we communicated our final decision among those whose complaints we investigated was also linked to the outcome of their investigation; those whose complaints were fully upheld were the most positive about this.
- The majority of people whose complaints we investigated agreed they were given the opportunity to comment on a draft of our report on their complaint.
- However, among those who did go on to comment on a draft of our report, less than half understood how their comments were used.
- A substantial proportion of complainants were left with the wrong understanding of the decision we made on their complaint. For instance, half of those whose complaints we partly upheld felt their complaint was fully upheld or not upheld at all.

This section explores how we communicate our final decision following the investigation. More specifically we explore the extent to which complainants feel we have delivered:

- a transparent and fair investigation;
- enough communication with them about our findings;
- a clear report that explains the issues we looked at; and
- an opportunity to comment on our final report.

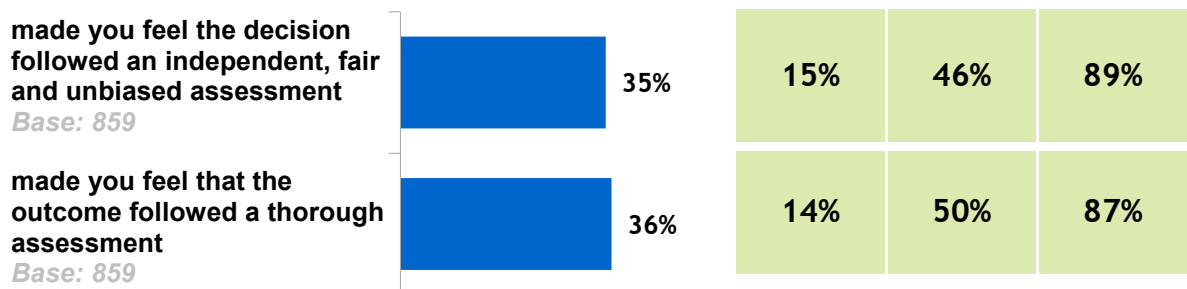
## Confidence in our service and our impartiality

We asked people to tell us if they had confidence in our process, and also in the impartiality and thoroughness of our investigation. Their responses are broken down by the outcome of our investigation.

### % agree / strongly agree that...



### % agree / strongly agree that the final report...



*Q: Thinking back to your contacts with the Ombudsman, how much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?*

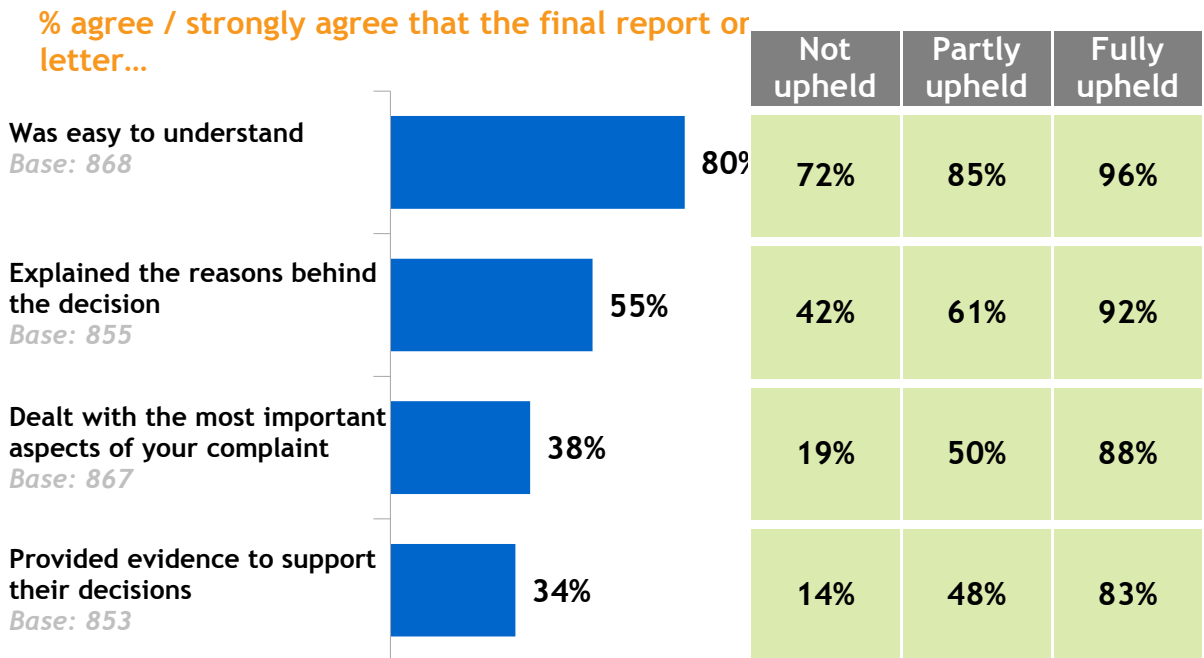
*Q: Now I would like to ask you about the contact informing you of the decision to [accept/ reject] your complaint for investigation. How much would you agree or disagree that the contact...?*

*Variable bases, shown in brackets underneath statements.*

Among those complainants whose complaints we upheld, most indicated that they had confidence in the system handling their complaint (82%), felt the decision followed an independent, fair and unbiased investigation (89%) and that the investigation was thorough (87%). However, responses to this question appear to be linked to the decision that we made. Among those whose complaints we did not uphold, 36% indicated that they had confidence in the system handling their complaint, with 15% feeling the investigation was independent, fair and unbiased and 14% feeling the investigation was thorough.

**People whose complaints we investigated: satisfaction with the contact informing them of the final decision**

We asked people to tell us about how we communicated the outcome of our investigation. The following chart breaks down these responses by outcome.



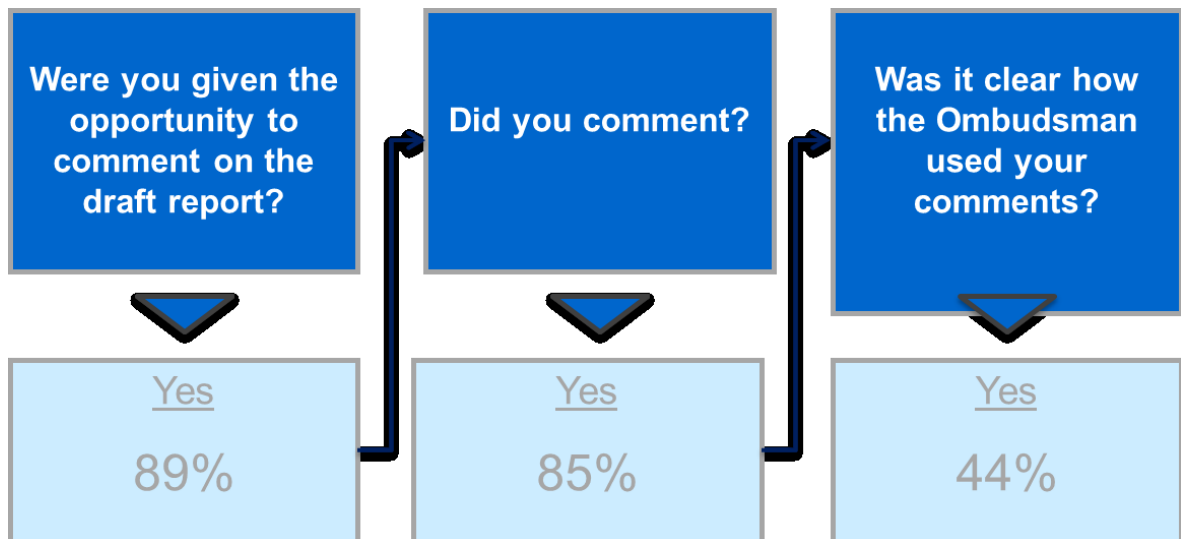
*Q: Extent to which agree/ disagree that the correspondence informing you of the decision...Variable bases, shown in brackets underneath statements.*

Again, the outcome of our investigation influenced the responses to these questions. Among those whose complaints were upheld, 83% agreed that the final report provided evidence to support its conclusions; this figure was 14% among those whose complaints we did not uphold. Similarly, among those whose complaints were upheld, 88% felt that the report dealt with the most important aspects of their complaint, this figure was 19% among those whose complaints we did not uphold.

Most complainants, regardless of the outcome of their complaint, found our final report easy to understand.

## Giving people whose complaints we investigated the opportunity to comment on the draft report

Everyone whose complaint we investigate should be given the opportunity to comment on the draft report of our investigation into their complaint, before it is finalised. The following chart shows the proportion of complainants who felt they were given an opportunity to comment, the proportion who did comment, and among those who commented, the proportion who felt it was clear how we used their comments.



*Q: Were you given an opportunity to comment on the draft report or letter?  
Base: 852.*

*Q: And did you make any comments?  
Base: 751.*

*Q: Was it clear to you how the Ombudsman staff used your comments?  
Base: 606.*

It is positive that most complainants felt that they had the opportunity to comment on the draft report, and that the majority of these people did go on to make comments. However, among those who did go on to comment, less than half understood how their comments were used. These figures were comparable to those seen in 2014-15.

## **Perception of case outcome versus actual case outcome**

Considering the relationship between the outcome of our investigation and complainant satisfaction, it is important that we make sure individuals are left with the correct impression of the outcome of their complaint. However, almost half of the people whose complaint we investigated (44%) had an incorrect perception of their complaint outcome: 13% of those whose complaints were fully upheld, and over half (53%) of those complainants whose complaints were partly upheld, were left with an incorrect impression of the outcome of their complaint. A quarter (24%) of complainants whose complaints were partly upheld thought that their complaint was not upheld. These figures are comparable to those seen in 2014-15.

Those who had the wrong perception of their complaint outcome being fully upheld were significantly less likely to agree, based on the final decision letter, that the decision was reached following an independent, fair and unbiased decision (81%), than those who had the correct impression and whose complaints were fully upheld (91%).

People who had the incorrect perception that their complaint was fully upheld (81%) or partly upheld (26%) were also significantly less likely to agree, based on the final decision letter, that the final decision was reached following a thorough investigation than those who had the correct impression (94% and 43%).

## Demonstrating impact

### Key findings

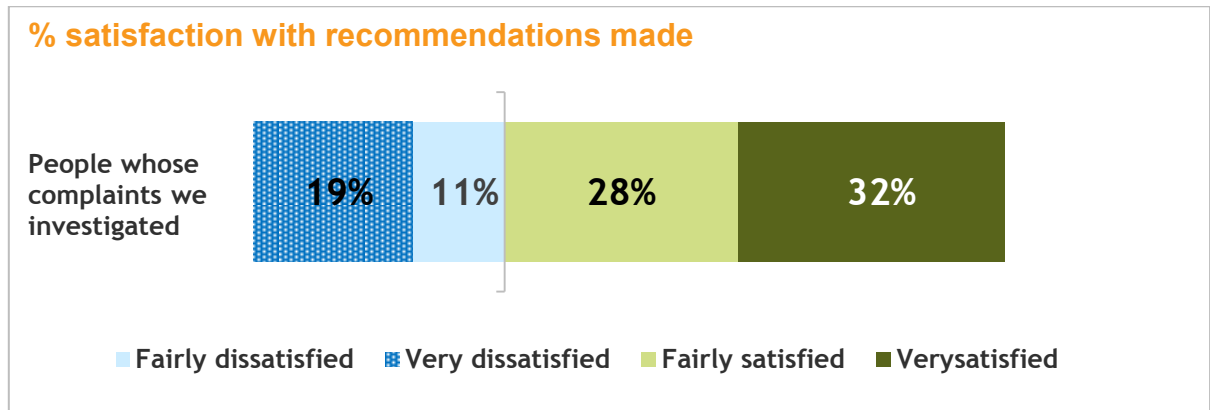
- The majority of people whose complaints we investigated and upheld, or partly upheld, were satisfied with the recommendations we made to the organisation to put things right. This has remained steady since the previous year. However, this is lower than in 2013-14 and a substantial minority are dissatisfied.
- Four in ten complainants whose complaint we upheld or partly upheld thought that our investigation would result in things being put right.
- Among those who thought the investigation would not or had not made a difference, the reasons most commonly given for this were thinking that they hadn't had a proper investigation, or because they felt the organisation's services were still not up to standard. Others said that this was because they had no confidence in the organisation complained about implementing changes.
- Among those complainants who thought the investigation would or had already made a difference, two thirds believed that the organisation's services would be or had already been improved.

In the final part of the results section of our report, we examine the impact our investigations have for our complainants. We focus on those complainants whose complaints were upheld or partly upheld, and explore their satisfaction with the recommendations we made in the final report, and the extent to which they felt things will be put right as a result of these.

The recommendations we make can be varied. In many complaints we might ask the organisation to apologise to the individual concerned. In some complaints we might ask the organisation to make a payment in recognition of distress caused or produce an action plan to show how it intends to prevent the same mistakes happening again.

## Satisfaction with the recommendations made

We asked those complainants whose complaints were fully or partly upheld to tell us what they thought about the recommendations we made. The following chart shows the results.



*Q. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the recommendations made by the Ombudsman as a result of the investigation? These would be given in the Ombudsman's final report or letter. Are you..?*

*Base: 368 people whose complaints we investigated who said the letter/ report upheld or partially upheld their complaint.*

The majority of people whose complaints we investigated (60%) were satisfied with the recommendations we made, broadly consistent with 2014-15 satisfaction levels (59%). However, this is a decline from 2013-14, when three quarters (76%) of complainants were satisfied.

Those who responded 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' (10%), have been excluded from this chart.

This lower level of satisfaction overall can be linked to continuing decreased satisfaction among individuals whose complaint was partly upheld (52% in both 2015-16 and 2014-15, compared to 73% in 2013-14).

Our survey typically takes place three to eight weeks after a person's contact with us has ended. This means that in some instances the recommendations we made may not yet have been implemented by the organisation complained about.

Our new approach to gathering feedback from those complainants whose complaints we have upheld will ask people for their satisfaction with our recommendations once we have confirmed that the recommendations we have implemented have been followed.

## Feeling that things will be put right

Four in ten (39%) complainants who were under the impression their complaint had been fully or partly upheld, were confident that our investigation would result in things being put right. This is consistent with 2014-15 (34%) and a decline from 2013-14, when half (51%) of complainants had confidence in this.

Among those who thought the investigation would not or had not made a difference, a third (32%) thought that things would not be put right as they hadn't had a proper investigation, and 27% said that this was because the organisation's services were still not up to standard. Others said that this was because they had no confidence in the organisation complained about implementing changes (24%), while some complainants said that nothing could adequately repair the damage done or the suffering caused (13%) or they believed that their complaint was still ongoing (12%).

Among those complainants who thought the investigation would or had already made a difference, two thirds (66%) believed that the organisation's services would be or had already been improved. Another quarter (24%) had received an apology or answers to questions, with others saying that things had been put right as a result of receiving a payment (11%).



## 7. Demographic profile of people who use our service

Our survey is our primary source of information about the demographic make-up of the people who use our service. The following table breaks down individuals into those whose complaints we closed following our initial checks, those closed following our assessment, and people whose complaints we investigated. It reports information on the proportions of these individuals by gender, age, ethnicity, disability, and whether a complainant had special communication needs.

	Closed following initial checks	Closed following assessment*	Investigation
<b>Gender <sup>1</sup></b>			
Male	44%	46%	43%
Female	56%	54%	57%
<b>Age<sup>2</sup></b>			
18-34	16%	14%	7%
35-54	45%	36%	38%
55-74	36%	45%	46%
75+	4%	5%	9%
<b>Ethnicity<sup>3</sup></b>			
White British	78%	85%	86%
White non-British	6%	3%	6%
Mixed	3%	1%	3%
Black	5%	4%	2%
Asian	6%	5%	3%
Chinese	0%	0%	0%
Other	2%	1%	0%
<b>Disability<sup>4</sup></b>			
Yes	35%	31%	33%
No	65%	69%	67%

*1 Base: initial checks 981; assessment 275; investigation 902.*

*2 Base: initial checks 960; assessment 267; investigation 889.*

*3 Base: initial checks 942; assessment 258; investigation 872.*

*4 Base: initial checks 960; assessment 267; investigation 886.*

*5 Base: initial checks 971; assessment 271; investigation 895.*

## 8. Conclusions and next steps

The results of our survey have remained broadly comparable from 2013-14 to 2014-15 and 2014-15 to 2015-16.

It is positive to see that almost two thirds of complainants whose complaint did not lead to a full investigation were very satisfied or fairly satisfied with the customer service we provided. Perceptions of customer service are associated with case outcome. Nearly all complainants whose complaints we investigated and fully upheld and two thirds of complainants whose complaints we investigated and partly upheld were satisfied with our customer service. Satisfaction was lower among those complainants whose complaints we did not uphold with only four in ten saying they were satisfied with our customer service.

People who had used our service were largely positive about the contact they had with our staff, who tend to be seen as polite, professional, helpful and approachable. However, people whose complaints we closed following an initial assessment and people whose complaints we did investigate were less decided that our staff had fully understood their complaint or were sympathetic. A number of the commitments in our new Service Charter place a strong emphasis on the need to discuss and agree the scope of our investigation with people right at the start, as well as keeping people abreast of the emerging facts as the investigation progresses.

A significant proportion of complainants, and in particular those whose complaints we don't uphold, do not feel our final report or letter left them confident our decision was reached following an impartial and thorough investigation. And while most had the opportunity to comment on the draft of their final report and most did so, less than half understood how we used their comments. This is another area covered in our Service Charter, where we have made a commitment to '*evaluate the information we've gathered and make an impartial decision on complaints*'. Over the previous six months we have produced revised guidance for our investigators on how to structure and communicate our reports. This includes providing detailed information on how comments have been incorporated into our final report, and, where comments have not been included, information on the rationale for not including them. We also expect that an increased focus on keeping people informed of emerging findings as the investigation progresses should lead to improvements in this area.

The survey has therefore been useful in flagging a number of areas we can focus on improving, particularly regarding how to build customer confidence that we have fully understood their complaint and that investigations have been impartial and thorough, even when we do not uphold their complaint.

We also need to make sure that people who make a complaint to us see the impact that complaining can have on improving public services - only four in ten people whose complaints we fully or partly upheld agree that the investigation had made a difference and would result in things being put right. We believe the changes we have made to gathering complainant feedback in the future, and in particular the shift to asking complainants about their satisfaction with our

recommendations once they have had an opportunity to be implemented, should provide more insight into this area.

### **How we use the feedback from this survey**

The feedback from the survey is shared with the senior leadership of the organisation on a monthly basis in order to identify areas of improvement or those areas in need of development. The feedback from the survey also feeds directly into our quality assurance framework, where it is combined with other measures of performance, before being communicated across the organisation to individual teams and directorates. The quality assurance framework is used to understand how we are performing, and flags up those areas we need to improve, which allows us to target our efforts to develop our service appropriately.

Our Service Charter, which was published in July this year, sets out what people can expect from our service when they bring a complaint to us. We have developed our Service Charter alongside our service model, which sets out the specific process we will follow for each complaint brought to us.

The feedback from the survey has fed directly in to the development of our new Service Charter and our service model, and helped to develop the specific commitments that form the basis of our Service Charter. We have introduced a number of specific improvements to our service in response to the feedback we receive from complainants, including:

- An increased emphasis in our service model on keeping people updated throughout the complaints process, with a focus on keeping people informed of the emerging findings of our investigations.
- Revisions to our report, letter and email templates to improve their accessibility and make them easier to understand.
- The production of a series of straightforward guides that explain our role and our complaint handling process.
- Investing greater resources in the assessment part of our complaints process in order to reduce the amount of time it takes us to reach a decision on people's complaints.

Though it is too early to test the impact of the Service Charter in this year's survey, we will be doing this with the 2016-17 feedback survey results.

### **Future plans for our survey**

We have recently introduced our new complainant feedback survey. The new survey is based on the various commitments in our Service Charter, and will provide direct feedback on the service commitments throughout the coming year.

Rather than surveying people once, at the end of the process, the new survey is undertaken at key milestones in the complaints process. This means that we can ask people about events while they are still fresh in people's minds. It also means that we can share the feedback much more quickly with the relevant teams in our organisation, and start addressing areas for improvement straight away.

The headline results of our new survey will be incorporated into our measures of how we are achieving against our Service Charter commitments. This will be shared on our website on a regular basis.