

Complainant Feedback Survey 2014-15

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1 Executive summary

Background

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 service¹. We use 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 come to an end. This report outlines the findings of this survey in 2014-15.

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 this. More information about how we deal with complaints, and the different stages to our process, is available on our website.

In 2014-15, IFF Research surveyed 2,001 people who had used our service; 900 people whose complaints we had investigated, and 1,101 people whose contact with us did not result in an investigation.

Overall satisfaction with our customer service

In 2014-15, the survey found that 69% of people whose cases we did not investigate were satisfied overall with our service.

Satisfaction with our service among people whose cases we investigated is linked to the decision we reach following our investigation:

- among people whose cases we upheld, 88% were satisfied with our service
- among people whose cases we did not uphold, 49% were satisfied
- among people whose cases we partly upheld, 71% were satisfied with our service,

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

Overall satisfaction with outcome

Among people whose cases we did not investigate in 2014-15, 43% indicated they were satisfied with the outcome of their case.

Among people whose cases we investigated:

- 79% of those whose case was upheld were satisfied
- 7% of those whose case was not upheld were satisfied with the outcome
- 30% of those whose case was partly upheld were satisfied with this outcome,

Accessing our service and contact with our staff

Three quarters of all our complainants agreed that our complaints process was easy to understand. A similar proportion said that when they first got in touch with us, staff clearly explained our complaints process and what we can and can't do.

The majority of people were positive about the contact they had with our staff. However, for some, lack of communication and meaningful updates during the process, and investigations taking longer than expected had been a source of dissatisfaction. Although the majority of people whose cases we investigated and fully upheld were satisfied with the impartiality and thoroughness of our investigations; among those whose cases we partly upheld or did not uphold, satisfaction was significantly lower.

Making recommendations and demonstrating impact

Just over half of people whose cases we investigated and fully or partly upheld were satisfied with the recommendations we made. However, only a third were confident that our investigation would result in things being put right by the organisation they had complained about, a decline on the previous year. Many people said they had no confidence that the organisation complained about would implement the changes we recommended.

We want to make sure that people who make a complaint to us see the impact that complaining can have on improving public services. This emphasises the importance of us working with organisations that provide public services to make sure that what is learned from the complaints we investigate is shared and acted on. Over the course of 2014-15 we started to publish a selection of our case summaries online every quarter. These show the difference that complaining can make to those who feel let down by public services.

Next steps

In spring 2016 we plan to publish our new service charter. This will set out what people can expect from our service when they bring a complaint to us. We have developed this service charter alongside our service model which sets out the specific process we follow for each complaint brought to us. The feedback from people who have used our service has helped us to develop these. People have told us they value openness and transparency about how we are dealing with their case. Our service model is designed to achieve this.

The feedback from our survey forms part of the range of measures we use for quality assuring our service, brought together under our quality assurance framework. We use this to measure and track our performance, and show what people think of the service we provide.

2 Introduction

This report sets out the results of our Complainant Feedback Survey for the year 2014-15. Throughout the year we undertook an independent survey of people who used our service to understand their attitudes toward, and experiences of, our service. This is part of our commitment to gather the views of people who contact us and to continually develop our service.

We use the information from this and previous surveys to continually assess our service, and the insight from this survey helped us develop our service model and [draft service charter](#). This will set out what people can expect from our service when they bring a complaint to us. We have developed this service charter alongside our service model which sets out the specific process we follow for each complaint brought to us. As part of a process of continual feedback, once the service charter is put in place, we plan to revisit our approach to gathering feedback. This will allow us to make sure that we are getting the information that best reflects the service we have committed to provide in our final service charter.

2.1 The complaints process

The Complainant Feedback Survey is undertaken with a sample of people who used our service in 2014-15. We have a range of different types of complainant who experience our service in different ways, depending on the level of contact they have with us. The following diagram explains how we deal with complaints, and shows the various stages at which peoples' contact with us may come to an end. This is the point at which we ask people to take part in the survey.

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

1. Accessing our service - initial checks

- In the first stage 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, or are complaining about an organisation we are not able to investigate by law.

2. Deciding whether to investigate - assessment

- In the second stage we assess the complaint and decide if we should investigate it.
- We consider whether there is an indication that mistakes have been made that have led to somebody experiencing an injustice that has not already been put right. If we see that this might be the case, we investigate. Sometimes we can see that there have been failings in the service provided, but that the organisation has, in our view, already done what it should to resolve the complaint. In these cases we cannot achieve anything more, but we can explain this to the person who made the complaint to reassure them about what happened. In some cases we can see that we might be able to get somebody's complaint resolved quickly, without the need for a formal investigation.

3. Investigation

- In the third stage 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 make recommendations on how they can put things right.

2.2 Survey methodology and interpretation

The following table highlights the total number of each of type of complainant who contacted us in 2014-15, the total number who we surveyed, and a measure of how representative the results are of all our complainants. A 'complainant' is the term we use to describe someone who uses our service.

Category of complainant	Total numbers	Total interviewed	Confidence interval*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People whose cases we didn't investigate: This includes both those closed following our <i>initial checks</i> and those closed following our <i>assessment</i>. These were individuals whose contact did not include a formal investigation 	24,720	1,101 of which: Initial checks: 1,014 Assessment: 87**	+/- 2.9%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People whose case we investigated: Someone whose complaint we formally investigated. 	4,159	900	+/- 2.9%

*Based on a finding of 50% at the 95% confidence level²

**The base size for assessment complainants is low; responses from this group should be treated with caution

² 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 (i.e. 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 by telephone interviews with 2,001 complainants. These interviews were undertaken with a random sample of complainants whose contact with us finished in 2014-15. Interviews were conducted using computer assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) technology. All interviews were done on our behalf by IFF Research, an independent research firm who invited people to take part in the survey once they had received the final decision on their complaint. The interviews took place between 19 May 2014 and 10 May 2015.

Our processes for investigating complaints changed significantly in 2013-14. Previously we 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.

The results of our survey are broken down and reported in line with our complaints handling process. Our complainants are only surveyed once, after we have given them a decision on their case. The information in section 3 of this report includes responses from all our complainants; sections 4 and 5 mainly focus on responses from people whose cases we did not investigate (this includes both those whose cases we closed after our initial checks, and those whose cases we closed following our assessment); and section 6 includes only responses from people whose cases we investigated.

Throughout this report we have used a range of charts to highlight our complainants' responses. Underneath each chart we demonstrate the 'base size' for each question. This figure represents the number of complainants who responded to that particular question. All base sizes and figures shown exclude those respondents who responded 'don't know'.

3 Overall satisfaction³

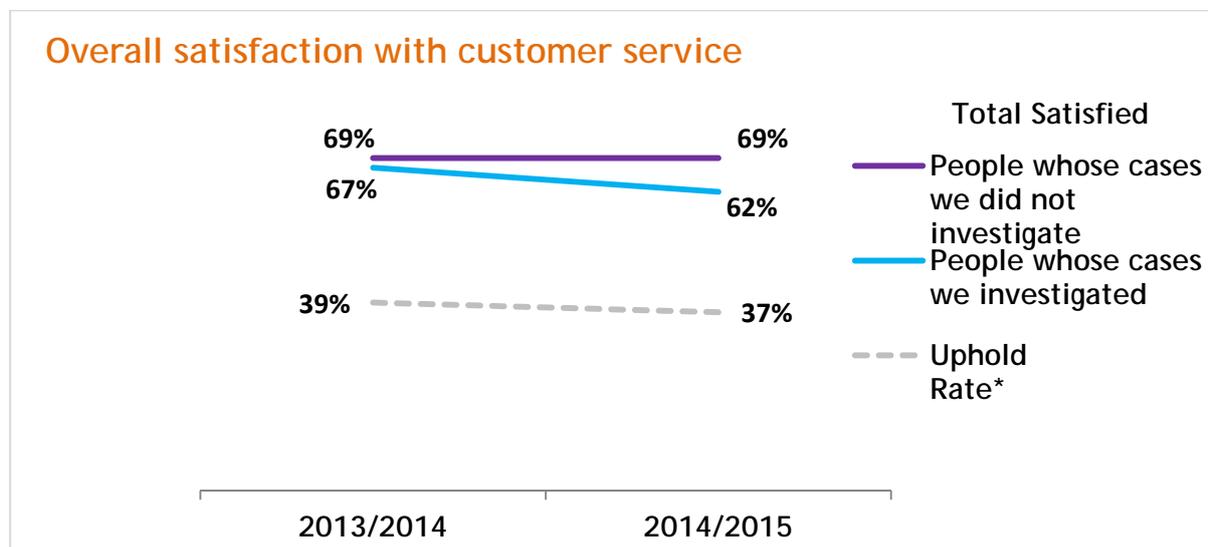
- People whose cases we did not investigate: satisfaction with our service and satisfaction with outcome has remained consistent since 2013-14.
- People whose cases we investigated and upheld: satisfaction with our service and with the outcome has remained steady since 2013-14.
- People whose cases we investigated and partly upheld: satisfaction with our service has declined slightly since 2013-14, while satisfaction with the outcome has declined significantly.
- People whose cases we investigated and did not uphold: satisfaction with our service and with the outcome has remained steady since 2013-14.

We asked all customers who took part in our survey to indicate their overall satisfaction with the decision we made on their case, and also with the level of customer service they received.

³ Because of the significant changes to our service that took place in 2013-14, along with an almost ten-fold increase in the number of investigations we carried out, we are unable to adequately compare feedback data from 2014-15 to the period before 2013-14.

3.1 Trends in satisfaction with customer service

Individuals' satisfaction with customer service has remained largely stable among those whose cases we did not investigate, with seven in ten (69%) reporting satisfaction across both 2013-14 and 2014-15.



Q: Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the complainant service you received? Are you...

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

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

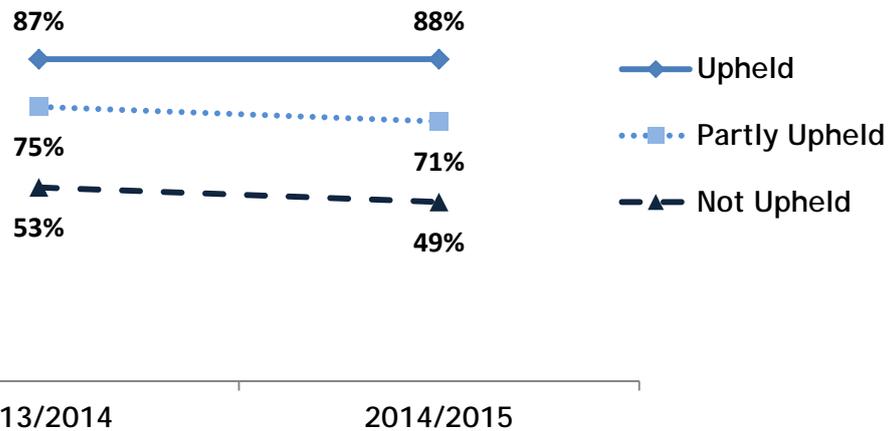
**This is the average uphold rate for people whose cases we investigated (including both partly or fully upheld)*

The changes to our process in 2013-14 led to a large increase in the number of complaints that we investigate, with an associated decrease in the proportion of investigations we ultimately uphold. As the satisfaction of people whose cases we investigated is linked to the decision we make, this is likely to explain the slight decline in satisfaction among this group of complainants when looked at as a whole, from 67% in 2013-14, to 62% in 2014-15.

Once the investigation decision is taken into account, the change in satisfaction with customer service becomes less marked, with no large changes between.

2014-15 and the previous year. The following chart demonstrates year on year change in satisfaction with customer service for people whose complaint we did investigate, broken down by investigation outcome.

Satisfaction with customer service by investigation decision



Q: Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the complainant service you received? Are you...

2014-2015 Base: 891 people whose cases we investigated

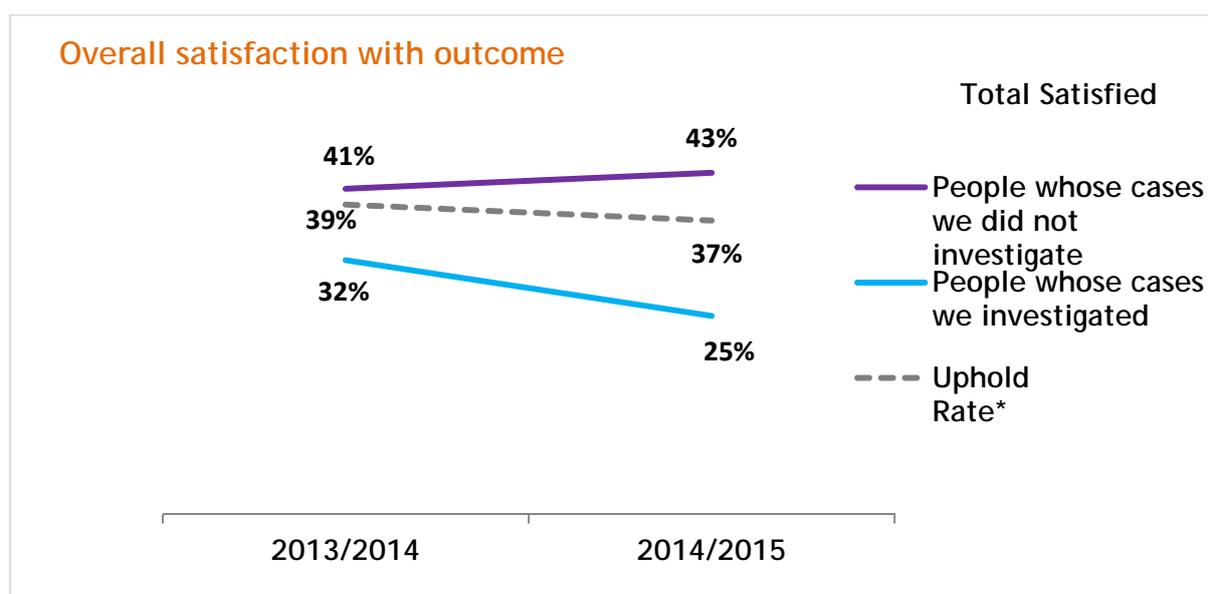
2013-2014 Base: 738 people whose cases we investigated

Overall satisfaction with customer service has remained consistent since 2013-14 for those individuals whose complaints we upheld, with nine in ten (88%) in 2014-15 stating that they were at least satisfied with our service overall, a similar proportion to 2013-14. Levels of satisfaction have also remained consistent for those individuals whose case did not lead to an investigation, with seven in ten reporting satisfaction across both years (69% in 2014-15; 69% in 2013-14).

There has been a slight fall in overall satisfaction among those individuals whose cases we investigated and partly upheld (to 71% in 2014-15 from 75% in 2013-14), and among those whose cases we did not uphold (to 49% in 2014-15 from 53% in 2013-14), though this later fall is not statistically significant.

3.2 Trends in satisfaction with outcome

As with satisfaction with service among people whose cases we did not investigate, satisfaction with outcome has remained broadly level since 2013-14. Overall, complainants whose cases we investigated are less satisfied with the outcome of their case than in 2013-14, this is in line with the decrease in the proportion of investigations we now uphold (from 41% in 2013-14 to 37% in 2014-15). A quarter (25%) of those whose cases we did investigate, and four in ten (43%) of those whose cases we did not investigate, reported satisfaction with the outcome of their complaint.



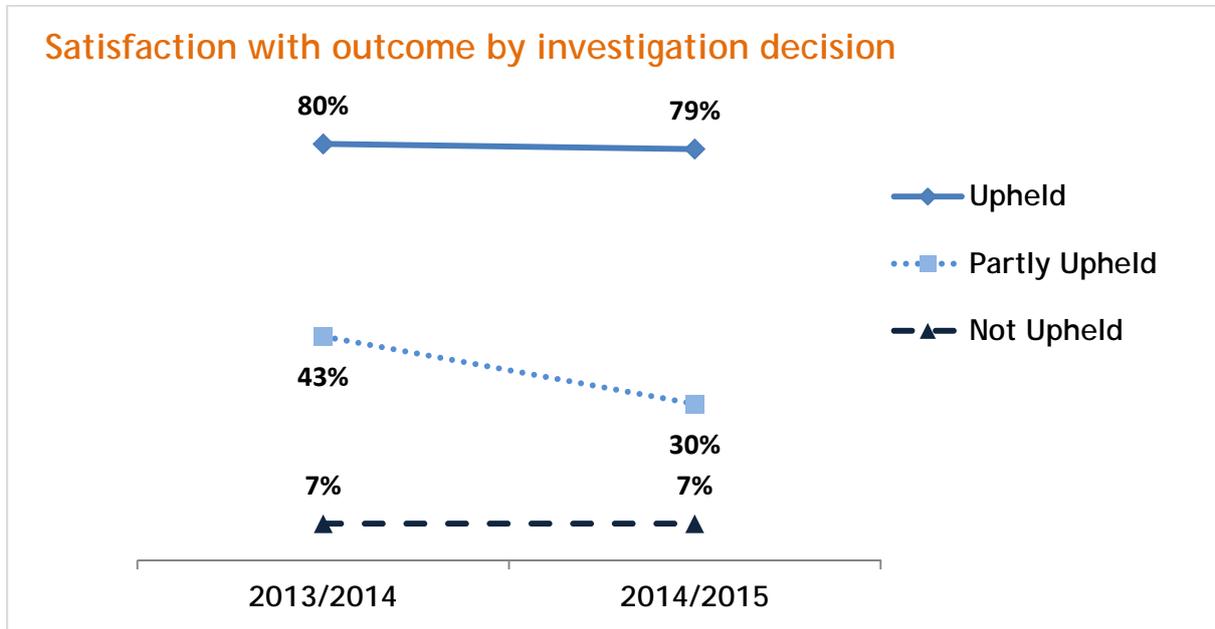
Q: How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with this decision - I mean just the final decision, not the overall way in which your complaint was dealt with by the Ombudsman's Office?

2014/2015 Base: 297 people whose cases we did not investigate, 854 people whose cases we investigated

2013/2014 Base: 903 people whose cases we did not investigate, 704 people whose cases we investigated

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

Satisfaction with outcome has remained static over the two years for both those complainants whose case was upheld, and those whose case was not upheld. However, there has been a significant fall (from 43% in 2013-14 to 30% in 2014-15) in satisfaction for those whose complaint was partly upheld, as shown on the following chart:



B3. 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?

2014/2015 Base: 854 people whose cases we investigated

2013/2014 Base: 704 people whose cases we investigated

4 First getting in touch

- Three quarters of people whose cases we did not investigate were happy with the form of communication they had with us.
- Three quarters of people whose cases we closed following our initial checks (stage one of our process), and also those whose cases we investigated (stage three of our process), agreed that our complaints process was easy to understand.
- Three quarters of people whose cases we closed following our initial checks, and also those whose cases we investigated, agreed our staff gave clear information about the complaints process and our role.
- People whose cases we closed following our assessment (stage two of our process) were generally less likely than those whose cases we closed following our initial checks to agree that our process was easy to understand, or that they were given clear information by our staff about our process and role.

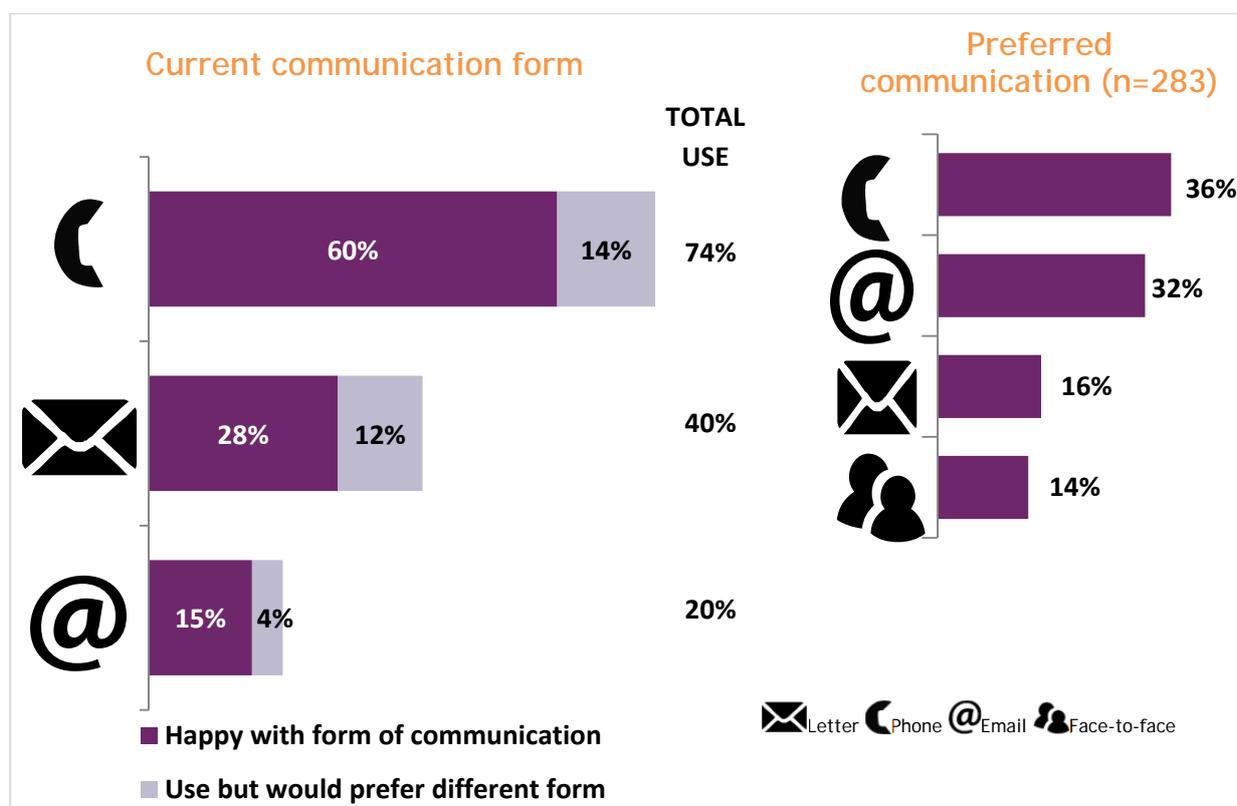
This section of the report covers complainants' initial contact with us. Here we explore:

- 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
- the extent to which people feel the complaints process is simple, straightforward, easy to understand and makes sure the complainant understands the process.

4.1 Meeting complainants' communication preferences

The following chart shows the types of communication complainants whose cases we did not go on to investigate, experienced when they contacted us in 2014-15. People who had more than one experience of contacting us whilst we handled their case may have had more than one type of contact with us. We ask people to tell us about all the types of contact they had.

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.



Q: How did staff at the Ombudsman's office communicate with you? Base: 1,049 people whose cases we did not investigate

Q: Would you have preferred any other form of communication with the Ombudsman's staff? Base: 1,022 people whose cases we did not investigate

Q: How would you have preferred the Ombudsman's staff to communicate with you? Base: 283 people whose cases we did not investigate

Around three quarters (72%) of all people whose cases we did not investigate were happy with the form of communication that they had with us, with those communicating by telephone the most satisfied (81%), and those communicating by letter least satisfied (70%).

Among those individuals who would have preferred a different form of communication, phone (36%) and email (32%) were the most frequently mentioned.

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

The following table shows complainants 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 cases we did not investigate		People who cases we investigated
	Closed following initial checks Agree	Closed following assessment Agree	Agree
When I first contacted the Ombudsman, staff clearly explained what the Ombudsman can and can't do. <i>(Base; Initial checks: 964, Assess: 80, Inv: 868)</i>	74%	51%	77%
When I first contacted the Ombudsman, staff clearly explained the complaints process. <i>(Base; Initial checks: 960, Assess: 78, Inv: 849)</i>	73%	49%	77%
The complaints process was easy to understand. <i>(Base; Initial checks: 957, Assess: 84, Inv: 887)</i>	72%	48%	71%

The base size for assessment complainants is low; responses from this group should be treated with caution.

The majority of people whose cases were closed following our initial checks, and people whose cases we investigated, agreed that we gave them clear information about our role and our complaints process when they first got in touch. Around three quarters of those whose cases were closed following our initial checks, and those whose case were closed after investigation, agreed that staff clearly explained the complaints process and what we can and can't do, and that this process was easy to understand.

Around half of those whose cases were closed following our assessment, agreed with these statements, although the base size for these complainants is relatively small and these results should be treated with caution.

5 Deciding whether to investigate

- Most people whose cases we closed following our initial checks were positive about the contact they had with our staff; those whose cases we closed following assessment tended to be more circumspect.
- Those whose cases we closed following our initial checks were more likely to have confidence in our process than those whose cases we closed following our assessment. They were twice as likely to agree the decision not to investigate was independent and unbiased, and twice as likely to agree that our process was thorough.
- Increasingly, people whose cases we did not investigate tell us it takes less time for us to handle their complaint than they expected. This tended to be seen positively by those whose complaints we closed following our initial checks, but negatively by those whose cases were closed following our assessment.

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

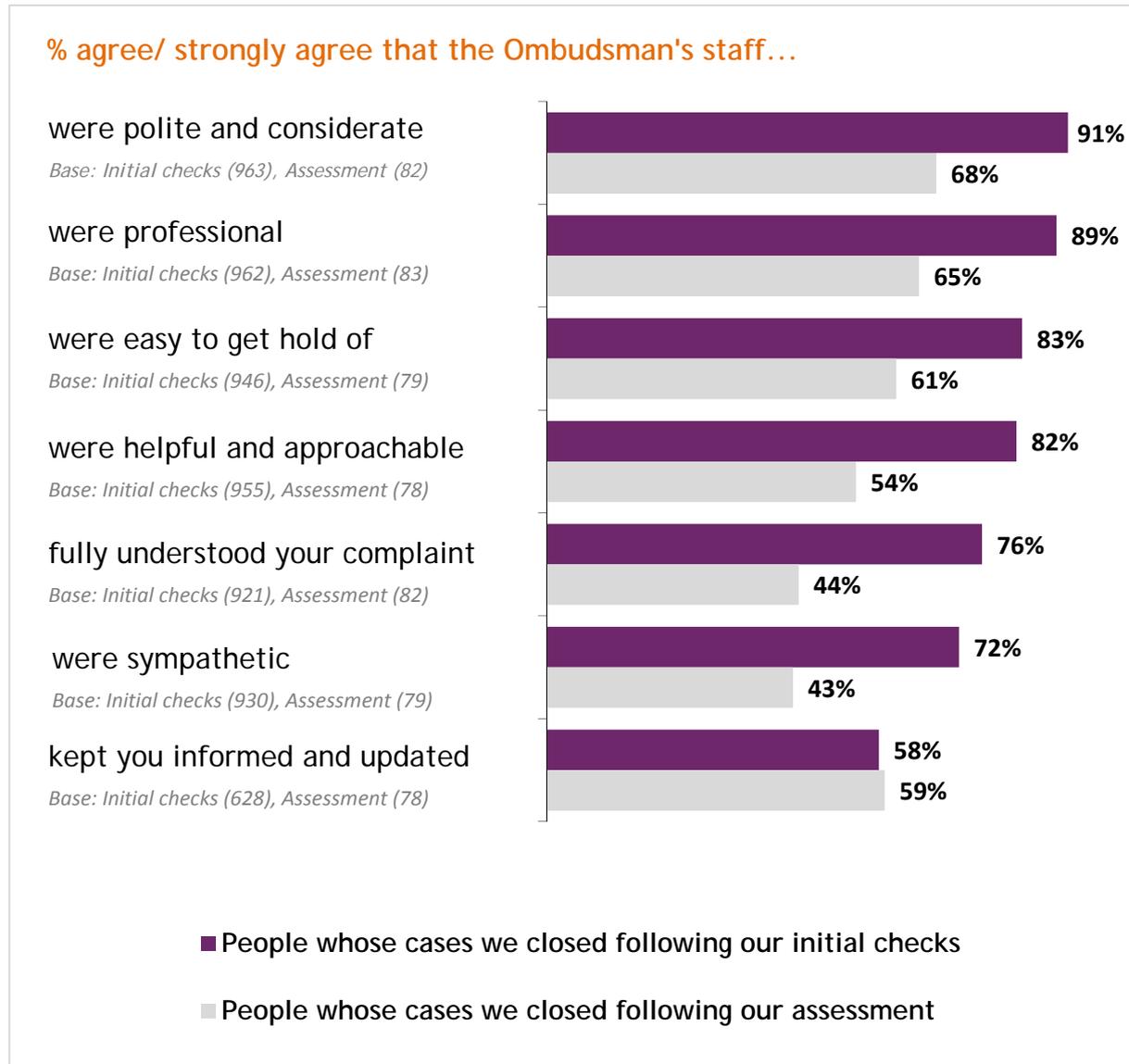
We explore the extent to which we:

- 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
- 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.

5.1 People whose cases we did not investigate: views towards our staff

We asked people whose cases 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

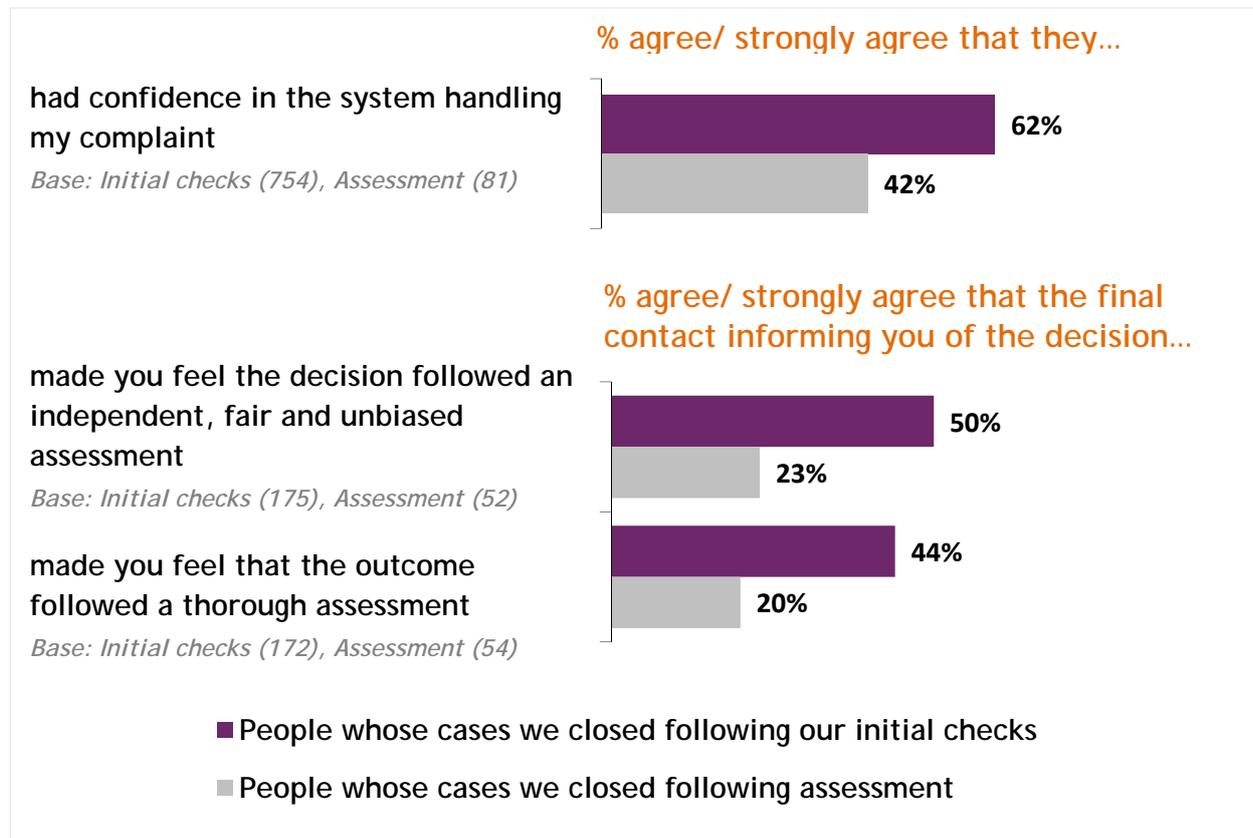
The base size for assessment complainants is low; responses from this group should be treated with caution. It is also important to remember that only those complainants who didn't receive an investigation were surveyed.

There were large differences in the views of those whose cases were closed following our initial checks, and those whose cases were closed following our assessment. Most of those whose cases were closed following our initial checks were positive about the contact they had with our staff, whereas assessment complainants tended to be more circumspect, particularly regarding the perception that staff fully understood their case.

One area in which the responses of these two complainant types were more aligned was in their replies to whether our staff kept them informed and updated. Six in ten (58%) of those whose cases were closed following our initial checks and also assessment (59%) complainants, agreed with this statement. However, this question is not necessarily relevant to all of those complainants whose cases we closed following our initial checks, as they may have only had one contact with us.

5.2 People whose cases we did not investigate: confidence in our service and our impartiality

We asked people whose cases we did not investigate to tell us how confident they were in the service we provide, and its impartiality.



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...?

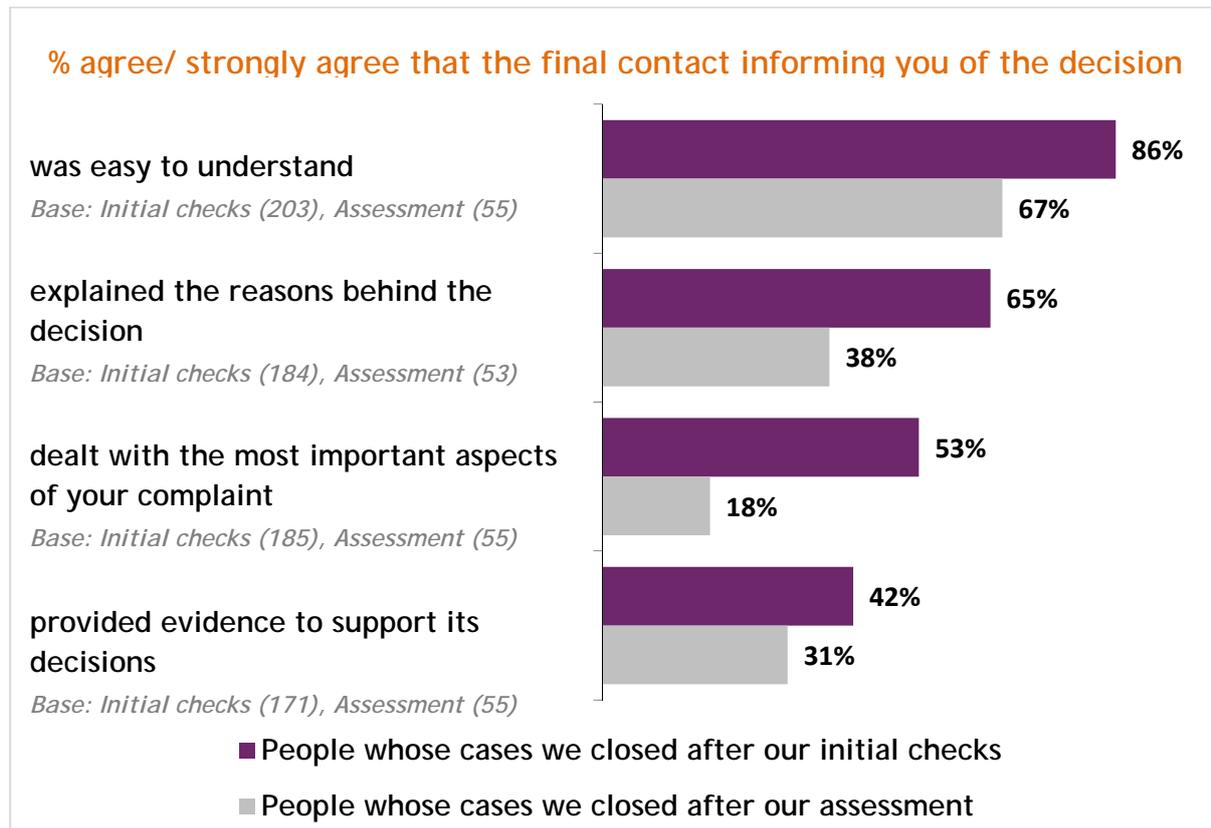
Variable bases, shown in brackets underneath statements

It is also important to remember that only those complainants who didn't receive an investigation were surveyed.

Confidence in our complaints system was generally higher among those whose cases we closed following our initial checks than in those whose cases we closed following our assessment. Those whose cases were closed following our initial checks were twice as likely as assessment complainants to feel that this decision was the result of a thorough assessment (44%, compared with 20% for those closed following initial checks), which was independent and fair (50% compared with 23%).

5.3 People whose cases we did not investigate: satisfaction with the way we told them of our decision not to investigate their case

Where we had decided not to investigate someone’s case, we asked them to tell us about the way we had communicated this. Many complainants did not answer this question as the nature of their enquiry meant that their case. For those who felt able to answer, the following chart demonstrates their response:



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

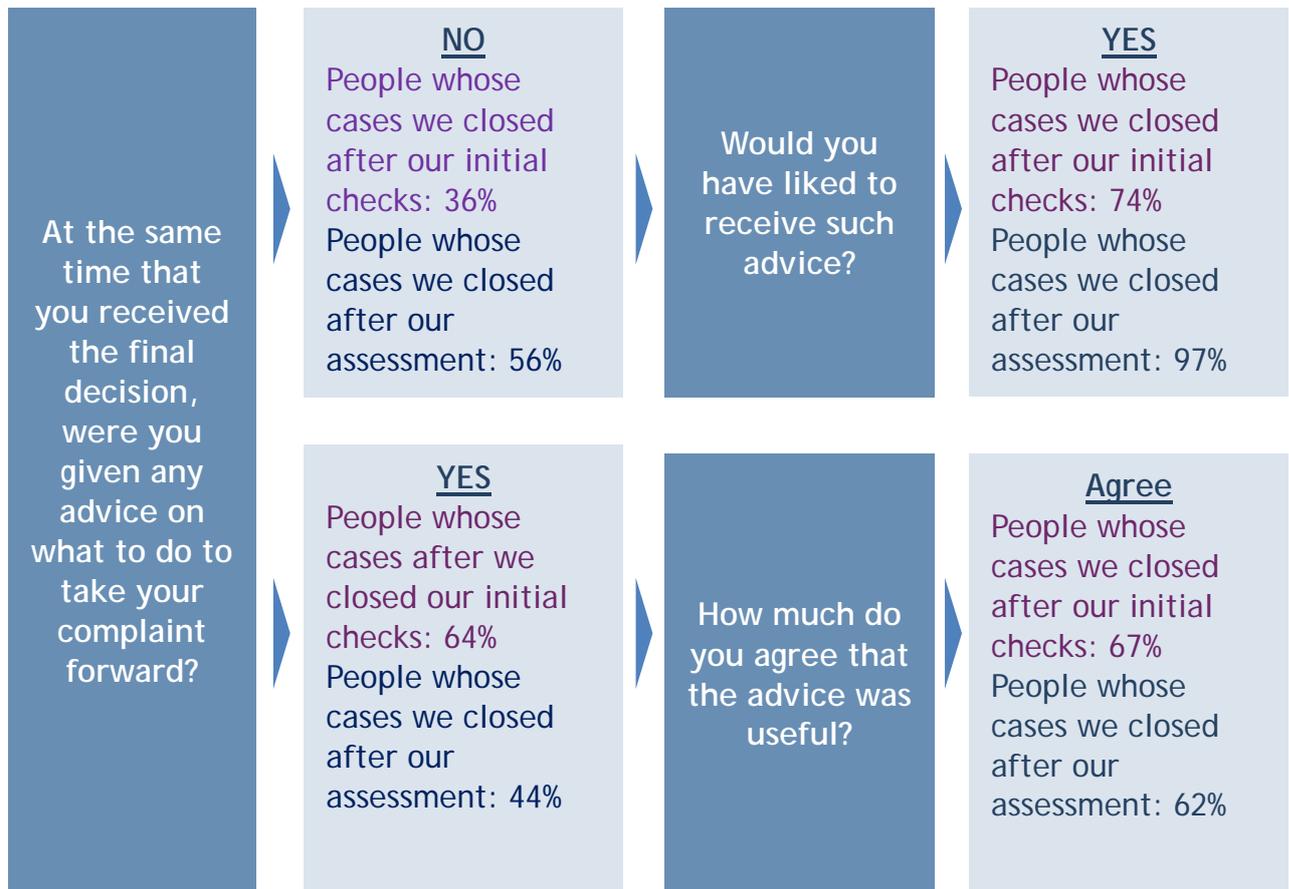
It is also important to remember that only those complainants who didn't receive an investigation were surveyed.

People whose cases we closed after our initial checks were generally more satisfied with way we told them of our decision not to investigate their case than people whose cases we closed after assessment. Assessment complainants in particular were significantly less likely to feel that the decision not to investigate dealt with the most important aspects of their complaint (18%), compared with 53% for those whose cases we closed following our initial checks.

There were further significant differences in satisfaction between these types of complainant with the explanation they received for our decision. Two thirds (65%) of people whose cases we closed after our initial checks agreed that in the final communication they had with us, we explained the reasons behind the decision, compared with 38% of those whose case was closed following our assessment.

5.4 Providing advice to those complainants whose cases 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 demonstrates 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?

The base size for people whose cases we closed after our assessment is low; responses from this group should be treated with caution. It is also important to remember that only those complainants who didn't receive an investigation were surveyed.

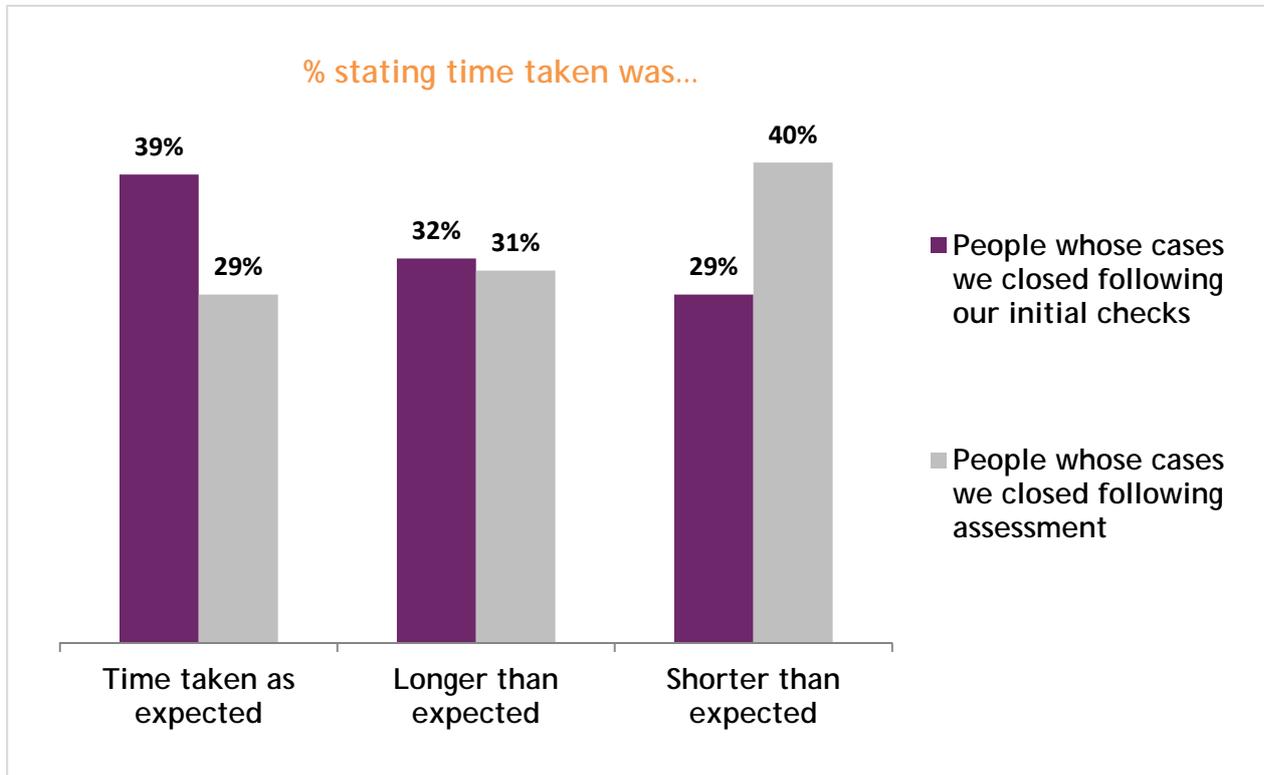
People whose cases we closed after our initial checks were more likely to feel that they were given advice as to how to take their complaint forward, than those whose cases we closed following an assessment. Two thirds (64%) of those whose cases we closed after our initial checks agreed that they had been given advice as to how to proceed, compared with 44% of those whose cases we closed following an assessment. However, three quarters (74%) of those whose cases we closed after our initial checks, and the majority (97%) of those whose cases we closed following an assessment, who were not provided with advice, would have liked to have received this.

As we are 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.

Conversely, cases we closed after our initial checks tend to be closed, not because there is nothing further that can be done, but rather 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.

5.5 People whose cases we did not investigate: their views on the length of time the assessment took

We asked people whose cases 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 by the Ombudsman's Office, would you say the time taken was...?

Initial checks: 290, Assessment: 62

It is also important to remember that only those complainants who didn't receive an investigation were surveyed.

Among those whose cases we do not investigate, the time we take to handle their case is increasingly likely to be less than the complainant expects. Overall, around a third (31%) of all people whose cases we did not investigate felt that their contact with us was shorter than expected, compared with 2013-14 when 21% felt this. A shorter than expected time scale was generally seen positively by those whose complaints we closed following our initial checks, with 63% stating that the short time scale was a good thing.

However, assessment complainants tended to view a shorter than expected assessment negatively, with only 29% saying that this was a good thing. This is likely to be as a result of these complainants being less likely to feel they have achieved the outcome they wanted from our service, which leads them to think we have not taken the time to fully look into their complaint.

Around a third of people whose cases we did not investigate (32%) felt that their complaint took longer than they expected, with no significant difference between those whose complaints we closed following our initial checks, and those closed following our assessment. Both groups also viewed this similarly, with 69% of those whose complaints we closed following our initial checks, and 68% of those closed following our assessment, seeing this as a bad thing.

6 Investigation

At this point in our complaints process we carry out a formal investigation. The following section refers only to responses from people whose cases we investigated.

We completed 4,159 investigations in 2014-15, compared with 2,199 investigations in 2013-14. Of these, 885 (21%) were about UK government departments and some other UK public service organisations, and 3,274 (79%) were about the NHS in England - proportions consistent with 2013-14.

We have broken down this section into three main parts, which reflect the structure of our investigation process, these are:

- Part 1 - Keeping in touch throughout the process
- Part 2 - Communicating our final decision
- Part 3 - Demonstrating the impact of our decisions.

6.1 People whose cases we investigated: communication with complainants

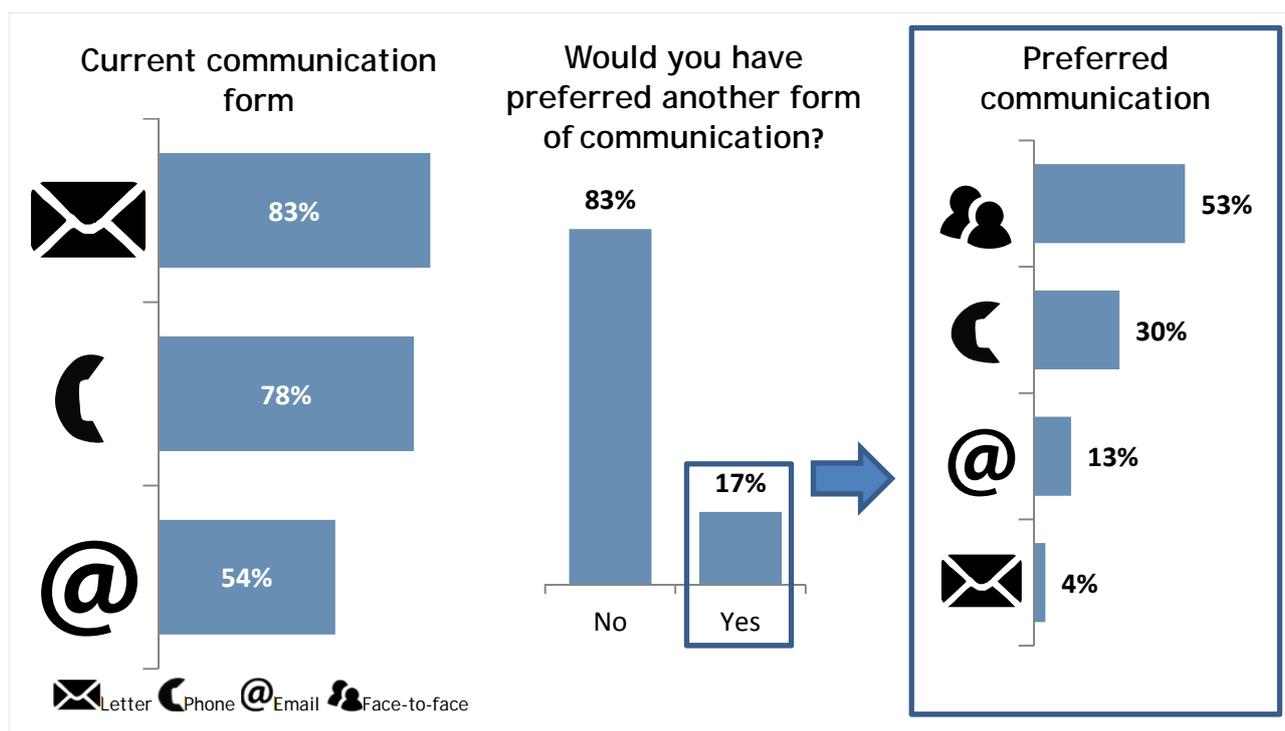
- The majority of people whose cases we investigated agreed we communicated with them in the way that they preferred.
- People whose cases we investigated were positive about their contact with our staff. In particular they felt our staff were polite, considerate and professional.
- We sent most complainants information in writing before the final decision, and most customers thought this was easy to understand.
- Investigations have increasingly taken longer than complainants expect, and people whose cases we investigate tend to view this negatively. However, investigations that were shorter than expected, where the complainants was not happy with the outcome, were also viewed negatively.
- There is a link between complainants feeling that they were not kept up to date and being dissatisfied with the length of time the investigation took.

This section also explores how we communicate with people whose cases we investigated, this includes we:

- making sure we communicate with people whose cases we investigated in the way they would prefer
- demonstrating 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
- investigating sensibly with a full understanding of the issues.

6.1.1 People whose cases we investigated: views on communication with us

The following chart shows the various types of communication our investigation customers experienced when they contacted us in 2014-15. We asked people to indicate all the various types of communication they had with us over the course of their investigation. It also shows the proportion of people who were happy with the form of communication they received, 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.



Q: How did staff at the Ombudsman's office communicate with you? Base size: 900 people whose cases we investigated

Q: Would you have preferred any other form of communication with the Ombudsman's staff? Base size: 894 people whose cases we investigated

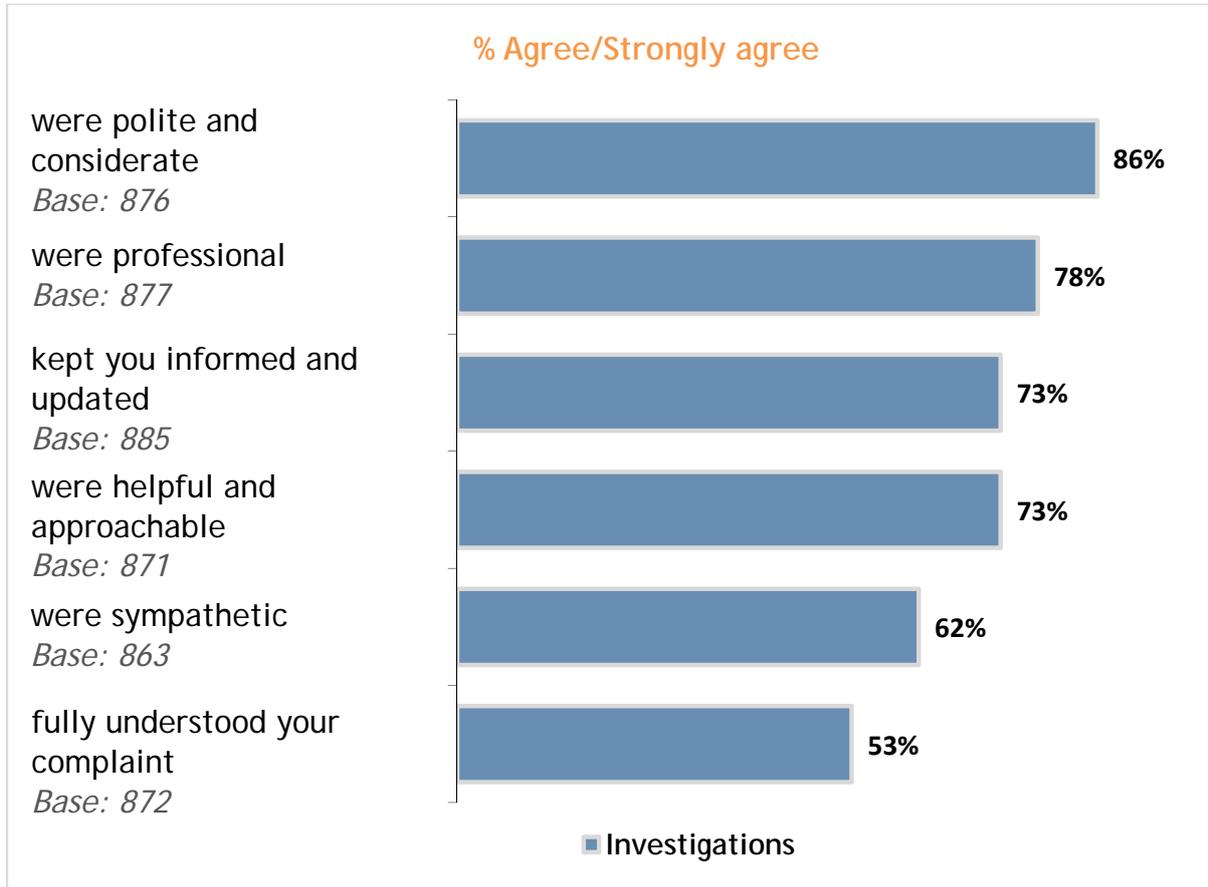
Q: How would you have preferred the Ombudsman's staff to communicate with you? Base size: 148 people whose cases we investigated

The majority (83%) 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, only a tiny proportion (4%) preferred we contact them by letter; and over half (53%) said they would rather communicate face to face.

6.1.2 People whose cases we investigated: 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 staff they had contact with.

The following chart shows their response:



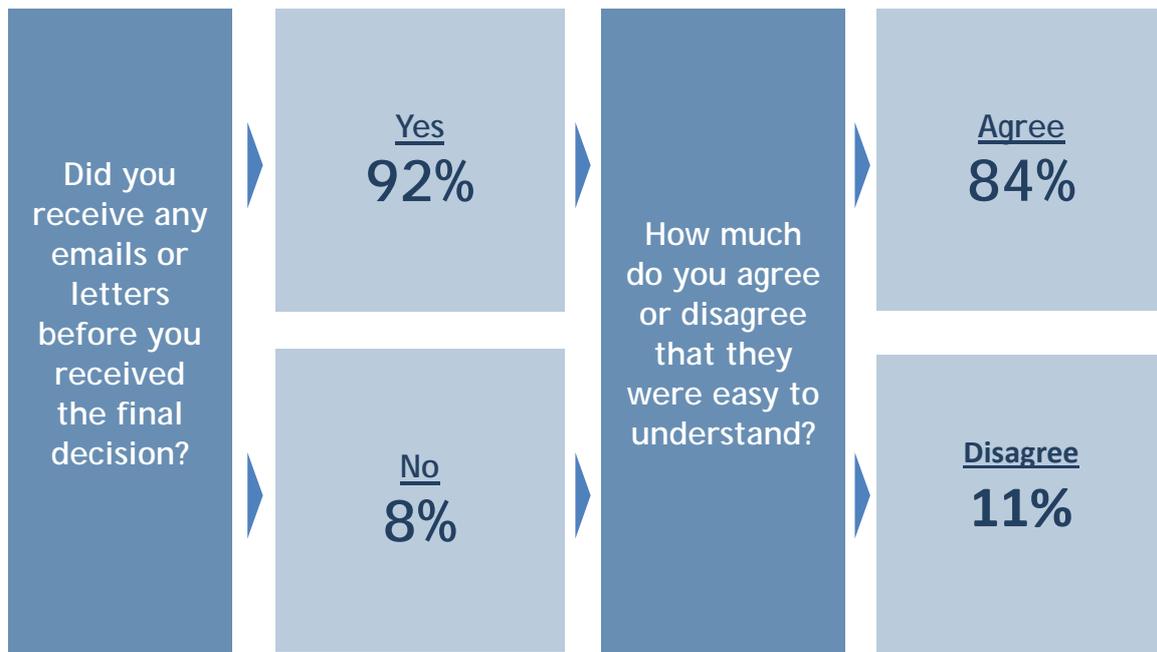
Q: And how much do you agree or disagree that the Ombudsman's staff you dealt with...?

Variable bases, shown underneath statements

The majority of people whose cases we investigated were positive about their contact with our staff. In particular, most complainants felt our staff were polite and considerate (86%), and professional (78%).

6.1.3 People whose cases we investigated: 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 to say whether they felt this was easy to understand. The following chart demonstrates the results:



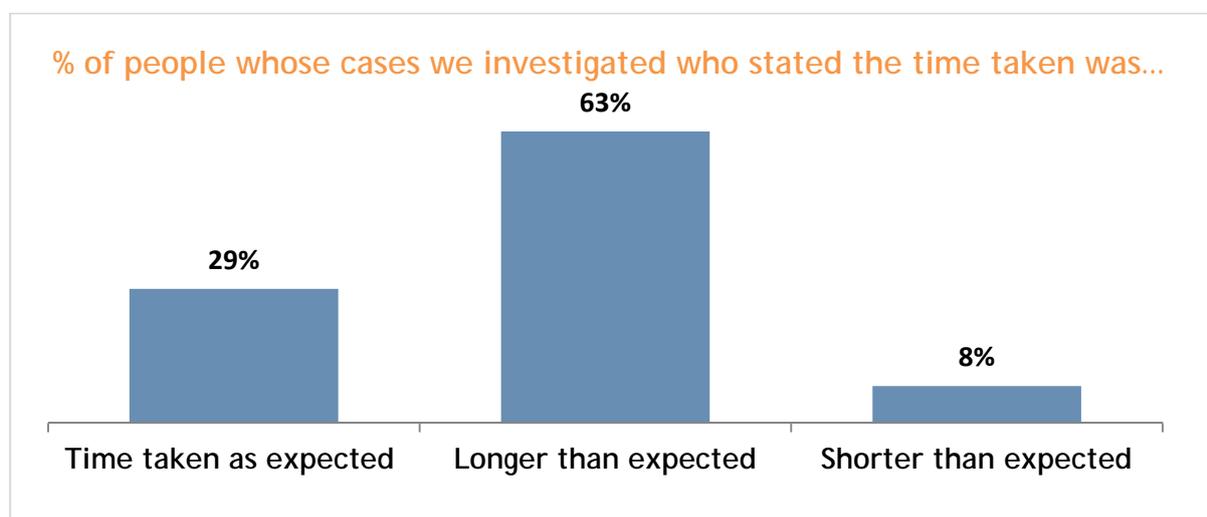
Q: Did you have any letters/emails from the Ombudsman in the time BEFORE you received the final decision? Base size: 861

Q: And thinking about these letters/emails how much would you agree or disagree that they were easy to understand? Do you...? Base size: 784

Positively, we wrote to the majority of people whose cases we investigated (92%) before the final decision, and most customers (84%) considered this to be easy to understand.

6.1.4 People whose cases we investigated: 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 by the Ombudsman's Office, would you say the time taken was...?

Base size: 865

Investigations tend to take longer than complainants expect, and this has increased compared with the previous year. Almost two thirds (63%) of complainants said that the investigation took longer than expected, compared with 55% in 2013-14.

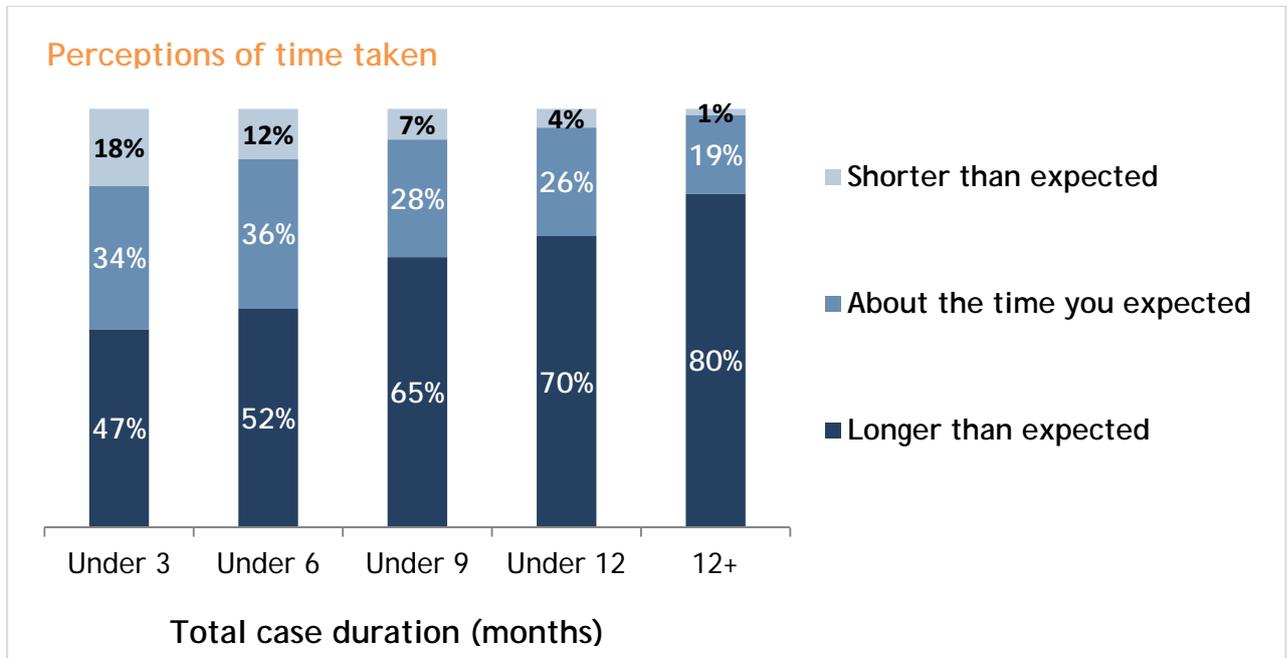
It should be noted that a number of people whose cases we investigated in 2014-15, had to wait a number of weeks for their investigation to start, after we informed them that we planned on investigating their case. Although we do not ask people specifically about this in our survey, it is possible that this initial wait for the investigation to start may have influenced complainants' responses to this question.

Investigations that take longer than expected tend to be viewed negatively by all people whose cases we investigated, and two-thirds (64%) of complainants who said they experienced this said it was a bad thing. However, complainants did not necessarily view shorter investigations positively. Satisfaction with shorter than expected investigations is strongly influenced by the outcome of the investigation. Eight in ten (82%) of complainants whose case was upheld said that the shorter than expected investigation was a positive, while two thirds (63%) of those complainants whose case was not upheld said the short investigation was a

negative. These complainants were more likely to view the shorter than expected investigation as evidence that the case had not been dealt with properly.

6.1.5 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 people’s complaint and the actual time taken:



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 size: 865

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

6.2 People whose cases we investigated: communicating our decision

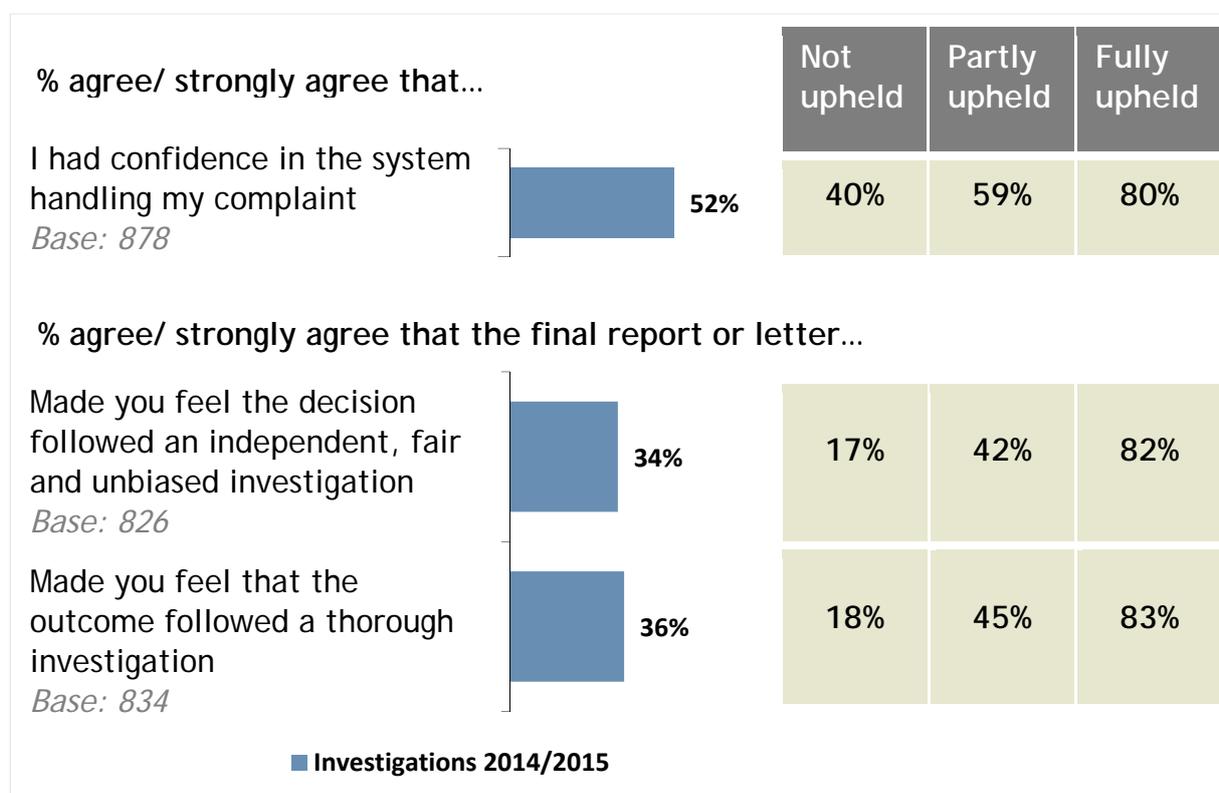
- The satisfaction of those whose cases we investigated was strongly linked to the outcome of their investigation.
- Complainants whose cases were upheld were twice as likely as those whose cases were not upheld to have confidence in our complaints process.
- The majority of people whose cases we investigated agreed they were given the opportunity to comment on a draft of our report on their case. However, it was not always clear to people how their comments were used.
- Lack of communication during the process, and timescales being longer than expected were the key points associated with dissatisfaction with our service.
- A number of complainants were left with the wrong understanding of the decision we made on their case. For instance, a fifth of those whose cases we fully upheld felt their case was partly upheld or not upheld.

This report 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
- an opportunity to comment on our final report.

6.2.1 People whose cases we investigated: 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.



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 underneath statements

Among those complainants whose cases we upheld most indicated that they had confidence in the system handling their complaint (80%), they felt the decision followed an independent and fair investigation (82%) and they felt the investigation was thorough (83%). However, responses to this question were strongly associated with the decision that we made. Among those whose cases we did not uphold, 40% indicated that they had confidence in the system handling their complaint, with 17% feeling the investigation was fair and unbiased and 18% feeling the investigation was thorough.

6.2.2 People whose cases 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

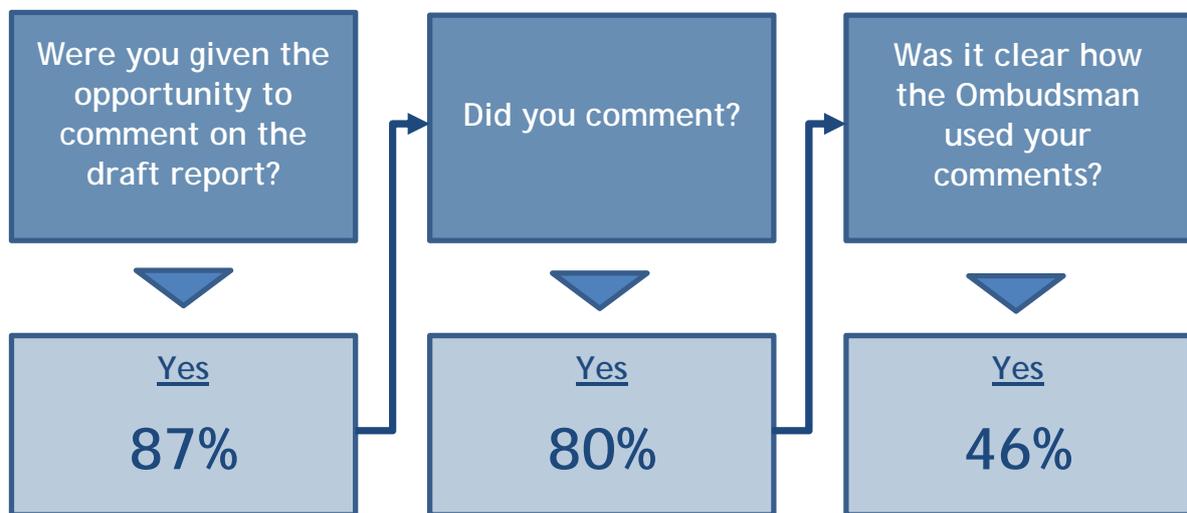
Variable bases, shown underneath statements

Again, the outcome of our investigation strongly influenced the responses to these questions. Among those whose case was upheld, 80% agreed that the final report provided evidence to support its conclusions; this figure was 18% among those whose cases we did not uphold. Similarly, among those whose case was upheld, 88% felt that the report dealt with the most important aspects of their case, this figure was 24% among those whose cases we did not uphold.

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

6.2.3 Giving people whose cases we investigated the opportunity to comment on the draft report

Everyone should be given the opportunity to comment on the draft report of our investigation into their case, 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: 833

Q: And did you make any comments? Base: 720

Q: Was it clear to you how the Ombudsman staff used your comments? Base: 549

It is positive that most complainants felt that they had the opportunity to comment on the draft report. However, among those who did go on to comment, less than half understood how their comments were used.

6.2.4 Perception of case outcome versus actual case outcome

Considering the very strong relationship between the outcome of our investigation and complainant's satisfaction, it is important that we make sure individuals are left with the correct impression of the outcome of their case. However, around a fifth (21%) of those whose cases were fully upheld, and over half (53%) of those complainants whose cases were partly upheld, were left with an incorrect impression of the outcome of their case.

Over a quarter (27%) of complainants whose case was partly upheld thought that their case was not upheld. These people were less likely to agree that the complaint process was easy to understand (60%), compared with those complainants with the correct impression of their partly upheld complaint (74%). They were also less likely to say that letters or emails they received from us were easy to understand (78%, compared with 91%).

Complainants who had the wrong perception of their case outcome were more likely to say that we could improve our service by being less biased/ more on their side (36%, compared with 14%) and by being more thorough/ looking at all the evidence (22%, compared with 10%).

6.3 People whose cases we investigated: demonstrating impact

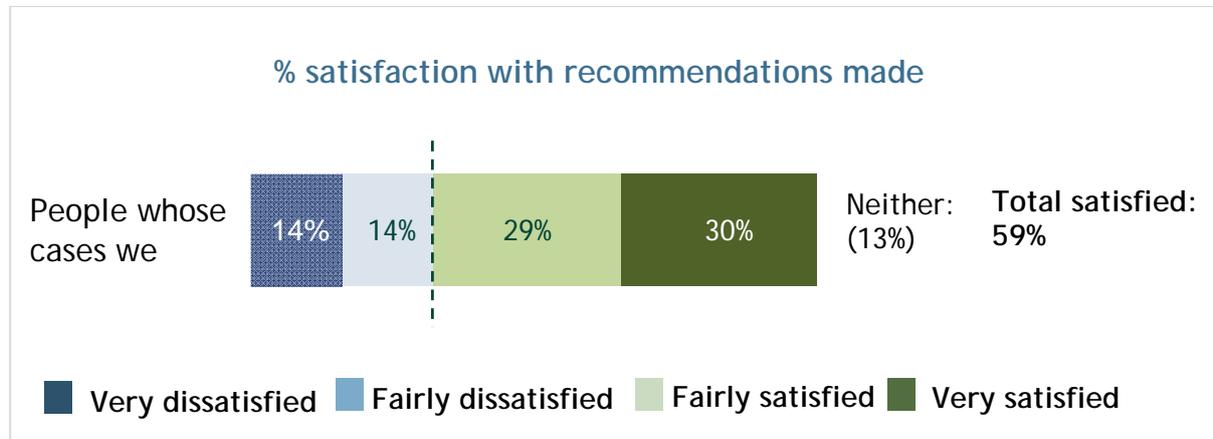
- The majority of people whose cases we investigated and upheld, or partly up were satisfied with the recommendations we made. This has declined since the previous year, which has been driven by decreased satisfaction among those people whose case was partly upheld.
- Only a third of complainants whose case we upheld or partly upheld thought that this would result in things being put right.

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 case was upheld or partly upheld, and explores their satisfaction with the recommendations we made in the final report, and the extent to which they feel things will be put right as a result of these.

The recommendations we make can be varied, in many cases we might ask the organisation to apologise to the individual concerned. In some cases we might ask the organisation to provide compensations or produce an action plan to demonstrate how they intend to prevent the same mistake happening again.

6.3.1 Satisfaction with the recommendations made

We asked those complainants whose case was fully or partly upheld to tell us what they thought about the recommendations we made. The following chart demonstrates the results:



B20B 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: 348 people whose cases we investigated who said the letter/report upheld or partially upheld their complaint

The majority of people whose cases we investigated (59%) were satisfied with the recommendations we made. However, this is a decline on 2013-14, when three quarters (76%) of complainants were satisfied. This may partly be related to the finding in the previous section (6.2.4) that a number of complainants have an incorrect impression of the outcome of their complaint.

This fall has been driven by decreased satisfaction among individuals whose complaint was partly upheld (to 52% from 73% in 2013-14); while satisfaction among individuals whose complaint was upheld also declined, the decrease was not as pronounced (84% in 2014-15, compared with 89% 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. However, it is still concerning to see such a large decrease.

6.3.2 Feeling that things will be put right

Similarly, a third (34%) of complainants who were under the impression their case had been fully or partly upheld, were confident that our investigation would result in things being put right. This is a decline on 2013-14, when half (51%) of complainants had confidence about this.

Among those who thought the investigation would not or had not made a difference, a third (34%) said that this was because they had no confidence in the organisation complained about implementing changes, while another 22% said that the organisation's services were still not up to standard. Others thought that things would not be put right as they hadn't had a proper investigation (19%), while some complainants said that nothing could adequately repair the damage done or the suffering caused (19%).

Among those complainants who thought the investigation would or had already made a difference, almost two thirds (62%) believed that the organisation's services would be or had already been improved. Another quarter (26%) had received an apology or answers to questions, with others saying that things had been put right as a result of receiving compensation (14%).

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 those individuals into those whose cases we closed following our initial checks, those closed following our assessment, and people whose cases 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
Gender¹			
Male	43%	52%	45%
Female	57%	48%	55%
Age²			
18-34	16%	6%	9%
35-54	45%	43%	37%
55-74	34%	49%	45%
75+	5%	2%	9%
Ethnicity³			
White British	78%	80%	85%
White non-British	6%	2%	5%
Mixed	2%	1%	1%
Black	6%	8%	4%
Asian	6%	6%	4%
Chinese	0%	0%	0%
Other	1%	2%	1%

Disability ⁴			
Yes	34%	37%	31%
No	66%	63%	69%
Special communication needs ⁵			
Yes	4%	2%	4%
No	96%	98%	96%

**The base size for assessment complainants is low; responses from this group should be treated with caution.*

¹ *Base size: Initial checks 1,014; Assessment 87; Investigation 900*

² *Base size: Initial checks 992; Assessment 86; Investigation 881*

³ *Base size: Initial checks 980; Assessment 84; Investigation 868*

⁴ *Base size: Initial checks 1,002; Assessment 86; Investigation 883*

⁵ *Base size: Initial checks 1,010; Assessment 86; Investigation 894*

8 Conclusions and next steps

The results of our survey have remained broadly comparable from 2013-14 to 2014-15. This is over a period where we have undergone some significant changes in the way we deliver our service; we have started to deliver greater numbers of investigations than at any point in the history of our organisation.

It is positive to see that the majority of complainants whose case did not lead to a full investigation were very satisfied, or satisfied with the customer service we provided.

It was also positive that the majority of complainants whose cases we investigated and fully upheld or partly upheld were satisfied with the customer service they received.

The outcome of individual cases continues to be strongly associated with perceptions of customer service, and satisfaction was lower among those complainants whose cases we didn't uphold.

But despite this, people who had complained to our organisation about the NHS or another government organisation were generally positive about the contact they had with our staff, who were seen to be polite, professional, helpful and approachable. This was regardless of the outcome.

The survey has also been useful in flagging a number of areas we can focus on improving. Many complainants, and in particular those whose complaints we don't uphold, do not see our investigations as impartial and thorough.

It is also the case that for many people who complain to us, we take longer to reach a decision than many people expect. This perception is exacerbated when individuals don't feel they are kept meaningfully updated on what is happening with their case.

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, as there has been a fall in the number of people who feel that things will be put right as a result of our investigation. This emphasises the importance of us working with organisations that provide public services to make sure that what is learned from the complaints we investigate is shared and acted on. Over the course of 2014-15 we started to publish a selection of our case summaries online every quarter. These demonstrate to people the sorts of issues we can help with and help to show the difference that complaining can make to those who feel let down by public services.

How we use the feedback from this survey

We are currently consulting on our new service charter. This will set 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 our survey has fed directly in to the development of our new service charter and our service model. Much of the feedback around keeping people updated, reducing delays, and showing the impact that complaining has on the organisations being complained about have all been incorporated into our service model, which commits us to being open and transparent throughout the entire complaints process.

Information in the survey is shared across our organisation on an ongoing basis, and at all levels, to help all staff to understand the areas that are working well, and identify those areas in need of improvement. Our Executive Team and Board use data from the survey to monitor our performance. It is also fed directly back to staff who deal with cases, to help them understand how their specific area of the organisation is performing.

Future plans for our survey

The feedback from our survey forms part of a range of performance measures we currently bring together under our quality assurance framework, and we use this to measure and track our performance within our organisation. In the future, we plan to use this information to demonstrate to external stakeholders how well we are achieving our aims.

The current approach to measuring complainants' feedback has not changed significantly over the past three years; therefore we also need to make sure our approach to capturing feedback is aligned with how we now deliver our service. In spring 2016 we plan to significantly change the way we gather feedback from the survey. We survey people more often throughout the process, and speed up sharing that feedback across the organisation. We will also make changes to the survey, to help us find out how well people feel we are living up to the promises we make in our new service charter, when it is finalised after our consultation.