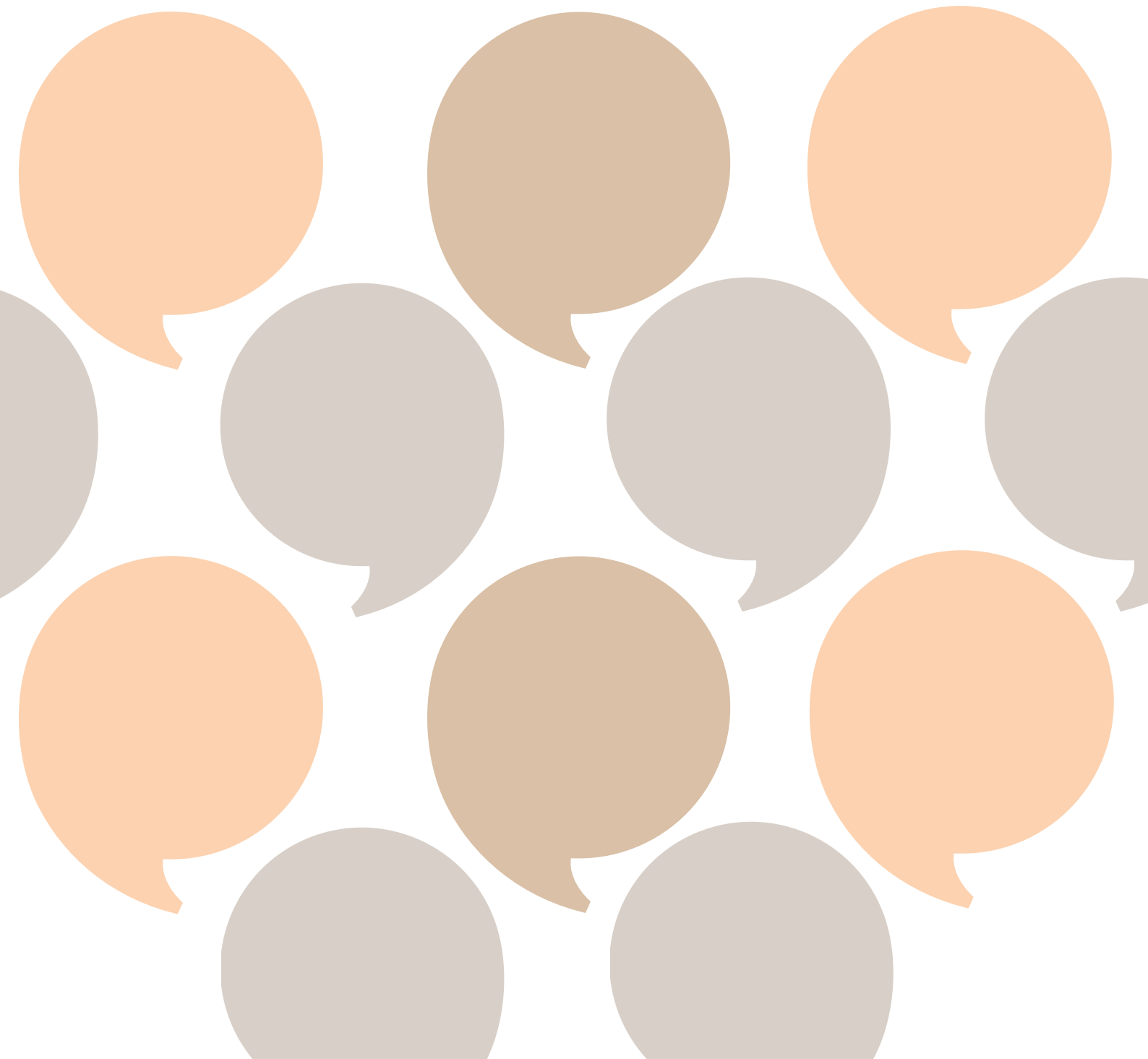


Customer Satisfaction Research

Summary of results

June 2012 - October 2012



Terminology

Our customer satisfaction research results are broken down into three categories: enquirers, complainants and review customers.

We use the word customer as a collective term for any member of the public who has been in contact with us.

An **enquirer** is a member of the public who gets in touch with us to ask us to investigate their complaint about a UK government department or agency, or the NHS in England.

A **complainant** is someone whose complaint we are formally investigating.

A **review customer** is someone who has asked us to review our decision about their enquiry or complaint, or who has made a complaint about our service.

Parliamentary complaints are complaints about government departments, their agencies and a number of other organisations in the UK.

Health complaints are complaints about NHS care or care provided on behalf of the NHS in England.

Research methodology

Our customer satisfaction research takes place throughout the year. This research summary covers the period from June to October 2012. The research is conducted by an independent research company, using telephone surveys with enquirers, complainants and review customers.

A random sample of enquirers and review customers, and all complainants, are invited to take part in the survey once they have received the final decision about their case.

The sample size of the complainants group was very small in this latest survey. This is because our customer satisfaction research was put on hold in the early months of 2012/13 due to other research priorities. This means that all results for complainants need to be treated with caution.

Response rate	
	(as a percentage of all those invited to take part in the survey)
1,000 enquirers	54%
40 complainants	86%
89 review customers	60%



Who are our customers?

Our customer satisfaction survey asks enquirers, complainants and review customers to provide us with information about themselves.

The table opposite shows a breakdown of our customers by gender, age and ethnicity. It also shows how many of our customers state that they have a disability.

As in previous research surveys, there were slightly more women than men amongst our enquirers (53 per cent and 47 per cent respectively) and a greater proportion of women than men had their complaints investigated in the period June to October 2012 (65 per cent compared to 35 per cent). This discrepancy is unsurprising: women tend to be more frequent users of the NHS, and health cases make up a much larger proportion of our casework than parliamentary cases.

In contrast, men tend to use services on the parliamentary side of our business, such as unemployment-related benefits, more frequently. As a result of these trends, the majority of complainants in health cases are female and the majority of complainants in parliamentary cases are male, with women accounting for a higher proportion of complainants overall.

A small proportion of our enquirers (17 per cent) are under 35, with an even smaller proportion, 5 per cent for complainants and 7 per cent for review customers. Just over one third of our enquirers (34 per cent) tell us that they have a disability. This is higher than the national average, and reflects the nature of our work in investigating complaints about the NHS. These trends are in line with previous surveys.

Customer demographics

Please note that the figures have been rounded to the nearest decimal place and, in some cases, may not add up to 100 per cent.

	Enquirers		Complainants		Review customers	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Total	1000	100	40	100	89	100
Sex	1000	100	40	100	89	100
Male	467	47	14	35	56	63
Female	533	53	26	65	33	37
Age	985	100	39	100	84	100
18-34	166	17	2	5	6	7
35-54	448	45	15	38	31	37
55-74	316	32	20	51	39	46
75+	55	6	2	5	8	10
Ethnicity	968	100	39	100	85	100
White British	803	83	33	85	65	76
White not British	47	5	0	0	6	7
Mixed	13	1	0	0	3	4
Black	36	4	1	3	5	6
Asian	61	6	3	8	4	5
Chinese	2	0.2	0	0	1	1
Other ethnic background	6	1	2	5	1	1
Disability	985	100	40	100	84	100
Yes*	339	34	9	23	30	36
No	646	66	31	78	54	64

* Customers who tell us that they have a disability.

Overall satisfaction with our service

As in previous surveys, most enquirers and complainants are satisfied with the service they receive, while the majority of review customers feel dissatisfied.

Overall, 76 per cent of enquirers and 95 per cent of complainants said they were fairly satisfied or very satisfied with our customer service in the period June to October 2012. This compares to enquirers' satisfaction of 71 per cent and complainants' satisfaction of 82 per cent in the period May 2011 to April 2012. The increase marks a significant improvement, although the results for complainants need to be treated with caution due to the very small sample size of this group in this survey.

Good information and advice, good communication, and being kept informed, as well as interested, sympathetic and professional staff, are the main reasons why customers were satisfied with the service they received.

As can be expected, our review customers (those who have asked for a review of the decision made about their case, or who have complained about us) were more critical of their experience with our Office: under a third

(31 per cent) said that they were satisfied or very satisfied with our service. This is a drop of 1 percentage point compared to 2011/12 but is above the satisfaction level of review customers in previous years.

The main reason why many review customers continue to be dissatisfied with our service is that they lack confidence in our ability to handle the review of their complaint. They believe that their complaint was not investigated properly, that we did not take all the evidence into account, or that our communications were poor.

The nature of our work – we look at complaints without taking sides – means that there will always be people who are unhappy with the outcome of their complaint. However, earlier this year we introduced a new, more customer-focused approach to our communications with review customers: where possible and appropriate, we initially deal with them by telephone, before following this up in writing. We believe that this new approach delivers a more personal service and enables our customers to get their views and comments across more easily.

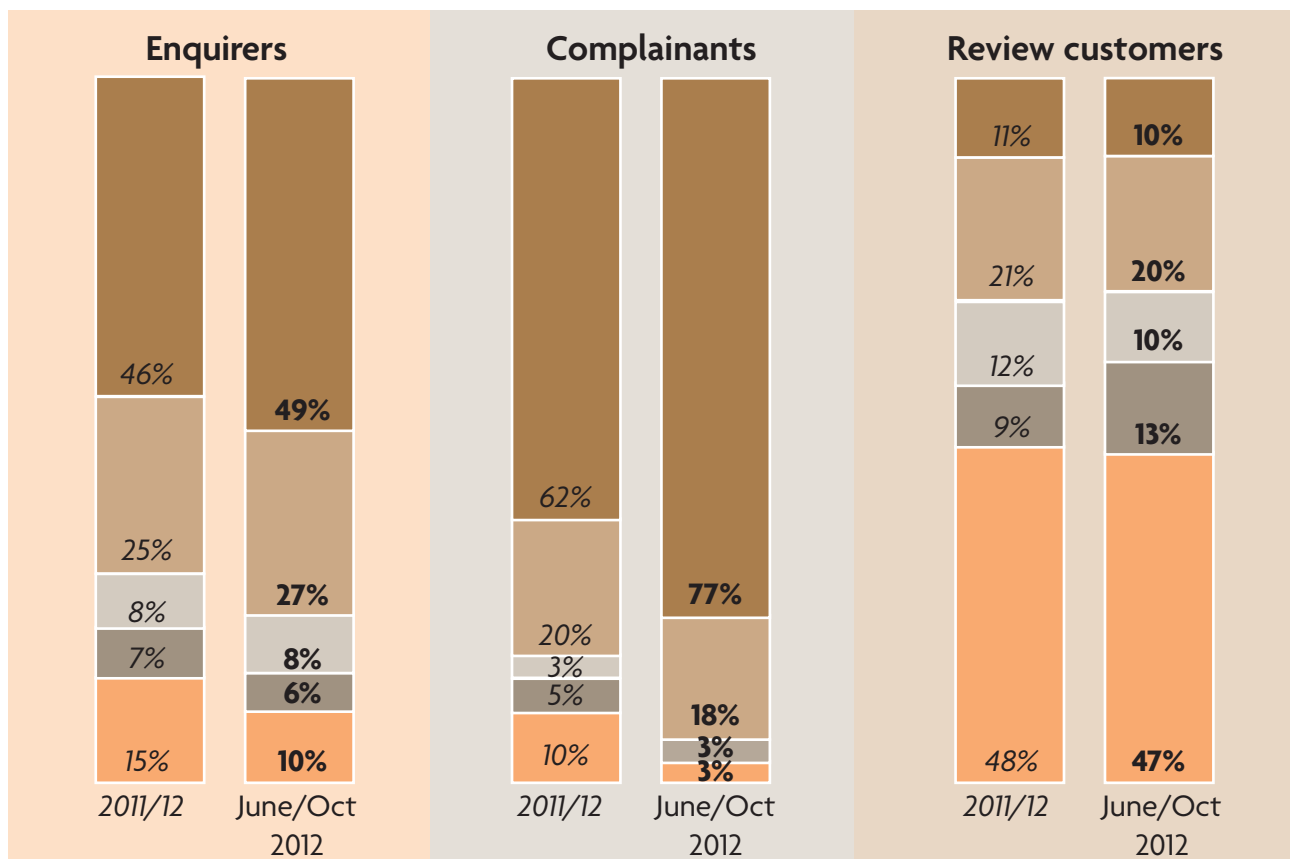
'It was not the decision I was hoping for - but I'm satisfied they've done everything they can - it was rules and regulations that stopped it in its tracks.'
(Enquirer)

'I felt at the time I could trust them, I felt they are well trained and efficient.'
(Complainant)

'I think [their] letter showed understanding and sympathy for my position.'
(Review customer)



Overall satisfaction with customer service June to October 2012, compared to May 2011 to April 2012*



Very satisfied
 Fairly satisfied
 Neither
 Fairly dissatisfied
 Very dissatisfied

*Please note that the figures have been rounded to the nearest decimal place and, in some cases, may not add up to 100 per cent. This also means that 'very satisfied' and 'fairly satisfied' may not add up to overall satisfaction quoted elsewhere in the text.

Parliamentary and health complaints

'The outcome that I got was more than what I could have expected. I was taken seriously.'
(Enquirer)

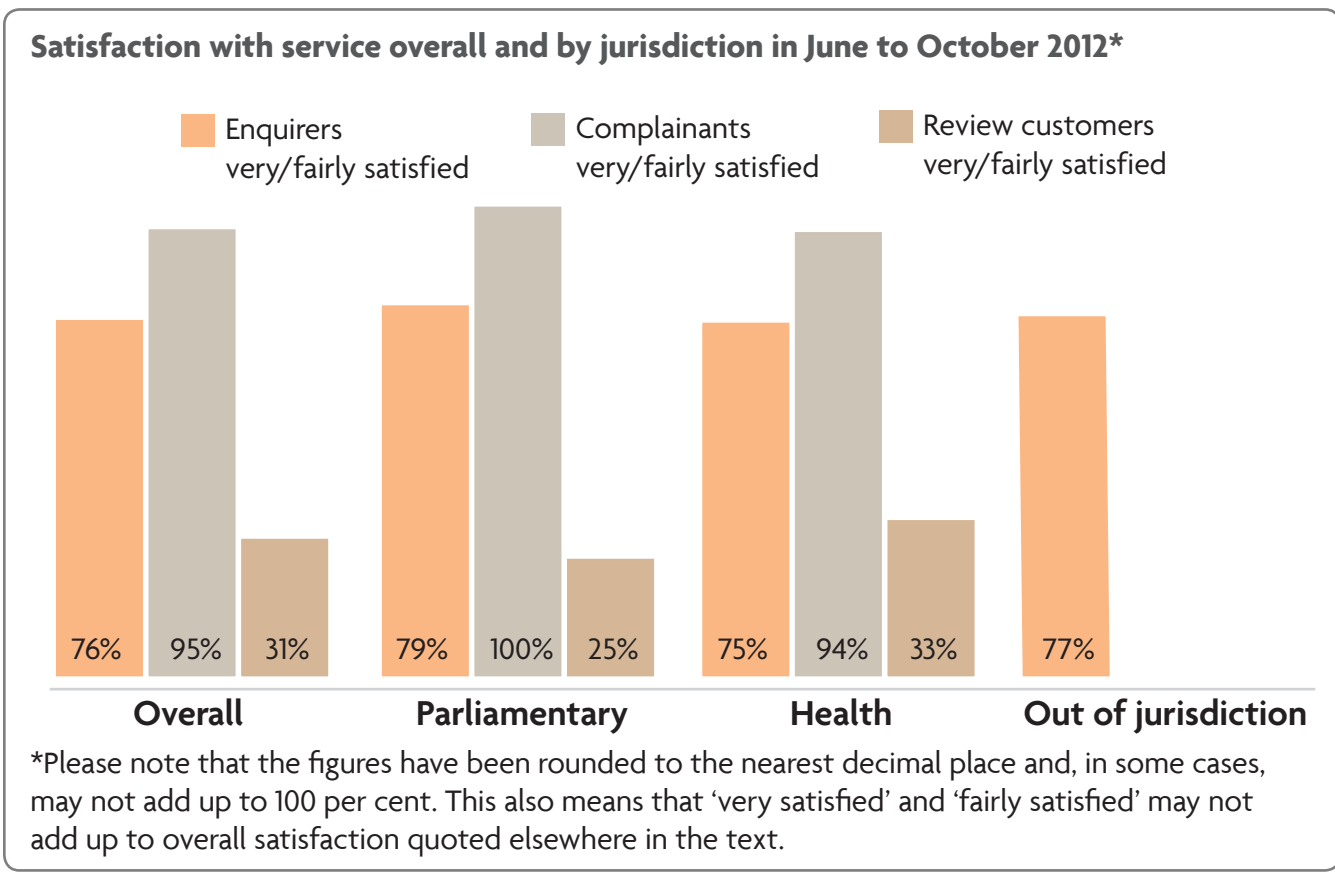
'The complaint was upheld and a recommendation was made, and now I know that [the NHS] are going to implement changes.'
(Complainant)

'Each time I had a conversation or letter they seemed very friendly and understanding but I feel the whole system is not working for the patient.'
(Review customer)

Levels of satisfaction amongst enquirers and complainants are broadly comparable across our parliamentary and health work, with between 79 and 75 per cent of enquirers saying that they are fairly satisfied or very satisfied with our service. In comparison, between 100 and 94 per cent of health and parliamentary complainants were very or fairly satisfied with our work. The

satisfaction figures for complainants need to be treated with caution, however, due to the very small sample size of this group in the survey.

The results also show that review customers with parliamentary complaints are less satisfied (25 per cent) than review customers with health complaints (33 per cent).





Customer service

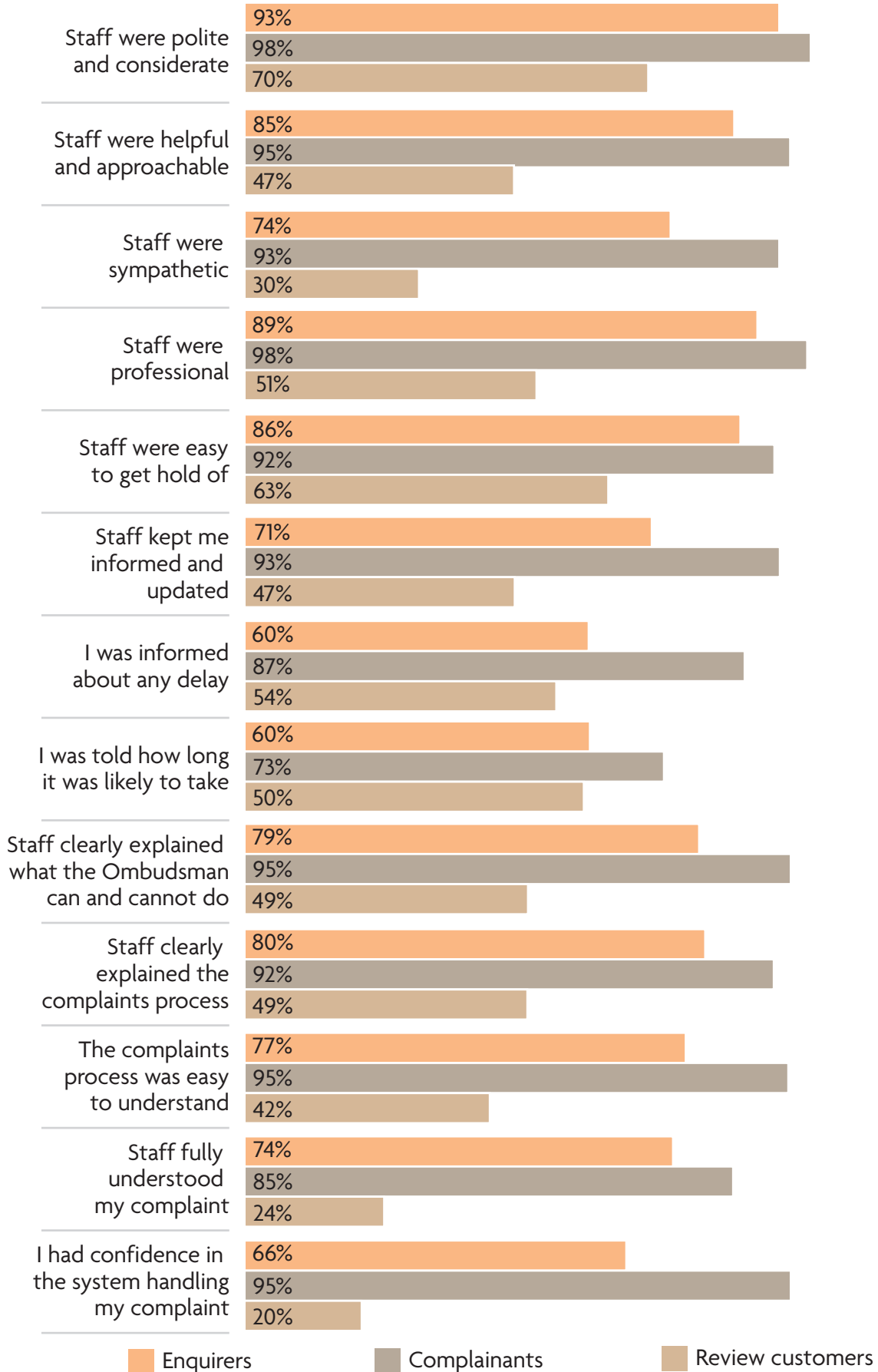
- 80 per cent of enquirers, 92 per cent of complainants, and 49 per cent of review customers felt that **staff clearly explained our complaints process**, with 77 per cent of enquirers, 95 per cent of complainants and 42 per cent of review customers stating that our **complaints process was easy to understand**;
- 79 per cent of enquirers, 95 per cent of complainants, and 49 per cent of review customers felt that **staff clearly explained what we can and cannot do**;
- 93 per cent of enquirers, 98 per cent of complainants, and 70 per cent of review customers felt that **staff were polite and considerate**, with 85 per cent of enquirers, 95 per cent of complainants and 47 per cent of review customers stating that **staff were helpful and approachable**;
- 86 per cent of enquirers, 92 per cent of complainants, and 63 per cent of review customers felt that **we were easy to get hold of**;
- 74 per cent of enquirers, 85 per cent of complainants, but only 24 per cent of review customers felt that **we fully understood their complaint**;
- 74 per cent of enquirers, 93 per cent of complainants, and 30 per cent of review customers felt that **we were sympathetic**; and
- 66 per cent of enquirers, 95 per cent of complainants and 20 per cent of review customers said that **they had confidence in our system being able to handle their complaint**.

'It was quick and they were polite and professional.'
(Enquirer)

'They couldn't do anything else. They did their best.'
(Complainant)

'I do think that my concerns were not really recognised in this matter. There was no real empathy shown towards [me].'
(Review customer)

Percentage that strongly/tend to agree with statements



Communication and correspondence

'They did write when they said they were going to write back.'
(Enquirer)

'They always kept [me] up to date with the process via letters and telephone calls and they were compassionate and professional.'
(Complainant)

'It was all contact by letter.'
(Review customer)

We write to our complainants, some enquirers and review customers to keep them up to date with the progress of their case. Of those who

received letters or emails from us before we reached a final decision, most said that the communication was easy to understand.

Communication rating

Those who received correspondence
before the final decision

Enquirers 49%

Complainants 100%

Review customers 66%

Correspondence
rated easy to
understand

90%

95%

75%

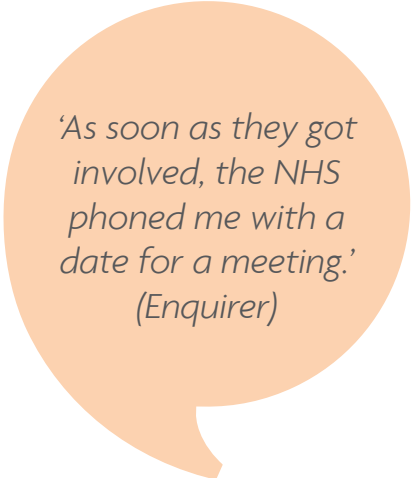


Timeliness


As in previous customer satisfaction research surveys, the majority of customers interviewed said that they were kept informed and updated: 71 per cent of enquirers, 93 per cent of complainants and 47 per cent of review customers thought this was the case (see chart on page 13).

A large proportion of our customers also said that they were informed about any delay in the progress of their case: amongst enquirers, 60 per cent said they were informed, while 87 per cent of complainants and 54 per cent of review customers also agreed with this statement.


In terms of the time it takes to deal with a case, 50 per cent of complainants and 52 per cent of review customers felt that dealing with their case took longer than expected, compared to 27 per cent of enquirers. Compared to 2011/12, the perception that the case took longer than expected has fallen amongst enquirers and, in particular, amongst complainants (by eight percentage points). However, the results for complainants may be exaggerated because of the very small sample size of this group of customers used in our latest survey. Amongst review customers, the perception that the case took longer than expected has remained unchanged.



'As soon as they got involved, the NHS phoned me with a date for a meeting.'
(Enquirer)

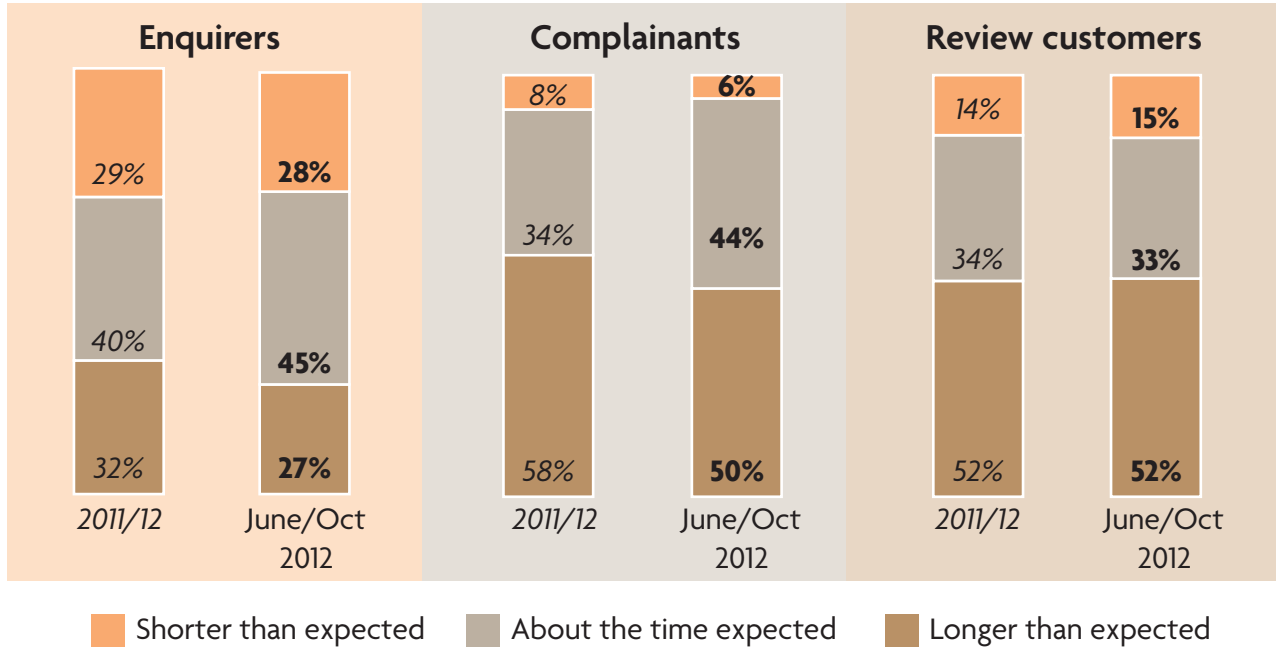


'They took the complaint seriously; they recognised there was a case to answer [but] the timescale and the financial compensation didn't reflect the severity of the case.'
(Complainant)



'They could take a shorter time, keep in contact a bit more.'
(Review customer)

Timeliness, June to October 2012 compared to May 2011 to April 2012*



*Please note that the figures have been rounded to the next decimal place and, in some cases, may not add up to 100 per cent.

Our service standards

Time we will take to acknowledge and respond to enquiries

Email enquiry	Acknowledgement sent within 1 working day
Written enquiry	Acknowledgement sent within 2 working days
Substantive response to enquiries	90 per cent within 40 working days

Time we will take to investigate complaints

From acceptance for investigation	
Within 12 months	90 per cent

Time we will take to deal with complaints about us

Initial response to complaints	95 per cent within 5 working days
Substantive response to complaints	90 per cent within 16 weeks

Outcome of complaints

Customers' satisfaction with the outcome of their enquiry or investigation remains very closely linked to whether or not they agree with our decision.

Overall, satisfaction with the outcome has improved for all three customer groups. During the time frame of this research, only a small proportion of cases in the sample was accepted for investigation and/or upheld. This affects satisfaction with the outcome:

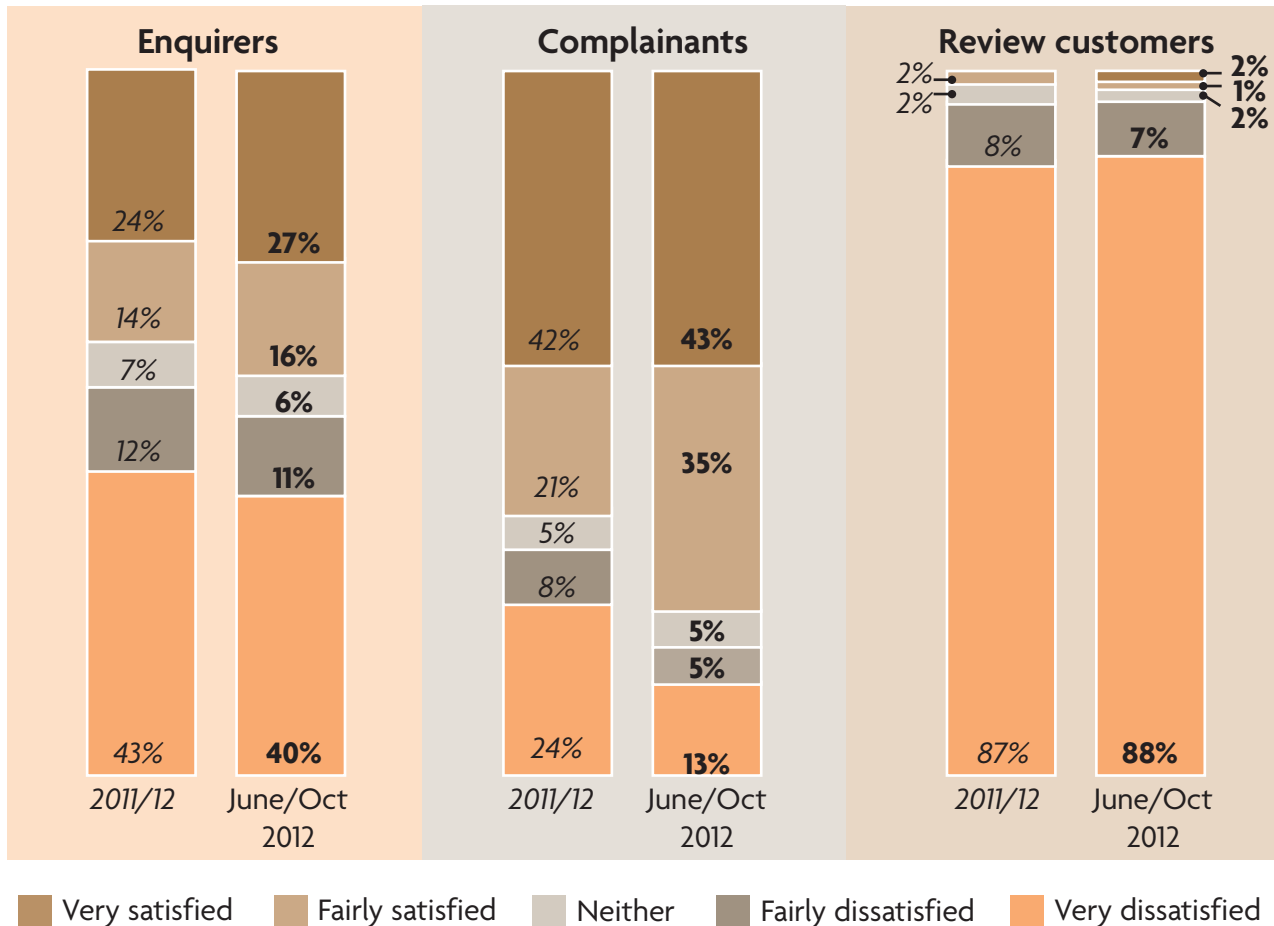
- 43 per cent of enquirers were fairly satisfied or very satisfied (up 5 percentage points compared to 2011/12);
- 78 per cent of complainants were fairly satisfied or very satisfied (up from 63 per cent in 2011/12) – the very small sample size of complainants used in this latest survey may have exaggerated this increase; and
- 3 per cent of review customers were fairly satisfied or very satisfied (up from 2 per cent in 2011/12).

'It wasn't the decision I wanted but they obviously did look into the issue very thoroughly and came to their decision - not the one I was hoping for but they gave it due diligence and investigated it very well.'
(Enquirer)

'They didn't look into it properly.'
(Review customer)

'They only agreed to look at how the complaint had been handled and not the complaint itself - but they did uphold my complaint in that sense so I couldn't have asked for more than that really.'
(Complainant)

Satisfaction with outcome June to October 2012, compared to May 2011 to April 2012*



*Please note that the figures have been rounded to the next decimal place and, in some cases, may not add up to 100 per cent. This also means that 'very satisfied' and 'fairly satisfied' may not add up to the overall satisfaction quoted elsewhere in the text.

Most complainants and enquirers say they are very or fairly likely to use our service again (77 per cent and 88 per cent respectively) and would recommend us to their friends and family (76 per cent and 93 per cent).

In contrast, just over a third (35 per cent) of review customers say they are very or fairly likely to use our service again, and just 23 per cent would advocate our service to friends and family.

What our customers think we could do better

'The service should be set up so that members of the public can voice a complaint directly to the Ombudsman without having to involve an MP.'
(Enquirer)

'I don't think they could have done any more.'
(Complainant)

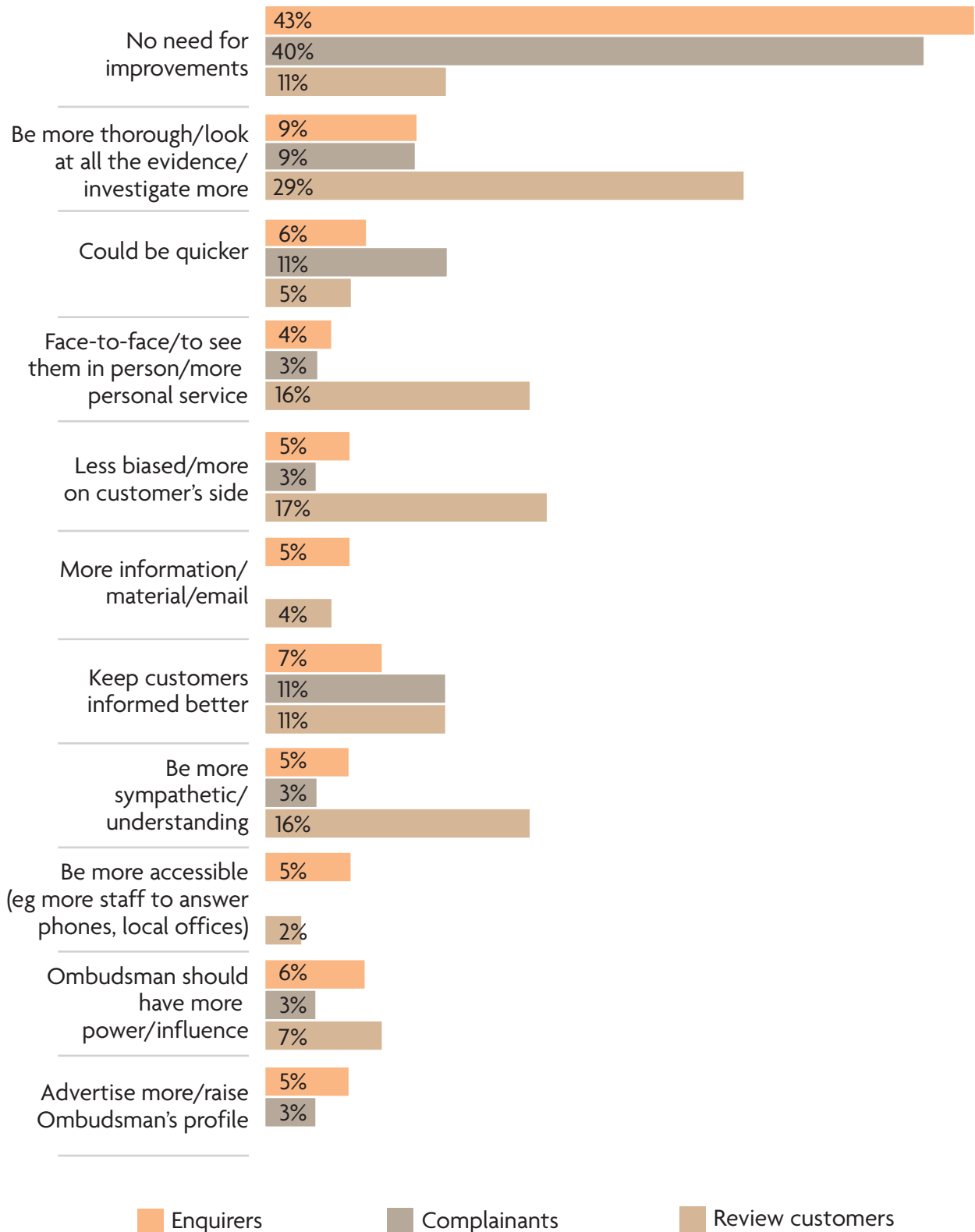
'I think the communication in some parts would have been better dealt with over the phone so that I could discuss it.'
(Review customer)

Asked about how they think we could improve, 43 per cent of enquirers, 40 per cent of complainants and 11 per cent of review customers said that they did not see any need for improvements.

The most common suggestion for improvement from enquirers and review customers was that we should be more thorough in our casework, look at all the evidence and investigate more: 9 per cent of enquirers and 29 per cent of review customers made this suggestion. For complainants, providing a quicker service (11 per cent) and keeping customers informed (also 11 per cent) were the priorities for improving our service.

Review customers also suggested we should be less biased and more on our customers' side (17 per cent of all review customers), that they would like to have face-to-face meetings and a more personal service (16 per cent) and that we should be more sympathetic and understanding (also 16 per cent).

Suggested improvements



How do people find out about our service?

'People might get confused with the title - it should be the national service ombudsman stopping people getting confused.'
(Enquirer)

'If you ask the right question you will find out about them, if not you won't know where to look.'
(Enquirer)

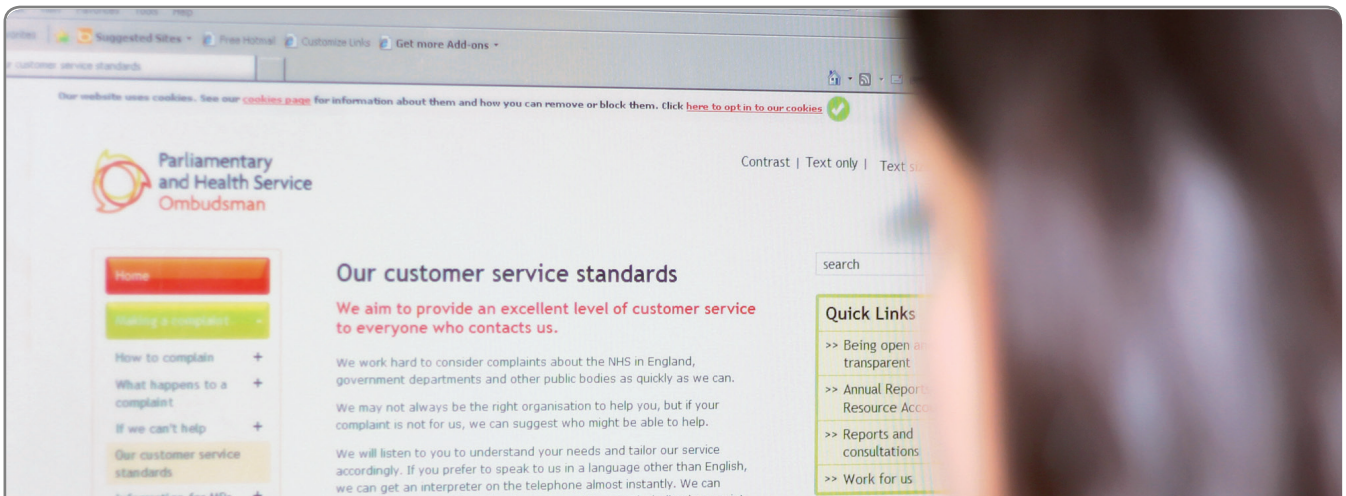
'I used a combination of leaflets, internet and phone calls to find out about them.'
(Enquirer)

Our research survey asks people how they find out about our service. Unsurprisingly, NHS service providers remain the main way in which people who want to complain about the NHS find out about our service: 21 per cent of all enquirers and 26 per cent of all complainants found their way to us through an NHS hospital, doctor or PCT.

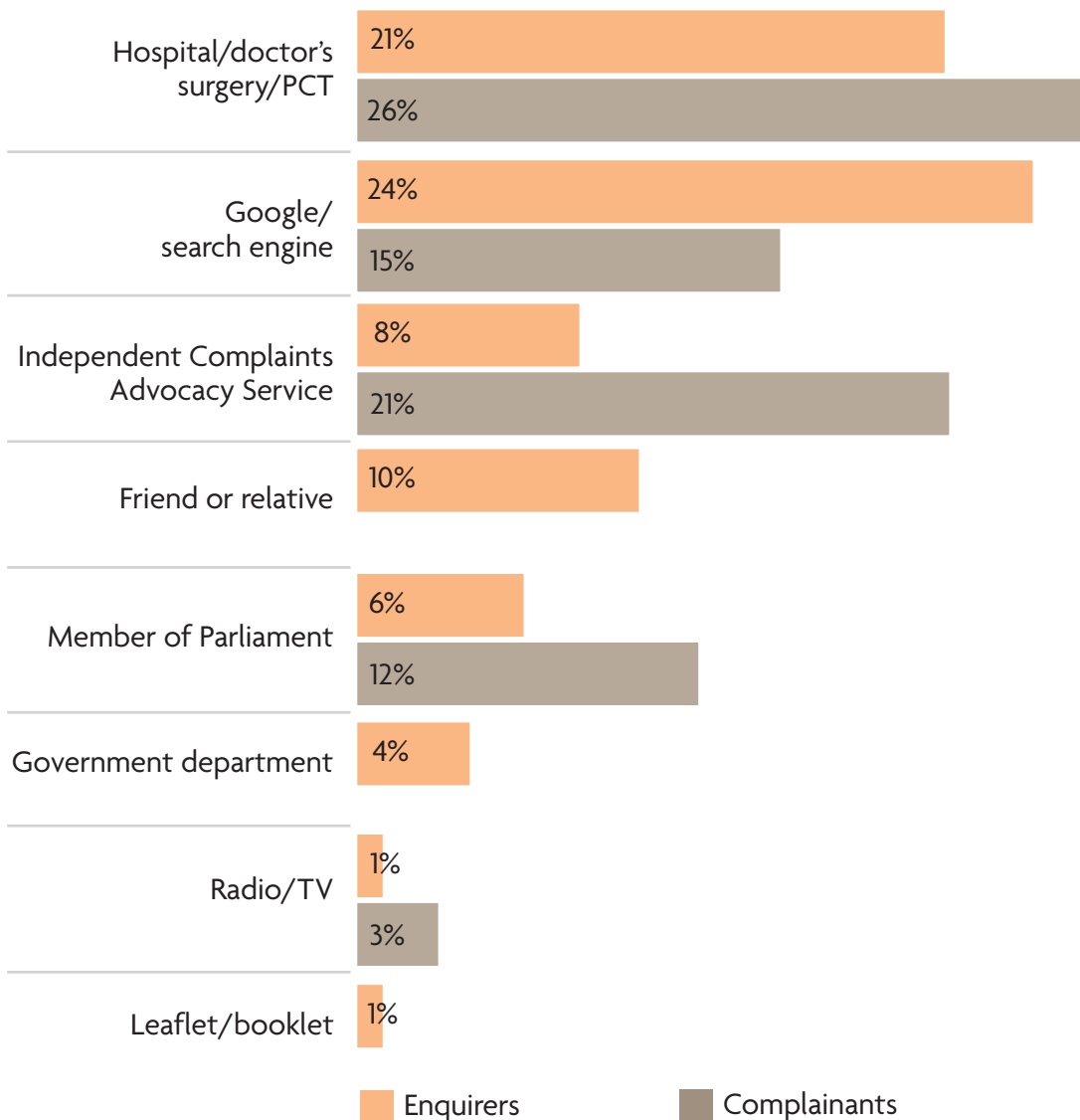
The Independent Complaints Advocacy Service (ICAS) – an advocacy service which helps people raise concerns about NHS care or treatment – also plays an important role in directing people to us: 8 per cent of all enquirers and 21 per cent of all complainants found their way to us through ICAS.

The internet is an increasingly important tool in helping people find and get in touch with us: 24 per cent of enquirers (19 per cent in 2011/12) and 15 per cent of complainants (9 per cent in 2011/12) used Google or another search engine to find us. We are committed to ensuring that our website is easy to find and navigate for those who want to know if we can help.

Members of Parliament (MPs) also continue to play a key role in signposting people to us. In total, 6 per cent of our enquirers and 12 per cent of complainants found out about our service through an MP. Amongst those with a parliamentary complaint, 14 per cent of enquirers and 67 per cent of complainants learnt about us through their MP. This is to be expected, as members of the public who wish to complain about a government department or agency must be referred to us by an MP.



How customers find out about our service



Conclusion

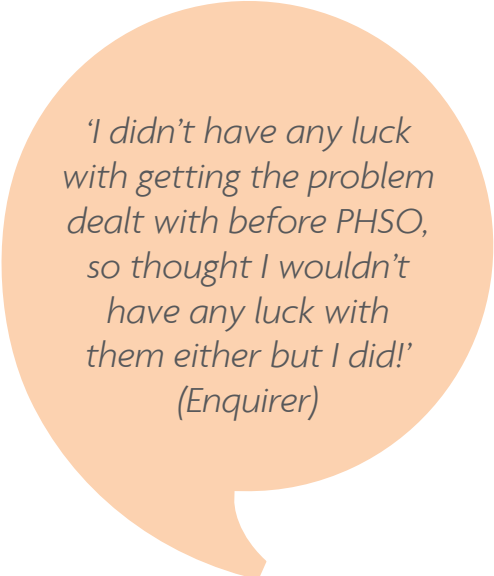
We are pleased that the majority of enquirers and complainants continue to be positive about most aspects of our service. However, we also note that the satisfaction levels of our review customers - those who disagree with our decisions or have a complaint about our service – remain low. We are committed to improving their experience of our service and want to ensure that everyone who brings a complaint to us can be confident that we have listened to them and have understood their complaint.

We published our new Strategy in November. It sets out how we will work to deliver more impact for more people over the next five years.

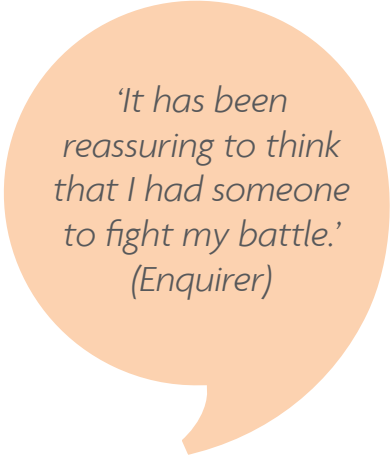
We developed the Strategy using customer research and after taking views from the public, Parliament, advice and advocacy groups, some of the most complained about organisations in our jurisdiction, regulators and professional organisations.

The research exercise showed that there is a clear unmet need among the public for simpler, clearer information about how to complain and for a better, more efficient complaints system. The research also demonstrated that the public currently lacks confidence that complaints will make a difference.


In the New Year we will publish our strategic plan to explain how we will deliver our new Strategy over the next five years. Our customer satisfaction research will play an important role in this: it will allow us to assess our progress in providing an excellent service, making it easier for people to find us and use our service, and giving our customers more confidence that complaints can make a difference.



'I didn't have any luck with getting the problem dealt with before PHSO, so thought I wouldn't have any luck with them either but I did!'
(Enquirer)



'It has been reassuring to think that I had someone to fight my battle.'
(Enquirer)



'I hope what happened will draw people's attention to it so that it won't happen again.'
(Complainant)



Parliamentary
and Health Service
Ombudsman



more
for more **impact**
people



If you would like this research summary in a different format, such as Daisy or large print, please contact us.

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