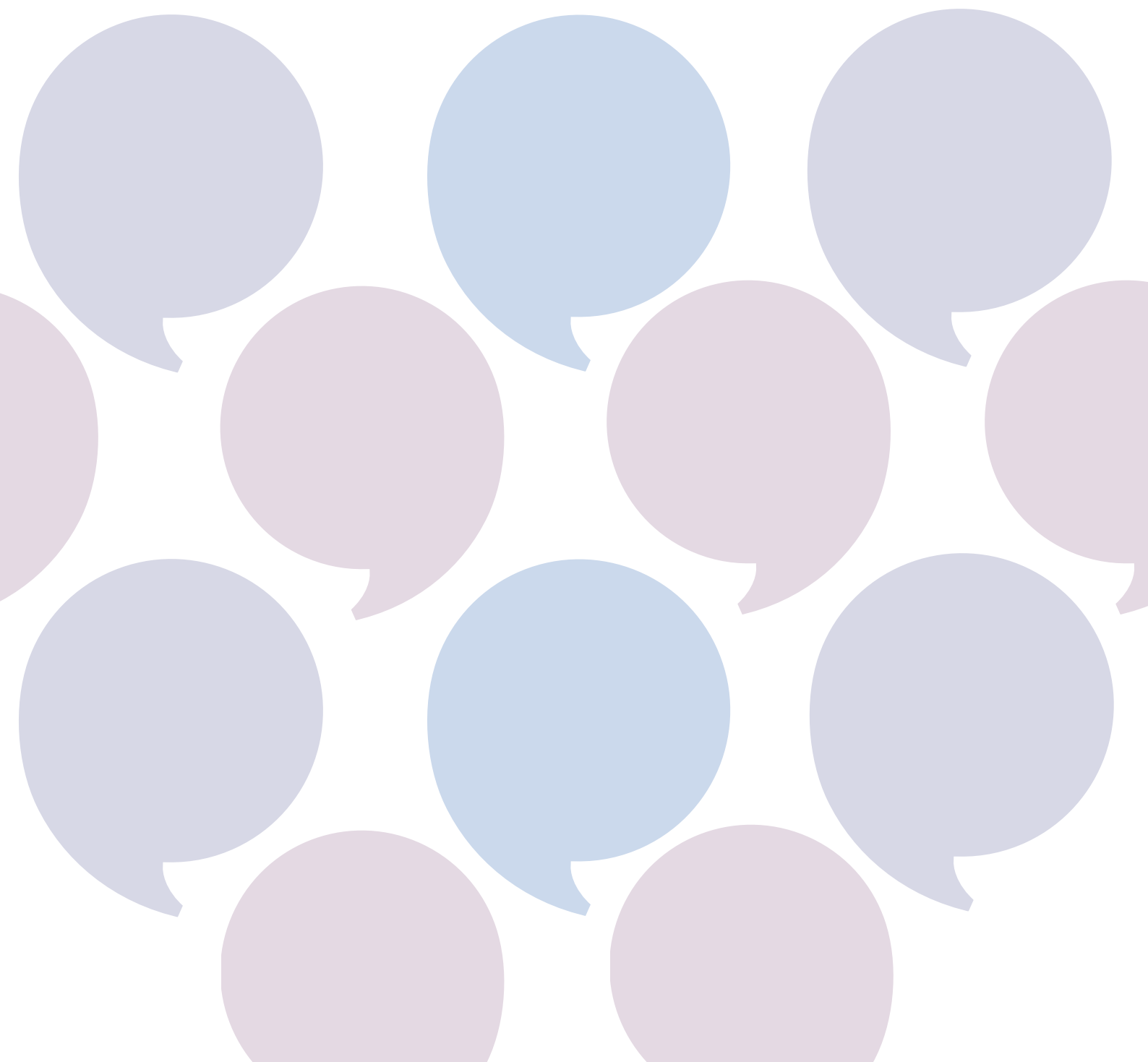


# Customer Satisfaction Research

## Summary of results

May 2011 – April 2012







# Terminology

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

We use the word customer to mean 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 May 2011 to April 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.

Total number of interviews completed	Response rate (as a percentage of all those invited to take part in the survey)
2,300 enquirers	54%
197 complainants	86%
244 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 (54 per cent and 46 per cent respectively) and a greater proportion of women than men had their complaints investigated in the period May 2011 to April 2012 (64 per cent compared to 36 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 (13 per cent) is under 35, with an even smaller proportion, 5 per cent, for both complainants and 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	%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2300</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Sex</b>	<b>2300</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>197</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>100</b>
Male	1048	46	70	36	139	57
Female	1252	54	127	64	105	43
<b>Age</b>	<b>2263</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>100</b>
18-34	294	13	10	5	12	5
35-54	990	44	84	44	86	37
55-74	849	38	87	45	119	51
75+	130	6	11	6	17	7
<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>2214</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100</b>
White British	1815	82	164	85	188	82
White not British	138	6	9	5	12	5
Mixed	31	1	2	1	4	2
Black	76	3	2	1	9	4
Asian	118	5	11	6	15	7
Chinese	5	0.2	0	0	0	0
Other ethnic background	31	1	4	2	2	1
<b>Disability</b>	<b>2253</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>237</b>	<b>100</b>
Yes*	762	34	46	24	90	38
No	1491	66	146	76	147	62

\* Customers who choose to 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, 71 per cent of enquirers and 82 per cent of complainants said they were fairly satisfied or very satisfied with our customer service. This compares to enquirers' satisfaction of 70 per cent and complainants' satisfaction of 88 per cent in 2010-11. We do not understand fully at the moment why complainants' satisfaction has dropped by 6 percentage points since 2010-11 but we will monitor whether this is just a temporary drop or part of a long-term trend.

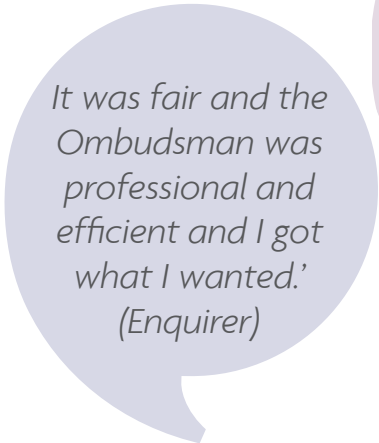
Good information and advice, good communication, and being kept informed, as well as interested, sympathetic and polite staff, are the main reasons why customers are satisfied with the service they received.

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

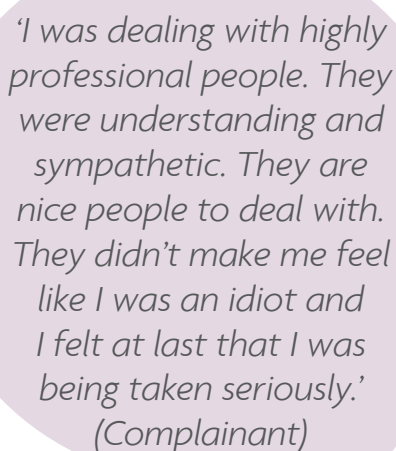
(32 per cent) said that they were satisfied or very satisfied with our service. However, this is an improvement of 6 percentage points compared to review customers' satisfaction of 26 per cent in 2010-11.

The improvement can be linked to our new, more customer-focused, approach to our communications with this group. Where possible and appropriate, we initially deal with review customers by telephone, before following 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.

However, the research results make clear that there remains room for further improvement; the main reason why 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.



*It was fair and the Ombudsman was professional and efficient and I got what I wanted.'*  
(Enquirer)



*'I was dealing with highly professional people. They were understanding and sympathetic. They are nice people to deal with. They didn't make me feel like I was an idiot and I felt at last that I was being taken seriously.'*  
(Complainant)



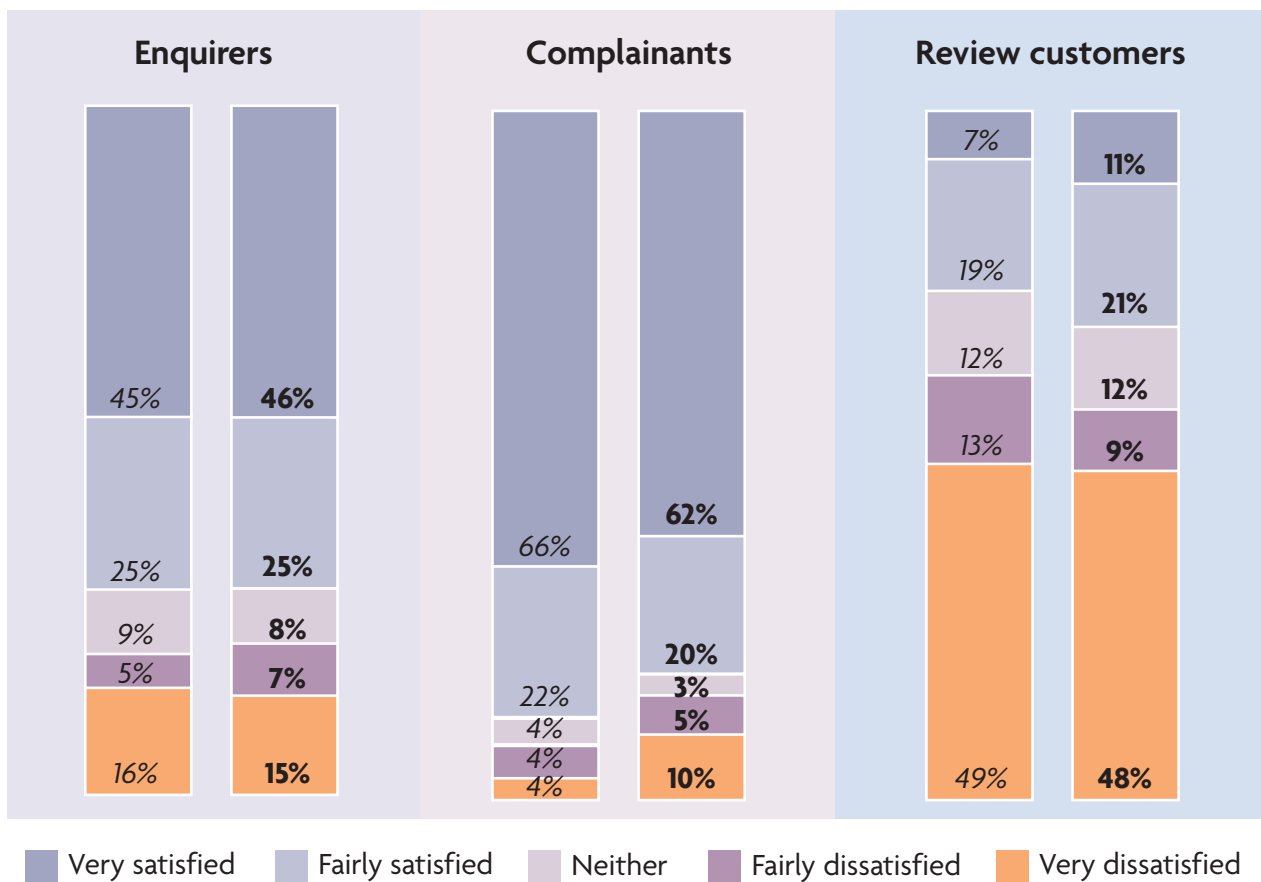
*'They are polite and helpful but I don't really feel they've got to the bottom of some of the key issues, so in that respect the customer service is lacking.'*  
(Review customer)





**Overall satisfaction with customer service May 2011 to April 2012, compared to May 2010 to April 2011\***

*(Figures for the period 2010-11 are in italics.)*



\*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

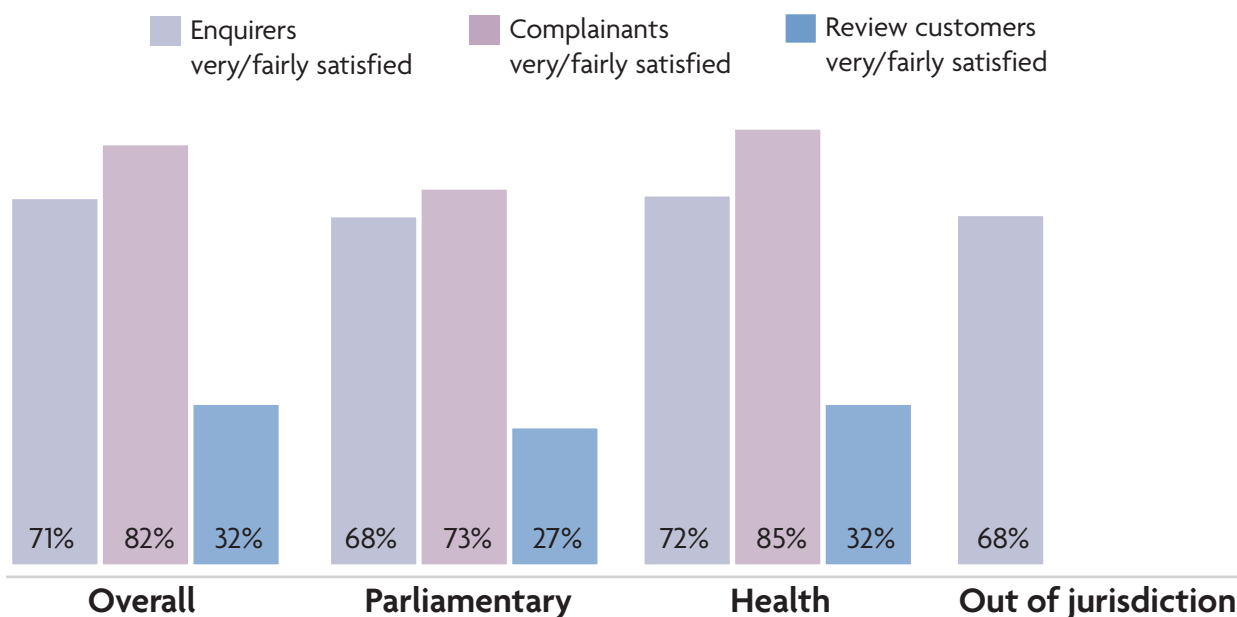


Levels of satisfaction amongst enquirers are broadly comparable across our parliamentary and health work, with between 68 and 72 per cent of enquirers saying that they are fairly satisfied or very satisfied with our service. Satisfaction amongst complainants is more variable: 85 per cent of health complainants were very or fairly satisfied with our work,

compared to 73 per cent amongst parliamentary complainants. But the figure for complainants' satisfaction marks an increase of 5 percentage points since 2010-11.

The results also show that review customers with parliamentary complaints are less satisfied (27 per cent) than review customers with health complaints (32 per cent).

## Satisfaction with service overall and by jurisdiction\*



\*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.



# Customer service

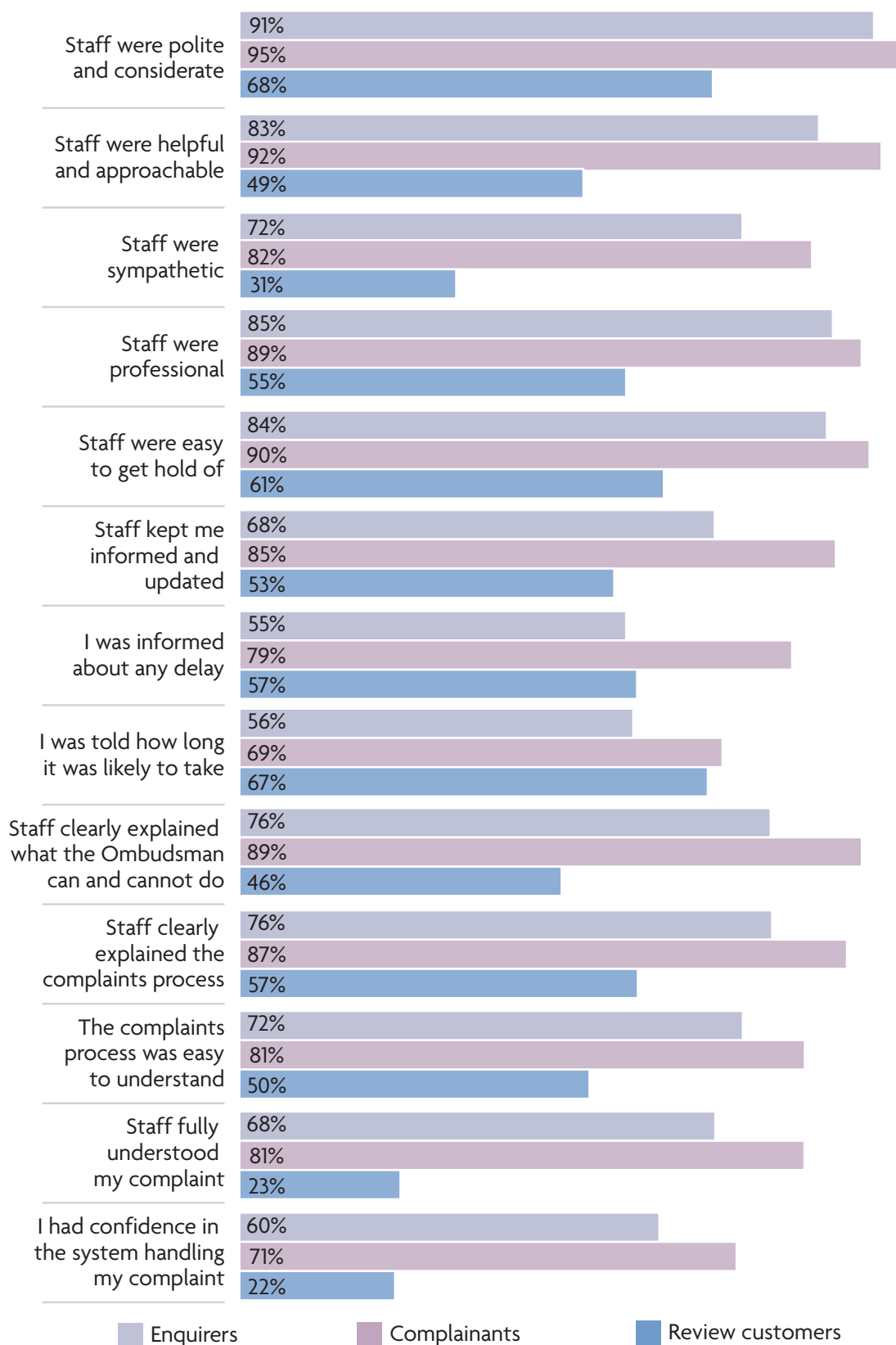
- 76 per cent of enquirers, 87 per cent of complainants, and 57 per cent of review customers felt that **staff clearly explained our complaints process**, with 72 per cent of enquirers, 81 per cent of complainants and 50 per cent of review customers stating that our complaints process **was easy to understand**;
- 76 per cent of enquirers, 89 per cent of complainants, and 46 per cent of review customers felt that **staff clearly explained what we can and cannot do**;
- 91 per cent of enquirers, 95 per cent of complainants, and 68 per cent of review customers felt that **staff were polite and considerate**, with 83 per cent of enquirers, 92 per cent of complainants and 49 per cent of review customers stating that **staff were helpful and approachable**;
- 84 per cent of enquirers, 90 per cent of complainants, and 61 per cent of review customers felt that **we were easy to get hold of**;
- 68 per cent of enquirers and 81 per cent of complainants, but only 23 per cent of review customers felt that **we fully understood their complaint**;
- 72 per cent of enquirers, 82 per cent of complainants, and 31 per cent of review customers felt that **we were sympathetic**; and
- 60 per cent of enquirers, 71 per cent of complainants and 22 per cent of review customers said that **they had confidence in our system being able to handle their complaint**.

*'It exceeded my expectations:  
I was treated in a compassionate manner.  
It was an emotional topic I was dealing with  
and they dealt with my emotions very well.'*  
(Enquirer)

*'The people that I dealt with at PHSO  
were very nice. Very sensitive and caring.  
I don't think they could have done any more.'*  
(Complainant)

*'They have no bite and they don't seem to want to do anything.'*  
(Review customer)

## Percentage that strongly/tend to agree with statements



# Communication and correspondence

*'From when the Ombudsman have come on board, they've sat me down and gone through the whole thing, they've advised me on the right way to go about it, and it's working. They've been very fair.'*  
(Enquirer)

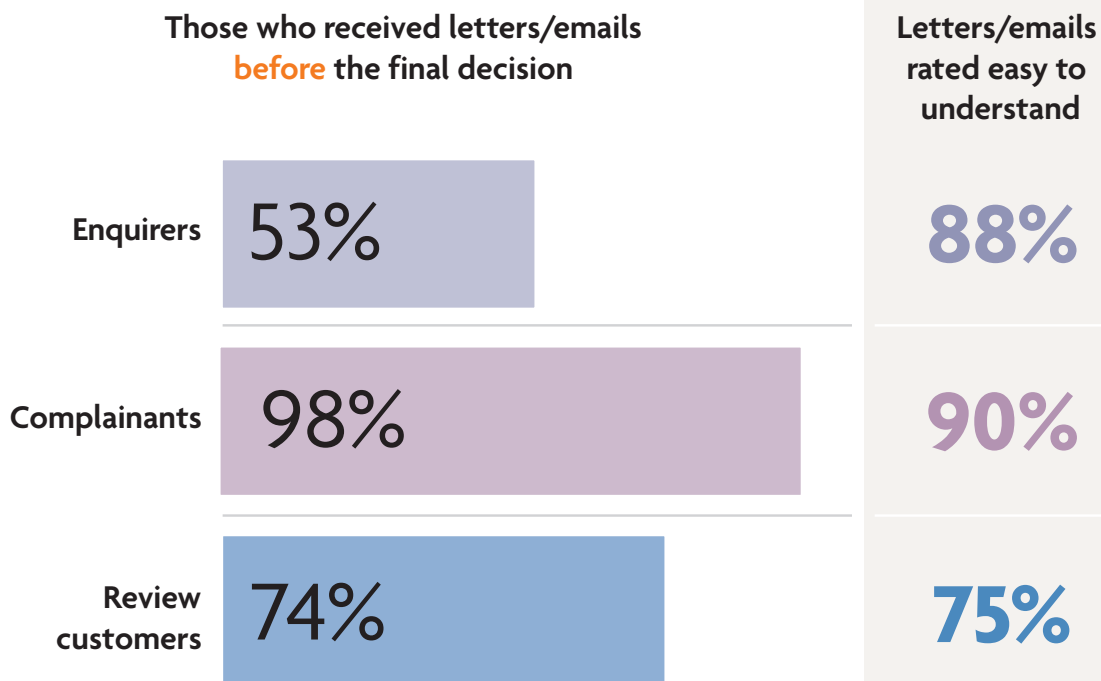
*'Everything was very professional, they kept me updated, I was never left in the dark, they kept me in touch by phone. It's a very professional organisation.'*  
(Complainant)

*'They were very polite in emails and postal communications, I just think I could have been made aware of the time limits. They were very forthcoming with their responses. Other than that I would have been very satisfied.'*  
(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



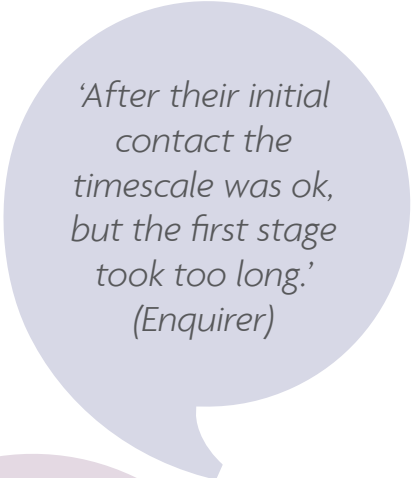


# Timeliness

As in previous customer satisfaction research surveys, the majority of customers interviewed said that they were kept informed and updated; 68 per cent of enquirers, 85 per cent of complainants and 53 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, 55 per cent said they were informed, while 79 per cent of complainants and 57 per cent of review customers also agreed with this statement.

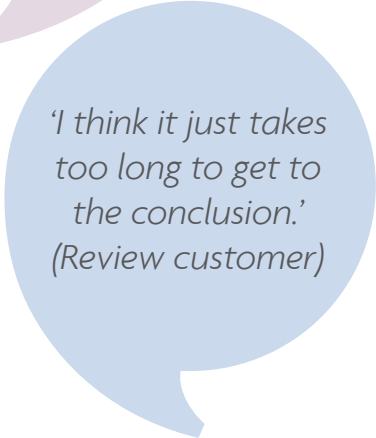
In terms of the time it takes to deal with a case, 58 per cent of complainants and 52 per cent of review customers felt that dealing with their case took longer than expected, compared to 32 per cent of enquirers. Compared to 2010-11, the perception that the case took longer than expected has remained the same amongst enquirers and has fallen amongst complainants (by 4 percentage points) and in particular amongst review customers (by 10 percentage points), mainly as a result of better communication of the likely timescales with this group.



*'After their initial contact the timescale was ok, but the first stage took too long.'*  
(Enquirer)



*'We were told how long it would take. It didn't take any longer than they said. They gave me updates about the timescales. They kept me informed.'*  
(Complainant)

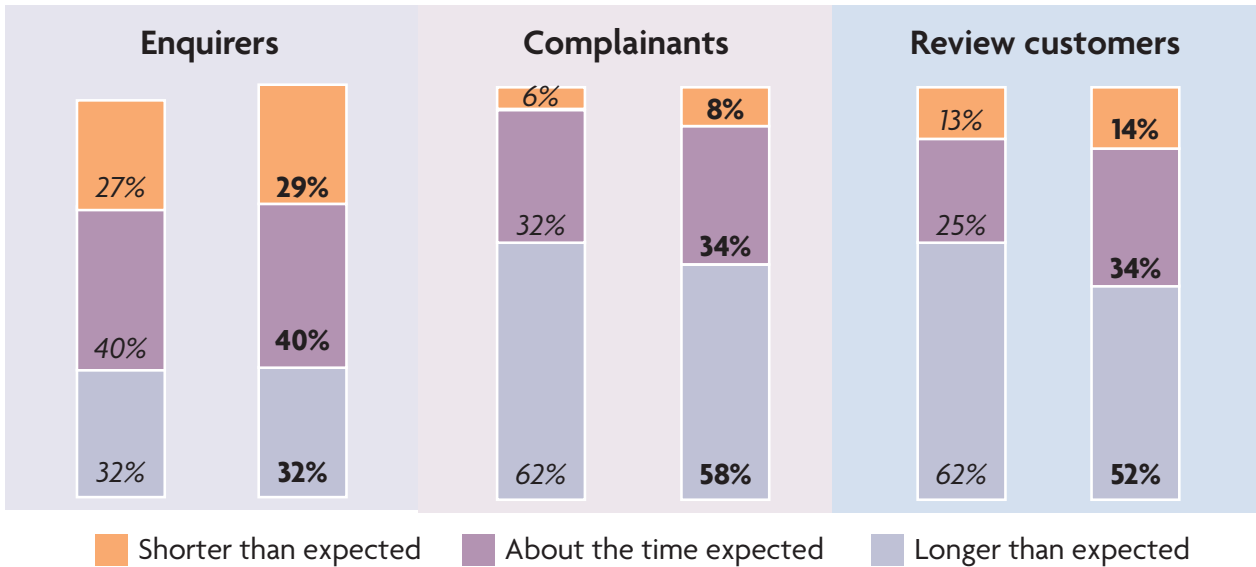


*'I think it just takes too long to get to the conclusion.'*  
(Review customer)



## Timeliness May 2011 to April 2012, compared to May 2010 to April 2011\*

(Figures for 2010-11 are in italics.)



\*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.

The expected timescale for us to resolve a case was:

- Less than three months for enquirers (83 per cent) and review customers (74 per cent); and
- between three months to one year for complainants (66 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 enquirers and has fallen slightly for complainants and review customers since 2010-11.

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:

- 38 per cent of enquirers were fairly satisfied or very satisfied (up 4 percentage points compared to 2010-11);
- 63 per cent of complainants were fairly satisfied or very satisfied (down from 64 per cent in 2010-11); and
- 2 per cent of review customers were fairly satisfied or very satisfied (down from 3 per cent in 2010-11).

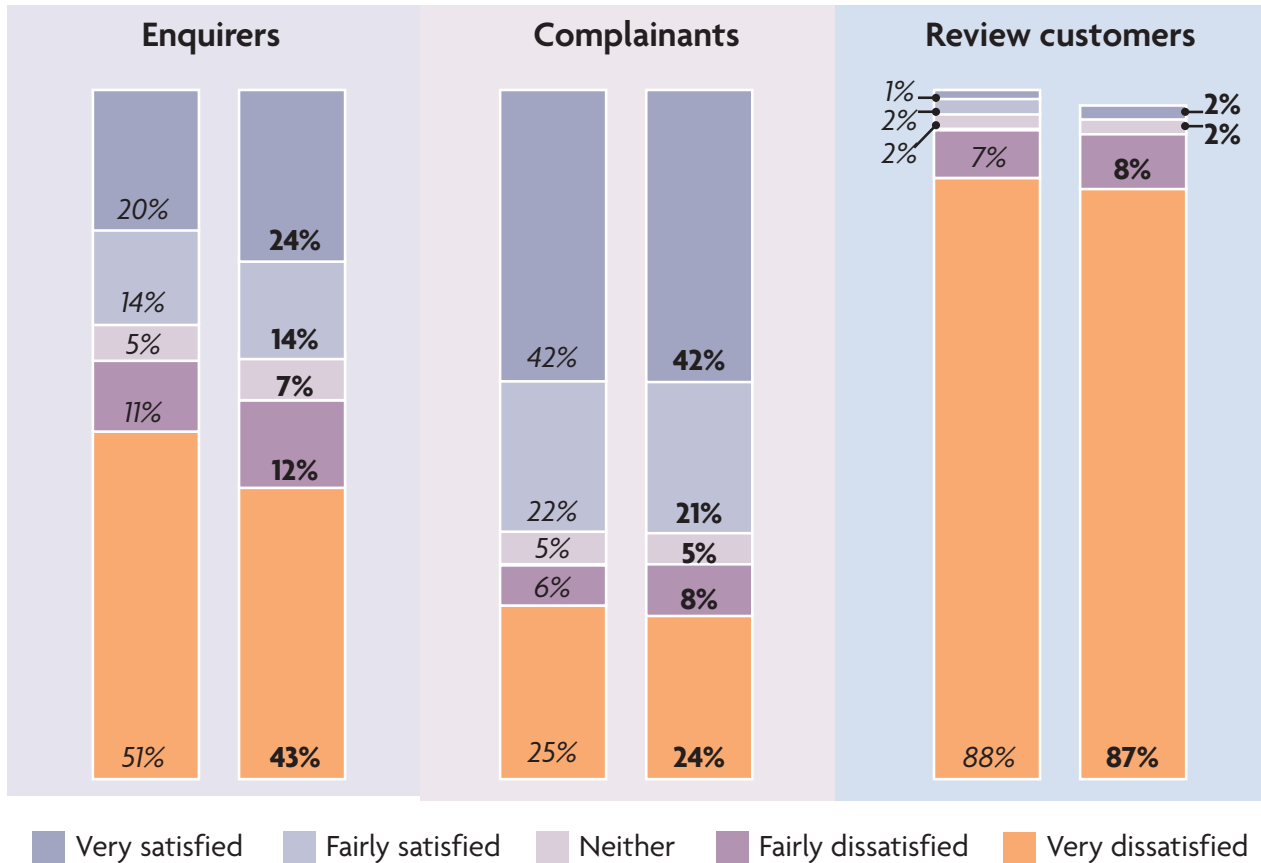
*'The pressure from the Ombudsman meant that the issue was sorted out.'*  
(Enquirer)

*'My complaint was pursued and upheld. I feel satisfied I was listened to.'*  
(Complainant)

*'I was happy with the customer service, not the decision.'*  
(Review customer)

**Satisfaction with outcome May 2011 to April 2012, compared to May 2010 to April 2011\***

(Figures for 2010-11 are in italics.)



\*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.

However, while there may be dissatisfaction with the Ombudsman's decision, most complainants and enquirers say they are likely to use our service again (73 per cent and 76 per cent respectively) and would recommend us to their friends and family (71 per cent and 77 per cent).

In contrast, a third (33 per cent) of review customers say they would use our service again, and just 24 per cent would advocate our service to friends and family.

# What our customers think we could do better

*'They did not check all the details of the case.'*  
(Enquirer)

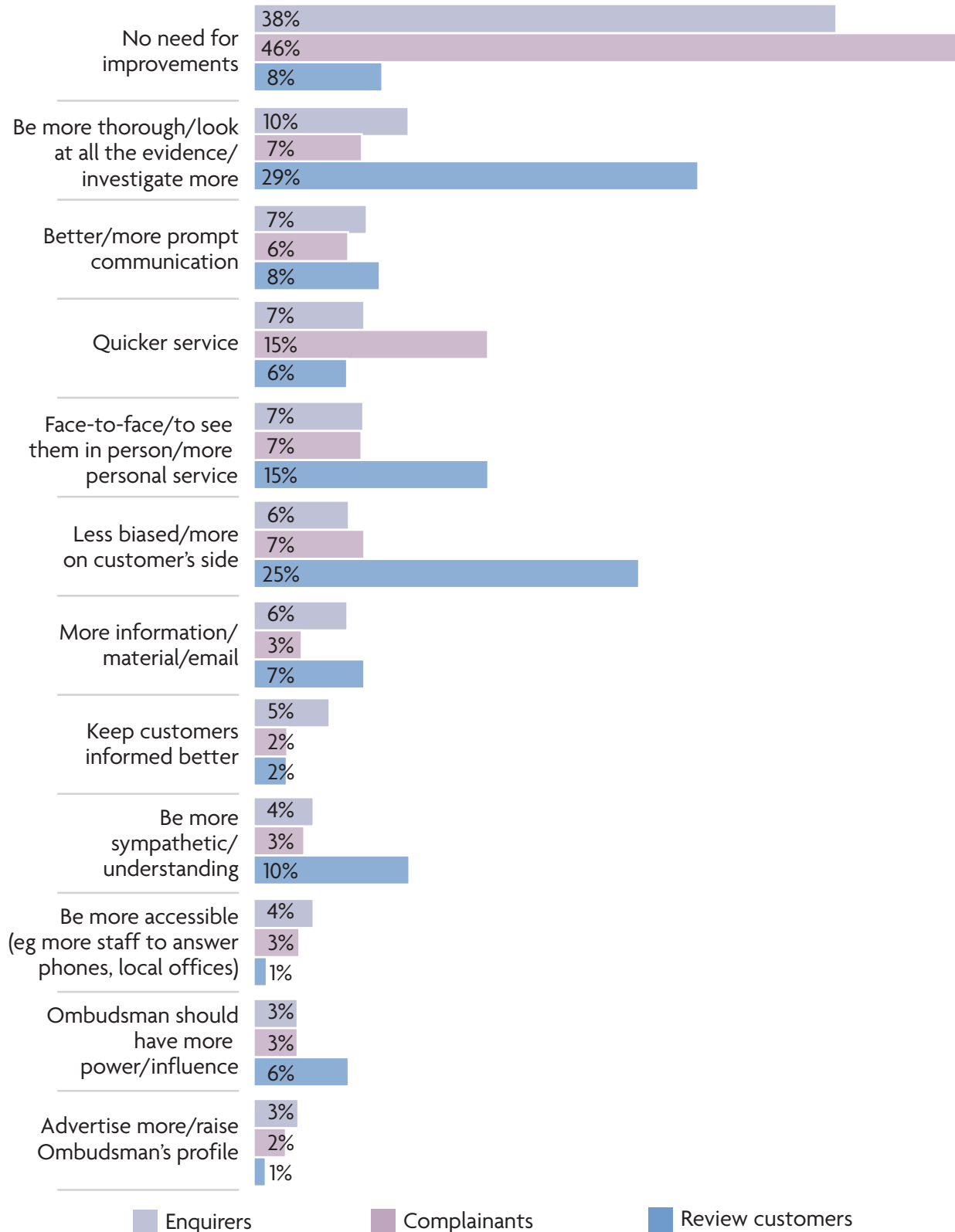
*'They could have kept me informed and been more forceful with the hospital they were investigating - PHSO didn't seem to have any teeth.'*  
(Complainant)

*'I didn't feel my complaint had been properly understood.'*  
(Review customer)

Asked about how they think we could improve, 38 per cent of enquirers, 46 per cent of complainants and 8 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, 10 per cent of enquirers and 29 per cent of review customers made this suggestion. For complainants, providing a quicker service was the priority for improving our service (15 per cent). Review customers also suggested we should be less biased and more on our customers' side (25 per cent of all review customers) and that they would like to have face-to-face meetings and a more personal service (15 per cent).

## Suggested improvements



# How do people find out about our service?

*'They told me what I have to do, signposted me, explained the process very clearly for me.'*  
(Enquirer)

*'They were so thorough and they went into it properly and I felt as though at last someone was there to help me. They went through it with me.'*  
(Complainant)

*'They communicated well, they answered my enquiries quickly.'*  
(Review customer)

Our research surveys ask 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: 22 per cent of all enquirers and complainants found their way to us through an NHS hospital, doctor or PCT.

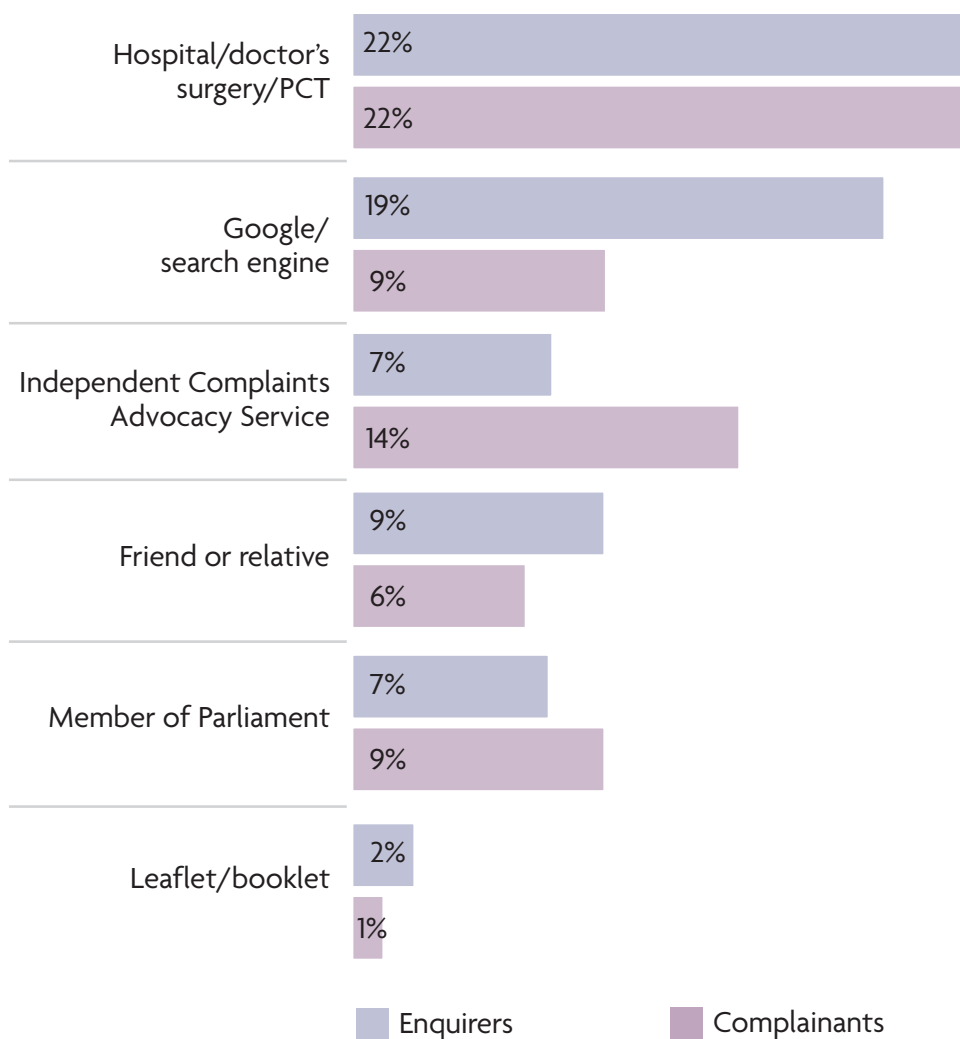
The Independent Complaints Advocacy Service (ICAS) – an advocacy service that helps people raise concerns about NHS care or treatment – also plays an important role in directing people to us: 7 per cent of all enquirers and 14 per cent of all complainants found their way to us through ICAS.

The internet is an increasingly important tool in helping people find and get in touch with us: 19 per cent of enquirers (16 per cent in 2010-11) and 9 per cent of complainants (unchanged from 2010-11) 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, 7 per cent of our enquirers and 9 per cent of complainants found out about our service through an MP. Amongst those with a parliamentary complaint, 17 per cent of enquirers and 33 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

These latest research results are encouraging: the majority of enquirers and complainants are positive about most aspects of our service and the satisfaction levels of our review customers – those who disagree with our decisions or have a complaint about our service – have improved as a result of a more customer-focused approach to our communications with them.

The overall satisfaction levels of our review customers remain low, however, and we are committed to further improve the way we

communicate with them; we 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.

Throughout 2012-13 we will continue our work to deliver more impact for more people, by raising our profile and by making it easier for people to complain. We will also look at how we can better share the learning from our casework so that we can use our expertise more effectively to help improve public services for everyone.

*'They were very quick, they were not patronising, they were understanding, and they managed to resolve my query.'*  
(Enquirer)

*'I think they did a sterling job. I just do. The complaint itself, there were a lot of components to it. They investigated each and every one thoroughly. Extremely satisfied.'*  
(Complainant)

*'If it is basic customer service then I am satisfied. However, if it was about the complaint I am not satisfied.'*  
(Review customer)





Parliamentary  
and Health Service  
Ombudsman



practice

10

Our health, our

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

Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman

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