

Complainant satisfaction survey 2009 & 2010

This survey of complainants' views compares the survey returns of people who received a decision from the SPSO in the first quarter of this financial year with those who received a decision in the first quarter of last year. The survey was issued and the returns analysed by the independent research company, Craigforth Consulting. We are very grateful to members of the public who used our service for taking the time to provide feedback to us.

Craigforth recognise the small scale of the survey (based on a total of 229 returns) and explain that 'the results should be considered as indicative rather than statistically robust'. Despite the low numbers of returns we take the views of all respondents seriously, and consider their perspectives a valuable learning tool. We have proactively sought the views of service users since 2007, as our previous surveys show.

Key findings

- Overall, in 2010, 33% of people were very satisfied with the service they received (up from 23% in 2009 and 22% in 2008), and 17% were satisfied. However, 27% were very dissatisfied (compared with 24% in 2009 and 23% in 2008). This is broadly in line with the 'half satisfied, half dissatisfied' findings typical of other Ombudsman offices (such as the UK Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman and Local Government Ombudsman (England)).
- In terms of length of time taken to deal with a complaint, satisfaction levels rose slightly in 2010.
- In each survey period, more than 1 in 2 respondents agreed that they would use SPSO again, although the proportion that strongly disagreed also remained relatively constant at around 1 in 4. While 1 in 2 also agreed that they would recommend the SPSO to others, around 1 in 3 strongly disagreed with this proposition.

Future action

Our 2010 collection of survey data coincided with the implementation of our new complaints handling process in May 2010, following the Ombudsman's business review. The new process incorporated feedback from previous surveys, informing improvements such as the clarity of our communication and the speed with which we handle complaints. This latest survey took place too early to provide us with an opportunity to assess the effectiveness of these changes. It does, though, provide us with evidence that we need to further improve four areas:

- how we communicate with complainants in writing and by telephone
- the thoroughness of our examination of complaints
- the clarity of the explanation of the reasons for our decision
- the quality of our communication tools for people who use different languages or formats (e.g. Braille, large print)

We will do this by:

- ensuring that our new quality assurance process is effective in testing the standard of our written and telephone communication and taking immediate action to address any problems identified
- ensuring that our new quality assurance process is effective in testing the thoroughness of our examination of complaints and taking immediate action to address any problems identified

- supporting our complaints reviewers by providing training in using Plain English to communicate complex legal or technical information
- asking external, independent, appropriately qualified organisations to review the quality of the material we provide for people who use different languages or formats and taking action in response to their recommendations

Our new quality assurance process is designed to address the key concerns identified in both this and previous surveys, and training in Plain English is an objective in our current Business Plan.

Future surveys

On the advice of Craigforth, we are exploring the possibility of forming a focus group of service users to provide us with more qualitative feedback. We expect to progress this in the next financial year, when our new business process has had an opportunity to settle into place.

The full survey results are posted at <http://www.spsso.org.uk/media-centre/research>