

**Customer Survey Quarter 1 (April-June 2016)
Analysis February 2017**

Purpose

To provide an overview of the findings of the SPSO's customer survey results for Quarter 1 (April-June 2016).

Key Findings

2.1 Response Rate

Fig. 1	Year 15/16			Q1 16/17			
<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Surveys Returned</i>	<i>Surveys Issued</i>	<i>% of total returned</i>	<i>Surveys Returned</i>	<i>Surveys Issued</i>	<i>% of total returned</i>	<i>Diff.</i>
not upheld	68	324	34%	24	90	52%	+18
some upheld	57	199	28.5%	12	39	26%	-2.5
fully upheld	75	239	37.5%	10	49	22%	-15.5
Overall	200	762	100%	46	178	100%	

46 out of 178 forms issued for cases closed in Quarter 1 were returned, resulting in a response rate of 25.8%. This compares to a rate of 26.2% in the year 2015-2016. The above table indicates a notable increase in the proportion of surveys returned from complainants who had their complaints not upheld, and a notable decrease in the proportion of surveys returned from complainants who had their complaints fully upheld.

2.2 Satisfaction against service standards

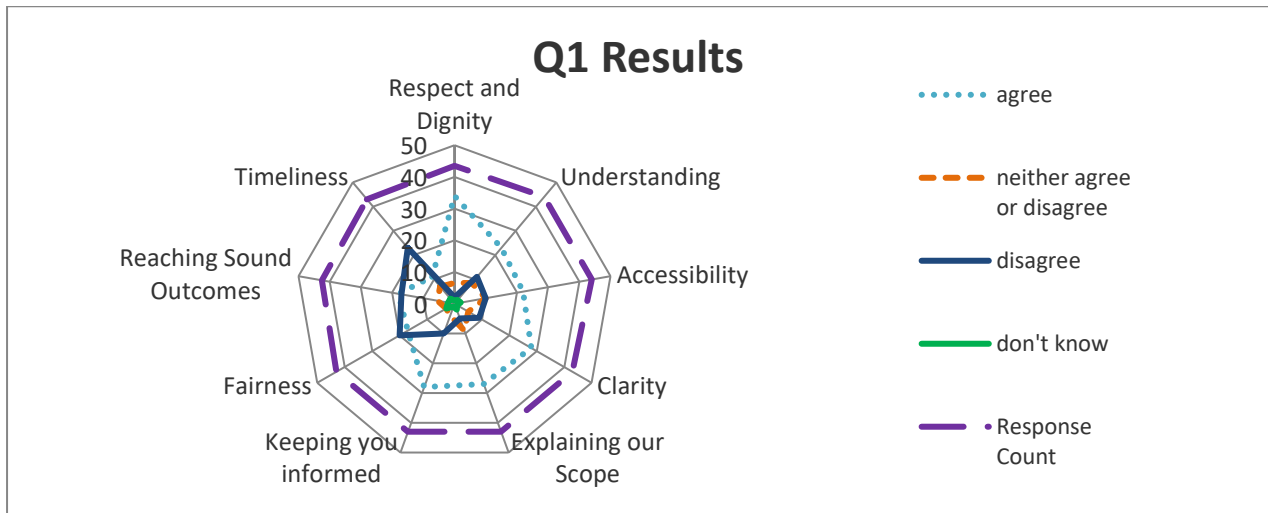


Fig. 2

	agree	neither agree or disagree	disagree	don't know	Response Count
Respect and Dignity	34	6.5	2	1	43.5
Understanding	23	8.5	11	1.5	44.0
Accessibility	22	10	10	2	44
Clarity	28	5	9	1	43
Explaining our Scope	27	9	5	2	43
Keeping you informed	28	4	10	1	43
Fairness	17	3	20	3	43
Reaching Sound Outcomes	18	5.5	17	2	43
Timeliness	11	7	23	2	43

As can be see above, there has been a decrease in satisfaction against service standards this Quarter. We will consider this further at 2.4 below.

2.3 Satisfaction of customers whose complaints were fully upheld

Looking firstly at the results from the respondents whose complaints were fully upheld (ten in total), with the exception of two statements, the respondents unanimously agreed with the statements. For the statement, 'SPSO clearly told me what outcomes they may or may not be able to achieve for me', one respondent neither agreed nor disagreed and for the statement, 'The time it took to deal with my complaint was reasonable,' four out of ten respondents agreed. With the exception of satisfaction with timescales, the results for this Quarter indicate that respondents whose complaints are fully upheld are very satisfied with the service provided by SPSO.

Fig. 3

SPSO statement	SPSO Q1 16/17 % agree	SPSO Annual 15/16 % agree	Difference
Staff treated me with courtesy	77.8	86.4	-8.6
Staff listened to me and understood my complaint	47.7	73	-25.3
I was provided with all the support I needed from SPSO to access its service	50	74.1	-24.1
SPSO checked what I wanted to happen	56.8	77.7	-20.9
It was clearly explained to me how my complaint would be handled	62.8	79.1	-16.3
SPSO clearly told me what outcomes they may or may not be able to achieve for me	62.8	72.7	-9.9
I was told clearly how my complaint was being progressed	65.1	77.6	-12.5
SPSO communication with me was clear	67.4	82.6	-15.2
SPSO staff treated me respectfully	78.6	85.1	-6.5
I felt my complaint was dealt with fairly	39.5	61.5	-22
I was given a clear explanation for SPSO's decision(s)	55.8	71.3	-15.5
The time it took to deal with my complaint was reasonable	25.6	46.4	-20.8

2.4 Comparative customer satisfaction: SPSO Quarter 1 2016/17 and SPSO annual 15/16

Figure 3 shows that there has been a decrease in agreement with all statements between the year 2015/2016 and Quarter 1 2016/2017. The level of decrease was 6.5 points in the lowest case and 25.3 points in the largest case. The decrease in the percentage of respondents who agreed with the statements was over 15 points in eight of the twelve statements and over 20 points in five of the statements.

Results from previous customer surveys have indicated that that customer service satisfaction is linked to satisfaction with the outcome of customers' complaints. The effect of the increase in the proportion of responses from respondents whose complaints were not upheld and the decrease in the proportion of responses from respondents whose complaints were fully upheld, may explain the decrease in satisfaction rates with service standards.

It might reasonably be expected that the percentage agreement with some statements would be more likely to be linked with the outcome of customers' complaints than others. Looking at two of the five statements with the largest decrease in percentage agreement, we see that the statement, 'I felt my complaint was dealt with fairly' is a statement that one would expect to be linked with the outcome of a customer's complaint, and it is therefore not surprising that the decrease is among the highest. On the other hand, the statement, 'I was provided with all the support I needed from SPSO to access its service' is not a statement that one would expect to be linked with the outcome of a customer's complaint, yet the decrease of 24.1 points is the second highest in the results. It is difficult to estimate what caused such a decrease in the agreement with this latter statement, especially since SPSO has not changed the guidance or process in relation to this statement. This matter was discussed at SPSO's service improvement group in February 2017 and a project on accessibility is being taken forwards.

2.5 Timeliness

In relation to timeliness, Figure 3 shows a drop in the percentage of respondents who agreed with the statement 'The time it took to deal with my complaint was reasonable' from 46.4 in the year 2015/16 to 25.6 in Quarter 1 2016/2017.

Noting that satisfaction in relation to timeliness was one of the areas of satisfaction that saw a significant drop between 2015/2016 and Quarter 1 2016/2017, we considered whether there were identifiable factors that might have contributed to this. One obvious factor related to satisfaction with timeliness is the time taken to deal with a complaint.

The average days open figure¹ (the number of working days SPSO required to deal with a case) for cases closed after investigation for the period of the year 2015/16 was 141. The equivalent figure² for cases closed in Quarter 1 2016/2017 was 160: a difference of 19

¹ Average figure calculated from 770 cases closed in this period, which compares to 762 customers who were surveyed – discrepancy of 1%

² Average figure calculated from 184 cases closed in this period, which compares to 178 customers who were surveyed – discrepancy of 3%

working days, and roughly equivalent to four weeks. Although it is not possible to definitively attribute the decrease in satisfaction with timeliness to an increase in the average number of days taken to close a case, it is certainly a relationship to bear in mind.

2.7 Investigation

A number of respondents made negative comments about the way their case was investigated. There were comments from respondents saying that we simply accepted or gave too much weight to the comments received from the organisation complained about and that we did not contact other people that they had asked us to contact. There was also a comment from one respondent that they felt that their actions, rather than the organisation complained about, were being scrutinized. Some respondents stated that their suggestions for improvement (in relation to the organisation being complained about) were ignored without any explanation, that our powers were limited and that contacting us was a waste of time. Others were unhappy about the advice we received and a respondent said that their main concern was about 'something which is probably a matter of policy determined at a senior level about interpretation about what the Ombudsman can and cannot do'. However, there were no negative comments from complainants who had all of their complaints upheld.

Clearly, complainants will be disappointed if (some of) their complaints are not upheld. However, our view is that it is for us to decide how the investigation is to be carried out. This includes whom we contact for further information, what information is considered to be relevant and what recommendations should be made. That said, we have made a recommendation in relation to this matter below.

2.8 Correspondence returned with a sticky note

One respondent commented that their initial letter outlining their complaint was returned with a sticky note advising them to complete an online form. They said that this made them feel that their concerns were being dismissed before the process even started. I discussed these comments with the Advice Team Manager. They confirmed that, where further information is required from a complainant before a complaint can be set up, the correspondence received from them would be returned with a post card and not a sticky note. They also explained that, where appropriate, the complainant may be provided with a complaint form and would be told that they could either complete this or submit the complaint online. We are unable to explain why the respondent made these comments. However, we consider that the current process in place for returning correspondence and requesting that a complaint is submitted is reasonable and we have not made any recommendations in relation to this matter.

2.9 Request for decision to be read out

Another respondent commented that they asked for the 'response decision to be read to me which it was not'. They said that it can take weeks to get an appointment for someone to read things to them and that the SPSO member of staff was not 'very helpful to people with learning difficulties' and that they were told to 'read and then phone them'. As we are not aware of the specific case, we are unable to say how

much information the complainant had provided about their disability and the adjustment that they wanted to be provided. This matter will also be considered as part of the accessibility project.

2.11 Misuse of language

One respondent referred to 'the misuse of the English language of the first person from your office who contacted me.' They said that the complaints reviewer had a condescending attitude and a manner of speaking that led the respondent to have to decipher what was being said. They stated that the worst mannerism was constantly saying, 'you know' and 'well, you know'. Clearly, staff should not have a condescending attitude and should communicate clearly when speaking to complainants. We consider that staff know this and do not need reminding. Whilst we acknowledge that the respondent was irritated by the member of staff constantly saying, 'you know' and 'well you know', having carefully considered the matter, we did not feel that this was significant enough to make a recommendation.

3.0 Recommendations

Recommendations:

Where a complainant asks us to take a particular action to investigate their complaint, or suggests we make a particular recommendation, and we do not consider that these are appropriate, we should consider explaining to the complainant why we will not take this action.