

Customer Satisfaction Research

Summary of Results

May 2010 to October 2010



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Introduction



I am pleased to be publishing the second summary of our customer satisfaction research results. This latest summary details the results of telephone interviews, conducted on our behalf by an independent research company, with a sample of our customers between May and October 2010.

The primary role of my Office is to investigate complaints of unfair treatment or poor service by public bodies or the NHS, and to put things right where we can. Of course, making judgments on the quality of services provided by others means that we ourselves have to strive to achieve the highest standards of customer service.

One of our strategic objectives is to deliver a high quality and accessible complaint handling service. We use the results of our customer satisfaction research to measure our success in achieving this objective, and to ascertain to what extent we fulfil the expectations our customers have of the service we provide.

I am pleased that the results of this latest research suggest that we are meeting our objective: the majority of our customers continue to rate our services favourably in most respects. Our customer satisfaction levels have increased since the publication of our first research summary in August 2010. This reflects the approachability of our staff and the high quality of their communications with our customers.

However, the research also shows that some of our customers continue to be critical about their experience and do not have confidence in our ability to handle their complaint appropriately. The nature of our work – we handle complaints independently – means that there will always be people who are unhappy with the outcome of their complaint. Nonetheless, we are committed to maintaining the highest quality of customer service, and to communicating the reasons for our final decisions which may disappoint, in a timely, efficient and accessible manner. We will continue to work to address our customers' concerns and to increase their confidence in our ability to handle their complaints.

If you have recently made a complaint to us, or are thinking of bringing a complaint, I hope this research summary will provide a useful snapshot of the experiences of some of our recent customers. We are grateful to all those who have participated in the research: as a result of your feedback we are able to improve the service we offer to everyone.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ann Abraham".

Ann Abraham
Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman

Research methodology



Our customer satisfaction research takes place throughout the year and this research summary covers the period from May to October 2010. The research is conducted by an independent research company, using telephone surveys with enquirers, complainants and review customers.

The surveys take place using computer assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) technology.

A random sample of enquirers, 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
579 enquirers	61%
76 complainants	79%
107 review customers	64%

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 asking us to investigate their complaint about a government department or agency, or the NHS in England.

A **complainant** is someone whose complaint is being formally investigated.

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 public bodies in the UK.

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

Who are our customers?



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

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

There is an almost even split between women and men amongst our customers (52 per cent and 48 per cent respectively), although a greater

proportion of women than men had their complaints investigated during the time frame of our survey (59 per cent and 41 per cent). A small proportion of our customers (15 per cent) are under 35 and just over one third of our customers (37 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 demographic findings have changed little since the last survey results were published.

	Enquirers		Complainants		Reviews	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Total	579	100	76	100	107	100
Sex						
Male	280	48	31	41	55	51
Female	299	52	45	59	52	49
Age	572	100	76	100	104	100
18-34	85	15	6	8	3	3
35-54	239	42	35	46	38	37
55-74	217	38	34	45	58	56
75+	31	5	1	1	5	5
Ethnicity	557	100	74	100	101	100
White British	447	80	60	81	86	85
White not British	41	7	5	7	6	6
Mixed	11	2	1	1	1	1
Black	18	3	2	3	3	3
Asian	37	7	3	4	5	5
Chinese	2	0.4	1	1	0	0
Other ethnic background	1	0.2	2	3	0	0
Disability*	564	100	110	100	197	100
Yes	208	37	10	13	45	43
No	356	63	66	87	59	57

* Customers who tell us that they have a disability

Overall satisfaction with our service

'They dealt with me very fairly. I was kept informed of progress; I wasn't left in limbo.'
 Enquirer



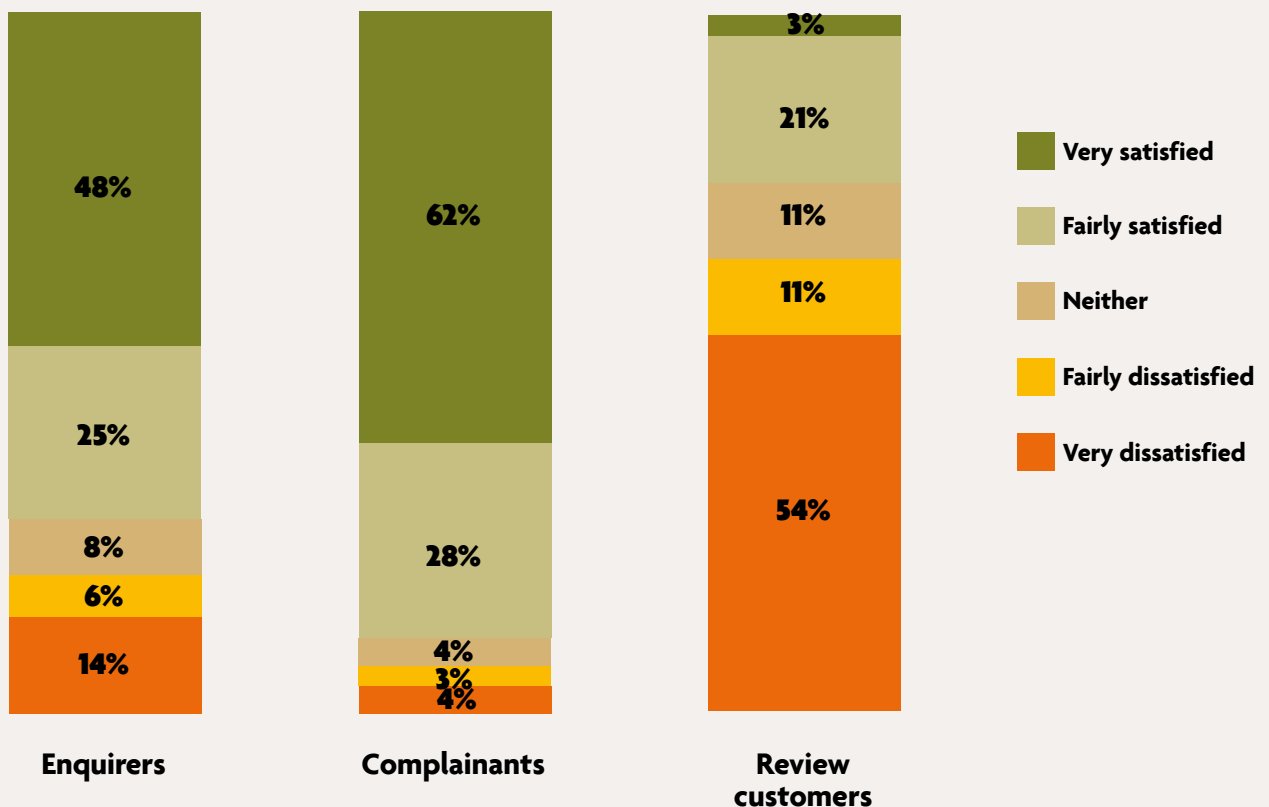
The majority of enquirers and complainants are satisfied with the service they receive, while the majority of review customers feel dissatisfied.

Overall, 73 per cent of enquirers and 89 per cent of complainants said they were satisfied or very satisfied with our customer service. This compares to satisfaction levels of 70 per cent and 81 per cent for enquirers and complainants in the previous survey and shows that satisfaction with our service has increased since the last survey results. The way we communicate and keep our customers informed as well as the helpfulness and politeness of our staff were the main reasons for enquirers and complainants to be satisfied with our service.

Unsurprisingly, our review customers (those who have asked for a review of the decision made about their case, or who have complained about us) continue to be more critical about their experience. Just under one-quarter of review customers (23 per cent) said that they were satisfied or very satisfied with our service. This is 11 per cent lower than in the previous survey. The main reason for dissatisfaction among review customers is a concern that their complaint was not properly investigated. A majority of our review customers also thought that we had not fully understood their complaint and that we had not been sympathetic.

Overall satisfaction with customer service*

* 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 overall satisfaction quoted elsewhere in the text.



Parliamentary and health complaints



'They were polite and professional and they took the time to listen to you and understand your problem.'

Enquirer

Levels of satisfaction remain broadly comparable across our Parliamentary and health work; with about 70 per cent of enquirers and around 90 per cent of complainants saying they are satisfied or very satisfied with our service. Parliamentary complainants are the most satisfied with the service they receive: 93 per cent were

either fairly or very satisfied, 7 per cent were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and none were dissatisfied with our customer service.

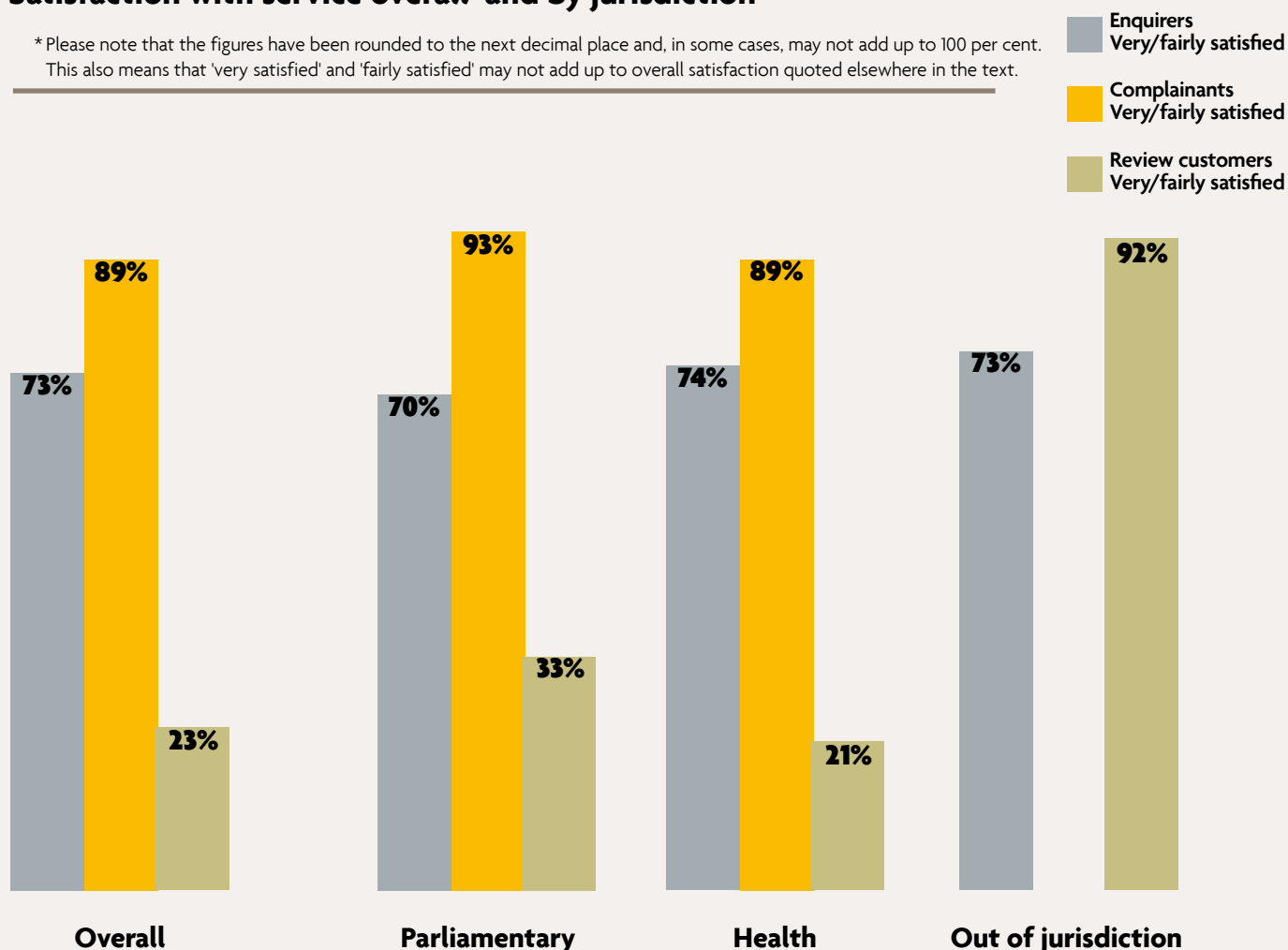
The results also show that review customers with health complaints are overall less satisfied than review customers with Parliamentary complaints.

'They were available when I needed to speak to them, or they would call me back if busy at the time.'

Enquirer

Satisfaction with service overall and by jurisdiction*

* 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 overall satisfaction quoted elsewhere in the text.



Customer service

'They were extremely helpful, prompt and pursued it relentlessly.'

Enquirer



75 per cent of enquirers and 91 per cent of complainants felt that our staff clearly explained the complaints process. Amongst review customers only 36 per cent thought this was the case;

95 per cent of enquirers, 93 per cent of complainants and 66 per cent of review customers felt that our staff were polite and considerate;

76 per cent of enquirers, 81 per cent of complainants but only 28 per cent of review customers thought that we were sympathetic;

81 per cent of enquirers, 93 per cent of complainants and 58 per cent of review customers felt that we were easy to get hold of;

65 per cent of enquirers, 88 per cent of complainants and 42 per cent of review customers thought that we kept them informed and updated;

68 per cent of enquirers and 79 per cent of complainants felt that we fully understood their complaint, compared to just 15 per cent of review customers;

52 per cent of enquirers, 64 per cent of complainants but only 14 per cent of review customers said that they had confidence in us handling their complaint.



Communication

'The lady...the caseworker...was professional and unbiased all the way and kept me informed.'

Complainant



We write to our complainants and some enquirers 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, the majority said that the communication was easy to understand.

However, fewer review customers than in the last survey received emails or letters from us before we made our final decision (73 per cent compared to 87 per cent in the last survey) and a smaller proportion of them rated these emails or letters as easy to understand (67 per cent compared to 82 per cent in the last survey).

Communication rating

Those who received letters or emails before the final decision

Letters or emails rated 'easy to understand'



86%



92%



67%

Timeliness

'The lack of regular updates is a problem, and the lack of clarity of timescales.'

Complainant



As in the last research survey, the majority of customers interviewed said that they were kept informed of any delay to the resolution of their case. Amongst enquirers, 51 per cent said they were kept informed, whilst 84 per cent of complainants and 41 per cent of review customers also felt they were informed of any delays.

However, more than two thirds of complainants and review customers felt that dealing with their case took longer than expected, compared to approximately a third of enquirers. The perception that the case took longer than expected is decreasing for complainants but remains relatively unchanged for enquirers and review customers.

The expected timescale for us to resolve a case was:

- Up to three months for enquirers (77 per cent) and review customers (61 per cent)
- Between three months to one year for complainants (63 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% within 40 working days

Time we will take to investigate complaints

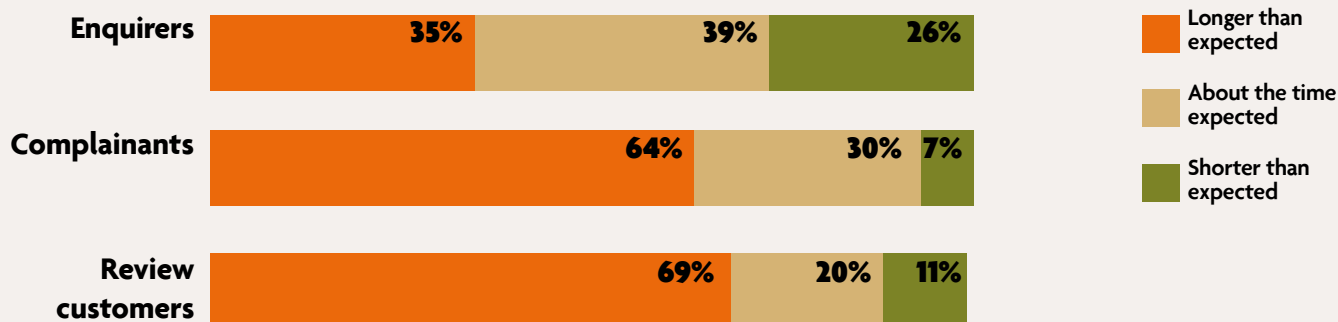
From acceptance for investigation	
Within 12 months	90%

Time we will take to deal with complaints about us

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

Timeliness*

* 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.



Outcome of complaints

'I was satisfied they'd investigated thoroughly and answered all the points I raised.'
Complainant



Customers' satisfaction with the outcome of their enquiry or complaint remains very closely linked to whether or not they agree with our decision. Overall, satisfaction with outcome is improving for complainants, but for enquirers and review customers, it is falling.

During the timeframe of this research, only a small proportion of cases in the sample were accepted for investigation and/or upheld. This affects satisfaction with the outcome:

- 33 per cent of enquirers were satisfied or very satisfied;

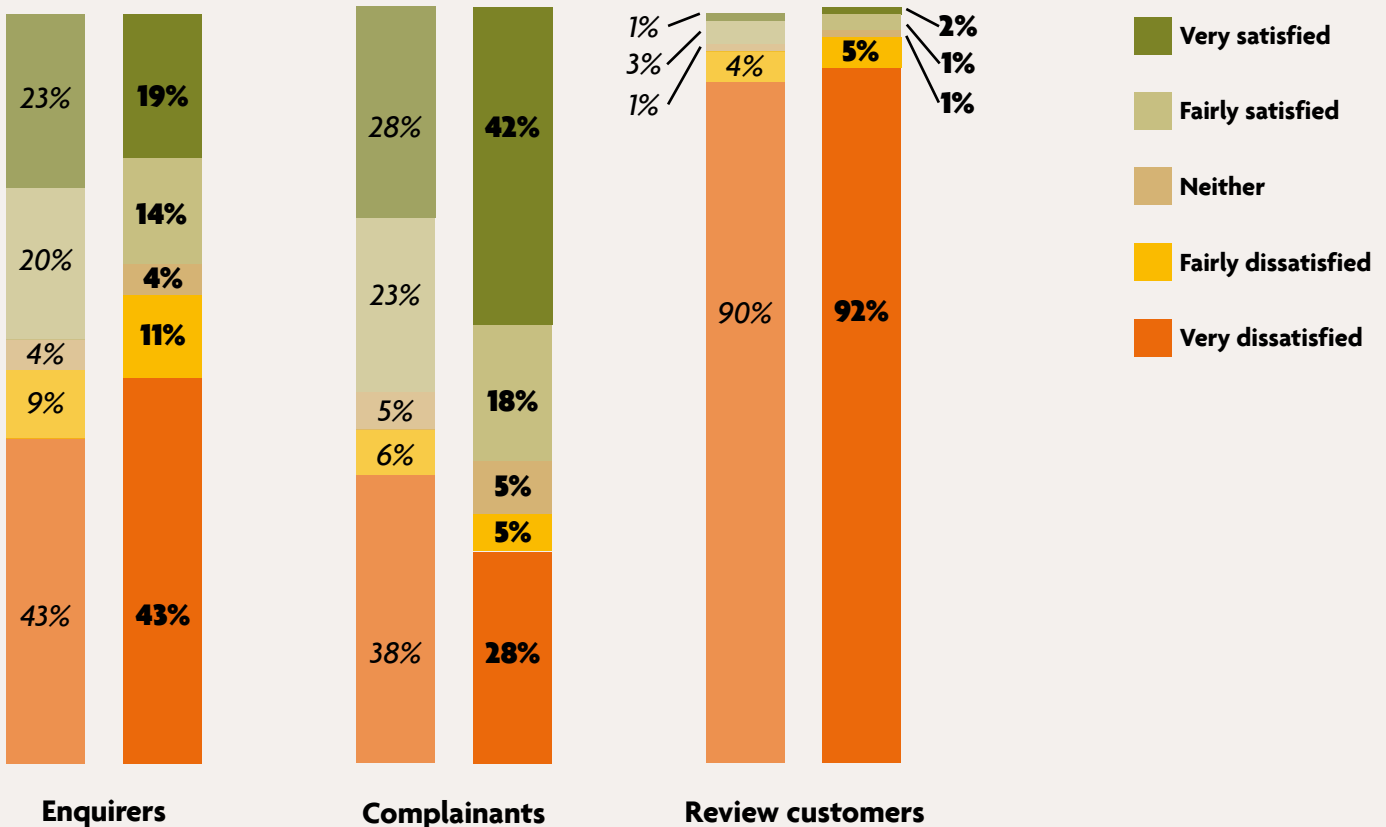
- 61 per cent of complainants were satisfied or very satisfied; and
- 3 per cent of review customers were satisfied.

While there may be dissatisfaction with the Ombudsman's decision, the majority of complainants and enquirers are likely to use our service again (71 per cent and 81 per cent respectively) and recommend us to friends and family (70 per cent and 84 per cent respectively). In contrast, just 32 per cent of review customers say they would use our service again, and just 25 per cent would advocate the service to friends and family.

Satisfaction with our service*

(Figures for the period November 2009 - April 2010 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 overall satisfaction quoted elsewhere in the text.



How do people find out about our service?

'Glad that people are there for me and willing to get things done!'
Complainant

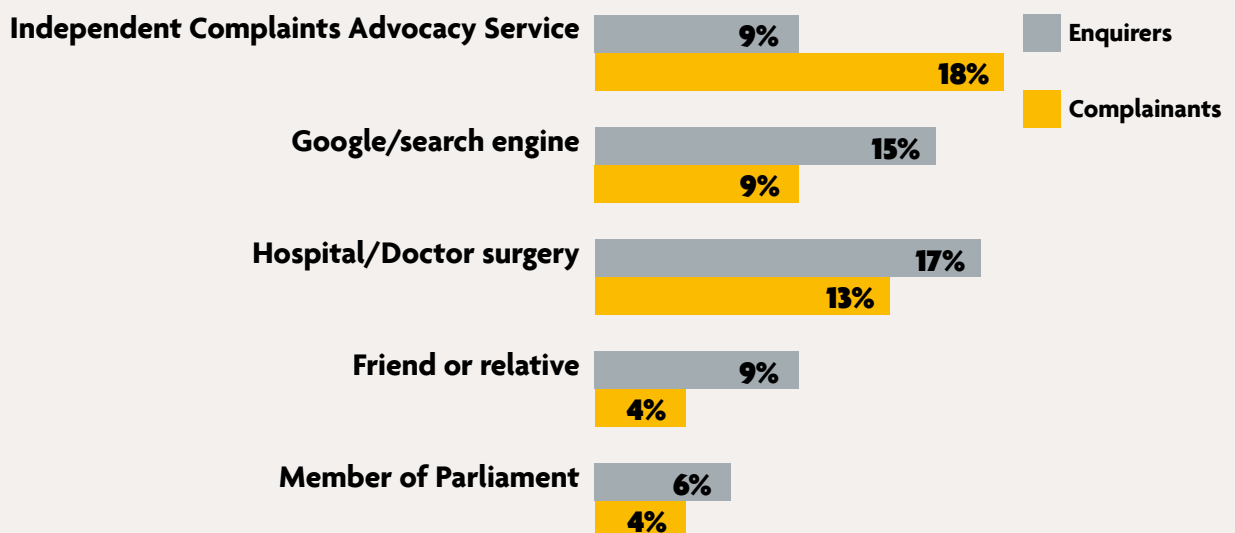


Our research surveys ask people how they find out about our service. As the chart below shows, the Independent Complaints Advocacy Service (ICAS) – an advocacy service which helps people raise concerns about NHS care or treatment – is an important way in which people who want to complain about the NHS find out about the Ombudsman: 18 per cent of our complainants and 9 per cent of our enquirers found out about us through ICAS. Unsurprisingly, hospitals and doctors are another important source of information about us, with 17 per cent of enquirers finding out about the Ombudsman through them.

The internet is an increasingly important tool in helping people find and get in touch with us. 15 per cent of enquirers used Google or other search engines to find out about the Ombudsman. We are committed to ensuring that our website is easy to find and navigate for those wanting to know if we can help.

MPs also continue to play a role in telling people about the Ombudsman. Six per cent of our enquirers find out about our service this way. The main reason for this is that members of the public wishing to complain about a government department or agency must be referred to the Ombudsman by a Member of Parliament.

How customers find out about our service



Conclusion



These latest research results continue to provide encouraging news about the levels of satisfaction with our service amongst enquirers and complainants. They also highlight that we need to continue to build confidence among our review customers - who disagree with our decisions or have a complaint about our service – that we have listened to them and understood their complaint.

The findings of our customer satisfaction surveys are shared with our staff to enable us all to learn the lessons from this important source of feedback.

Over the coming year, we will continue to work to improve awareness of and access to our service and customer satisfaction. It is important to us that everyone who needs us is able to find us and access our services and that all customers, irrespective of the outcome of their complaint, are satisfied with the service they receive. We hope that the next Customer Satisfaction Research report will show the impact of our work to achieve this.

