



Customer Survey and BUJ Survey Report 2018-19

Contents

Contents 2

 Introduction 3

 Methodology..... 4

 Findings..... 6

Accessibility 6

Clarity 8

Expertise..... 10

Explaining our scope 12

Fairness..... 13

Handling of information..... 15

Impartiality and independence..... 16

Keeping you informed..... 18

Reaching sound outcomes 21

Respect and dignity 24

Timeliness 26

Transparency..... 29

Understanding 31

 Summary of recommendations 33

Introduction

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) is committed to offering a high-quality service. Our customer service standards describe what all our service users can expect of us. We make three commitments, each of which include a number of service standards:

Table 1: SPSO service standards

Commitment	Service standards
A. We will communicate effectively with you	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Respect and dignity• Keeping you informed• Timeliness• Clarity• Accessibility• Understanding
B. We will work openly and fairly	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transparency• Fairness• Impartiality and independence
C. We will carry out our duties competently and responsibly	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expertise• Explaining our scope• Reaching sound outcomes• Ensuring Impact• Handling information• Putting things right

By regularly seeking feedback, e.g. in the form of surveys, we measure our effectiveness and the quality of our service against the above standards, in order to identify and initiate service improvements.

Methodology

This report provides an overview of our performance against our service standards in the year 2018-19 for our complaints investigation service. It is based on the findings from our customer and authorities satisfaction surveys.

We have analysed respondents' satisfaction with our performance against each service standard, and have compared our customers' (complainants') satisfaction with the authorities'/bodies our jurisdiction (BUJ) satisfaction. Finally, we've also compared this year's results with results from 2017-18. However, in 2017-18 our authority's survey was under review and was not conducted, so we were only able to consider our customers' satisfaction for 2017-18.

Our satisfaction surveys are sent out to both complainants (excluding prisoners¹) and BUJs on an ongoing basis; all parties who received a decision from us, are sent the survey questionnaire in the quarter following the decision in their case (e.g. survey in Q2 for decisions made in Q1).

In 2018-19, we sent out 332 questionnaires to BUJs and received 44 responses, a response rate of 13%. We sent out 633 questionnaires to complainants, which generated 172 responses, a response rate of 27%.

Table 2: Survey return information – authority's survey 2018-19

	sent	response	response rate	Sector % share of surveyed group
Colleges/Universities	29	7	24%	16%
Health	143	10	7%	23%
Housing	58	6	10%	14%
Health and Social Care	21	2	10%	5%
Local Gov	39	13	33%	30%
Scottish Gov	42	6	14%	14%
total	332	44	13%	100%

¹ While prisoner complainants do not receive the customer survey, we do record and consider their feedback that we receive directly as comments and customer service complaints.

Table 3: Survey return information - customer survey 2018-19

	Return			<i>email</i>		<i>paper</i>		sent % split	return % split
Not upheld	68	262	26.0%	54	217	14	45	41.4%	39.5%
Some upheld	35	133	26.3%	30	113	5	20	21.0%	20.3%
Fully upheld	69	238	29.0%	56	193	13	45	37.6%	40.1%
Overall	172	633	27.2%	140	523	32	110		

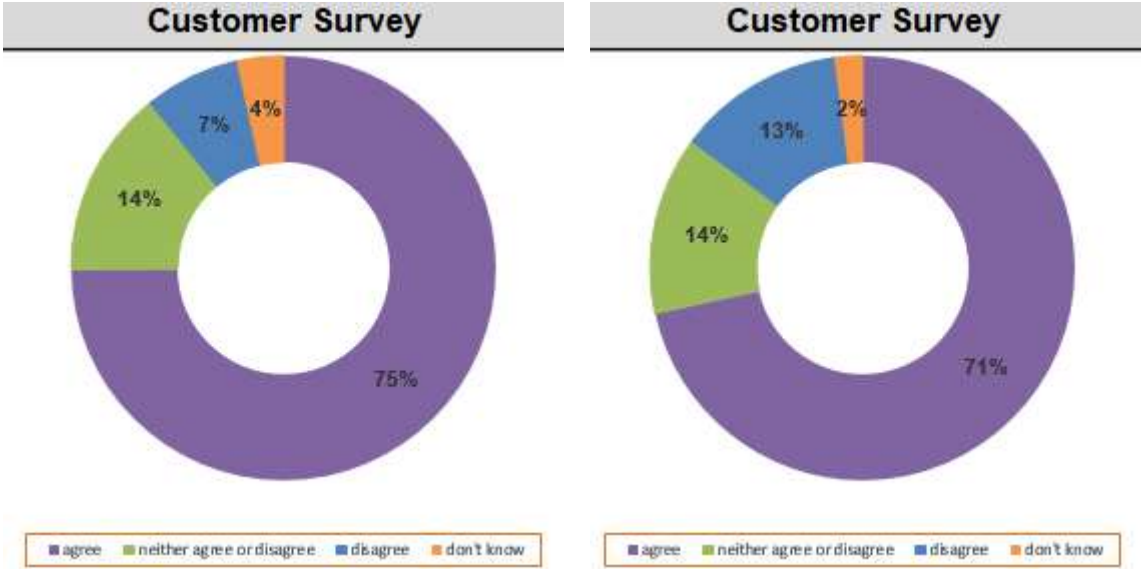
While a positive or negative decision outcome may have an impact on respondents' satisfaction with our service, we monitor this carefully, and as response rates of those complainants with fully, partly and not upheld complaints are fairly similar, we expect any potential bias to be balanced out.

Findings

Accessibility

2018-19

2017-18



Customer survey questions:

- Where I needed support from the SPSO to access its service, the SPSO arranged this for me.
- SPSO staff contacted me using my preferred method of communication (if I specified one).

Interpretation of customer survey results:

Results have improved during 2018/19.

We have made improvements to our online complaint form and website and have experienced an increase in complaints being received by web form. We have also made it clear to complainants that they can choose for us to keep in touch with them in a range of ways. We have encouraged staff to use the telephone to assist in building an understanding of the complainants needs and circumstances so that we can deliver an accessible service.

Throughout the year a range of organisations have been invited to present to our staff about the needs of their client groups to increase our awareness on how we can adapt our service appropriately. Informative presentations have been

provided by, Independent Prison Monitors, ADHD Perth, Clan Childlaw, Families Outside, Inclusion Scotland.

A community of practice forum has been established by staff. The groups' focus is to consider how we can meet our commitments to our Accessibility service standard.

Comments received from customers that we appreciate/can learn from:

"I am more than grateful for the careful, thorough, detailed, sensitive and compassionate way in which my complaint was handled. Concern for my wellbeing was evident".

"It made a significant difference that the complaint handler took significant time to talk directly to me about my complaint, really listen to my concerns and explain how she would deal with the complaint".

"Any queries I had, or information I needed, was quite clearly explained to me. Sometimes my Complaints Reviewer had to break it down for me, the service was excellent".

"SPSO treated me like a person, understanding my needs".

"It took a very long time to process my complaint and the person dealing with it was often not available".

Recommendation

This question received the highest percentage of 'don't know' answers, suggesting that it may not be clearly understood. The wording of the question will be rewritten to clarify understanding.

All SPSO staff are to be trained/given refresher training on the Equality Act, and an Inclusion Diversity, Equality and Accessibility Strategy will be developed.

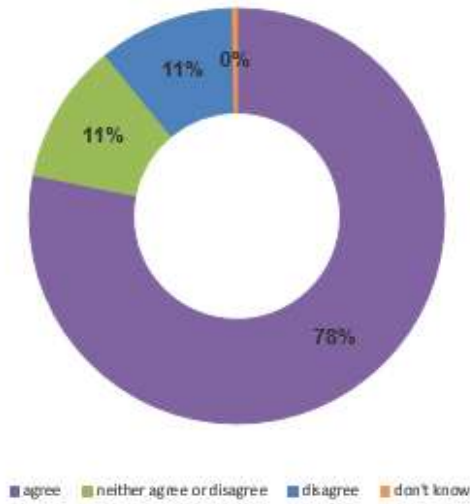
Two interns will join the organisation working within our Communications and Assessment and Guidance teams during 2019-20. Our interns will be able to share lived experience of disabilities, assisting us to build on our understanding of the needs of our wider customer group.

Staff who do not work Monday to Friday will be instructed to communicate their work pattern days/hours in written correspondence via email and letter signature footers to ensure that complainants know when they can get in touch with them.

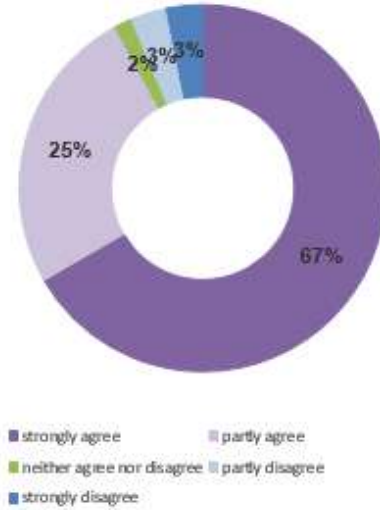
Clarity

2018-19

Customer Survey

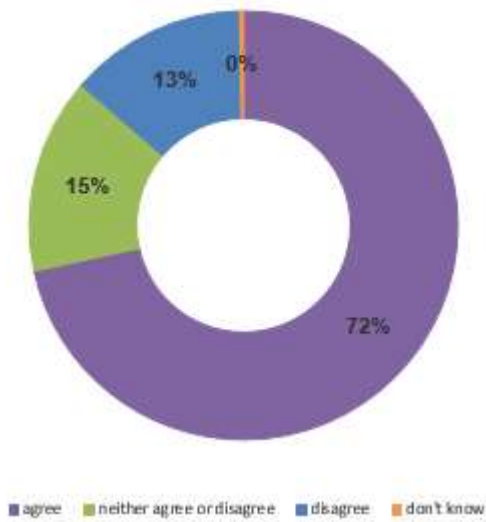


BUJ Survey



2017-18

Customer Survey



Customer survey questions:

- SPSO staff communicated with me using plain and clear language.
- SPSO's communication with me was accurate.

BUJ survey question:

- SPSO's communication with us was accurate, plain and clear.

Interpretation of customer survey and BUJ survey results

Results have improved during 2018/19.

Again, encouraging staff to adopt a combination of telephone and written communication allows us to clearly clarify our process and decision-making.

Our office relocation in December 2018 allowed us the opportunity to refresh and review many of our communication materials and we also launched a refreshed website containing resources for complainants and BUJs on our process.

Comments received from customers that we appreciate/can learn from:

“SPSO produced a comprehensive but easily understood decision which included many actions”.

“The final response was clearly written and the complaint was thoroughly investigated”.

“SPSO resolution was clear and seemed balanced”.

“SPSO understood my needs and communicated with me at every stage in a format that was clear and easy to understand”.

“The explanation for not upholding my complaint was based on the erroneous analysis of facts”.

Comments received from BUJ that we appreciate/can learn from:

“In the last few months we believe this has improved in particular clarity on the recommendations and the evidence required to meet these”.

Recommendations

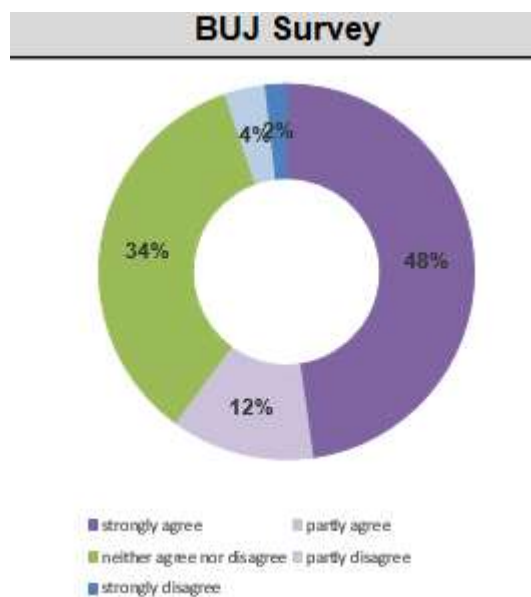
In 2019-20, we will work on a customer communications journey project, including mapping, reviewing and analysing all communications that a customer would receive from us during their complaints journey to and through SPSO. This project aims to improve our customer communications by making them more accessible, clear and consistent.

A change in our process to issuing provisional decisions (see also see p. 13-14 ‘Fairness’) and decision notices may also help in making our communications

clearer and easier to understand. Both the decision letter templates and decision notice templates, come with guidance for our complaints reviewers (CRs) on how to use them, and this may contribute to more consistent communications experiences throughout our customer base. We will monitor closely how this will be perceived.

Expertise

2018-19



BUJ survey questions:

- The complaints reviewer(s) had relevant knowledge, training and skills to make the decisions (or had access to professional advice)
- If SPSO used professional advice, it was of a high standard.

Interpretation BUJ survey results

The majority of respondents - 60% - agreed that our CRs had relevant knowledge, skills and training to make the decisions (or had access to professional advice) and agreed that if SPSO used professional advice, it was of a high standard. Only 6% disagreed. This result is encouraging but there is room for improvement. We note that a significant proportion of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statements, which suggests we must focus on any steps we can take to build confidence in this area.

Comments received from BUJ that we appreciate/can learn from:

A number of comments were received from organisations stating that they were unaware of the SPSO staff or advisors knowledge and skills. One organisation suggested – *“It would be useful for reviewers to be exposed more to the sectors they deal with, through training events, conferences etc”*.

Recommendations

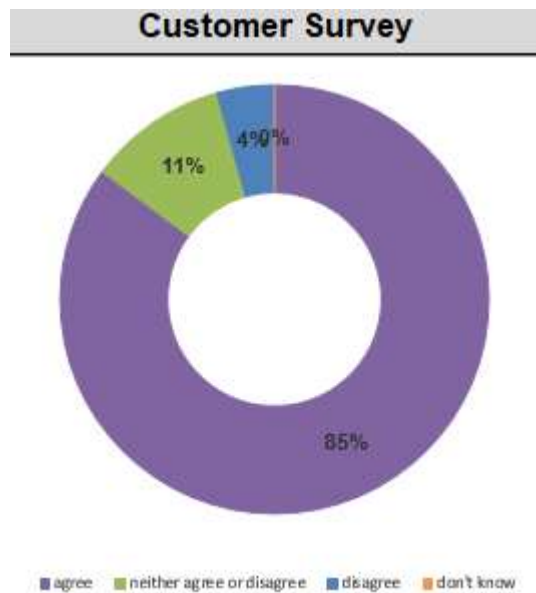
During National Customer Service week 2019, SPSO staff are encouraged to visit organisations that we consider complaints about and invite organisations to SPSO, to build relationships and exchange knowledge to support efficient complaint handling.

Our new staff have an opportunity to visit a prison as part of their induction to the office, for learning and better understanding. In addition, a range of independent advisers, including specialist clinical advisers and advisers in planning and social work, attend our office regularly and assist complaints handling staff to build their knowledge on specific topics and subjects. Colleagues attend stakeholder events and meetings and report back on emerging issues or themes relevant to particular sectors and topics we receive complaints about. We will continue to look for further opportunities to continue this cross-learning and engagement in the coming year.

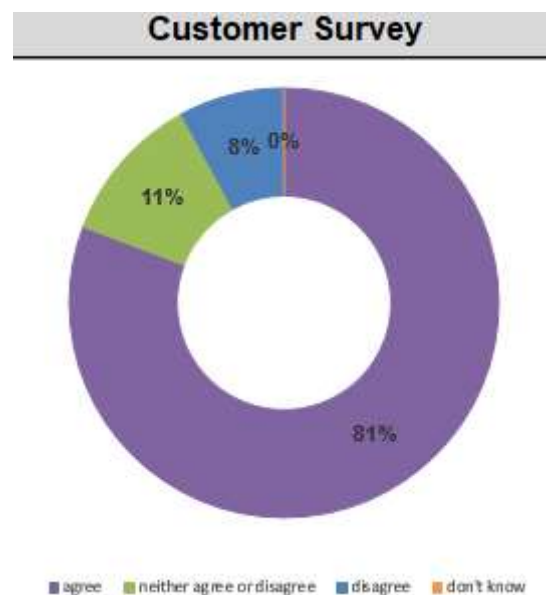
We are committed to continuous learning and improvement, and will seek to identify suitable opportunities for staff to develop their knowledge and skills, not only in complaint handling and investigation techniques, but to learn more about the subjects and sectors we examine. This includes individual discussions at regular one-to-one meetings and annual appraisal to identify learning and development needs.

Explaining our scope

2018-19



2017-18



Customer survey question:

- SPSO staff explained to me the role of the SPSO and what SPSO can and cannot do.

Interpretation of customer survey results

Results have improved during 2018/19.

We have incorporated information on our online complaints form relating to subjects of complaints, explaining our scope and what we may or may not be able to deal with. Our Assessment and Guidance Team are supported by a Duty Complaints Reviewer who can assist them with expectation management during telephone calls and when meeting visitors to our office.

Comments received from customers that we appreciate/can learn from:

“SPSO explained what they could and couldn’t do. Whether it was what I wanted to hear or not. I was always fully informed”.

“Interaction with SPSO staff was exemplary. The reviewer listened patiently to my views and explained what was (or was not) possible to achieve”.

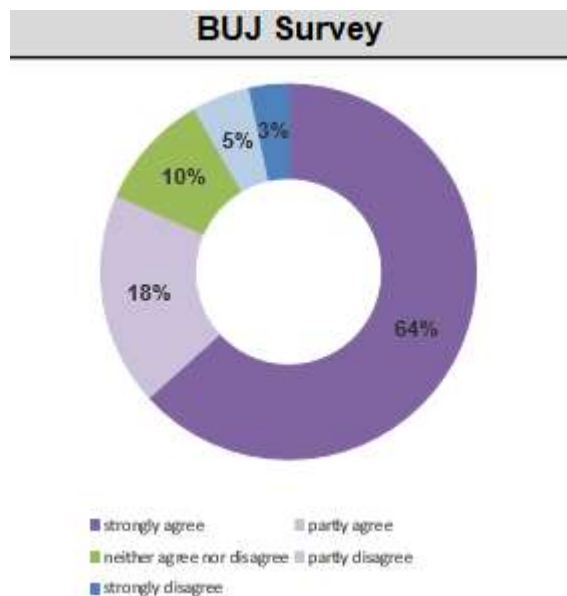
Unfortunately a number of comments suggested that the SPSO were “*biased*”, suggesting a lack of understanding of our role.

Recommendations

Communicating effectively and clearly is important to us, and we will continue to identify areas for improvement in the coming year. We are committed to using plain language as far as possible when explaining our role, and to avoid legalistic language, and to being open and honest as early as possible about what we can and cannot do, to help manage expectations. We have revised our information about our limited role in considering financial redress, and we have a suite of information leaflets explaining our role in key complaint areas. Our Frequently Asked Questions section on our website also aims to give clear information about what we can and cannot do. As part of the customer journey project (see p. 8-9 ‘Clarity’) in 2019-20, language and content we use in the various stages of our customer communications process will be evaluated and recommendations for improvements will be made.

Fairness

2018-19



BUJ survey question:

- We had an opportunity to respond to the complaint and provide comment on any new information.

Interpretation of BUJ survey results

67% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that they had an opportunity to respond to the complaint and provide comments on any new information. As a learning organisation, we reviewed our process to identify improvements. As a result of that review, which included seeking views of stakeholders and staff, we made a significant change to our complaint handling process: Since 1 February 2019, before we make our final decision on cases we have investigated, we issue a draft decision letter to both the complainant and the BUJ. We call this a 'provisional decision'. We now invite both parties to highlight any factual errors or provide new information they think will influence the outcome of the complaint. Our aim is to help ensure that both the complainant and the BUJ understand our decisions better and feel they have been heard.

As part of that process change, we have improved the information we give BUJs about their right to ask for a review of our decisions. While this is not a statutory requirement, in the interests of fairness SPSO has always been keen to offer this option, but some BUJs have told us they did not always know about it.

Comments received from BUJs that we appreciate/can learn from:

"The recent draft decisions letters have caused additional workload. We appreciate the opportunity to review these but the timescales can be challenging for busy clinicians".

"There is a lack of scope to appeal after the Ombudsman's decision is reached".

"The SPSO and any people we work with there are very supportive and welcoming of responses, new information etc".

"Most often it seems a one sided process. The complainant puts their case but we are not allowed to offer our views".

Recommendation

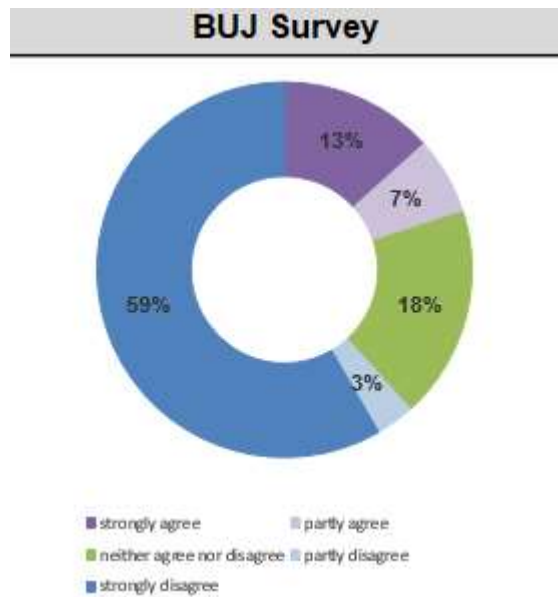
We will monitor the effectiveness of the process changes we have introduced through BUJ feedback that we receive on individual cases.

We understand the pressures and challenges BUJs are under, and we will do all we can to accommodate reasonable requests for extensions e.g. to allow recommendations to be fully actioned.

We aim to ensure our requests for information and evidence from BUJs are proportionate and relevant, recognising the time and resources involved for BUJs.

Handling of information

2018-19



BUJ survey question:

- I had concerns about the way in which SPSO handled and shared information.

Interpretation of BUJ survey results

It appears from the few comments received that guidance on SPSO's position on requesting and sharing information would be helpful for BUJs.

We are pleased to note that there is interest in developing efficient systems in transporting information.

Comments received from BUJs that we appreciate/can learn from:

"I am unsure exactly who is party to the information – but we had no concerns with anything shared with us or the complainant".

“Would welcome more guidance/partnership working on the safe transfer of information. Also, would welcome a clear statement on the SPSO’s legal basis for requesting and processing personal information”.

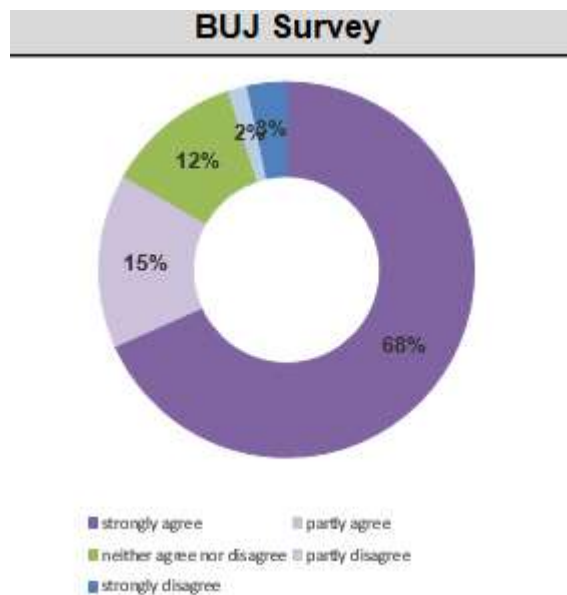
Recommendation

We are developing a guidance leaflet for BUJs which will be issued to them when we decide to consider or investigate a complaint further about them, this leaflet will include guidance on sharing information.

We have identified a development project to improve secure/bulk transfer of information. During 2020 we will investigate and make improvements to how we share information electronically with BUJs. We will consult BUJs on our proposals, developing a process which is mutually beneficial.

Impartiality and independence

2018-19



BUJ survey question:

- SPSO made their decision(s) based on an independent evaluation of the evidence provided to them.

Interpretation of BUJ survey results

While the results show the majority of BUJ respondents consider we offer an independent and impartial service, a very small number of respondents (5%) felt either in part or fully that we had not based our decision on an impartial evaluation of the evidence.

During 2018/19 we changed the way we issue our decisions. As explained above, we are now issuing provisional decisions on the complaints we accept for investigation before making a final decision and closing the complaint. Our provisional decision sets out our thinking and gives both complainants and public bodies an opportunity to highlight any factual errors or provide new information that either party thinks may influence the outcome of the complaint.

We have also changed the format of our decision letters which were previously written to the complainant and a copy sent to the BUJ. We now issue anonymised 'decision notices' with a covering letter to both parties.

Comments received from BUJs that we appreciate/can learn from:

There were no significant comments received on impartiality and independence.

Recommendations

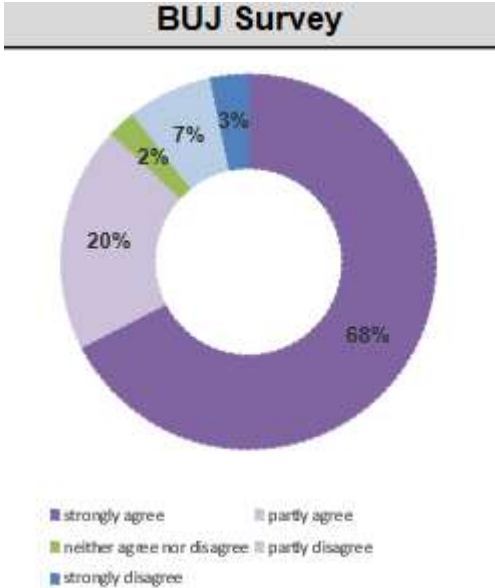
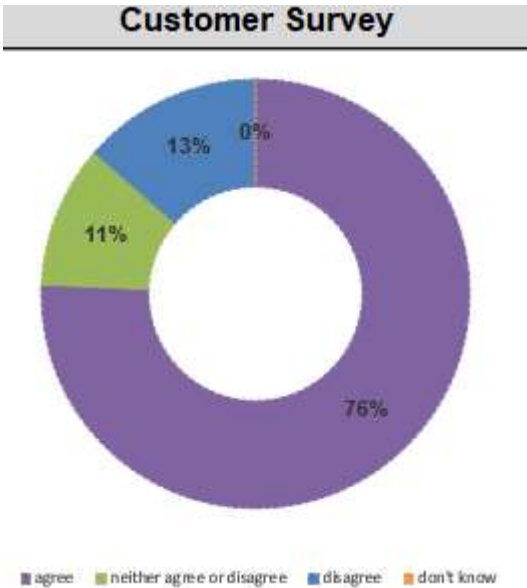
Due to a lack of comments provided to this question, it is difficult to understand why a very small % of BUJ respondents did not agree that we had based our decision on an impartial evaluation of the evidence (or in relation to why 12% did not have a view either way).

We consider the move to provisional decisions and decision notices demonstrate our commitment to carrying out a full independent and impartial evaluation of the evidence before reaching a final decision. During 2019-20 we will carry out a review of this change and will measure the impact (positive and negative) on our service users.

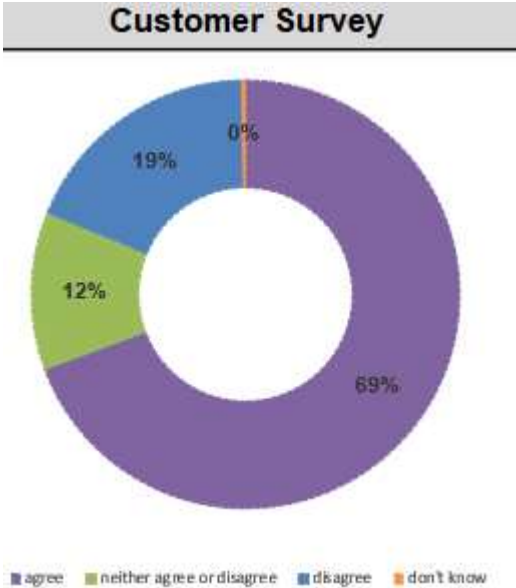
As previously mentioned, in 2019-20 we are developing a guidance leaflet for BUJs (to be made available on our website and in leaflet format) which explains how we consider the complaints we receive; including how we reach decisions and assess the evidence. We will record feedback and measure impact of this new publication next year.

Keeping you informed

2018-19



2017-18



Customer survey questions:

- I was regularly told how my complaint was being progressed.
- I was told at each stage of the process who I could contact if I had any questions.

BUJ survey questions:

- SPSO kept us informed of progress with updates every 6 to 8 weeks and/or timely correspondence.
- SPSO always told us who we could contact if we had any question.

Interpretation of customer survey and BUJ survey results

Results have improved during 2018/19 in feedback from complainants.

The comments received from customers demonstrate that they were, in the main, satisfied with how we had updated them and a large majority of those responding to the survey (76%) considered they had been regularly updated and kept informed of progress.

While the majority of those responding to the BUJ survey (68%) considered they were kept informed this was a lower percentage than the customer survey. The comments received from BUJ also demonstrate that some didn't consider they received regular updates or the updates they received were of limited value.

Comments received from customers that we appreciate/can learn from:

"I was overwhelmed by the personal care and professional work undertaken by the SPSO investigator – the CR kept me constantly updated".

"I found the service to be informative and was kept in touch about the case".

"Excellent communication throughout".

"The person in charge of looking into my complaints was very supportive during an extremely distressing time. Explained very clearly the way the complaint process would work and gave me regular updates. I could contact them at any stage".

Comments received from BUJs that we appreciate/can learn from:

"Unaware of any contact for several months [...] when final decision was issued".

"Communication varies between reviewers. Updates are of limited value when they are essentially saying that there is nothing to report at present".

"On occasion there are long delays, in excess of 8 weeks, once we have replied to a request for information with no information or updates provided".

“Increasingly we find that SPSO request information about a complaint they are investigating within a fairly challenging timescale (2 weeks from the date of the request seems to be fairly standard) and then we hear nothing for months in some cases”.

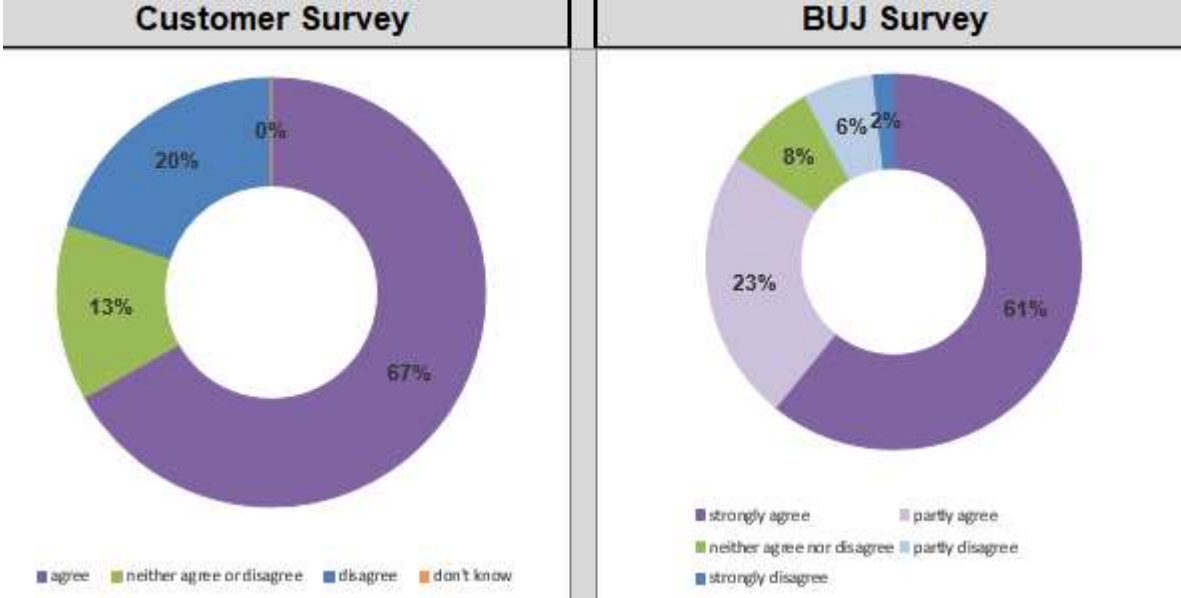
Recommendations

While the survey results evidence that the majority of complainants consider they were kept informed of progress, during 2018-19 we have experienced an increase in cases for detailed consideration. This has resulted in a delay time in allocating complaints to CRs. We acknowledge that it is important that we continue to keep our customers updated and informed, particularly when we are experiencing an increase in demand on our service and an increase in the time it takes us to allocate complaints. We have recognised improvements that we can make in communicating this, for example explaining allocation timescales more clearly when a complaint is received. Improvements will be implemented 2019-20 to ensure we keep complainants informed on what is happening at the earliest possible opportunity.

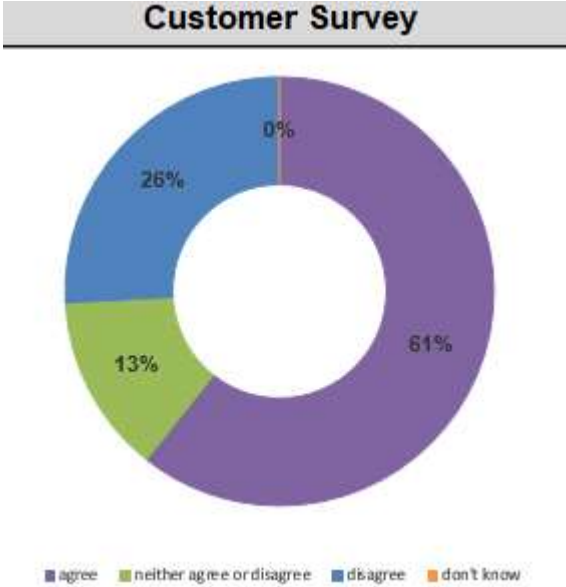
While we met our target of completing 95% of investigations within 260 days, the comments received from the BUJ survey also clearly show there is room for improvement in how we keep them updated, and we will continue to monitor how we update complainants and BUJs particularly during an investigation.

Reaching sound outcomes

2018-19



2017-18



Customer survey question:

- I received a clear explanation of the reasons for the SPSO's decision(s) on my complaint.

BUJ survey questions:

- SPSO clearly explained their reasons for their decision(s) to us.
- SPSO's recommendations were appropriate to address the impact of any failings on the complainant and to promote wider learning and improvement.

Interpretation of customer survey and BUJ survey results

Results have improved during 2018-19. However there is still room for improvement particularly in the way that we explain the reason for our decisions to complainants.

For complainants, 67% of those who responded to the survey agreed they had received a clear explanation for the SPSO's decision, while 20% disagreed. For BUJs who responded, 61% agreed they had received a clear explanation for the decision while 23% disagreed.

Comments received from customers that we appreciate/can learn from:

"I cannot praise SPSO enough they produced a comprehensive but easily understood decision which included many action points".

"The final response was written clearly and the complaint was thoroughly investigated".

"I think it is a very positive development that drafts are now to be sent out before a letter is issued. I just missed the boat for this – it can only improve the quality of decisions".

"The SPSO carried out an in-depth investigation but I don't believe the complaint was fully understood".

Comments received from BUJs that we appreciate/can learn from:

"Promoting wider learning etc. has been of little relevance in a couple of recent cases as the cases were so old we had already put changes in place before the complaint was made to SPSO".

“Reasons are based on incorrect assumptions. The matter has been concluded by the time SPSO had written to the Council. Also on other occasions, recommendations haven’t been clear”.

“Recommendations are generally helpful but making a number of recommendation on a complaint that has not been upheld causes confusion at times. There are also some occasions where SPSO will uphold part of a complaint that was resolved prior to complaint being taken to SPSO.

Recommendations:

As noted, we are now issuing provisional decisions on the complaints we accept for investigations, before making a final decision and closing the complaint. We expect that issuing provisional decisions will help us to ensure our decisions are clearly explained and the evidence we are asking for in relation to implementation of our recommendations is achievable. We will continue to monitor the impact if this change.

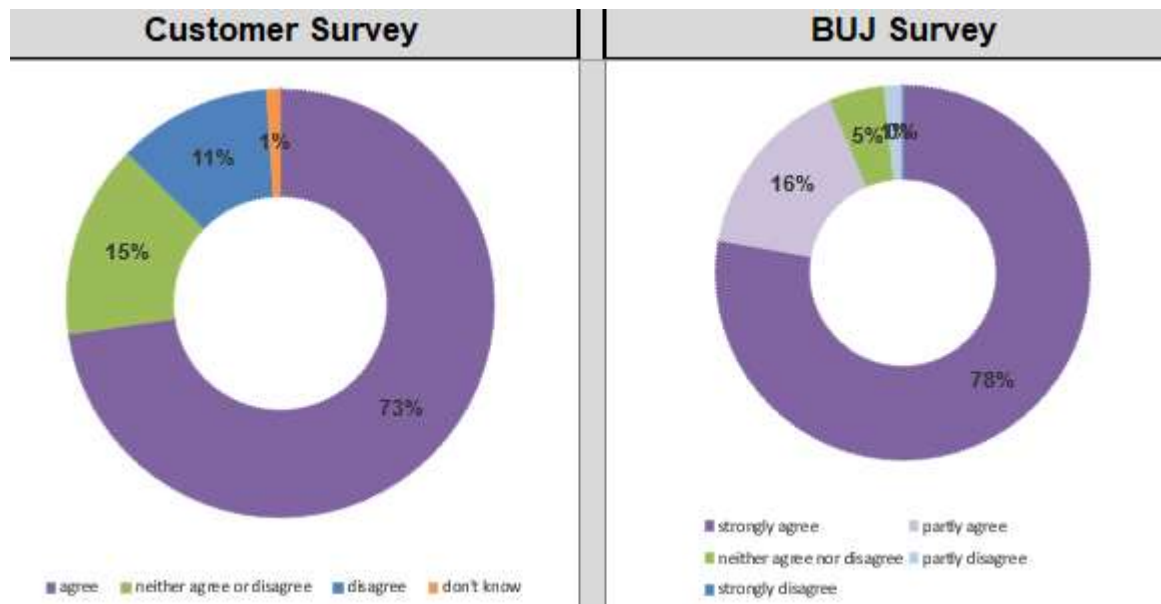
In relation to the comment from a BUJ that making recommendations on a complaint that has not been upheld causes confusion, we have recently changed our process and now no longer make recommendations where we have not upheld the complaint (except for complaint handling recommendations)

We will also continue to provide feedback on the interaction with SPSO and alert the BUJ to key points within our decision in both upheld and not upheld cases as we consider this helps to support service improvement.

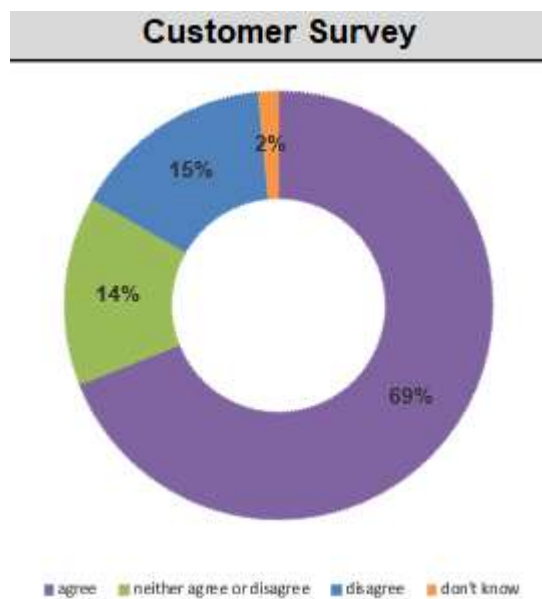
See also recommendation at 7: Impartiality and Independence.

Respect and dignity

2018-19



2017-18



Customer survey question:

I received a customer focused service from the SPSO.

SPSO staff treated me with courtesy, respect and dignity.

SPSO staff treated me without discrimination and prejudice.

BUJ survey question:

SPSO treated us courteously, respectfully and with dignity.

Interpretation of customer survey and BUJ survey results

Results in the customer survey have improved during 2018-19 with an increase to 73% in the number of people who agree with the questions we asked about the dignity and respect they received from our office. We would, however, like to see these results improve further.

In terms of the responses from BUJ's, 78% of respondents strongly agree and 16% partly agree that we met our commitments to deal with them with respect and dignity. However, as 5% neither agreed nor disagreed and 1% partly disagree, we have further work to do to improve these figures.

We continue to encourage staff to make early contact with complainants by telephone, where appropriate, which gives complainants the opportunity to ask questions about the service they can expect from us, how we will communicate with them and how we will deal with their case.

We also encourage open communication with BUJs and, as with complainants, we provide the direct telephone numbers of our staff and encourage BUJs to contact us if they wish to discuss a case.

We have established an Inclusion, Disability, Equalities and Accessibility community of practice forum. The group's focus is to consider how our organisation can continue to develop our work in a way which is line with our duties under equalities legislation.

Comments received from customers that we appreciate/can learn from:

"The staff members were empathetic and approachable, they were understanding and I felt listened to rather than dismissed".

"My case was complex and harrowing but your company handled each question with utter respect and dignity without prejudice or judgement".

"Concern for my wellbeing was evident both in the call and the follow up letter".

"Polite, helpful and pleasant at all times".

"On a personal level interaction with SPSO was exemplary, I was listened to patiently".

Comments received from BUJs that we appreciate/can learn from:

“Staff always make themselves available to discuss matters”.

“Depends on case handler”

Recommendations:

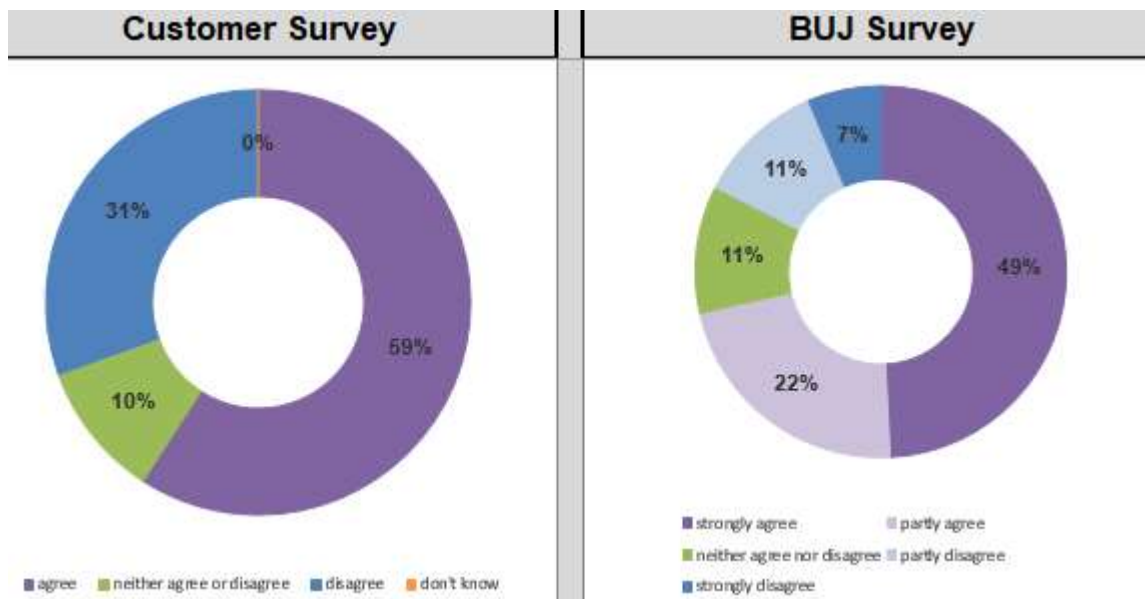
As detailed previously, all SPSO staff are to be trained/given refresher training on the Equality Act, and an Inclusion Diversity, Equality and Accessibility policy will be developed in 2019-20.

In addition, in order to improve the quality of our telephone communication, a new telephone quality assurance system is being considered and should be implemented 2019-20.

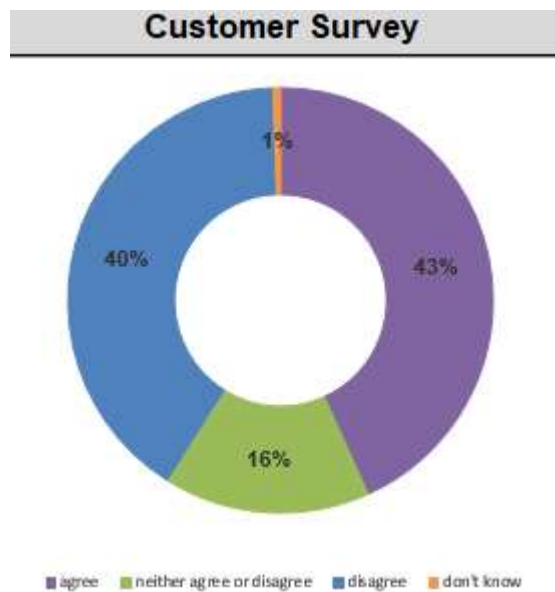
We intend developing a behaviour statement to be issued to complainants early in the process, clearly stating our commitment to providing a fair and accessible service. This will also highlight that we believe that everyone who contacts us has the right to be treated with respect and dignity. We feel that it is important that we make it clear that we also believe that our staff have the same rights, and we must provide a safe working environment for our staff.

Timeliness

2018-19



2017-18



Customer survey question:

SPSO dealt with my complaint in a timely manner taking into account the complexity of my case.

BUJ survey question:

SPSO dealt with the complaint(s) in a timely manner.

Interpretation of customer survey and BUJ survey results

The results have improved in 2018-19 with significant increases in satisfaction from 43% to 59% of complainants agreeing that the SPSO dealt with their complaints in a timely manner given the complexity of the case. There was also a drop in the number of complainants who were dissatisfied with our timeliness.

In general, the results were positive from the BUJs with 71% either fully or partly agreeing that the SPSO dealt with the complaints in a timely manner.

During 2018-19 we focused significant efforts on improving our triage and early assessment of cases. This allowed us to identify cases which did not need to go through our full investigation process and could be resolve more quickly. We also focused on reducing the time taken between receipt of the complaint in the office and allocation to a complaints reviewer for consideration.

It is important to highlight that the time taken to deal with complaints is directly related to the complexity of the cases we receive, the volume of cases received

and the resources we have available to manage our casework. Any changes to any of these three aspects can have a direct impact of the timeliness of our investigations.

Comments received from customers and BUJs that we appreciate/can learn from:

Unfortunately comments were largely negative around timeliness.

“The process took longer than I thought”.

“The whole process is far too slow”.

“The time taken has been difficult to accept”.

“An honest timescale from the outset would have been good”.

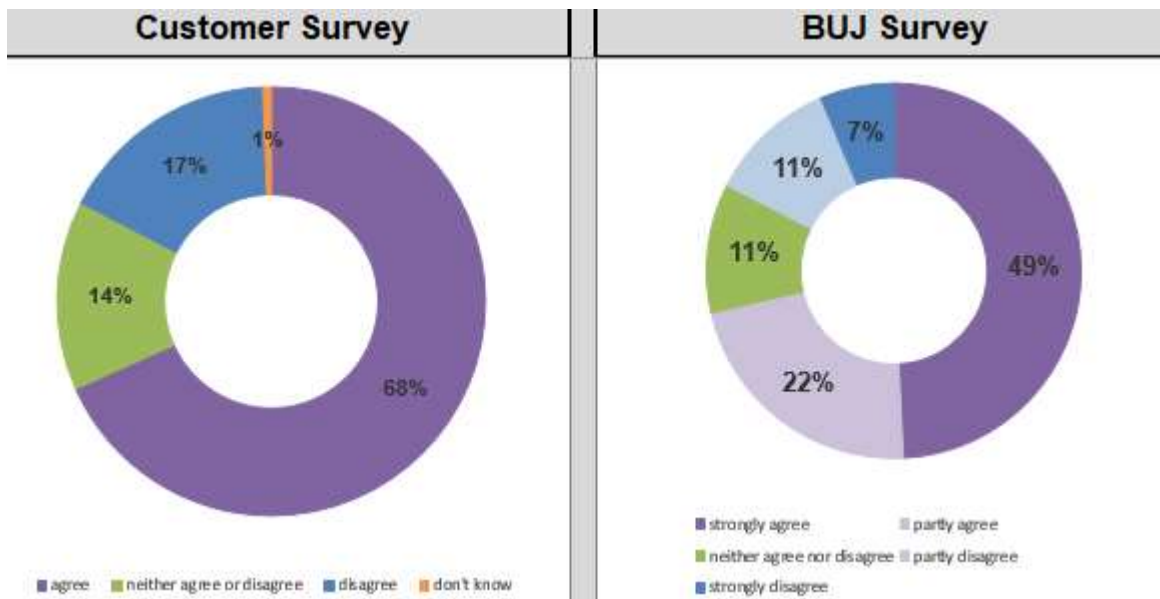
Recommendations:

We will continue to monitor and review our casework in order to identify further efficiencies and improvements to our processes which may reduce the time taken to investigate complaints.

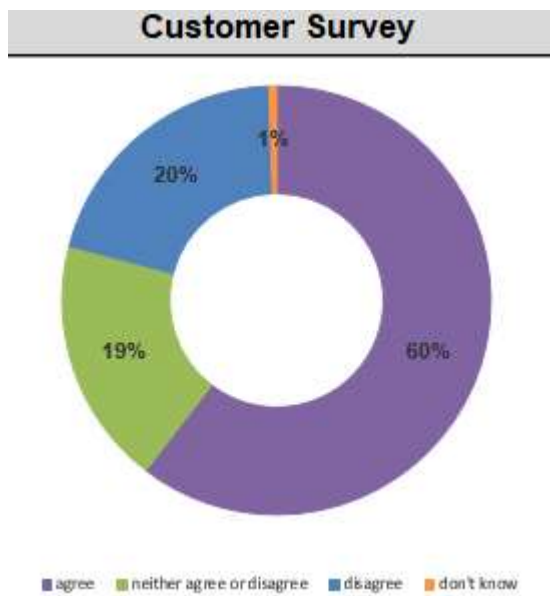
Many of our cases are very complex in nature and can take a considerable time to investigate and conclude. In order to ensure that complainants and BUJ's are clear about the possible timescales for investigation, we will review our communication materials as part of a customer journey project in 2019-20 (see p 8-9, 'Clarity') to make sure we are clear about our targeted timescales; this will help inform complainants about any anticipated delay in allocation of their case.

Transparency

2018-19



2017-18



Customer survey question:

SPSO staff explained to me how my complaint would be handled and the likely timescales for completion.

BUJ survey question:

SPSO provided us with the information explaining how they handle complaints.

Interpretation of customer survey and BUJ survey results

There has been a slight increase in our performance in terms of transparency during 2018-19 with 68% of respondents (an increase of 8%) agreeing that staff explained to them how their complaint would be handled, and the likely timescales.

There has been a continued focus on personal contact by our staff, particularly by telephone, along with providing regular updates to complaints and authorities. Wherever possible, we are increasingly promoting the use of telephone contact as a way of improving communication between each party.

Comments received from customers that we appreciate/can learn from:

“Staff explained to me each step they made from the start to the end”.

“At times I felt my complaint was taking too long but when I contacted the Complaint Reviewer I was reassured”.

“Although the SPSO are very good at communicating that there are going to be delays in their responses and when they will be in touch, the whole process took too long”.

Comments received from BUJs that we appreciate/can learn from:

“I do not recall having received information regards handling complaints”.

“This is a major issue for us. We do not understand how SPSO takes complaints forward and discussions through the practitioners group have failed to clarify this properly. Handling is a bit of a mystery”.

Recommendations:

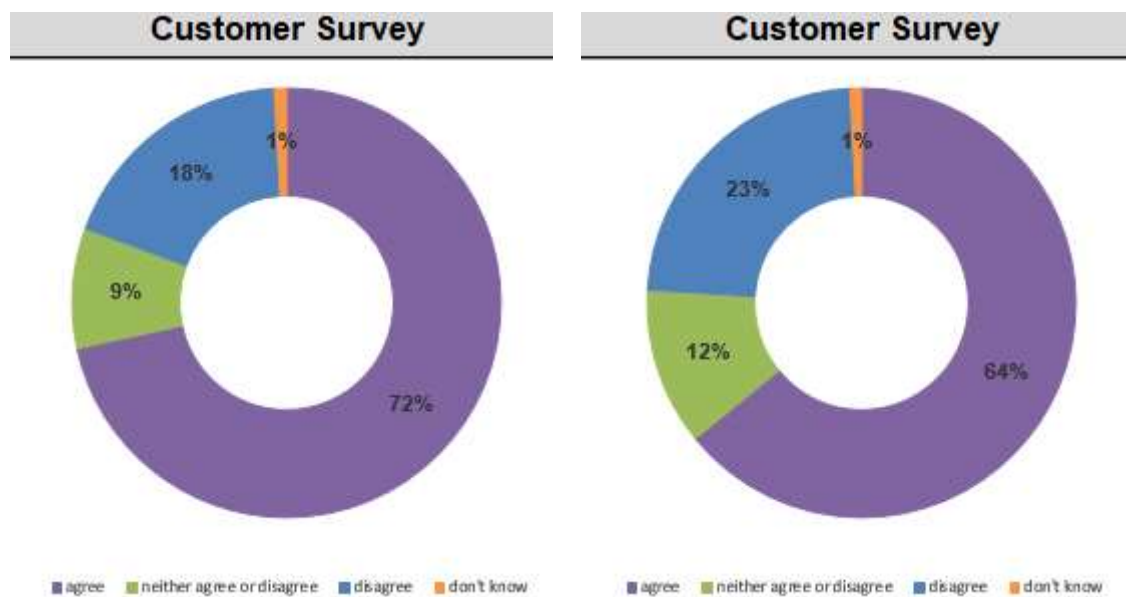
We will continue to review the information we provide to both complainants and BUJs to ensure that we provide clear information on our process and what complainants can expect from us. Through our Quality Assurance (QA) process we will monitor individual cases to ensure that our CRs tell complainants how their case will be handled and what they can expect from us.

We will arrange for staff to attend and speak at practitioner forums/networks arranged by our BUJs in order to discuss our investigations process, address any concerns BUJs may have and improve communication between BUJs and the SPSO.

Understanding

2018-19

2017-18



Customer survey question:

SPSO staff listened to me and understood my complaint.

Interpretation of customer survey results

There has been an improvement in the response from complainants during 2018-19. As previously mentioned we have encouraged staff to use the telephone to assist in building an understanding of the complainant's needs and the detail of their complaint, we feel that this is demonstrated in the results.

Our Assessment and Guidance Team work closely with Duty Complaints Reviewers to ensure that there is sufficient detail submitted in complaint forms when they are first received by our office. Forms are assessed to ensure that complainants have given us enough information for us to have a good understanding of what they are complaining about and the outcome that they are

hoping to achieve. Where this isn't clear, we return the form to the complainant asking further detail.

We also have good links with advocacy services who support complainants in articulating their complaint to our office, many of these organisations have a good understanding of what we require to consider complaints.

Managers quality assure telephone calls of complaint handling staff throughout the year to ensure that staff were listening carefully during conversations with complainants and understanding their needs and complaint.

Comments received from customers that we appreciate/can learn from:

"Staff listened to me and understood".

"The person I dealt with was easy to speak to and listened carefully".

"The person dealing with my complaint was often unavailable".

"My reviewer was a good listener".

"I felt listened to rather than dismissed".

Recommendations:

An information event will be held for advocates and advisors during 2019 to assist them in gathering correct information and clearly expressing complaints on behalf of complainants to ensure understanding. We will also develop a dedicated section for advisors on our website providing information and guidance.

The importance and value of telephone contact with complainants will continue to be promoted as good practice within the SPSO.

Summary of recommendations

The following recommendations will be progressed by SPSO during 2019-20:

Recommendation	SPSO staff member(s) responsible for progressing
1. Equality Act training/refresher training for all staff	HR Officer
2. Appointment of two intern colleagues from Inclusion Scotland to join Assessment and Guidance Team and Communications Team	HR Officer, A&G Manager, Communications Manager
3. Part-time staff to communicate their work pattern/hours in written correspondence with complainants	Part-time complaint handling staff
4. Customer journey communications project, mapping, reviewing and analysing all communications that a customer receives from SPSO	Communications Manager
5. Monitor and review the effectiveness of new provisional decisions process	Investigation Managers
6. Encourage complaint handling staff to visit organisations or invite organisations to the SPSO to encourage cross learning and engagement	A&G Manager and Investigation Managers
7. Develop guidance leaflet for BUJs on SPSO complaint handling process	Investigation 2 Manager and Communications Manager
8. Research how information can be more efficiently shared electronically with BUJs and implement improvements	Corporate Services Manager

9. Consider how we can make improvements in updating BUJs during the investigation process	Investigation Managers
10. Consider improvements to telephone quality assurance system	A&G Manager
11. Develop positive behaviour statement	A&G Manager
12. Through our QA process, ensure that complaint handling staff advise complainants how their case will be handled and what they can expect	Executive Casework Officers
13. Arrange staff to attend and speak at practitioner forums/BUJ networks to discuss our investigation process and address any communication concerns.	A&G Manager and Investigation Managers
14. Host information event for advisors and advocacy agencies to assist them in gathering the right information from complainants and make guidance available on our website.	A&G Manager, Communications Manager