

**SCOTTISH
PUBLIC
SERVICES
OMBUDSMAN**



People Centred | Improvement Focused

Public Sector Complaints customer survey report 2021-22



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Executive summary

1. This report provides analysis of feedback received from customers with public service complaints investigated by SPSO.
2. Findings were analysed throughout 2021-22 on a quarterly basis by SPSO complaint handling heads of service and operational managers.
3. Methods of analysis include quantitative and qualitative data and comparisons have been made against results available from the previous year.
4. The challenges of 2020-22 under lockdown restrictions had a significant impact on SPSO and all of our stakeholders. Delays in case investigation times were unavoidable. Our capacity to investigate complaints was impacted.
5. During 2021-22, the challenges of the year also led to innovation and invention customer satisfaction feedback has encouraged us to advance improvements in our service delivery.
6. Despite the challenges of a second unprecedented year we are pleased to note that satisfaction levels which had improved across many measurable service standards during 2020-21 have remained stable.
7. Notably, we have listened to our customers and made improvements to service delivery to support our commitments across the following service standards:

Accessibility ([see page 8](#))

8. Accessibility is at the heart of SPSO's values and recognising the challenges of the pandemic on our service users, accessibility has been at the forefront of our minds when considering service improvement. We have developed and embedded vulnerability guidance into all areas of our service delivery. This has ensured that our service has remained accessible and adaptable. We have also conducted a review of staff awareness, understanding and application of this guidance.

9. We have continued to experience a channel shift in complainants contacting us via our website, in response we enhanced the guidance and support we offer electronically and through our web complaint form. We have invested in the development and design of our web form, ensuring that we are capturing the right level of detail and supporting documentation from complainants to allow us efficiently assess their complaint.
10. We ask customers how we can best communicate with them and if they require any reasonable adjustments to be made to our service when they first contact us. In recognition that individuals needs and circumstances may change throughout the time that they are engaging with us, we remind complainants that we can adapt our service and check-in that our approach is meeting their needs.
11. We keep complainants updated on our progress during an investigation and provide direct contact details for the member of staff dealing with their complaint at an early stage.

Clarity ([see page 9](#))

12. Feedback on this service standard has most significantly improved during 2021/22.
13. Many of the complaints that we deal with are about complex and sensitive issues, we recognise the importance of communicating with service users using plain and clear language. We are also aware of how significant the complaints that are brought to us are for our service users and the importance of ensuring that our communication with them is accurate.
14. Many of our investigation decisions are reviewed by a manager before they are issued to ensure that they are clear and accurate. Outcomes of investigations are set out in clear decision notices. We also have a formal quality assurance process and any helpful wording identified in these reviews is shared with relevant staff.

Explaining our Scope ([see page 10](#))

15. This service standard has received the most positive statistical feedback, however, we have received no quantitative feedback for context on satisfaction.

16. We have over the last two years made significant changes to our communication about our complaint handling process, specifically aimed at improving how we explain our role and the time we may take to consider a complaint from the outset and also how we demonstrate fairness in our decision-making with public bodies at the end of the complaints process.
17. Staff are encouraged to make telephone contact with complainants at an early stage to discuss our role and what the SPSO can and cannot do in relation to their complaint. This helps to clarify our remit and answer any questions complainants have. The positive statistical feedback received in relation to this service standard indicates the benefits of this approach and there will be an increased focus on telephone contact with complainants during 2022/23.
18. We have also made improvements to the information on our website to ensure that the remit of the SPSO is set out clearly. In addition, we have a range of information leaflets that explain our role in relation to complaints about specific subjects and organisations that fall within our jurisdiction. This information is reviewed periodically to ensure that it is clear and accurate.

Timeliness ([see page 14](#))

19. Unfortunately the time taken to consider and investigate complaints has increased during 2021/22. From early feedback from complainants in 2020-21, we decided that being open about expected delays was important. We communicate delay times clearly on our website and our web form, staff are also active in communicating delays with service users during telephone conversations. We clearly acknowledge all new complaints stating the number of weeks/months for allocation to a complaints reviewer for detailed consideration. We closely monitor predicted allocation times and proactively communicate any changes to expected timescales.
20. We will continue to think creatively about any efficiency gains that we can introduce to any part of our process and where appropriate adopt agile working principles to develop our customer interface and methods of processing complaints.

21. From general comments that we have received it is clear that many of our customers value personal contact with us. In recognition of this, an increased focus on telephone contact with complainants will be made during 2022/23, we have provided tools to support staff and plan to carry out quality assurance of this contact.
22. We are grateful to all users of our service who have taken the time to offer their valuable feedback.

Introduction

23. 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

24. By regularly seeking feedback 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

25. This report provides an overview of our performance against our service standards in the year 2021-22 for public service complaints that we investigated. It is based on the findings from our customer satisfaction surveys.
26. We analysed respondents' satisfaction with our performance against each service standard.
27. We have also compared this year's results with results from 2020-21.
28. Our satisfaction surveys are sent out to customers on a quarterly basis. Customers who received an investigation 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).
29. This report does not include results from our bodies under jurisdiction (BUJs) satisfaction survey. Due to staff resourcing issues, we are still collecting survey feedback from BUJs, and we expect to report on these results in Q3 2022.
30. This year we continued to send out our survey questionnaires exclusively online. As prisoner complainants are unable to access digital questionnaires, they did therefore not participate in the survey. A review of our prisoner communications is included in the business plan for 2022-23 and accessibility to the satisfaction survey for this customer group will be one area we will explore further.
31. Table 2 shows the overall survey return data for the 2021-22 customer service survey. The number of survey's sent to complainants was lower than the previous year (244 in 2021-22 compared to 369 in 2020-21).
32. The response rate for the customer survey dropped by five percentage points (19% decrease from response rate of 27% in 2020-21 to 22% in 2021-22).

Table 2: Survey return information - customer survey 2021-22

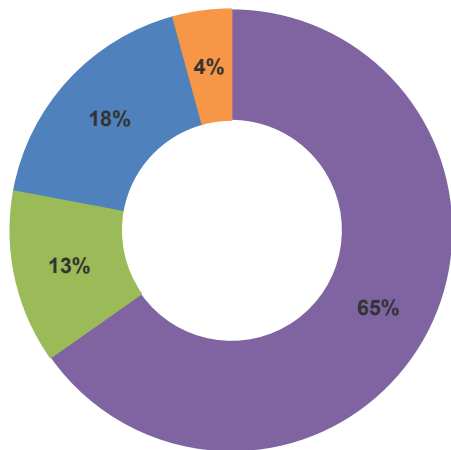
	Returned	Sent	Return %	sent % split	return % split
Not upheld	19	90	21%	37%	36%
Some upheld	9	61	15%	25%	17%
Fully upheld	25	93	27%	38%	47%
Overall	53	244	22%		

Findings

Accessibility

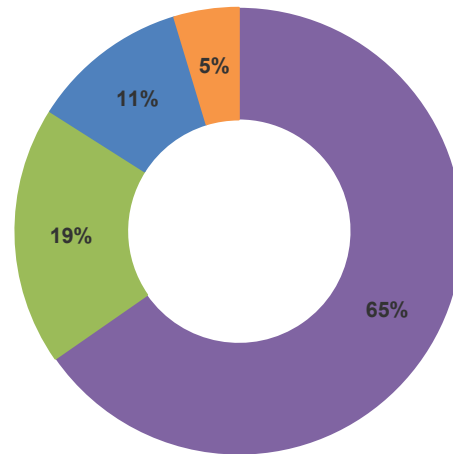
Customer survey

2021-22



■ agree ■ neither agree or disagree ■ disagree ■ don't know

2020-21



■ agree ■ neither agree or disagree ■ disagree ■ don't know

Customer survey questions:

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

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

'I was given the opportunity to verbally give an overview of my complaint via the telephone which I found helpful. The staff member was extremely patient and listened to my thoughts and reasons for complaining'.

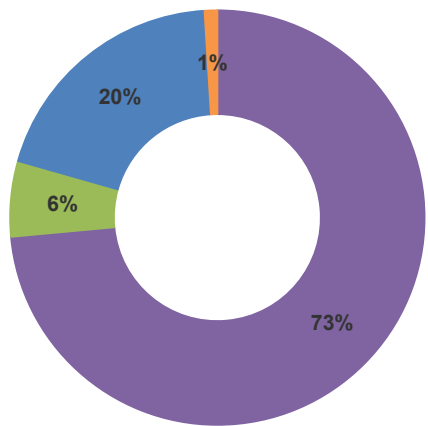
'It definitely helped having the opportunity to speak to an officer and I only wish it could have been done face to face as well'.

'The lady who dealt with me was kind, patient and understanding – your service is brilliant'.

'Communication was sporadic. A number of times when I called or emailed and left messages there was no response – this was probably due to COVID'.

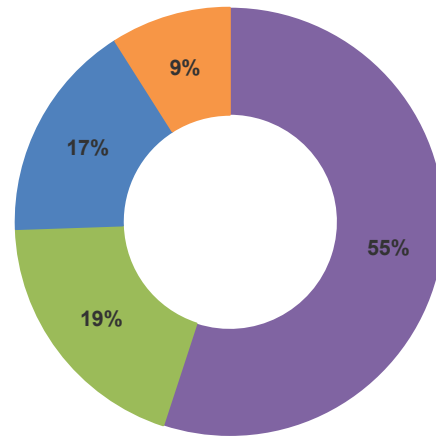
Clarity

2021-22



■ agree ■ neither agree or disagree ■ disagree ■ don't know

2020-21



■ agree ■ neither agree or disagree ■ disagree ■ don't know

Customer survey questions:

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

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

'Clear communication, regular update emails as promised. Details of how to speak to the person carrying out the investigation if I wished to'.

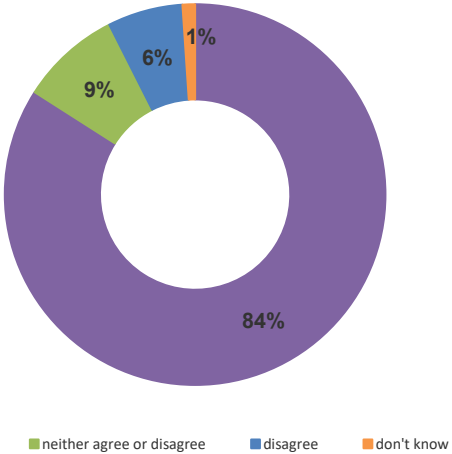
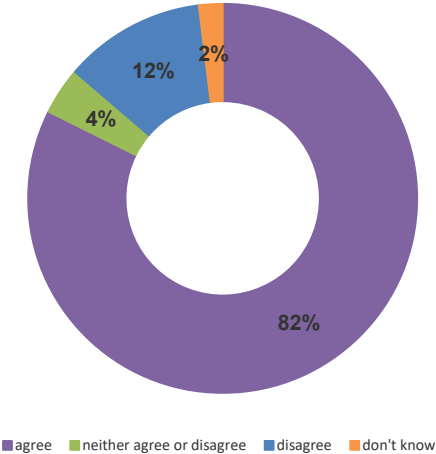
'Communication was friendly rather than official which was reassuring to me and made me feel like I was being listened to and treated with respect'.

Explaining our scope

Customer survey

2021-22

2020-21



Customer survey question:

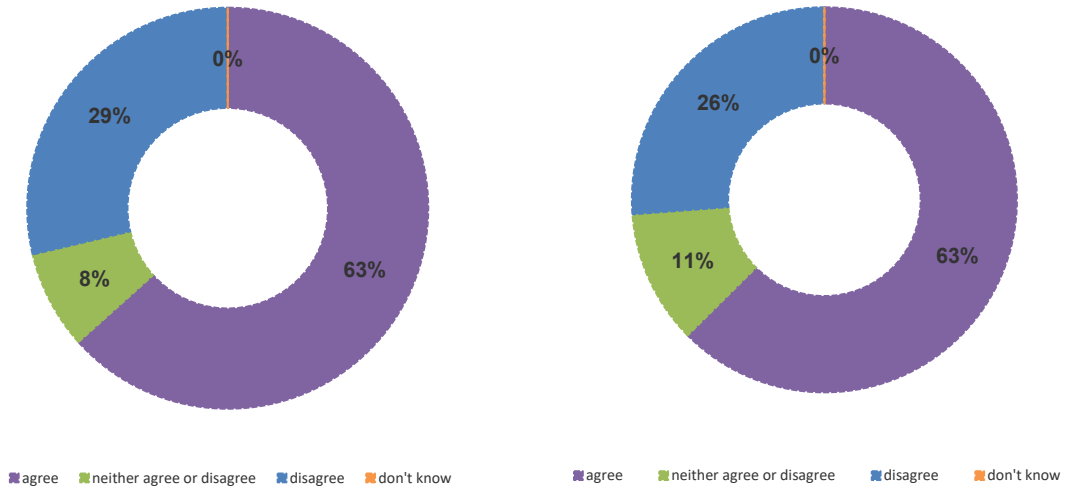
- SPSO staff explained to me the role of the SPSO and what SPSO can and cannot do.

We received no comments from customers relating to this service standard.

Keeping you informed

2021-22

2020-21



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.

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

'My complaint was handled well and I was kept informed on the progress at all times'

'I was fully informed through the process'

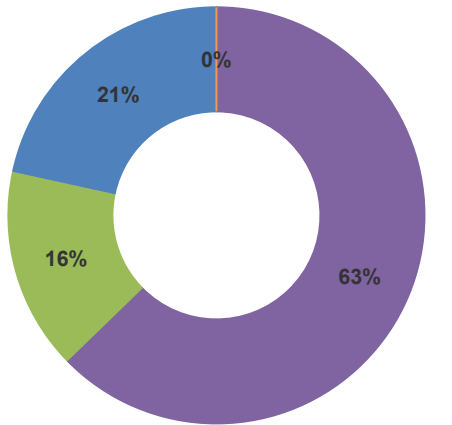
'SPSO could do a much better job keeping complainants informed'

'Always left chasing where case was at, timescales for updates not stuck to'

'There were quite a few times where I had to contact the SPSO for updates. I do appreciate that some of these were due to circumstances out with SPSO's control but on occasion it was regarding information that that should have been passed on'

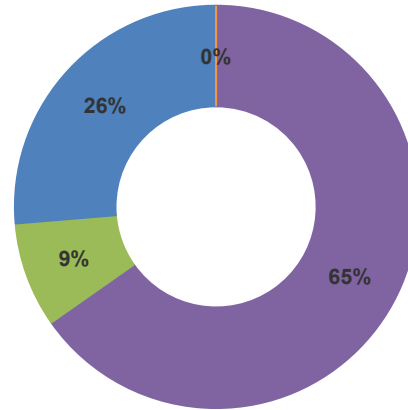
Reaching sound outcomes

2021-22



■ agree ■ neither agree or disagree ■ disagree ■ don't know

2020-21



■ agree ■ neither agree or disagree ■ disagree ■ don't know

Customer survey question:

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

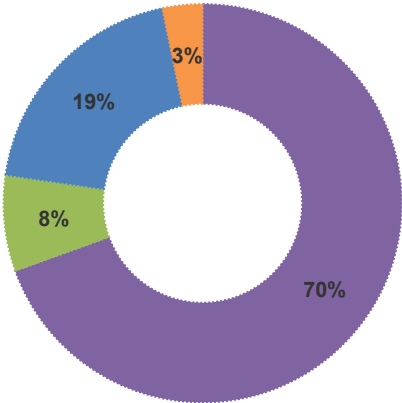
Comments received from customers that we appreciate/can learn from:

'SPSO investigates well and comes up with complete answers to the complainers and those complained about'.

'The fairness with which my case was handled was exemplary. I had phone contact with staff and I have the highest praise for them'.

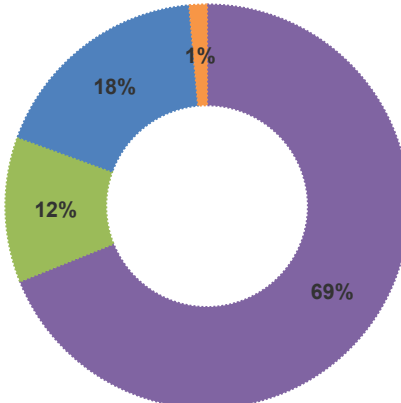
Respect and dignity

2021-22



agree neither agree or disagree disagree don't know

2020-21



agree neither agree or disagree disagree don't know

Customer survey questions:

- 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.

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

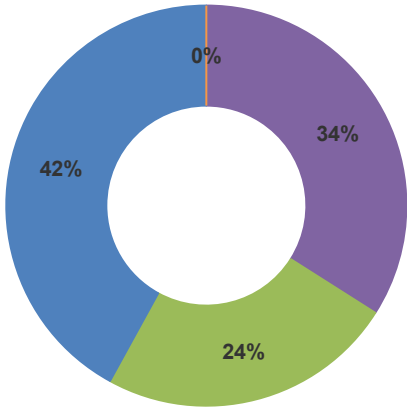
'I had experienced trauma relating to the initial incident I complained about and I felt that I was treated with care and respect in the way SPSO interacted with me'.

'So pleased that this service exists it made a huge impact on my life – to be believed after I was made feel I was lying'.

'I felt my complaint was dealt with in a very professional and unbiased manner'.

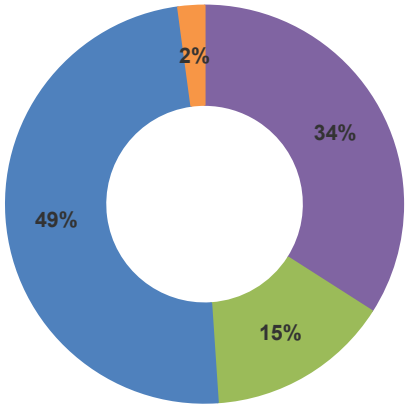
Timeliness

2021-22



■ agree ■ neither agree or disagree ■ disagree ■ don't know

2020-21



■ agree ■ neither agree or disagree ■ disagree ■ don't know

Customer survey question:

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

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

'The Investigator kept us up to date with any delays and appreciated how stressful it was – she was absolutely fantastic'

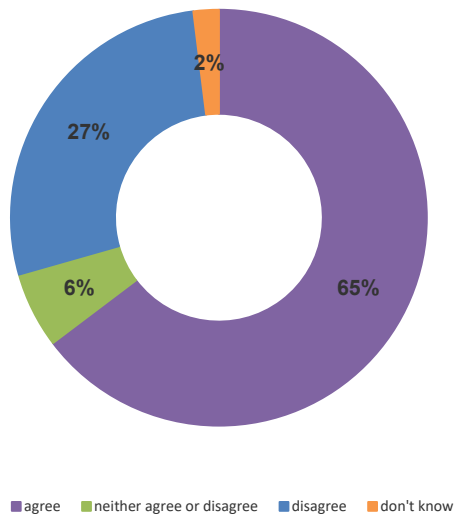
'Service was excellent as was the person handling the complaint – only criticism was the length of time the process took'

'It's a traumatic process having to go over and relive all the details, therefore, anything SPSO can do in order to reduce the timescales involved would greatly help complainants'

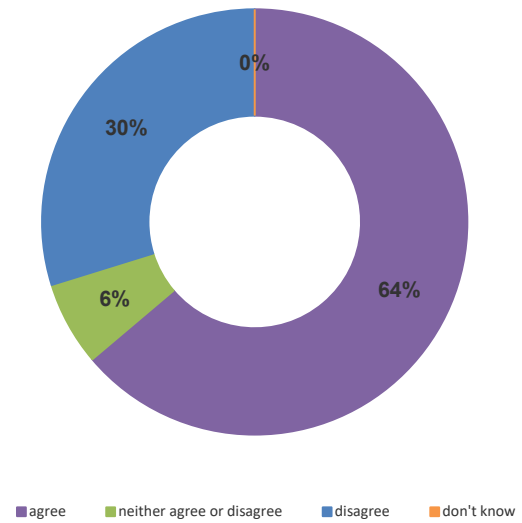
'The length of time taken from submission to being allocated to an advisor and then the time it took for SPSO to process the complaint was excessive'

Transparency

2021-22



2020-21



Customer survey question:

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

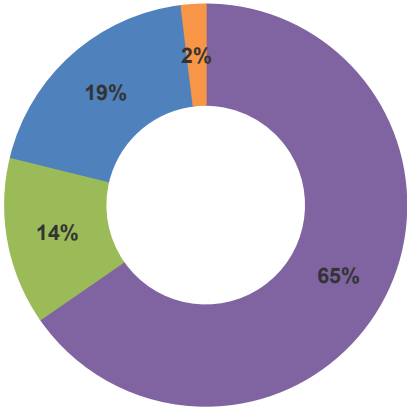
Comments received from customers that we appreciate/can learn from:

'I thought two years was a long time to get an answer to my complaint, the final date kept changing'.

'I was updated regularly which was wholeheartedly appreciated. It was respectful and enabled me to know the steps going forward'.

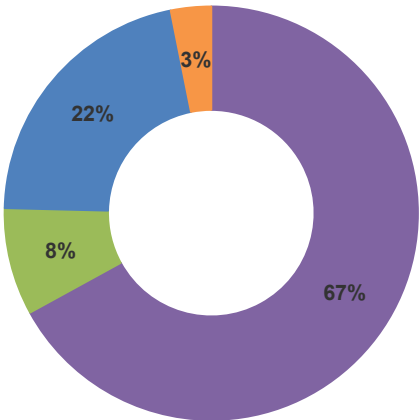
Understanding

2021-22



■ agree ■ neither agree or disagree ■ disagree ■ don't know

2020-21



■ agree ■ neither agree or disagree ■ disagree ■ don't know

Customer survey question:

- SPSO staff listened to me and understood my complaint.

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

‘SPSO acted very professionally in dealing with my stressful complaint. They listened to my concerns and validated them. My complaint was upheld’.

‘The investigator was very professional and approachable her investigation was forensic in nature’.

‘The investigator was able to see behind the superficial façade constantly repeated. Her resoluteness to seek the truth and obtain accurate facts is to be commended’.

‘The SPSO kept disappearing and were unclear about what their goal was, despite me explaining in depth what happened to me’.