



Customer Satisfaction Survey



Northern Ireland

Public Services

Ombudsman

Final Report of Findings

By Opinion Research Services

April 2022



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1. Introduction

Background

- 1.1 The Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) commissioned Opinion Research Services (ORS) to carry out a telephone survey measuring customer satisfaction. The purpose of the survey was to better understand various aspects of complainants' experiences of interacting with NIPSO, such as: the process of making contact, their views on the information and service provided, and their general satisfaction with the process. The findings of this survey are detailed in this report.
- 1.2 A Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) methodology was employed, with interviews undertaken by ORS's social research call centre interviewers. NIPSO provided ORS with a file containing details of individuals who had submitted complaints to NIPSO over a roughly two-year period prior to the start of the survey. ORS approached all complainants who provided a valid telephone number and, in total, undertook 212 interviews between the 5th of October and the 18th of November 2021.
- 1.3 From the original sample, ORS sought to conduct as many interviews as possible with respondents whose cases went to an investigation. This was done so that the views of those who had gone through an investigation process could be understood with more confidence.
- 1.4 As a result of this approach, respondents whose cases went to investigation were over-represented in the final achieved sample (relative to the other groups). The data was therefore weighted by complaint closure stage to make the results more representative of the original file of cases that NIPSO had provided to ORS (see Table 1).

Respondent profile

- 1.5 The tables that appear without commentary below and on the following page show the unweighted profiles of the responses to the survey (please note that the figures may not always sum to 100% due to rounding).

Table 1: Closure Stage – All Complainants (Note: Figures may not sum due to rounding)

Closure Stage	Unweighted Count	Unweighted Valid %	Weighted Valid %
Initial Assessment	79	41	55
Assessment	72	37	30
Investigation	41	21	14
Other	2	1	1
<i>Not known</i>	18	-	-
Total	212	100	100

Table 2: Gender – All Complainants (Note: Figures may not sum due to rounding)

Gender	Unweighted Count	Unweighted Valid %	Weighted Valid %
Male	110	53	55
Female	97	47	45
<i>Not known</i>	5	-	-
Total	212	100	100

Table 3: Age – All Complainants (Note: Figures may not sum due to rounding)

Age	Unweighted Count	Unweighted Valid %	Weighted Valid %
16-34	18	9	9
35-44	38	19	20
45-54	58	29	29
55-64	42	21	20
65+	47	23	22
<i>Not known</i>	9	-	-
Total	212	100	100

Table 4: Ethnic Group – All Complainants (Note: Figures may not sum due to rounding)

Ethnic Group	Unweighted Count	Unweighted Valid %	Weighted Valid %
White	196	97	96
BAME	7	3	4
<i>Not known</i>	9	-	-
Total	212	100	100

Interpretation of the Data

- ^{1.6} The results of the Customer Satisfaction Survey are presented in a largely graphical format. The pie and bar charts (and other graphics) show the proportions (percentages) of complainants making responses.
- ^{1.7} Where percentages do not sum to 100, this may be due to computer rounding, the exclusion of 'don't know' categories, or multiple answers. Throughout the report an asterisk (*) denotes any value less than half of one per cent.
- ^{1.8} The number of valid responses recorded for each question (base size), are reported throughout. As not all respondents answered every question, these base sizes vary between questions.

Acknowledgements

- ^{1.9} ORS would like to thank Andrew Ruston and Gabrielle Cairns at NIPSO for their help and assistance in developing the project. We would also like to thank the 212 respondents who took part in the survey, without whose valuable input the research would not have been possible.

2. Executive summary

How complainants found out about NIPSO

- 2.1 About a third of complainants found out about NIPSO by being referred from a public body (32%). Another third or so found NIPSO via a web search (32%).
- 2.2 Of those who had been referred from a public body, a quarter had been referred from an educational body (25%), a quarter had been referred from a local government/council (25%), a similar percentage had been referred from the health service (24%) and just under a fifth had been referred from a Government department (19%).

Contacting NIPSO

- 2.3 Less than one in ten complainants (9%) received help from an advisory or advocacy service in making a complaint to NIPSO. Of those who had received help in making their complaint, the most common advisory services were the Patient and Client Council of Northern Ireland and the Citizens Advice Bureau.
- 2.4 The most popular methods to contact NIPSO were by email and telephone, with each of these being used by over a third of complainants (35% and 34% respectively).
- 2.5 Of those who had used the online complaints form to contact NIPSO (17%), around a quarter (26%) had experienced some kind of difficulty. Commonly mentioned difficulties included the website crashing and text boxes on the form being too small.

Information provided by NIPSO

- 2.6 Under half (45%) of complainants agreed that the information they were provided with by NIPSO was useful, but a slightly smaller proportion of complainants disagreed (39%). Complainants whose complaints had reached the assessment stage or investigation stage were significantly more likely to agree that the information they were provided with was useful.
- 2.7 When it came to making further comments about the information provided by NIPSO, around half expressed a view that the information was vague, too general, or otherwise unhelpful.

Staff at NIPSO

- 2.8 Complainants generally had a positive opinion about the staff at NIPSO and showed broad agreement with a range of statements about NIPSO's staff. The statement with the highest level of agreement (75%) was that 'the staff are courteous'. However, even the statement with the lowest level of agreement ('the staff at NIPSO has a good understanding of your complaint') still had agreement from over half (53%) of complainants.
- 2.9 Complainants whose complaint had reached the assessment stage or investigation stage were significantly more likely to agree with most of these six positive statements about the staff at NIPSO.

Decision taken by NIPSO

- 2.10 Half (50%) of complainants agreed that the decision on their case was explained clearly to them, but around two fifths (39%) of complainants disagreed.
- 2.11 Of those who had disagreed that their case decision was clearly explained, over a half (54%) gave the reason of a generally bad experience as the reason why they disagreed that their case decision was clearly explained. Around a third mentioned issues with information given (35%) as a reason, and the same proportion cited issues with the investigation (35%).

Service provided by NIPSO

- 2.12 Complainants had a somewhat mixed opinion about the service provided by NIPSO.
- 2.13 Over half (57%) agreed with the statement: “your complaint was dealt with in a timely manner”. However, fewer (41%) agreed with the statement: “your complaint was considered thoroughly taking account of all relevant evidence”; moreover, around half (51%) disagreed with this statement.
- 2.14 In a similar vein, opinion was split in terms of whether complainants were satisfied with the overall service provided by NIPSO. Around half (49%) were satisfied with the overall service provided by NIPSO whilst two fifths were dissatisfied (40%).

How NIPSO could improve

- 2.15 Lastly for how NIPSO could improve its service, by far the most common theme was around wanting NIPSO to be more personal, empathetic, considerate and to demonstrate better listening, with over two fifths (45%) of all respondents mentioning this theme.

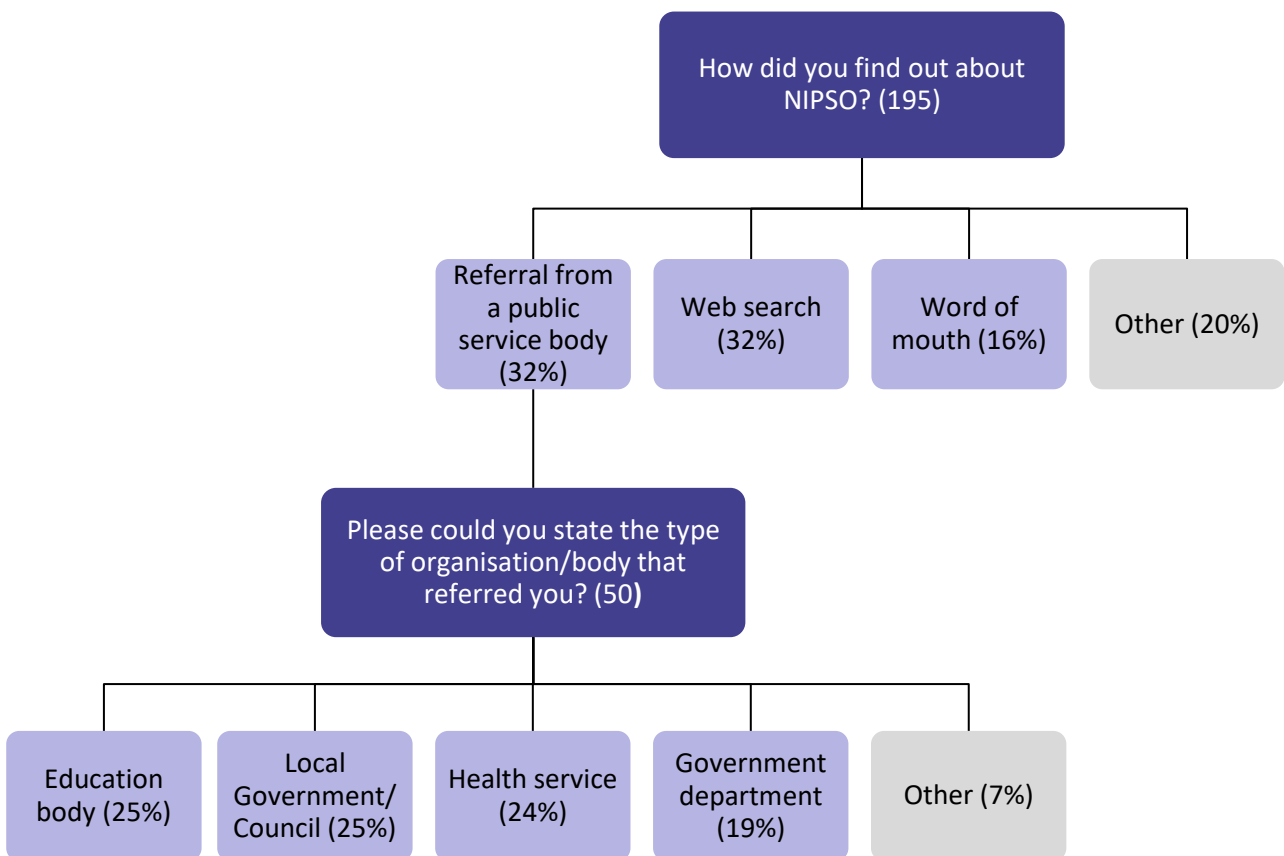
3. Results

How complainants find out about NIPSO

- 3.1 Complainants found NIPSO through a variety of channels. About a third (32%) were referred to NIPSO by a public service body, while another third (32%) found NIPSO via a web search, and 16% found out about NIPSO from word of mouth.
- 3.2 One fifth (20%) of complainants discovered NIPSO in other ways, for example, a number indicated that they had previous knowledge and/or a longstanding awareness of NIPSO and its work. Other ways of finding out about NIPSO included television/TV adverts and through one’s profession/job role.
- 3.3 Of the complainants who were referred to NIPSO by a public body, Figure 1 shows that a quarter (25%) were referred by an education body, and another quarter (25%) by local government/council. Just under a quarter (24%) were referred by a health service and nearly one fifth (19%) were referred by a government department, only 7% were referred by other types of organisation.

Figure 1: How did you find out about NIPSO? & Please could you state the type of organisation/body that referred you?

Base: All complainants (number of respondents in brackets)

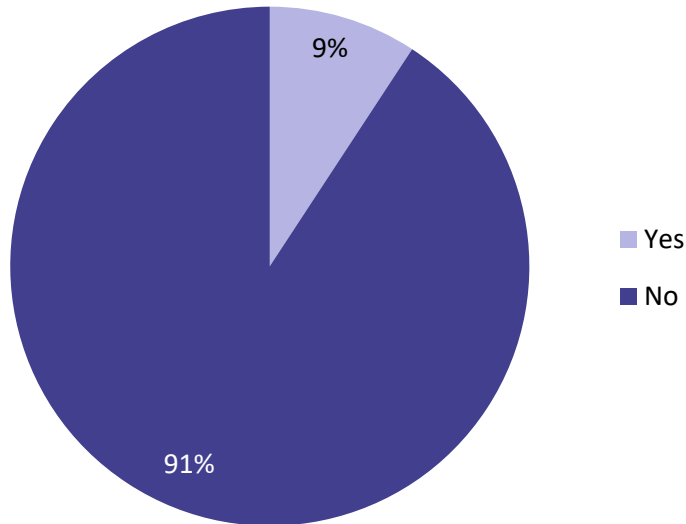


Contacting NIPSO

^{3.4} Just under a tenth of complainants (9%) received help from an advisory or advocacy service in making a complaint to NIPSO. Some of the advisory or advocacy services mentioned by these complainants included the Patient and Client Council of Northern Ireland and Citizens Advice Bureau.

Figure 2: Did you receive any help from an advisory or advocacy service in making the complaint? E.g. Advice NI, Citizen's Advice Bureau, a MLA

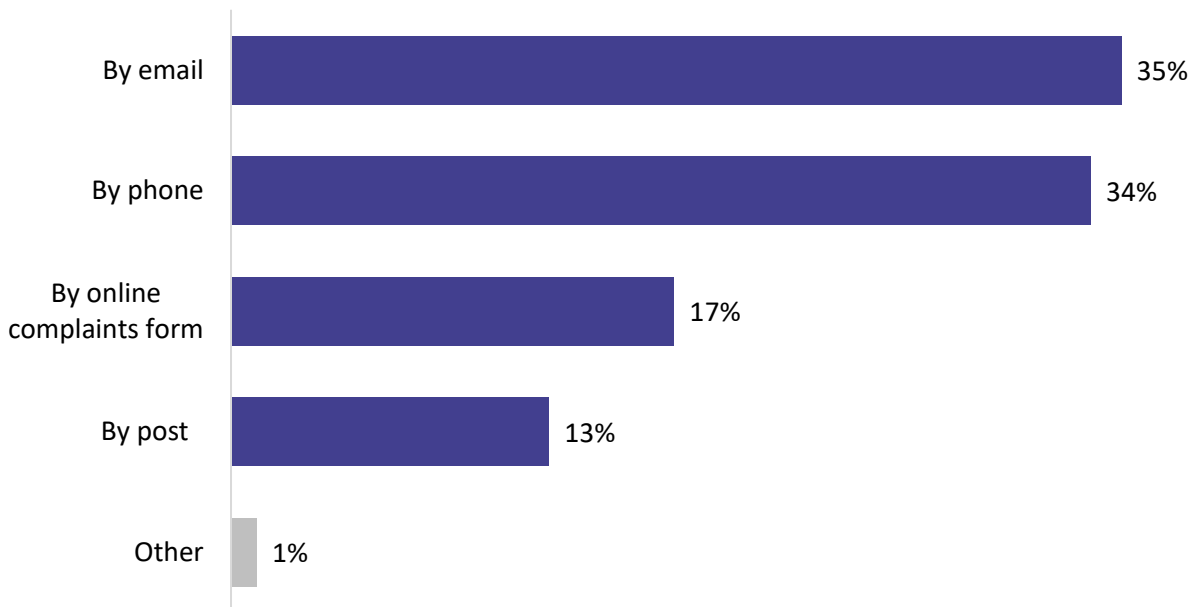
Base: All complainants (210)



^{3.5} The most popular methods to contact NIPSO were by email and phone which both were used by around a third of complainants (35% and 34% respectively). This was followed in popularity by the online complaints form (17%) and by post (13%) and lastly by other methods (1%).

Figure 3: How did you first attempt to make contact with NIPSO?

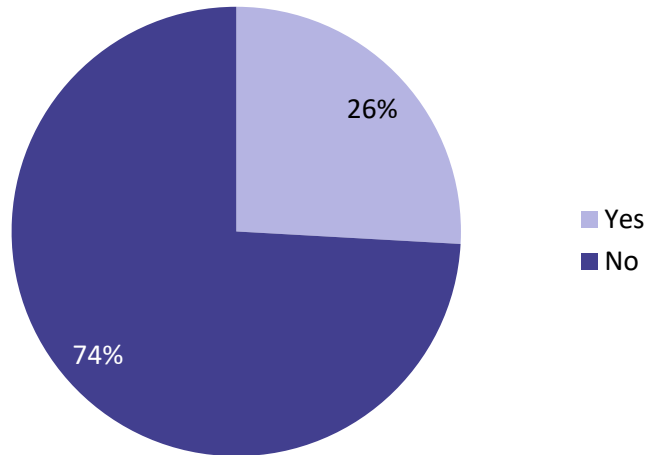
Base: All complainants (205)



^{3.6} Of those that used the online complaints form to contact NIPSO, around a quarter (26%) experienced some kind of difficulty. Difficulties included text boxes being too small, the website crashing so complainants had to restart, and the upload tool not working for documents.

Figure 4: Did you experience any difficulties in submitting your complaint form online?

Base: Complainants who filled in the online form (36)



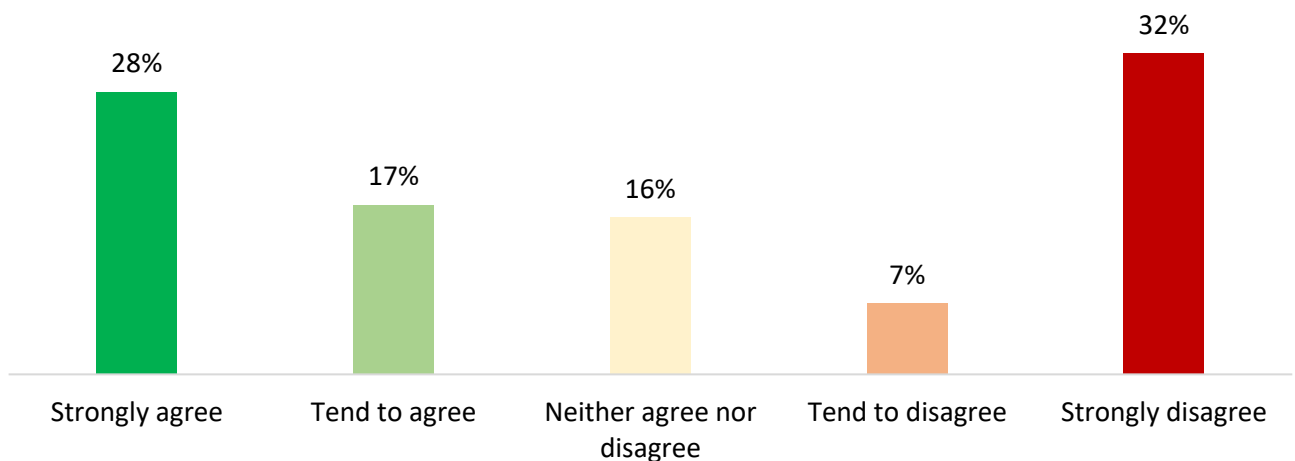
^{3.7} Complainants were asked if they had any specific communication requirements or needs when contacting NIPSO or submitting their complaint. 3 complainants (1% of respondents) said that they had had some kind of additional requirement.

Information provided by NIPSO

^{3.8} Opinion among complainants was split as to whether NIPSO provides useful information. Under half (45%) agreed that the information they were provided with was useful. A slightly smaller proportion of complainants disagreed (39%). The remaining 16% of users neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.

Figure 5: Thinking about any information you were provided with once you had made your complaint, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following: The information that you were provided with was useful.

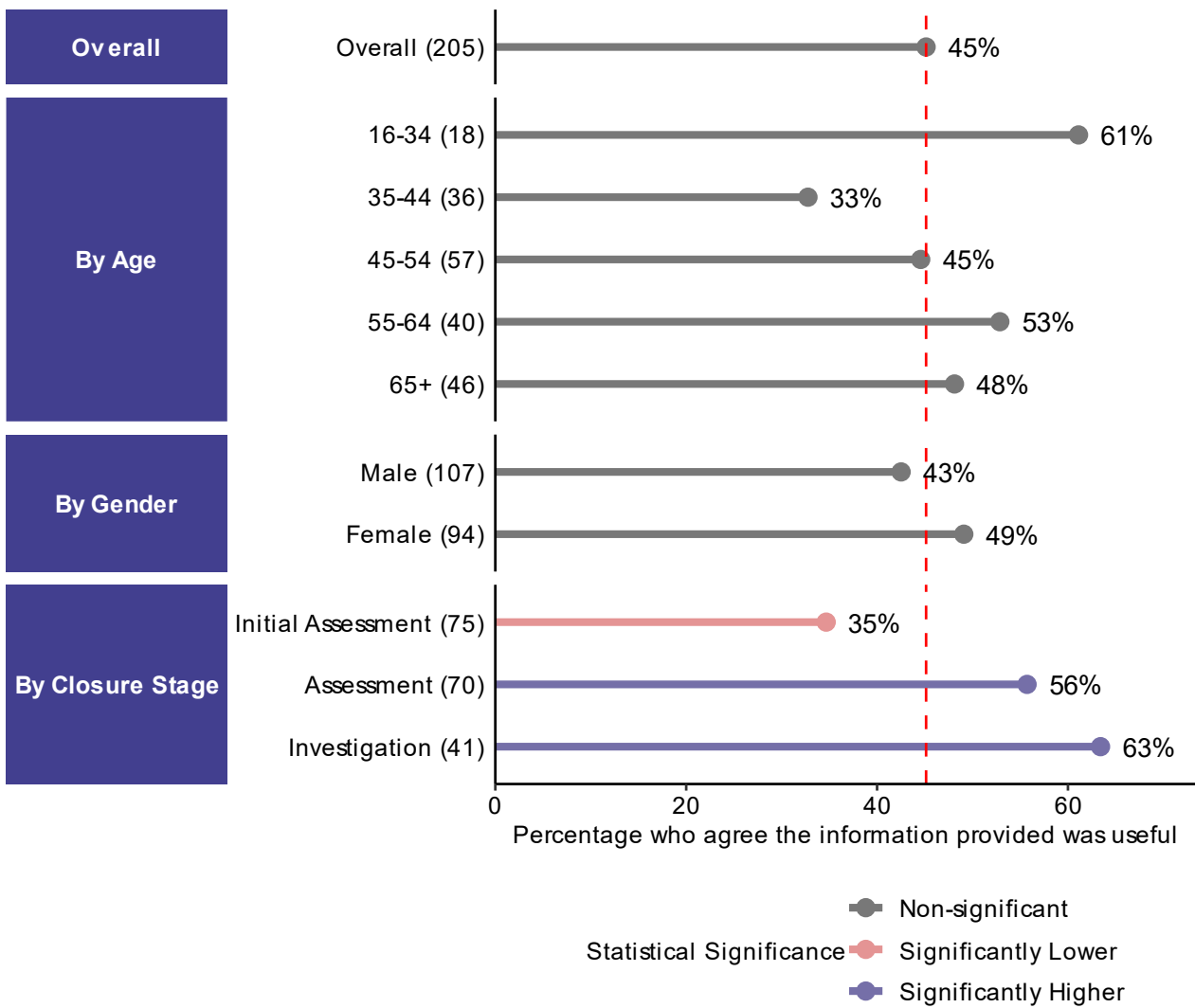
Base: All complainants (205)



3.9 Figure 6 summarises how views on the information differed by sub-group. The clearest differences were seen in relation to closure stage: of those respondents whose complaint reached the initial assessment stage, only a third (35%) found the information to be useful, compared with over half of complainants whose complaint reached assessment stage (56%) and more than three fifths of those whose complaint resulted in an investigation (63%).

Figure 6: Thinking about any information you were provided with once you had made your complaint, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following: The information that you were provided with was useful. (Agreement by subgroup)

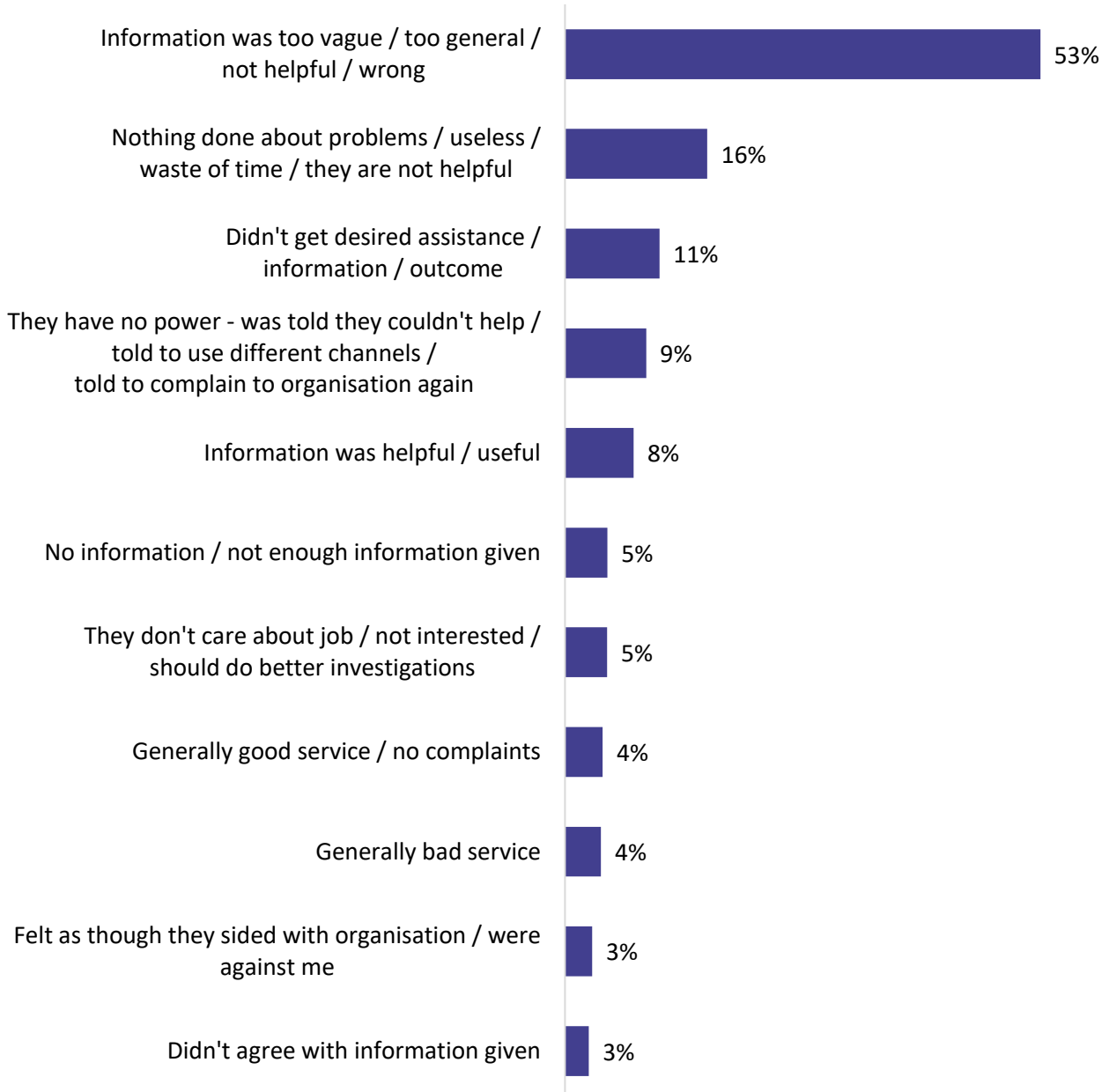
Base: All complainants (sub-group bases in brackets).



- 3.10 The survey respondents were asked to offer further comments on the information provided by NIPSO. Figure 7 overleaf shows the coded themes that were mentioned by more than 2% of complainants.
- 3.11 The top three most common themes expressed negative sentiment towards NIPSO. Just over half expressed a view that the information was vague, too general, or otherwise unhelpful.

Figure 7: Do you wish to make any further comments about the information you were provided with?

Base: All complainants (212)

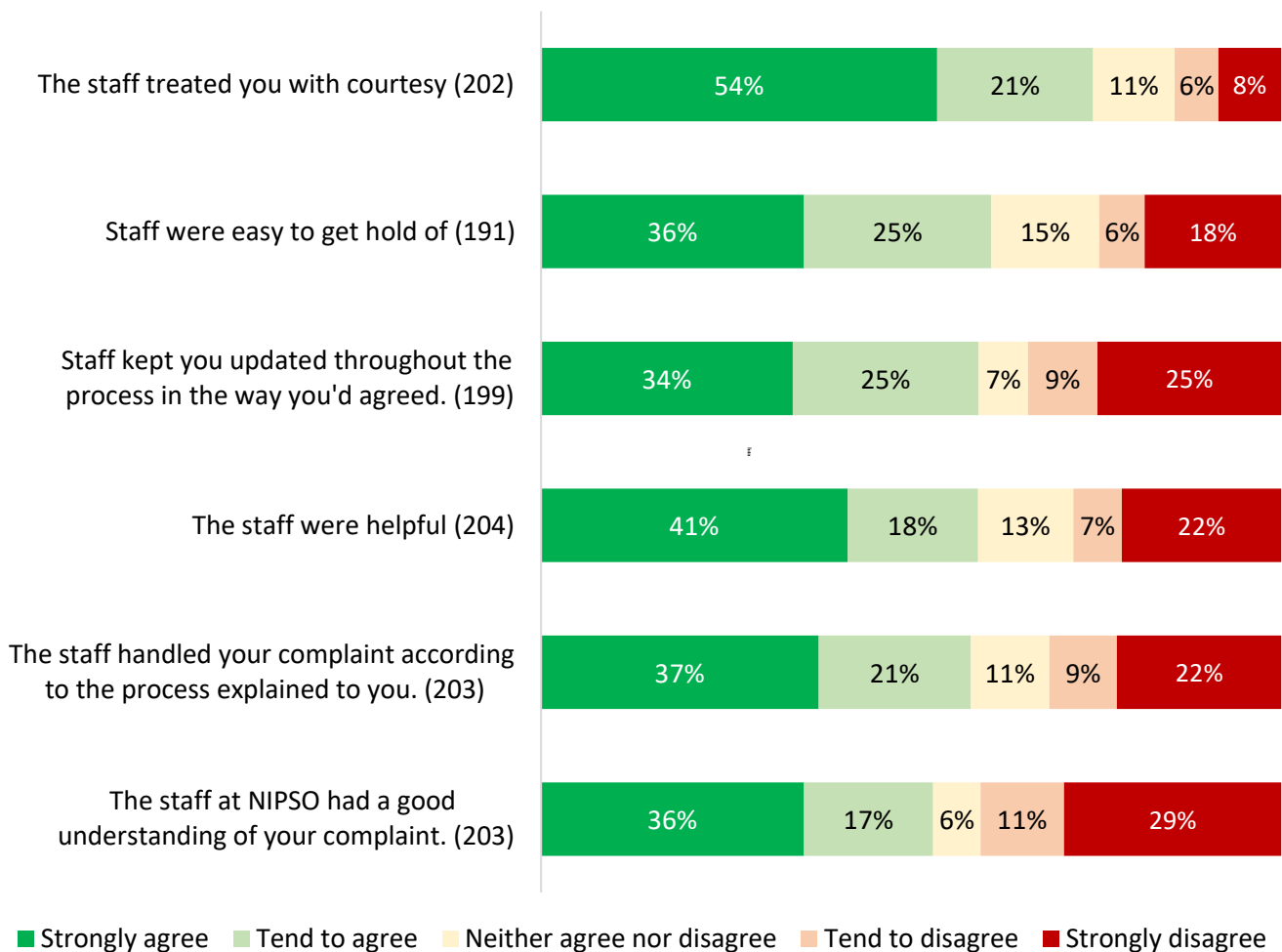


Staff at NIPSO

- 3.12 Opinion about the staff at NIPSO was generally positive, with Figure 8 showing broad agreement with a range of statements about NIPSO staff. The statement with the highest level of agreement was “*the staff you dealt with treated you with courtesy*”, three quarters of complainants (75%) agreed with the statement whilst only 14% disagreed.
- 3.13 The statement with the second highest level of agreement was “*staff were easy to get hold of*” which over 6 in 10 (61%) complainants agreed with.
- 3.14 The statement with the lowest level agreement was: “*the staff at NIPSO had a good understanding of your complaint*”- nonetheless, over half of users (53%) still agreed with this statement.

Figure 8: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following...

All complainants (Number of respondents in brackets)



- ^{3.15} Table 5 shows instances of significant variation in the level of support for each of these statements when results are analysed by subgroup.
- ^{3.16} Again, complaint closure stage is strongly associated with complainants' opinions on NIPSO's staff, with complainants whose case reached assessment or investigation stage tending to be more satisfied compared to the overall result. Compared with the overall result, female complainants were also significantly more likely to agree with three of the six statements.

Table 5: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following. Subgroup analysis.

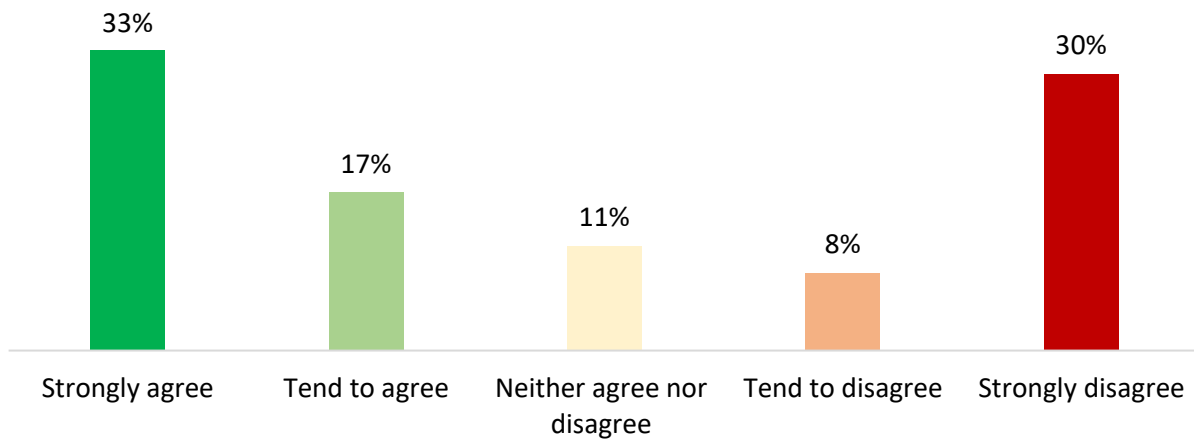
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following...	Subgroups significantly <u>more likely</u> to say they agree with the statement	Subgroups significantly <u>less likely</u> to say they agree with the statement
The staff you dealt with treated you with courtesy	Closure stage: Assessment Closure stage: Investigation	-
Staff were easy to get a hold of	Closure stage: Investigation	Closure stage: Initial Assessment
Staff kept you updated throughout the process in the way you'd agreed	Female	-
The staff were helpful	Closure stage: Assessment Closure stage: Investigation	Closure stage: Initial Assessment
The staff handled your complaint according to the process explained to you	Female Closure stage: Assessment Closure stage: Investigation	Closure stage: Initial Assessment
The staff at NIPSO had a good understanding of your complaint	Complaint relating to Health & Social Care Female Closure stage: Investigation	-

The decision taken by NIPSO

- ^{3.17} Complainants were asked to what extent they would agree or disagree that NIPSO's decision on their case was clearly explained. Half (50%) of users agreed that NIPSO's decision was clearly explained to them, whilst around two fifths (39%) of users disagreed.

Figure 9: To what extent would you agree or disagree that NIPSO's decision on your case was clearly explained to you?

Base: All complainants (200)

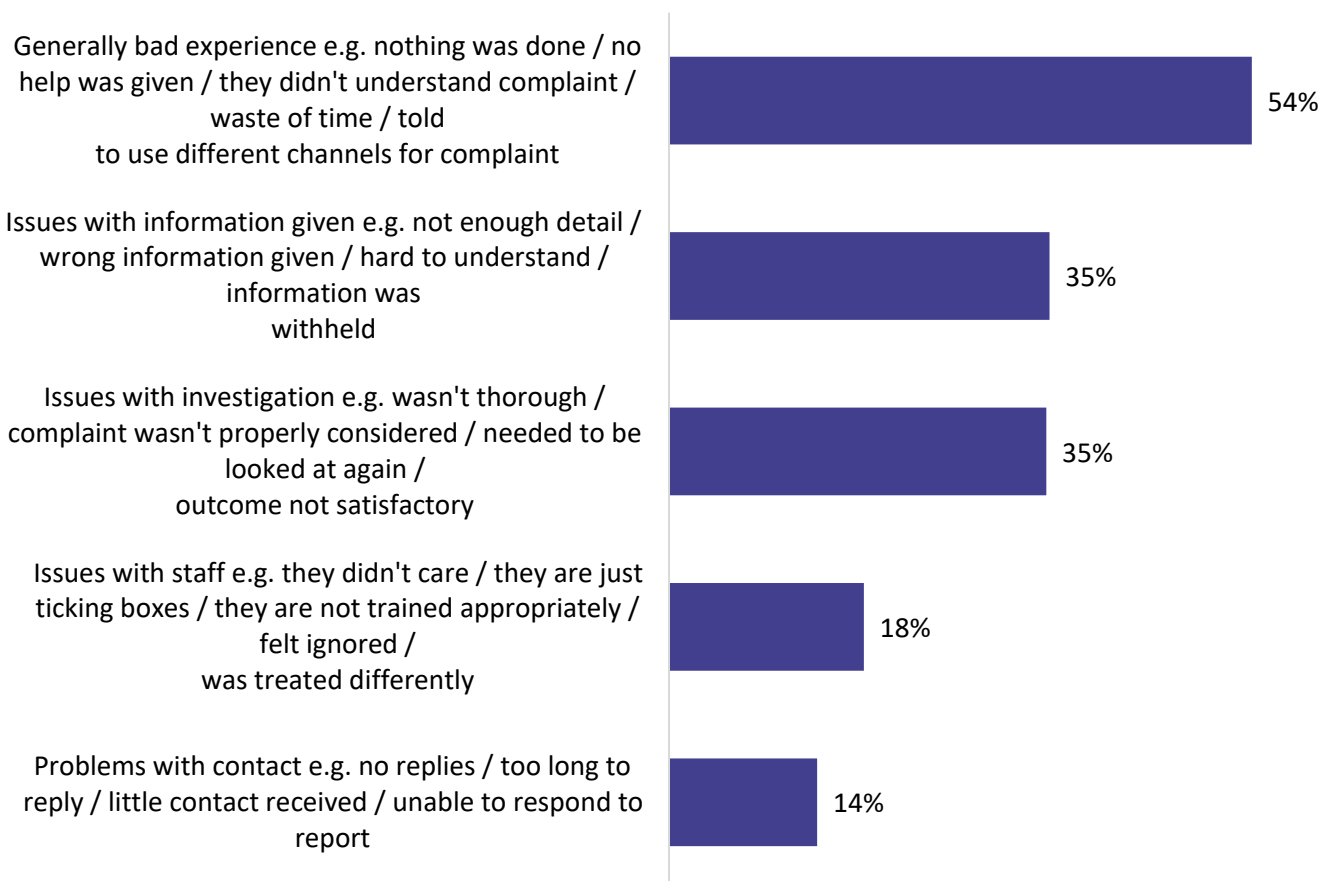


^{3.18} Complainants who disagreed that NIPSO's decision was clearly explained were also asked why this was this case. Over half (54%) of these respondents described a 'generally bad experience' (e.g. feeling that the complaint had been misunderstood or that nothing had been done).

^{3.19} Over a third (35%) said that there were issues with the information provided to them (e.g. in terms of this being wrong or lacking detail) and the same proportion cited issues with the investigation (e.g. feeling that the complaint had not been properly considered).

Figure 10: Please can you explain why you disagree that the decision was clearly explained?

Base: Complainants who disagreed that the decision was clearly explained (72)

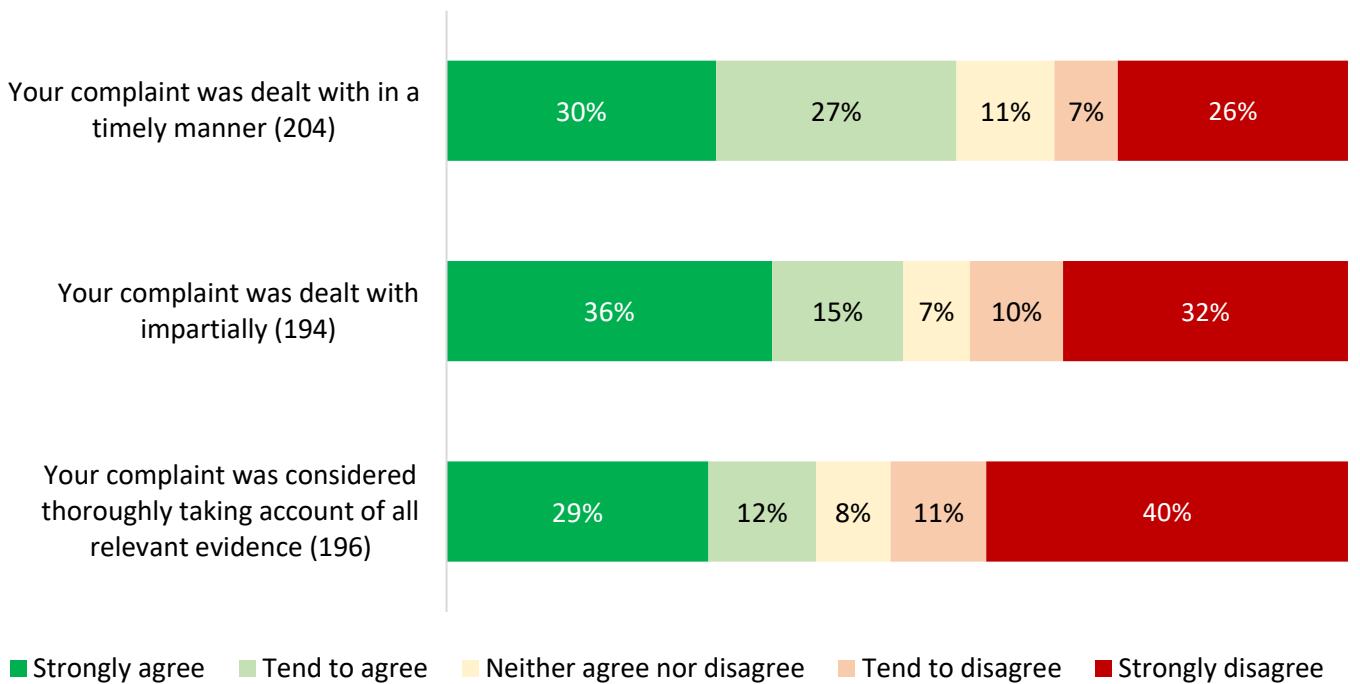


Service provided by NIPSO

- 3.20 Complainants were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed or disagreed with a range of statements around the service provided by NIPSO. As Figure 11 shows, opinions were split.
- 3.21 The statement with the highest level of agreement was that “*your complaint was dealt with in a timely manner*”: almost three fifths (57%) of NIPSO customers agreed with the statement whilst a third (33%) disagreed.
- 3.22 The statement with the lowest level of agreement (41%) was “*your complaint was considered thoroughly taking account of all relevant evidence*”; moreover, around half of complainants (51%) disagreed with this statement.

Figure 11: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following...

Base: All complainants (Number of respondents in brackets)



- 3.23 Table 6: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following. Subgroup analysis. Table 6 shows the sub-groups that are significantly more or less likely to agree with each of these statements. Customers whose complaints had reached the investigation stage were significantly more likely (than the overall result) to be satisfied that their complaint was considered thoroughly, i.e. taking account of all relevant evidence.
- 3.24 There are no sub-groups that are significantly more or less likely to agree with the statement of “*your complaint was dealt with impartially (treating all parties equally).*”

Table 6: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following. Subgroup analysis.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following...	Subgroups significantly <u>more likely</u> to say they agree with the statement	Subgroups significantly <u>less likely</u> to say they agree with the statement
Your complaint was dealt with in a timely manner	-	Complaints relating to Health & Social Care
Your complaint was dealt with impartially (treating all parties equally).	-	-
Your complaint was considered thoroughly taking account of all relevant evidence.	Closure stage: Investigation	-

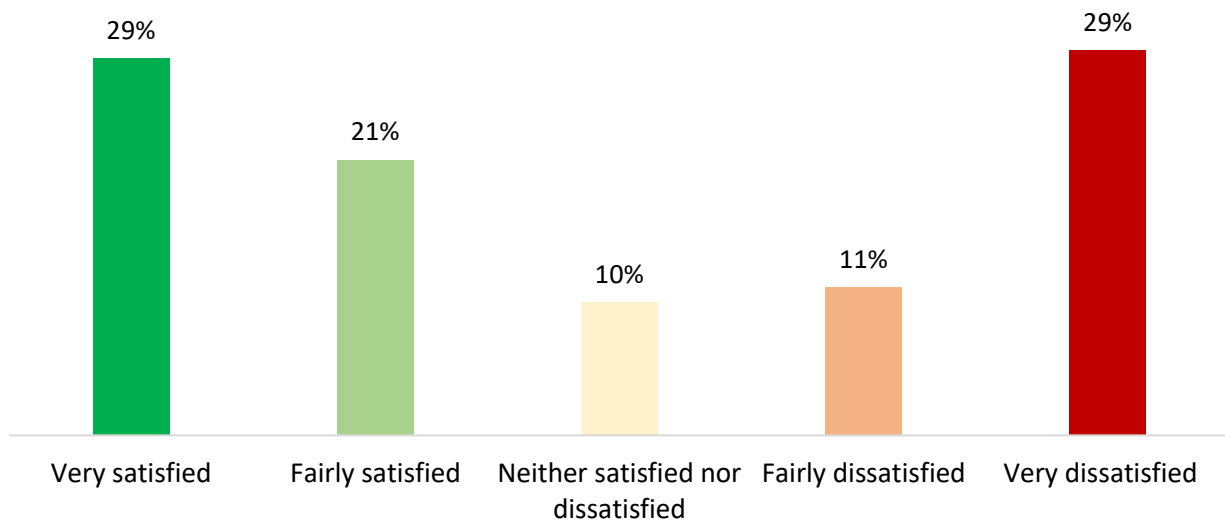
Overall service provided by NIPSO

^{3.25} Complainants were asked how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with the overall level of customer service that they received from NIPSO.

^{3.26} Opinion among complainants was split as to whether they were satisfied with the overall service provided by NIPSO. Around half (49%) were satisfied with the overall service whilst two fifths (40%) of complainants were dissatisfied. The remaining 10% of users were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the overall service provided by NIPSO.

Figure 12: Thinking about the service you received, rather than the actual outcome of your complaint; How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the overall level of customer service that you received from NIPSO?

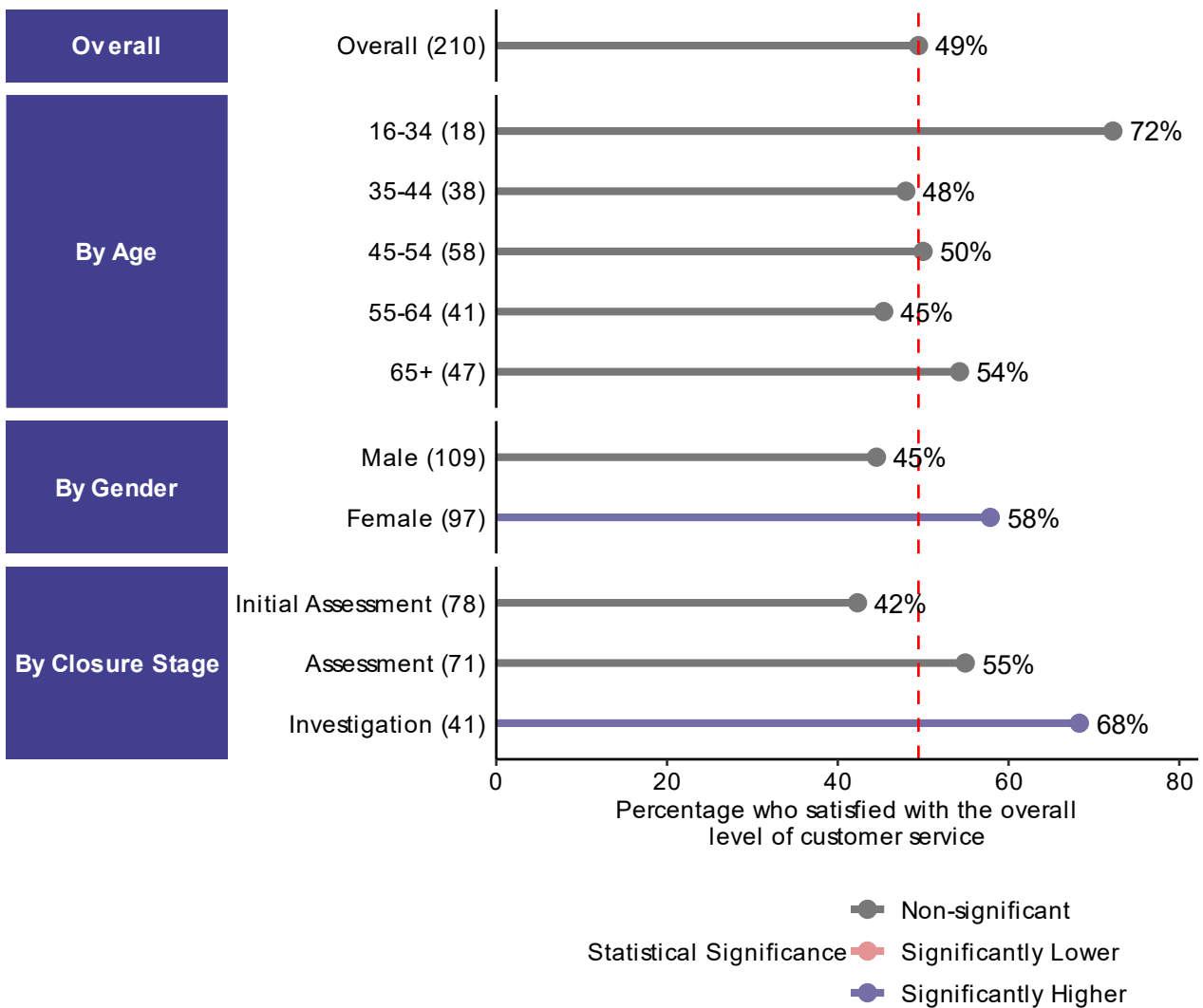
Base: All complainants (210)



- 3.27 Figure 13 shows again that satisfaction is associated with the closure stage of the complaint. Of the respondents whose complaint reached the initial assessment stage, only 42% were satisfied with the overall level of customer service from NIPSO. However, if the complaint reached the investigation stage, complainants were significantly more likely to be satisfied (68%) compared with the overall result.
- 3.28 It can also be seen that female complainants (58%) were significantly more likely to be satisfied with the overall level of customer service from NIPSO.

Figure 13: Thinking about the service you received, rather than the actual outcome of your complaint; How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the overall level of customer service that you received from NIPSO? (Satisfaction by sub-group)

Base: All complainants (sub-group bases in brackets)



- ^{3.29} NIPSO was interested in better understanding the extent to which views about the service (for cases that reached Investigation stage) might be linked to whether or not the complaint resulted in the desired outcome (i.e. whether or not the complaint was upheld, etc); therefore, overall satisfaction for these cases was further analysed according to the final complaint outcome.
- ^{3.30} The low number of cases largely precluded any opportunity for robust or useful comparisons; nonetheless, a summary of the results is provided in Table 7.¹

Table 7: Overall satisfaction by complaint outcome (for cases that reached Investigation Stage only)

Outcome	Number of respondents who were...		
	Satisfied	Neither	Dissatisfied
Upheld	18	3	6
Not upheld	2	-	1
Disposed of	1	-	1
Settled	2	-	1
Not known	5	-	1

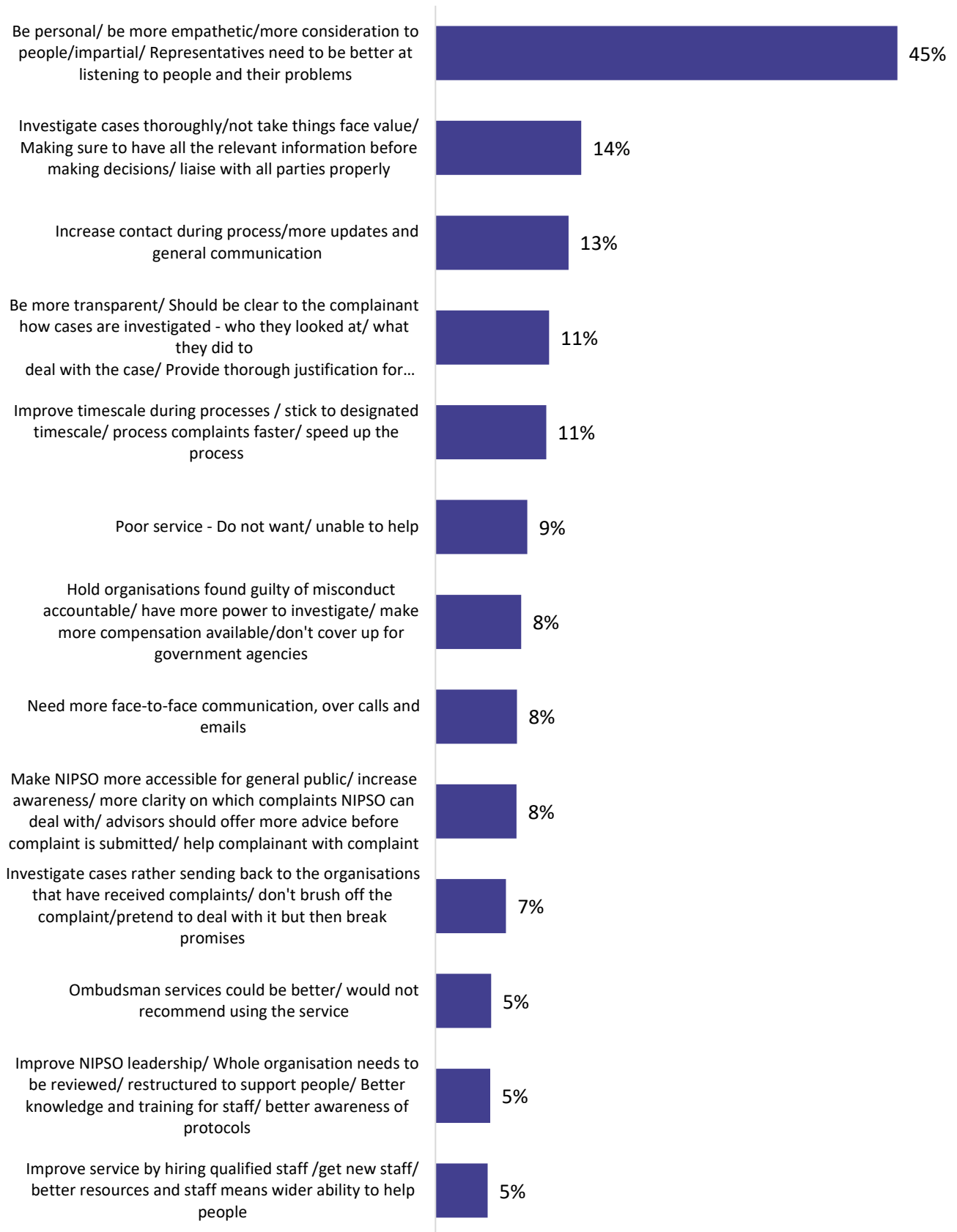
How NIPSO could improve

- ^{3.31} Lastly, the survey respondents were asked to suggest any ways in which NIPSO could improve its service. The figure overleaf shows the coded themes that were mentioned by more than 5% of complainants.
- ^{3.32} A wide variety of feedback was given by users on how NIPSO could improve its service but by far the most popular theme was to 'be more personal/empathetic/considerate to people/impartial/better listening' with over two fifths (45%) of all respondents mentioning this theme.

¹ Only 41 Investigation interviews were completed in total, with only 36 outcomes being known – and for these 36 cases, three-quarters (27) had their complaints upheld

Figure 14: Would you like to suggest any way in which NIPSO could improve its service?

Base: All complainants (211)



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