

Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland:

Annual report on  
public awareness of the  
Police Complaints  
System in  
Northern Ireland, 2015

June 2015

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## Main Findings

- The current level of awareness is the highest it has been in the last five years,
- Of those respondents who had heard of the Police Ombudsman:

**89%  
of  
respondents  
in 2015  
were  
aware of the  
Police  
Ombudsman**

- Eighty-one percent of respondents thought the Police Ombudsman was independent of the police,
- More than three in four were confident that he deals with complaints impartially,
- Eighty-one percent felt that they would be treated fairly if they made a complaint, and
- Eighty-two percent thought that the Police Ombudsman would help ensure that the police do a good job.

## Introduction

The Police Ombudsman's Office is required by law to provide an independent police complaints system which will secure the confidence of the public.

Each year it asks the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) to pose a series of questions on its survey of the general population of Northern Ireland, which helps gauge their attitudes to and confidence in the police complaints system.

This report presents the findings from an independent survey carried out by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) into public awareness of the Office of the Police Ombudsman (the Office).

It is recognised that many factors, some of which are outside the control of the Office, may influence the attitudes and perceptions of the public. These factors could include; past experience of the work of the Office, wider community confidence and to some extent the publicity that surrounds the Office. These surveys, however, provide an indicator of public attitudes to the Office and provide useful information on trends over time.

This report presents findings from the survey which was carried out between 5th January and 9th February 2015. It provides results for key questions and shows the overall trend for these questions.

Additional tables showing the responses to these key questions by gender, age and religion of respondents are available in the accompanying spreadsheet.

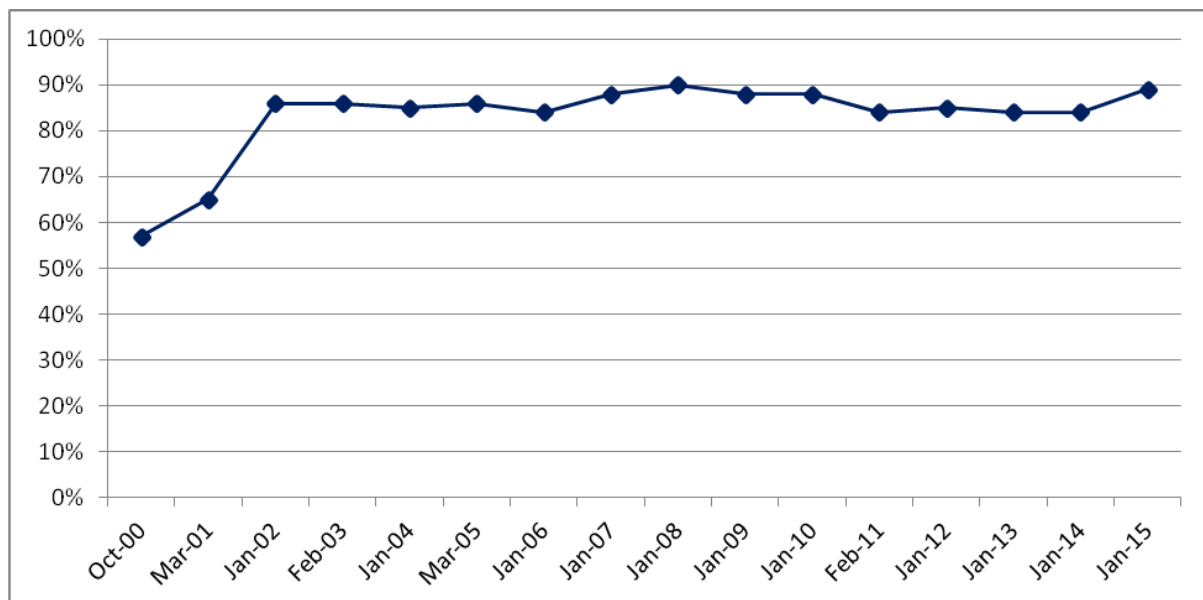
## Survey findings:

### Awareness of the Police Ombudsman

In 2015, almost nine out of ten respondents (89%) stated that they had heard of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland.

Figure 1 (Table 1) shows that awareness levels have been consistently high since 2002, with the current level of awareness being the highest it has been in the last five years.

**Figure 1: Level of awareness of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, 2000-2015**



The information provided by this survey is used by the Office to measure key performance indicators (KPI's) associated with service commitment. One of these targets relating to 'Quality and effective investigations, levels of satisfaction and confidence in the police complaints system' aims *'to maintain a level of 80% public awareness of the Office'*. Results from this survey show that this target has been achieved and surpassed.

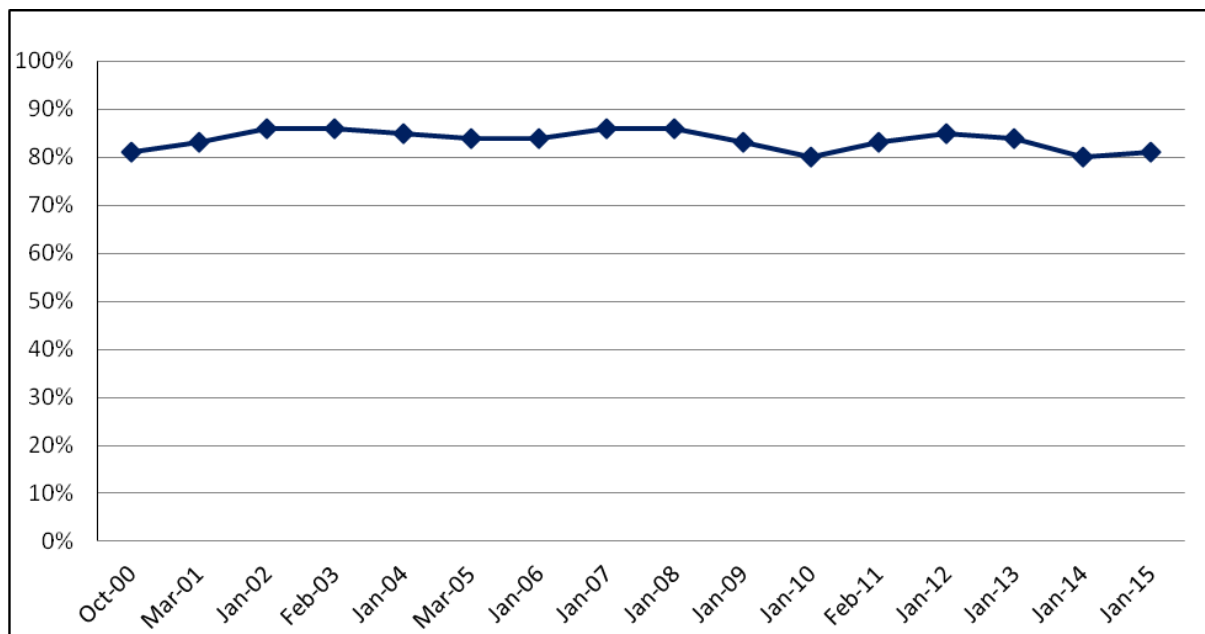
The following results in this report are based only on respondents that reported they had heard of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland.

## Independence of the Police Ombudsman

Respondents who had heard of the Police Ombudsman were asked for their opinion on whether or not the Police Ombudsman was independent of the police or part of the police. In 2015, the majority (81%) of respondents who had heard of the Police Ombudsman felt that he was independent of the police.

Although the proportion who thought that the Police Ombudsman was independent of the police has been consistently high since 2000, the current level has decreased from 85% in 2012 (Figure 2, Table 2).

**Figure 2: Perception of independence of the Police Ombudsman, 2000-2015**



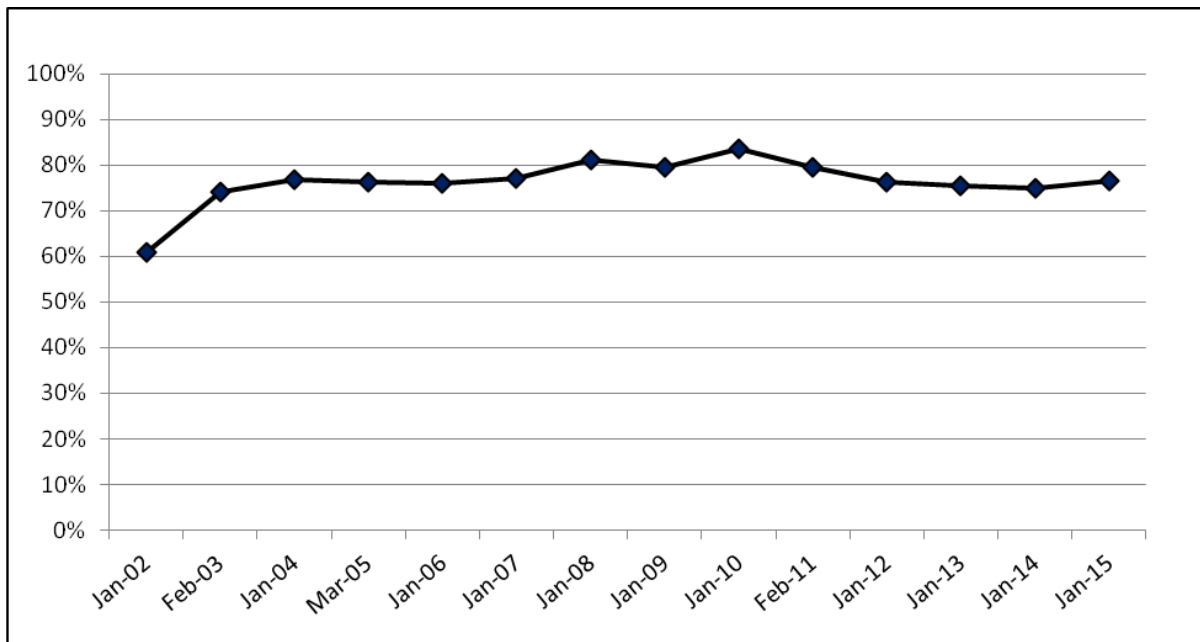
Another of the service commitment targets set by the Office aims *'to maintain a level of 80% awareness of the independence of the Police Ombudsman'*. Results from this survey show that this target has been met.

## Impartiality of investigation

In 2015, over three quarters (77%) of respondents who had heard of the Police Ombudsman were either fairly confident or very confident that he deals with complaints in an impartial way. A larger proportion of respondents reported they were *fairly* confident (61%) rather than *very* confident (16%).

Figure 3 (Table 3 & 4), shows that although confidence that the Police Ombudsman deals with complaints in an impartial way has been high since 2003, it has decreased from 84% in 2010.

**Figure 3: Level of confidence that the Police Ombudsman deals with complaints in an impartial way, 2002-2015**



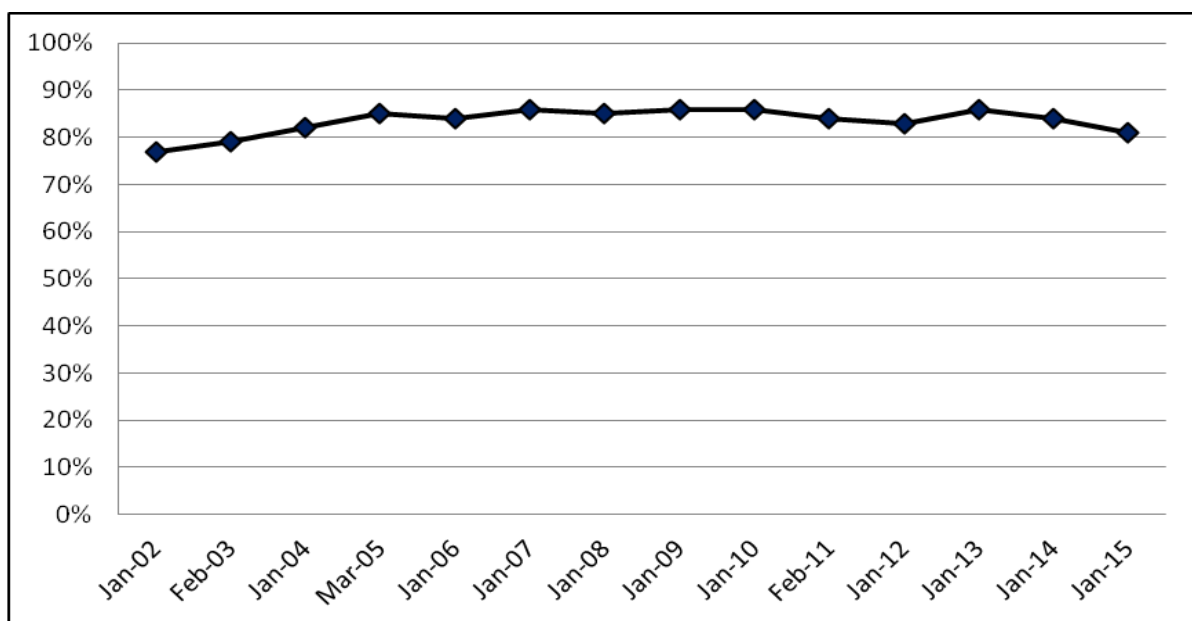
The Office aims *‘to maintain a level of 80% confidence that the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland deals with complaints in an impartial way’*. Current figures obtained for this show that it has failed to meet this target.

## Fairness of treatment

Respondents who had heard of the Police Ombudsman were asked if they thought they would be treated fairly if they made a complaint against a police officer. In 2015, 81% of respondents stated that they thought they would be treated fairly (Figure 4, Table 5).

Since 2002, this proportion of respondents who felt they would be treated fairly has been consistently high although it has decreased from 86% in 2013.

**Figure 4: Perception of fair treatment when making a complaint, 2002-2015**



The Office also aims *'to maintain a level of 80% of respondents who think that they would be treated fairly by the Office if they made a complaint against the police'*. This year it has met this target.

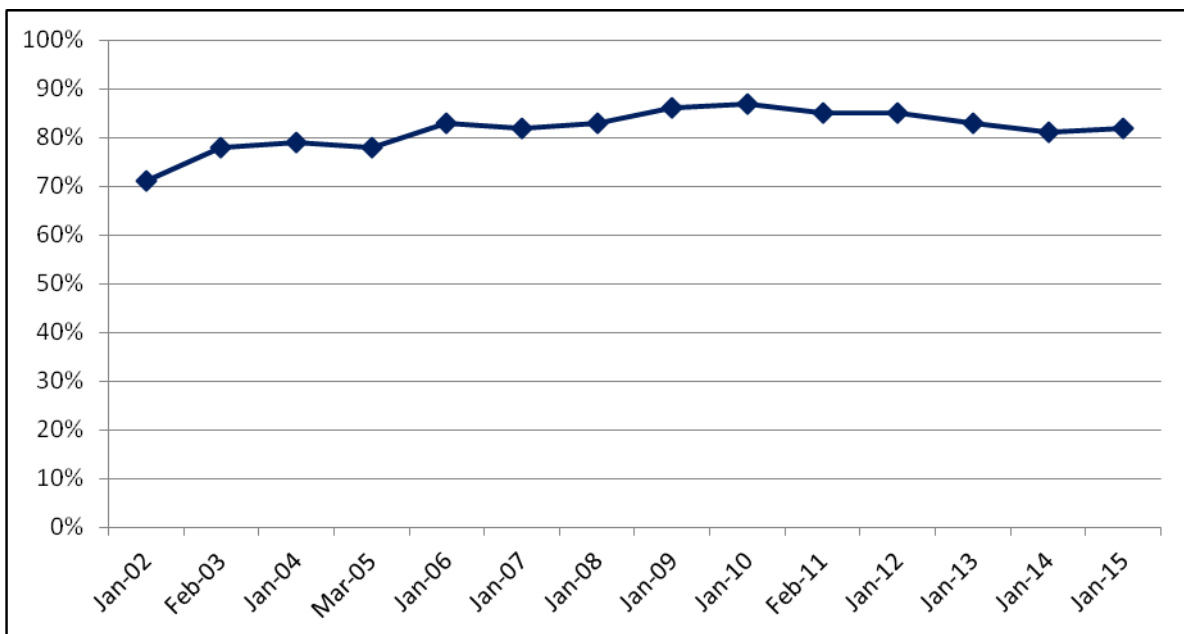


## Effect of Police Ombudsman on policing

Respondents were asked whether they thought the Police Ombudsman would contribute to effective policing in Northern Ireland. In 2015, 82% of respondents felt that the Police Ombudsman would help ensure that the police in Northern Ireland do a good job (Figure 5, Table 6).

Although, this proportion has remained consistently high over time (over 70%), the current level is lower than that reported in 2010 (87%).

**Figure 5: Belief that the Police Ombudsman will help ensure that the police do a good job, 2002-2015**



## Appendix 1: Tables of Results for key questions

**Table 1: Have you heard of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland?**

	Oct-00	Mar-01	Jan-02	Feb-03	Jan-04	Mar-05	Jan-06	Jan-07	Jan-08	Jan-09	Jan-10	Feb-11	Jan-12	Jan-13	Jan-14	Jan-15
Aware	57%	65%	86%	86%	85%	86%	84%	88%	90%	88%	88%	84%	85%	84%	84%	89%
Not aware	41%	35%	14%	13%	14%	14%	16%	12%	10%	12%	12%	15%	15%	16%	16%	11%
Don't know/refusal	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
<b>Total survey respondents</b>	<b>1189</b>	<b>1076</b>	<b>1142</b>	<b>1214</b>	<b>1292</b>	<b>1092</b>	<b>1122</b>	<b>1211</b>	<b>1238</b>	<b>1126</b>	<b>1216</b>	<b>1109</b>	<b>1141</b>	<b>1154</b>	<b>1217</b>	<b>1114</b>

*Asked to all persons aged 16 and over*

**Table 2: Do you think the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland is part of the police or independent of the police?**

	Oct-00	Mar-01	Jan-02	Feb-03	Jan-04	Mar-05	Jan-06	Jan-07	Jan-08	Jan-09	Jan-10	Feb-11	Jan-12	Jan-13	Jan-14	Jan-15
Independent of the police	81%	83%	86%	86%	85%	84%	84%	86%	86%	83%	80%	83%	85%	84%	80%	81%
Part of the police	11%	10%	9%	12%	11%	11%	11%	10%	12%	14%	17%	15%	12%	13%	14%	16%
Don't know/refusal	8%	7%	5%	2%	4%	5%	5%	3%	3%	3%	2%	2%	3%	4%	5%	3%
<b>Total survey respondents</b>	<b>682</b>	<b>699</b>	<b>984</b>	<b>1044</b>	<b>1102</b>	<b>930</b>	<b>941</b>	<b>1073</b>	<b>1117</b>	<b>999</b>	<b>1068</b>	<b>939</b>	<b>978</b>	<b>977</b>	<b>1025</b>	<b>998</b>

*Asked to all persons who were aware of the Police Ombudsman*

**Table 3: How confident are you that the Police Ombudsman deals with complaints against the police in an impartial way?**

	Jan-02	Feb-03	Jan-04	Mar-05	Jan-06	Jan-07	Jan-08	Jan-09	Jan-10	Feb-11	Jan-12	Jan-13	Jan-14	Jan-15
Very confident	15%	17%	20%	21%	17%	24%	26%	19%	18%	18%	14%	16%	14%	16%
Fairly confident	46%	57%	56%	57%	59%	54%	55%	60%	65%	62%	63%	60%	61%	61%
Not very confident	23%	17%	14%	13%	14%	14%	12%	14%	11%	14%	17%	15%	16%	16%
Not at all confident	11%	5%	4%	3%	3%	4%	4%	3%	2%	3%	3%	3%	4%	4%
Don't know/refusal	6%	4%	5%	7%	6%	4%	4%	5%	3%	3%	3%	5%	6%	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>984</b>	<b>1044</b>	<b>1102</b>	<b>930</b>	<b>941</b>	<b>1073</b>	<b>1117</b>	<b>999</b>	<b>1068</b>	<b>939</b>	<b>978</b>	<b>977</b>	<b>1025</b>	<b>998</b>

*Asked to all persons who were aware of the Police Ombudsman*

**Table 4: Confidence that the Police Ombudsman deals with complaints against the police in an impartial way**

	Jan-02	Feb-03	Jan-04	Mar-05	Jan-06	Jan-07	Jan-08	Jan-09	Jan-10	Feb-11	Jan-12	Jan-13	Jan-14	Jan-15
% Confident/Very confident (Combined)	61%	74%	77%	76%	76%	77%	81%	79%	84%	80%	76%	75%	75%	77%

**Table 5: If you were to make a complaint against a police officer, do you think you would be treated fairly?**

	Jan-02	Feb-03	Jan-04	Mar-05	Jan-06	Jan-07	Jan-08	Jan-09	Jan-10	Feb-11	Jan-12	Jan-13	Jan-14	Jan-15
Treated fairly	77%	79%	82%	85%	84%	86%	85%	86%	86%	84%	83%	86%	84%	81%
Not treated fairly	13%	15%	11%	8%	9%	8%	10%	9%	9%	11%	12%	9%	10%	16%
Don't know/refusal	10%	6%	6%	7%	7%	6%	5%	4%	5%	5%	5%	5%	6%	3%
Total survey respondents	984	1044	1102	930	941	1073	1117	999	1068	939	978	977	1025	998

*Asked to all persons who were aware of the Police Ombudsman*

**Table 6: Do you think the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland will help ensure that the police do a good job?**

	Jan-02	Feb-03	Jan-04	Mar-05	Jan-06	Jan-07	Jan-08	Jan-09	Jan-10	Feb-11	Jan-12	Jan-13	Jan-14	Jan-15
Yes	71%	78%	79%	78%	83%	82%	83%	86%	87%	85%	85%	83%	81%	82%
No	19%	16%	15%	15%	10%	12%	11%	8%	9%	10%	11%	11%	12%	13%
Don't know/refusal	9%	6%	6%	7%	6%	6%	5%	6%	4%	4%	4%	6%	7%	5%
Total survey respondents	984	1044	1102	930	941	1073	1117	999	1068	939	978	977	1025	998

*Asked to all persons who were aware of the Police Ombudsman*

## Appendix 2: Methodology

Five questions were commissioned by the Police Ombudsman's Office for inclusion in the January 2015 NISRA Omnibus Survey<sup>1</sup>.

The survey sample was drawn from The Land and Property Services Agency list of private addresses. This list was stratified into three regions (Belfast, East Northern Ireland and West Northern Ireland), and a random sample was drawn from each stratum. Interviewers called at each address on the list and randomly selected one person aged 16 or over living at the address for interview.

The total sample size was 2,200 addresses. The fieldwork took place between 05 January and 09 February 2015. From an eligible sample of 1,861 individuals 1,114 interviews were achieved, giving a response rate of 60%.

Weighting factors were applied to the data in relation to household size.

The percentages given in the tables have been rounded to the nearest whole number. The following symbols have been used:

- 0%: figure in cell is less than 0.5%
- cell is empty: category not applicable

In certain cases percentages may not add to 100% due to the effect of rounding. Totals may also add up to more than 100% as in some cases respondents could provide more than one response.

Statistical significance tests have been carried out on the findings and differences are reported where they have been found to be statistically significant at the 5% ( $p < 0.05$ ) level of probability (two tailed). This means that for any observed result that is found to be statistically significant one can be 95% confident that this has not happened by chance. Additional technical details and tables are available upon request.

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<sup>1</sup> Prior to 2015, 14 questions were asked however due to budgetary constraints this was reduced to five questions in 2015.

## Appendix 3: Notes

This is an Official Statistics publication. Official Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They undergo regular validation checks to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference.

### Data use:

The Office's Mission Statement is to provide an effective, efficient and accountable complaints system which is independent, impartial and designed to secure the confidence of the public and police.

The data collected are used by the Office to monitor and evaluate the service provided to the public and to assess how effective the Office's role is in improving policing in Northern Ireland. The data are also used by the Office to measure key performance indicators, whereby the Office aims to maintain:

#### ***'a level of 80% public awareness of the Office.'***

In 2015, 89% of respondents were aware of the Police Ombudsman.

#### ***'a level of 80% awareness of the independence of the Police Ombudsman.'***

In 2015, 81% of respondents were aware of the independence of the Police Ombudsman.

#### ***'a level of 80% confidence that the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland deals with complaints in an impartial way.'***

In 2015, 77% of respondents were confident that the Police Ombudsman deals with complaints impartially.

#### ***'a level of 80% perception of fair treatment by the Office if they made a complaint against the police.'***

In 2015, 81% of respondents felt that they would be treated fairly.



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