

Annual Statistical Bulletin
of the Police Ombudsman for
Northern Ireland,
2015/16

Revised August 2016

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INTRODUCTION

This Statistical Bulletin presents information on complaints and allegations received by the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland in 2015/16, as well as showing trend information for the last five years.

It was produced independently by Statisticians from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) who are seconded to the Police Ombudsman's Office and work alongside Police Ombudsman personnel. It has been produced in accordance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Why publish statistics?

The information presented in this bulletin has been produced to meet the needs of a variety of individuals and organisations who have a particular interest in the issue of police complaints.

The Police Ombudsman's Office uses these statistics to monitor trends in complaints and allegations received and how they were dealt with. It also uses this information to monitor performance against key performance indicators.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) have an interest in knowing about the trends and patterns in complaints made against their officers and use this information to help identify and address particular problems.

The Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB) use this material in developing an understanding of what aspects of police conduct are attracting public concern and whether these concerns are of substance.

The Police and Community Partnerships (PCSPs) also use the data to monitor police performance in their areas and to identify any particular concerns.

The general public have a right to know how both their police service and their police complaints service are performing.

Understanding the information in this bulletin

We hope this report will provide readers with a clear understanding of the trends and patterns in complaints and allegations received by the Police Ombudsman's Office over the last five years.

We have provided information on what we believe would be the main questions asked by readers: how many complaints and allegations have we received, what were they about and how were they resolved, for example.

Commentary has been provided throughout, which aims to provide some context and explanation or interpretation of the emerging trends.

However, a concise document like this can only ever provide part of that context. Other factors may be at play which cannot be reflected in this bulletin. Readers may also want to consider issues as varied as the levels of the police budget and the service it can provide, as well as the level of awareness of the police complaints system itself.

Similarly, making comparisons across geographical areas may not always be straightforward. Areas have different levels of population. Even that distinction can have further categories. Whether people travel to an area during normal office hours for their work or move into it in the evening to socialise can have an effect on the number of complaints we receive.

It is also difficult to make valid comparisons between the number of complaints and allegations received across Northern Ireland, England and Wales, and Scotland as each area operates a different system.

Terminology

For those with less knowledge of the Police Ombudsman's Office, we have provided an explanation of the police complaints process in the glossary in the appendices of this bulletin. We have tried to keep the terminology used in this bulletin 'jargon' free, but where this has not been possible we have provided a glossary with an explanation of those terms.

Could we improve this bulletin?

From the wealth of detailed information within the Police Ombudsman's Office, we have tried to produce a bulletin which focuses on the key issues which we believe would be of interest to the public and the police. We have also tried to make that information as clear and easily understood as possible. Have we succeeded? We would be keen to hear any views you have on this bulletin.

If you wish to provide any feedback or comments on this publication please see our contact details on the back page or email us via info@policeombudsman.org.

Conventions

Percentages in the tables and text are rounded to the nearest whole number, and thus may not always add up to 100.

Revisions

This bulletin was revised in August 2016. The figures in the 'Recommendations made to Chief Constable or Chief Officer' on page 21 have been revised along with the two corresponding tables, Table 4 and Table 20. The figures have been revised as a number of recommendations for discipline sanctions that were made during 2015/16 were added on to the CHS after the publication of this bulletin. The revision has resulted in an increase in the number of occasions where the Police Ombudsman recommended a discipline sanction for an officer or staff member from 311 to 355 for 2015/16.

A SUMMARY OF THE KEY TRENDS IN COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE POLICE

- The Police Ombudsman's Office received more than 3,000 complaints during 2015/16. This is a 10% decrease in complaints from the previous year.
- Criminal Investigation was the most common situation which gave rise to complaints, as it was in four of the last five years.
- Complaints arising from police enquires where no investigation has taken place have more than halved in 2015/16 when compared with each of the four previous years.
- Eight out of the eleven police districts received fewer complaints in 2015/16 than in any of the previous four years.
- The most frequent allegations received during the year were allegations of Failure in Duty, of Oppressive Behaviour, and of Incivility.
- Nearly four out of ten (38%) complaints dealt with by the Police Ombudsman's Office were subject to a full investigation. In 25% of these complaints the Office found evidence to substantiate all or part of the complaint, or identified another concern during the investigation.
- On 21 occasions during the year the Police Ombudsman recommended that the Director of Public Prosecutions should prosecute an officer. This is more than in each of the four previous years.
- The Police Ombudsman recommended on 355 occasions that a police officer should be disciplined.

COMPLAINTS

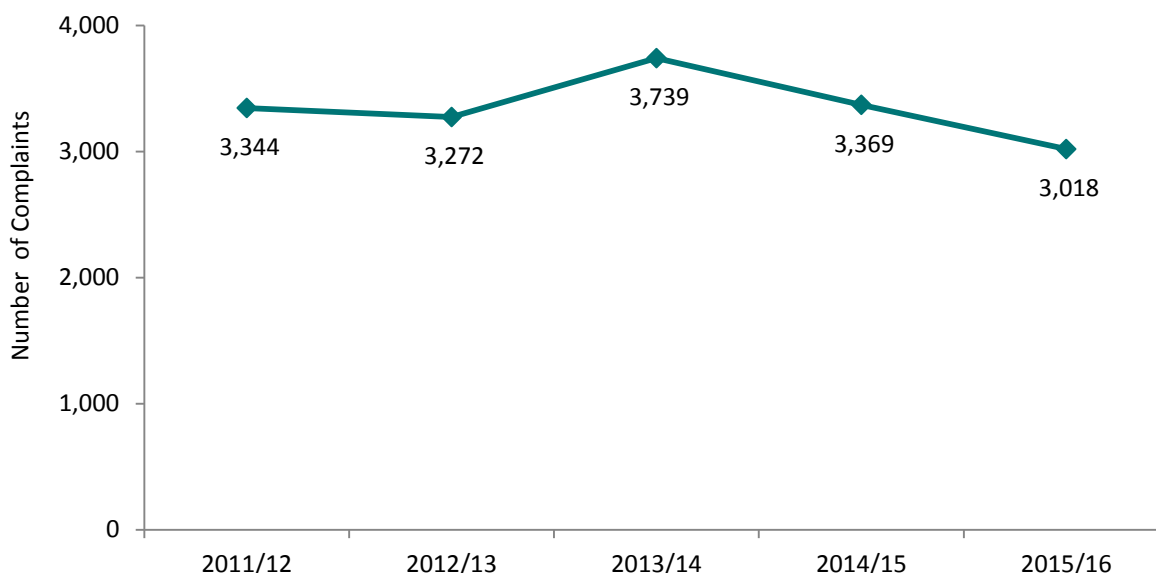
The volume of complaints and matters received

The number of complaints received and matters referred for independent investigations by the Police Ombudsman’s Office during 2015/16 was 3,018. This was a decrease of 10% from 2014/15 (Figure 1, Table 5).

The vast majority of these matters (97%) were complaints from members of the public. A further 2% were matters referred to the Office from the PSNI or from another organisation¹ or matters in which the Police Ombudsman exercised his power to initiate investigations. Call-In/Call-Outs make up the remaining 1%: these are situations where the Office is ‘called in’ to consider an incident and at an early stage determines that there is no requirement for any further investigation (Table 6).

For the purpose of clarity of reporting, this statistical bulletin will refer to all its incoming work by the term ‘complaints’.

Figure 1: Number of complaints received, 2011/12 to 2015/16



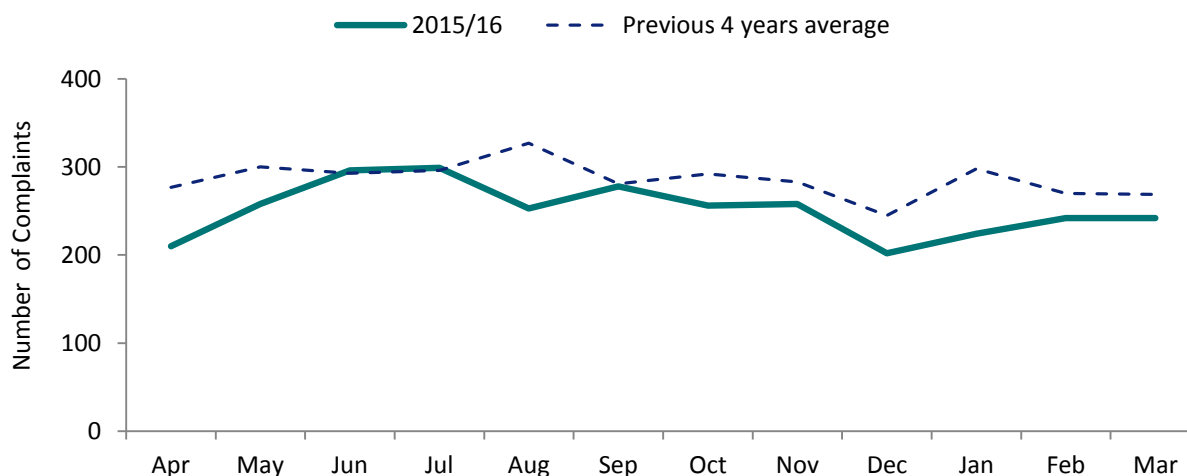
Complaints received by the Office have decreased by 10% in each of the last two years from a high of more than 3,700 in 2013/14. This was the year when the Office received the highest number of complaints since it opened.

¹ Public Prosecution Service (PPS), Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB) and the Department of Justice (DOJ).

Complaints received each month

In 2015/16 the Office received between 200 and 300 complaints each month. The trend throughout the year was similar to that of previous years apart from during April, August and January when it received around 70 fewer complaints each month than it would normally receive (Figure 2, Table 7)

Figure 2: Number of complaints received by month, 2011/12 to 2015/16



Who people were complaining about

The Police Ombudsman's Office has the remit to investigate complaints about officials from a number of bodies. These include police officers and 'designated civilians' within the PSNI and police officers with the Northern Ireland Airport Constabulary and Belfast Harbour Police. More recently the remit was extended to include the UK Border Force in 2014/15 and the National Crime Agency in 2015/16 (from 20th May 2015).

During 2015/16, the Office received its first complaints relating to UK Border Force and also the National Crime Agency. The vast majority of complaints received (98%) continue to be about PSNI officers (Tables 1 and 8).

Table 1: Complaints received by organisation, 2015/16

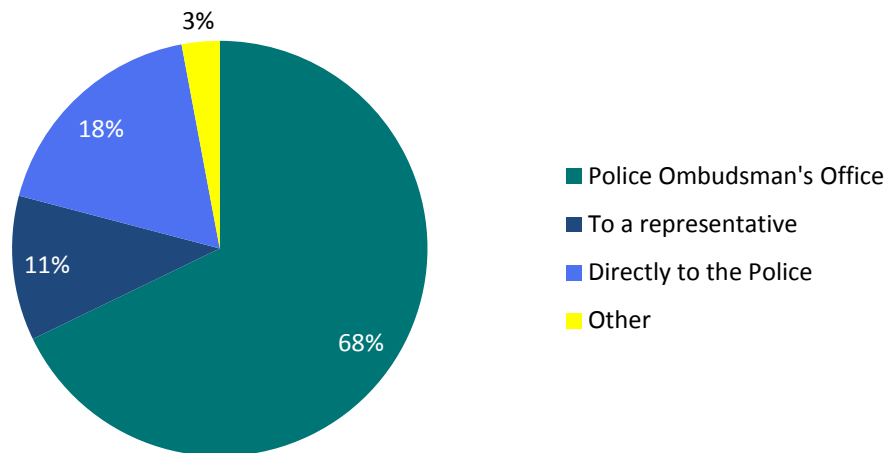
	No. of complaints received
PSNI	2,962
Designated Civilians	41
NI Airport Constabulary	3
UK Border Force	3
Harbour Police	1
National Crime Agency	1
Other / Unknown	7
Total	3,018

Where people initially made their complaints

Although the Police Ombudsman’s Office is the only body which can by law deal with complaints about the conduct of police officers, people do not always make their complaints directly to the Office. Sometimes their complaint is made in the first instance to the PSNI itself or to someone such as a solicitor or a political representative.

Most of the complaints received in 2015/16 were made directly to the Office without the use of an intermediary (Figure 3). This has been the trend in each of the last five years (Table 9).

Figure 3: Complaints received by where people initially made their complaint, 2015/16

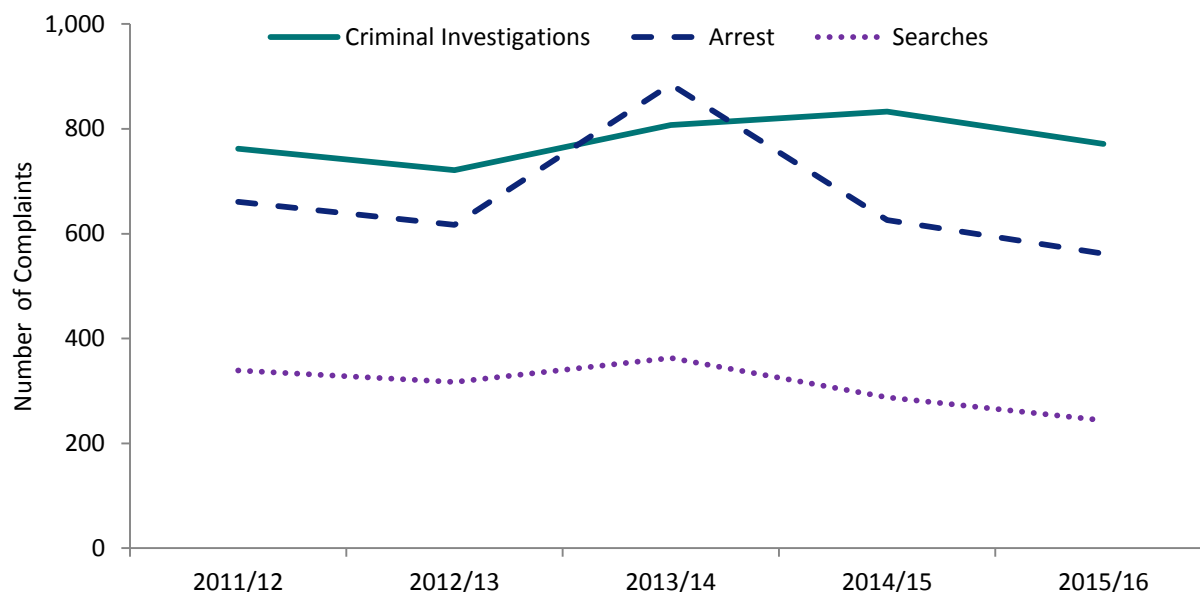


Situations which gave rise to complaints

In order to try and get a better understanding of what sorts of interactions might give rise to complaints about the police or police conduct, the Police Ombudsman's Office collect information on the background or context to the complaint.

Criminal investigations were the most common situations giving rise to complaints received in 2015/16, followed by arrests and then searches (Figure 4, Table 10).

Figure 4: Complaints arising from Criminal Investigations, Arrests & Searches 2011/12 to 2015/16



During 2015/16 the Office received around 770 complaints arising from criminal investigations. This is a decrease from the two previous years when more than 800 of these complaints were received.

Complaints arising from Arrests decreased this year to around 560 complaints. This is more than 300 fewer complaints than two years ago when they peaked. Complaints arising from Arrests are at their lowest level in the last five years.

During 2015/16, around 240 complaints were received following police searches. In general, these types of complaints have been decreasing over the last five years apart from in 2013/14 when they increased. Similar to Arrests complaints arising from searches are lower in 2015/16 than in any of the previous four years.

Fewer than 230 complaints were received in 2015/16 following traffic related incidents. These types of complaints have been in general decreasing over the last five years and are currently at their lowest levels over this time period.

Complaints arising from domestic incidents have decreased this year to around 180, after increasing for the last two years. They are still at a higher level in 2015/16 than they were four or five years ago. These include complaints arising from police interaction in disputes between neighbours as well as a small number of complaints relating to the handling of domestic violence incidents.

Situations where police made enquires but no investigation took place more than halved in 2015/16 compared with each of the previous four years. In 2015/16 there were 92 of these complaints received while in each of the previous four years there were more than 180 of these complaints.

During 2015/16 there were 77 complaints received relating to Historical matters, which is the second highest number received in the last five years. These are complaints that are investigated by the History Team within the Police Ombudsman's Office and relate to the 'Troubles'.

Complaints arising from incidents during parades or demonstrations were more than three times higher in 2015/16 than the previous year (63 complaints in 2015/16). This increase can be partially explained by an incident on the Ormeau Road, Belfast during March 2016 where an officer used CS Spray during a parade and also an incident at Twaddle Avenue / Woodvale Road, Belfast on the 13th July 2015. Although there has been an increase in complaints arising from parades or demonstrations in 2015/16 they are less than half the number received in 2012/13 and 2013/14.

Complaints received by police district^{2 3}

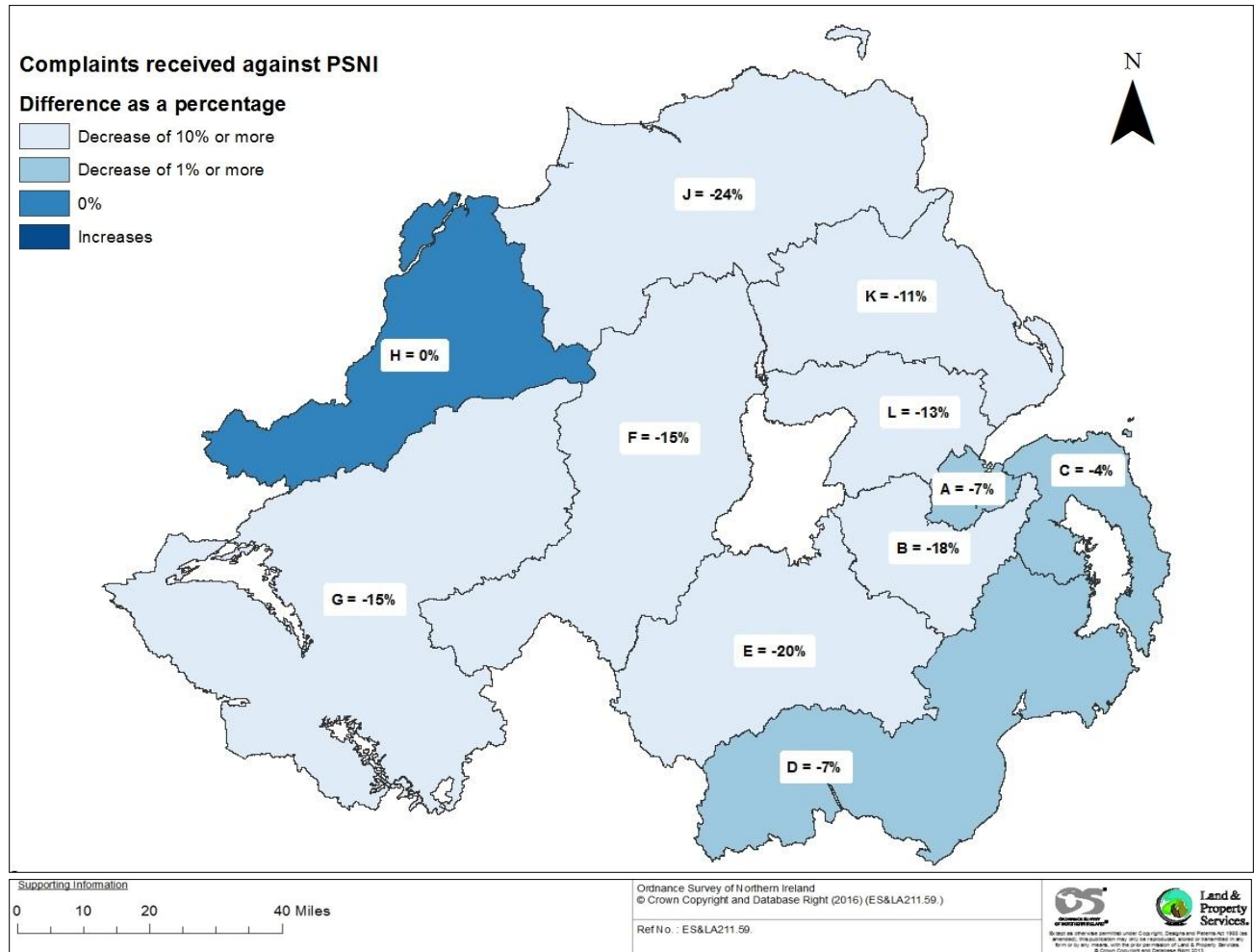
Belfast City District (A District) has received the largest number of complaints, just more than 900 complaints in 2015/16. It accounts for 30% of all complaints received. All other Districts had fewer than 240 complaints in 2015/16 (Table 11).

² In April 2015 the Policing districts changed to mirror the changes to the Local Government Districts in Northern Ireland. This resulted in an increase in police districts from 9 to 11. For the purpose of this publication the boundary changes have been backdated for the last five years, to allow for meaningful comparisons over time.

³ This is only for complaints made against the PSNI and does not include any other organisations such as NCA, Border Force or designated civilians.

Comparisons made between police districts must be made with caution. There are a number of reasons why complaints would vary between districts, such as the number of officers assigned to each district, and the level and type of interactions with the police in each districts.

Figure 5: Map showing the percentage change in complaints received by police district, 2015/16



All police districts, apart from one, had a decrease in complaints this year compared with 2014/15. Complaints remained similar in Derry City and Strabane (H District) over this time period, with an increase of one complaint (Figure 5).

Complaints are at their lowest levels in the last five years for most police districts (9 out of 11). Belfast City (A District) and Derry City & Strabane (H District) are the two districts that are the exceptions. In Belfast City complaints are lower in 2015/16 than in three of the four previous years. While, in Derry City & Strabane complaints have been higher in the last three years than in 2011/12 and 2012/13.

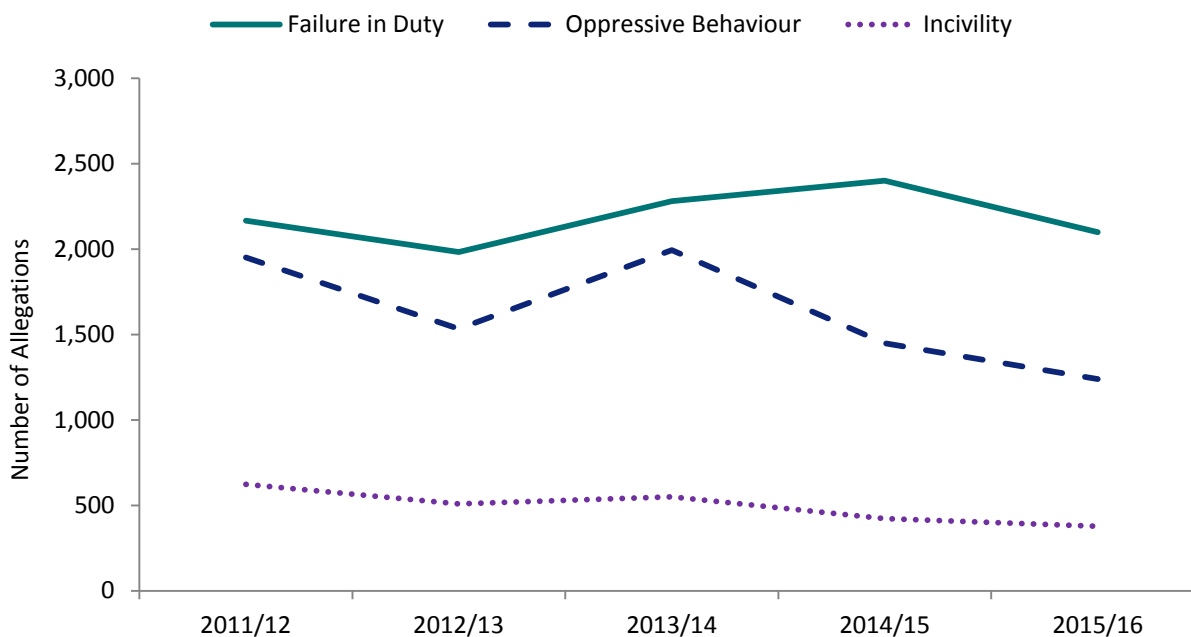
ALLEGATIONS

A person who makes a complaint may express a number of different concerns about the exchange they have had with a police officer. The Police Ombudsman's Office will record this as one complaint broken down into a number of 'allegations'.

In 2015/16 the Police Ombudsman's Office received 4,863 allegations (Table 12).

The most frequent allegations received during the year were allegations of a Failure in Duty, of Oppressive Behaviour, and of Incivility. (Figure 6, Table13).

Figure 6: Types of allegations received, 2011/12 to 2015/16



Failure in Duty allegations

In 2015/16, 2,100 allegations received by the Police Ombudsman's Office alleged a Failure in Duty by a police officer. This was a decrease of 13% on the number of allegations received in the previous year and is more similar to the number received in each of the three years prior to 2014/15.

More than half (54%) of the Failure in Duty allegations received in 2015/16 related to the conduct of police investigations or police response to incidents (Table 14).

The 2015/16 Policing Plan had a target for the PSNI to reduce Failure in Duty allegations by 2% from the number recorded in 2014/15. The PSNI achieved this target.

Oppressive Behaviour allegations

There were 1,239 Oppressive Behaviour allegations received during 2015/16. This was a decrease of 15% on the number of such allegations received in the previous year. Fewer Oppressive Behaviour allegations were received in 2015/16 than in any the previous four years.

Almost half (48%) of the Oppressive Behaviour allegations received in 2015/16 alleged unjustified force or violence⁴ (excluding serious or sexual assault). Allegations of serious and sexual assaults accounted for 3% of all the Oppressive Behaviour allegations received (Table 15).

The target in the 2015/16 Policing Plan was achieved, which had been to reduce these allegations for PSNI officers by 2%.

Incivility allegations

In 2015/16 there were 378 Incivility allegations received. This was an 11% decrease from the previous year and is the lowest number received in the last five years.

Around one in four (24%) of the Incivility allegations occurred at a domestic residence (Table 16).

The 2015/16 Policing Plan had a target to reduce allegations of Incivility by 2% for PSNI officers. This was achieved.

Other allegations⁵

In addition to Incivility and Oppressive Behaviour allegations being at their lowest levels in the last five years, allegations relating to irregularities in searches, discriminatory behaviour, malpractice and traffic related offences are also all at their lowest levels in the last five years. Allegations about malpractice are half the number in 2015/16 than in any of the previous four years (Table 13).

⁴ Referred to as 'other assault' in Table 15.

⁵ A further breakdown of allegations are available on the Police Ombudsman's website in the accompanying Excel tables.

Allegations regarding the use of police equipment

Allegations involving the use of police equipment accounted for 4% of all the allegations in 2015/16 (Table 17). This is similar to previous years.

Allegations relating to the use of handcuffs were the most commonly received allegations about the use of police equipment during 2015/16 (116 allegations). This is the same trend as in previous years.

During 2015/16 allegations about the use of CS Spray were the second most commonly reported allegations of police equipment. This is a different trend to previous years when batons were the secondly most commonly reported allegations of police equipment.

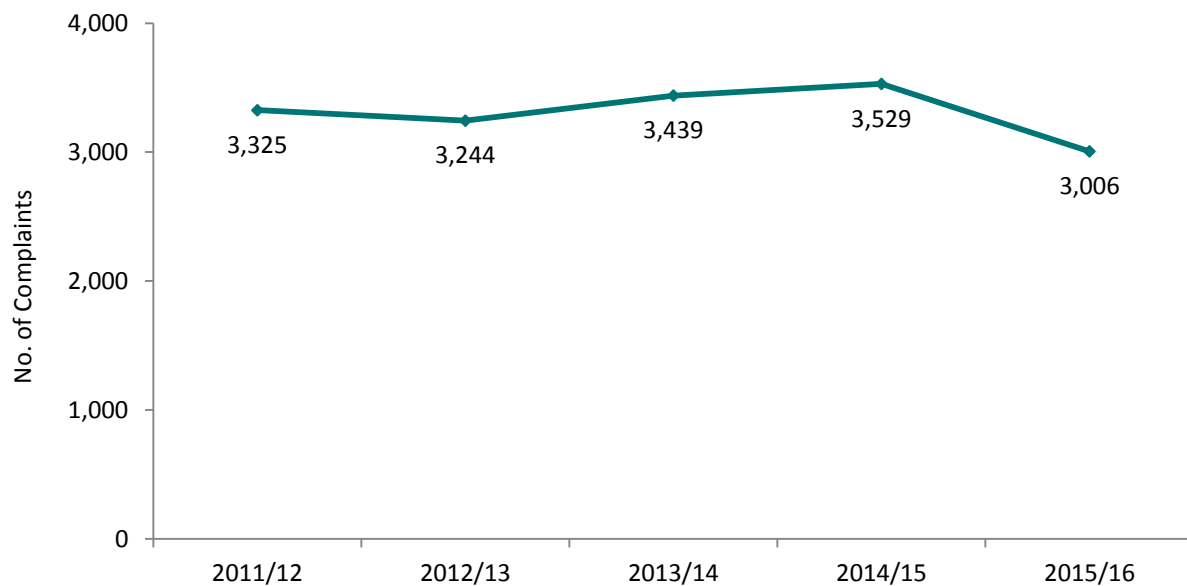
Over the last two years there has been a decrease in allegations received about the use of police batons.

COMPLAINTS CLOSURES

Complaints are closed when the Police Ombudsman’s Office has reached a view on the matter involved, when the complainant and the police officer have reached a level of agreement on the contested matter or when the person who made the complaint no longer wishes to engage with the process.

The Police Ombudsman’s Office closed more than 3,000 complaints in 2015/16 (Figure 7, Table 18).

Figure 7: Number of complaints closed by year, 2011/12 to 2015/16



This is the fewest number of complaints closed over the last five years. This reflects the decrease in number complaints received over the last two years.

Types of complaint closures

There are four main stages as to when complaints will be closed (Table 2).

Table 2: Complaint closures, 2015/16

Complaints Closed	3,006
Complaints closed following initial assessment	354
Complaint was not a matter for the Police Ombudsman	298
Call-in/Call-out – no further action	19
Other	37
Complaints closed following initial inquiries	1,312
Complainant did not fully engage with the police complaints system	895
Ill-founded	284
Withdrawn	125
Other	8
Complaints resolved informally/locally	192
Informally Resolved	184
Locally Resolved	8
Complaints fully investigated	1,148
Complaint not substantiated or no issue of concern identified	866
Complaint substantiated or an issue of concern identified	282

Around one in ten (12%) complaints closed during 2015/16 were closed after the initial assessment. These complaints tend to be closed fairly quickly, and often involve issues which are not a matter for the Police Ombudsman's Office.

A larger proportion of complaints (44%) were closed after initial inquiries. Initial inquiries can occur prior to an investigation commencing or at the start of an investigation. It involves getting more information from the complainant, looking for evidence regarding the matter complained about or making initial contact with the police officer(s) involved. Complaints closed at this stage are normally those where the complainant ceases to engage with the Office.

Complaints that were informally or locally resolved accounted for 6% of all complaints closed. This is an alternative way to resolve less serious complaints e.g. rudeness or incivility.

Nearly four in ten (38%) complaints closed were fully investigated. This is when a Police Ombudsman's Investigator looks into each allegation within the complaint and reaches a conclusion about it. The Office found evidence to substantiate all or part of the complaint, or identified another concern during the investigation in 25% of these complaints during 2015/16.

Trends in the types of complaint closures

The proportion of complaints closed following an initial assessment have generally decreased over the last five years, although remained stable over the last two years. Also there has been a decrease in complaints closed following local or informal resolution, while the proportion of complaints being closed following a full investigation has increased (Table 18).

Over the last five years, the proportion of fully investigated complaints that found evidence to substantiate all or part of the complaint or identified another policing issue of concern is at its second highest level in 2015/16. This decreased from 28% in 2014/15 to 25% in 2015/16 although it is still higher than in the three years prior to this.

Note: Following representation from key stakeholders and in order to make the reporting clearer, it has been decided to report our closures at complaint level. To do this, each of the closures within a complaint have been ranked, and the closure with the highest ranking used as the most representative of the overall complaint closure.

The highest ranking closure is also used to determine at which stage in the complaints process the complaint was closed: after initial assessment, initial inquiries, informal resolution, or following a full investigation. While this method will provide a clear and largely accurate picture in the majority of cases, there will be a few instances when this will not be the case. These discrepancies will only occur between initial assessment and initial inquiries stages.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO PPS AND POLICE

Public Prosecution Service (PPS)

Where the Police Ombudsman investigates a matter and identifies that a criminal offence may have been committed, legislation requires that the matter is reported to the PPS. A file will be sent to the PPS that sets out the information which has been established and makes a recommendation as to whether or not the police officer(s) should face a criminal charge. Irrespective of the Police Ombudsman's recommendation, it will be for the PPS to decide if an officer should be prosecuted.

In 2015/16, on 21 occasions⁶ the Police Ombudsman recommended that the Director of Public Prosecutions should prosecute an officer/staff (Tables 3).

Table 3: Occasions Police Ombudsman recommended prosecution /no prosecution for an officer/staff, 2015/16

	2015/16
No prosecution recommended for an officer	267
Prosecution recommended for an officer	21

The number of occasions during 2015/16 where prosecution was recommended for an officer/staff has nearly doubled since 2014/15 (increased from 12 in 2014/15 to 21 in 2015/16) and is greater than in any of the previous four years (Table 19).

⁶ This is the number of officers in each complaint that prosecution was recommended for. The Office may receive more than one complaint about the same incident and thus there may be some double counting of officers in this total.

Recommendations made to the Chief Constable or Chief Officer⁷

Following the conclusion of any criminal proceedings or investigations which relate to misconduct matters, the Police Ombudsman may make a recommendation to the Chief Constable or the Chief Officer, who will consider whether action should be taken against the police officers who were the subject of the complaint.

During 2015/16 the Police Ombudsman's Office recommended on 355 occasions⁸ that an officer/staff should receive a discipline sanction (Table 4). As with previous years most of these recommendations were for Advice and Guidance.

Table 4: Occasions Police Ombudsman recommended discipline sanction for officers/staff, 2015/16

	2015/16
Management Discussion	38
Advice and Guidance	248
Superintendent's Written Warning	55
Formal Disciplinary Proceedings	14
Total	355

The overall number of occasions where the Police Ombudsman recommended a discipline sanction for an officer/staff decreased from last year. The decrease was evident in two of the four sanctions; Management Discussion and Superintendent's written warnings. The number of occasions where formal disciplinary proceedings were recommended for an officer/staff more than doubled from 2014/15, and is higher than in each of the four previous years (Table 20).

The Police Ombudsman made 57 policy recommendations to the Chief Constable in the PSNI during 2015/16.

⁷ The statistics in this section of the bulletin were revised in August 2016. The revision was made as a significant number of discipline sanctions were added on to the CHS in June 2016 for the year 2015/16. These recommendations were mainly for advice and guidance. The total number of occasions where a discipline sanction was recommended to an officer/staff during 2015/16 was revised from 311 to 355.

⁸ This is the number of officers in each complaint that discipline sanctions were recommended for. The Office may receive more than one complaint about the same incident and thus there may be some double counting of officers in this total.

INFORMAL RESOLUTION

Complaints made against PSNI officers that are of a less serious nature, usually about incivility or certain types of failure in duties, may be considered for Informal Resolution. This involves a senior police officer speaking to both the officer(s) and the complainant with a view of reaching a satisfactory resolution. Prior to proceeding with this process the consent of the complainant must be obtained.

In 2015/16, 16% of complaints were considered for Informal Resolution and for more than half of these complaints the person making the complaint agreed for it to be dealt with through Informal Resolution (Table 21).

There has been a decrease in the proportion of complainants consenting for their complaint to be dealt with through Informal Resolution. In each of the previous four years 59% or more of complainants who were given the option of Informal Resolution consented to it; in 2015/16 this decreased to 56%.

During 2015/16 there were 196 complaints finalised through the Informal Resolution process and 159 of them were successfully resolved (Table 22).

In general over the last five years there has been an increase in the proportion of complaints finalised via Informal Resolution being successfully resolved. In 2011/12 three quarters (75%) of complaints resolved through Informal Resolution were successful while in 2015/16 more than four in five (81%) of these complaints were successfully resolved.

PSNI OFFICERS

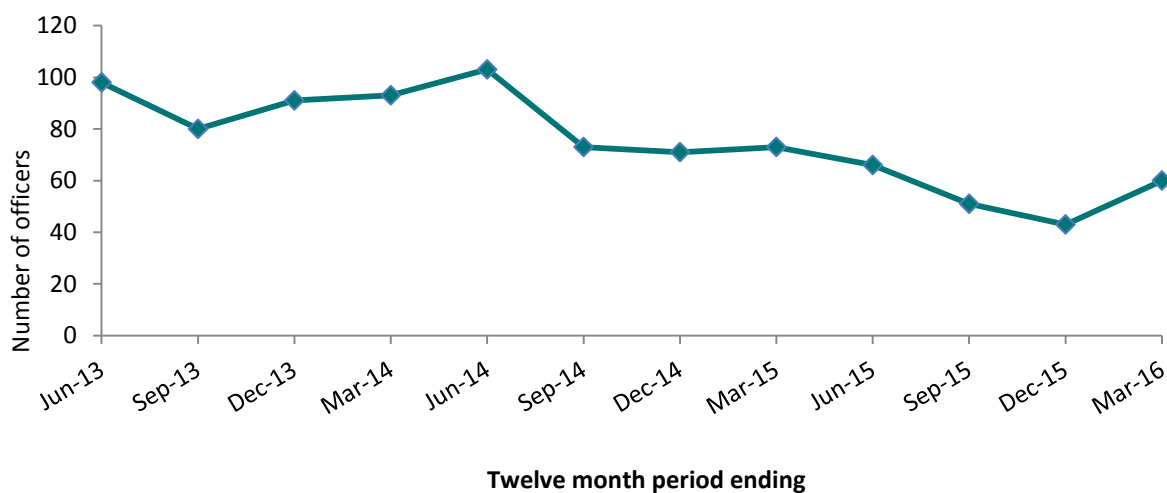
Approximately 60% of the complaints recorded by the Police Ombudsman’s Office have an identified officer associated with them. The other complaints which do not identify an officer tend to be those which have been closed at an early stage, such as those which were not a matter for the Police Ombudsman to investigate and those where the complainant did not fully engage with the Police Complaints System.

Most of the officers (82%) identified within complaints were constables, while fewer complaints were received about officers of higher ranks (Table 23). This is a similar profile to that of the composition of officers within the police service.

Information on officers identified within a complaint is shared with the Service Improvement Department within the PSNI. In April 2013 the PSNI amended the stage at which they initiate management intervention. From that date, officers who received three or more complaints that were formally investigated or dealt with by way of Informal or Local Resolution in the previous 12 months are subject of such intervention.

In general, the number of officers reaching this stage has been decreasing over the last three years (Figure 9, Table 24). This reflects the decrease in complaints received over this time period.

Figure 9: Officers that received three or more complaints that were formally investigated or dealt with by way of Informal or Local Resolution, 2013/14 to 2015/16



Note: During the course of an investigation, officers associated with the complaint can vary; as evidence is gathered more officers can be linked to the complaint and some may be removed. For this reason, to allow direct comparison across time, the information that was reported at the end of each quarter is not updated.

APPENDIX 1: STATISTICAL TABLES

Table 5: Complaints received, 2011/12 to 2015/16

Year	Complaints
2011/12	3,344
2012/13	3,272
2013/14	3,739
2014/15	3,369
2015/16	3,018

Table 6: Complaints and matters, 2011/12 to 2015/16

Complaints/Other Matters	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Complaints from members of the public	3,265	3,180	3,670	3,289	2,929
Matters referred to the Office	45	51	39	48	53
Matters the Police Ombudsman has chosen to investigate	6	8	9	5	14
Other	28	33	21	27	22
Total	3,344	3,272	3,739	3,369	3,018

Table 7: Complaints received by month, 2011/12 to 2015/16

Month complaint received	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
April	246	248	282	332	210
May	295	264	309	333	258
June	272	262	316	322	296
July	280	237	356	311	299
August	337	329	362	279	253
September	285	266	302	272	278
October	274	295	317	282	256
November	295	268	315	255	258
December	208	232	284	254	202
January	315	326	298	254	224
February	272	285	273	248	242
March	265	260	325	227	242
Total	3,344	3,272	3,739	3,369	3,018

Table 8: Complaints received by organisation, 2011/12 to 2015/16

Organisation	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)	3,289	3,216	3,652	3,303	2,962
Designated Civilian	34	36	64	42	41
Northern Ireland Airport Constabulary	2	2	1	1	3
Harbour Police	4	2	1	3	1
UK Border Force ⁹	-	-	-	0	3
National Crime Agency ¹⁰	-	-	-	-	1
G.B Officers ¹¹	0	0	3	0	0
Other / Unknown	15	16	18	20	7
Total	3,344	3,272	3,739	3,369	3,018

Table 9: Complaints received by where the initial complaint was made, 2011/12 to 2015/16

Source of complaints	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Directly with Police Ombudsman's Office	2,027	2,035	2,184	2,216	2,047
Directly with the Police	571	500	831	494	340
Via Representative	667	645	655	579	542
Other (includes referrals)	79	92	69	80	89
Total	3,344	3,272	3,739	3,369	3,018

⁹ The remit of the Police Ombudsman's Office was extended to include the UK Border Force on the 16th March 2015.

¹⁰ The remit of the Police Ombudsman's Office was extended to include National Crime Agency on the 20th May 2015.

¹¹ These are complaints about officers from other UK police authorities regarding their conduct whilst they were serving in Northern Ireland under the mutual aid arrangement (section 60 of the Police (N.I) Act 1998).

Table 10: Main situations giving rise to complaints, 2011/12 to 2015/16

Main situation	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Criminal investigation	762	721	807	833	771
Arrest	661	617	885	626	562
Search	339	317	363	288	244
Traffic incident	313	251	264	244	227
Domestic incident	168	164	236	239	179
Police enquiries	237	184	235	199	92
Historic Investigation	35	73	69	90	77
Parade/ Demonstration	20	170	132	22	63
Other	681	663	651	684	670
Unknown	128	112	97	144	133
Total	3,344	3,272	3,739	3,369	3,018

Table 11: Complaints received by police district, 2011/12 to 2015/16

Police districts ¹²	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
A: Belfast City	870	976	1,215	983	911
B: Lisburn & Castlereagh City	175	161	167	148	122
C: Ards & North Down	200	184	210	190	183
D: Newry Mourne & Down	230	216	237	195	181
E: Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon	351	250	297	282	227
F: Mid Ulster	175	151	147	124	105
G: Fermanagh & Omagh	174	167	175	164	140
H: Derry City & Strabane	219	211	244	233	234
J: Causeway Coast & Glens	275	240	243	298	227
K: Mid & East Ulster	173	166	199	164	146
L: Antrim & Newtownabbey	233	224	219	209	181
Unknown / Other Organisation	269	326	386	379	361
Total	3,344	3,272	3,739	3,369	3,018

¹² Only complaints made against the PSNI are assigned a police district. Other complaints will be categorised under 'other organisation' in this table.

Table 12: Number of allegations received, 2011/12 to 2015/16

Year	Allegations
2011/12	6,007
2012/13	5,285
2013/14	6,177
2014/15	5,630
2015/16	4,863

Table 13: Types of allegations¹³, 2011/12 to 2015/16

Types of Allegations	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Failure in Duty	2,167	1,983	2,281	2,401	2,100
Oppressive Behaviour	1,952	1,534	1,994	1,450	1,239
Incivility	623	508	550	423	378
Police Searches	271	258	312	309	245
Unlawful/ Unnecessary Arrest/ Detention	224	204	234	252	205
Mishandling of Property	107	105	156	127	135
Section 55 Referrals	51	59	48	54	69
Malpractice	124	110	145	110	55
Discriminatory Behaviour	81	77	107	72	54
Traffic Related Incidents	65	69	47	51	38
Other	342	378	303	381	345
Total	6,007	5,285	6,177	5,630	4,863

¹³ A full breakdown of allegations types are available in the accompanying Excel spreadsheet

Table 14: Failure in Duty allegations, 2011/12 to 2015/16

Failure in Duty allegations ¹⁴	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Conduct of Police Investigations/incident response	n/a	n/a	1,166	1,274	1,129
Failures in contact	n/a	n/a	277	310	299
Failure in record management	n/a	n/a	230	221	138
Conduct in custody suite	n/a	n/a	180	128	116
Failure to act impartially	n/a	n/a	73	86	92
Failure in duty of care	n/a	n/a	86	77	41
Other Failure in duty	n/a	n/a	269	305	285
Total	2,167	1,983	2,281	2,401	2,100

Tables 15: Oppressive Behaviour allegations, 2011/12 to 2015/16

Oppressive Behaviour allegations	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Other Assault ¹⁵	887	707	986	689	591
Oppressive Conduct (not involving assault)	755	579	711	549	462
Harassment (series of like incidents)	241	184	226	158	152
Sexual Assault	36	36	40	38	24
Serious non-sexual assault	33	28	31	16	10
Total	1,952	1,534	1,994	1,450	1,239

Table 16: Incivility allegations, 2011/12 to 2015/16

Incivility allegations	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Incivility At Domestic Residence	137	98	124	108	91
Incivility By Officer On The Telephone	92	76	91	93	76
Incivility At Police Station	73	63	69	59	39
Incivility When Stopped For A Traffic Offence	58	46	57	39	35
Incivility To Person Under 18 Years	15	8	14	6	6
Other incivility	248	217	195	118	131
Total	623	508	550	423	378

¹⁴ New Failure in Duty allegations were introduced in April 2013. This decision was made in conjunction with our key stakeholder. Thus it is not possible to provide a meaningful five year trend data, where comparison data is not available these cells have been denoted with n/a.

¹⁵ Unjustified force or violence (excluding serious or sexual assault).

Table 17: Allegations regarding the use of police equipment, 2011/12 to 2015/16

Police equipment	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Handcuffs	165	115	214	149	116
CS Spray	51	42	48	34	36
Baton	57	51	62	35	24
Taser	9	13	19	18	13
AEP/Baton Round/Riot Gun	12	12	14	2	6
Misuse/Discharge of Firearm	12	7	12	2	5
Other	10	18	17	9	11
No weapon involved	5,691	5,027	5,791	5,381	4,652
Total	6,007	5,285	6,177	5,630	4,863

Table 18: Complaint closures, 2011/12 to 2015/16

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Complaints closed	3,325	3,244	3,439	3,529	3,006
Complaint closed following initial assessment	489	519	472	423	354
Not a matter for the Police Ombudsman	413	442	406	361	298
Call in/Call out - no further action	31	36	26	25	19
Other	45	41	40	37	37
Complaints closed following initial inquiries	1,512	1,462	1,702	1,560	1,312
Complainant did not fully engage	1,119	1,057	1,310	1,084	895
Ill-founded	187	219	221	307	284
Withdrawn	169	155	160	152	125
Other	37	31	11	17	8
Complaints resolved informally	250	250	211	219	192
Informally resolved	213	213	179	191	184
Locally resolved	37	37	32	28	8
Complaints fully investigated	1,074	1,013	1,054	1,327	1,148
Complaint not substantiated or an issue of concern identified	812	789	841	959	866
Complaint substantiated or an issue of concern identified	262	224	213	368	282

Table 19: Occasions Police Ombudsman recommended prosecution/no prosecution for an officer/staff, 2011/12 to 2015/16

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
No prosecution recommended for Officer	669	467	435	370	267
Prosecution recommended for Officer	6	9	13	12	21

Table 20: Occasions Police Ombudsman recommended a discipline sanction for an officer/staff, 2011/12 to 2015/16¹⁶

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Management Discussion	50	65	31	64	38
Advice and Guidance	247	127	155	227	248
Superintendent's Written Warning	55	51	35	87	55
Formal Disciplinary Proceedings	6	5	7	5	14
Total	358	248	228	383	355

Table 21: PSNI Complaints suitable for Informal Resolution with consent obtained, 2011/12 to 2015/16

Complaints suitable for IR	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Number of complaints received ¹⁷	3,289	3,216	3,652	3,303	2,962
Complaints suitable for IR	502	462	478	482	467
Consent for IR obtained	309	273	292	289	262
Consent for IR not obtained	193	189	186	193	205

Table 22: Outcome of informally resolved complaints, 2011/12 to 2015/16

Outcome	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Successful	208	208	170	179	159
Failed	64	66	38	37	33
Withdrawn	5	1	3	0	4
Total	277	275	211	216	196

¹⁶ The figures in Table 20 were revised in August 2016 due to a significant amount of additional information being added on to the CHS after the cut off date for this publication.

¹⁷ Number of complaints received against the PSNI only.

Table 23: Rank of officer complained about, 2011/12 to 2015/16

Rank	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Constable	2,805	2,367	2,913	2,432	2,074
Sergeant	531	429	494	458	335
Inspector and Above	92	114	132	133	117

Table 24: Number of officers with three or more complaints that were formally investigated or dealt with by way of informal or local resolution, 2013/14 to 2015/16

Twelve month period ending	Number of officers
June 2013	98
September 2013	80
December 2013	91
March 2014	93
June 2014	103
September 2014	73
December 2014	71
March 2015	73
June 2015	66
September 2015	51
December 2015	43
March 2016	60

APPENDIX 2: UNDERSTANDING THE COMPLAINTS PROCESS

To help understand the information in this report, we have provided this short summary of the police complaints service in Northern Ireland and how it works.

What we do

The Police Ombudsman's Office provides for the independent and impartial investigation of complaints about the police in Northern Ireland. The Police Ombudsman is committed to providing a police complaints service in the way he thinks best suited to secure the confidence of the public and the police. He believes that for such confidence to be forthcoming, it is essential that people are informed about the nature of his work.

The Police Ombudsman has the remit to investigate the conduct of officers within the following organisations which operate in Northern Ireland:

- Police Service of Northern Ireland including Designated Civilians
- Belfast Harbour Police
- Belfast International Airport Police
- Ministry of Defence Police
- Border Force
- National Crime Agency

The Office deals primarily with complaints made by members of the public about the conduct of police officers. It also deals with matters referred to it by the PSNI Chief Constable. The following are incidents that the Chief Constable is required to refer to the Police Ombudsman:

- Any discharge of a police firearms (including those used in riot situations);
- Any fatal road traffic collisions involving police officers;
- Any death which may have occurred as a result of the actions of a police officer; and
- Any other serious allegation.

It also deals with matters referred to it by the NIPB, the DoJ and the PPS.

The Police Ombudsman also has the power to initiate an investigation without a complaint having been made if it appears to him to be desirable and in the public interest.

In most circumstances the Police Ombudsman can only investigate incidents which have occurred in the previous 12 months. However, there is no time limit on the investigation of grave matters, or where exceptional circumstances exist. Many of the investigations the Office is undertaking into incidents which happened between 1968 and 1998 (the period known as the Troubles) are matters the Police Ombudsman viewed as grave or exceptional.

The Police Ombudsman does not investigate complaints against officers whose conduct has been the subject of disciplinary or criminal proceedings; or complaints about off-duty police officers, unless the fact that he or she is a police officer is relevant to the complaint. The Office also does not investigate matters relating to the direction and control of the police service by the Chief Constable.

How we deal with complaints

All complaints are recorded on our Case Handling System, even where they are later determined to be outside the remit of the Office.

A complaint from a member of the public will invariably include a number of allegations. For example, if a person alleges a police officer pushed them *and* was rude to them, it would be recorded as one complaint with two allegations on the system.

Once a complaint has been received, it will become subject of an initial assessment. This will involve logging it onto our system and making an assessment as to whether the matter is something the Police Ombudsman's Office can deal with and if so, how best to do so.

If the complaint is something we deal with, the Office will consider if the matter can be resolved informally rather than being sent straight for investigation. Before we decide to take the Informal Resolution approach, the person who made the complaint must agree. If this proves unsuccessful, the Police Ombudsman will refer the complaint for investigation.

When a matter is suitable for investigation, a complaints officer or an investigation officer will set about making the initial inquiries necessary before an investigation commences. This will involve getting more information from the complainant, such as an official statement of complaint.

When a formal investigation has been completed, if the evidence indicates that police officers may have committed a criminal offence or breached the police Code

of Ethics, the Police Ombudsman can recommend that they are prosecuted and/or disciplined.

Where the Police Ombudsman considers that a criminal offence may have been committed by a member of the police, he must send a copy of the investigation report to the PPS, making appropriate recommendations. The PPS then decides whether or not to prosecute the police officer under investigation.

If the Police Ombudsman decides that no criminal offence has been committed, he is required to consider whether it is appropriate to recommend disciplinary proceedings. If the Chief Constable is unwilling administer the recommended discipline, the Police Ombudsman may, direct him to do so.

APPENDIX 3: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

This glossary has been designed to assist users of our statistical information to understand the terms which we use to describe data contained in the statistical bulletin. The terms are listed in alphabetical order.

Advice and Guidance

This is an informal discipline sanction for officers.

Allegation

Each complaint can be broken down into one or more allegations. These are all the individual behaviours or issues being complained about. For example, if a person alleges a police officer pushed them *and* was rude to them, it would be recorded as one complaint with two allegations on the system.

Call in/Call out (no further action)

These are situations where the Police Ombudsman's Office is 'called in' to consider an incident but determines at an early stage that there is no requirement for any further investigation.

Conduct in custody suite

This is a Failure in Duty allegation category. It includes incidents where the complainant was denied access to legal advice or medical attention while they were detained in custody. In addition it covers instances where it is alleged the officer did not inform the detained person of their rights and entitlements, or the officer did not keep accurate custody records.

Conduct of police investigations / incident response

This is a Failure in Duty allegation category and includes allegations where the complainant has alleged that the unsatisfactory conduct of either ongoing or completed police investigations, including the inappropriate disclosure of information. Also included would be allegations that the police failed to carry out any investigation into an incident, or were excessively slow to respond to an incident.

Complaint

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction by or on behalf of a member of the public about a member of the police service or an officer of another service over which the Office has jurisdiction.

For the purpose of clarity of reporting, the term complaints refers to complaints made by members of the public, matters referred to the Office from other organisation, and matters that the Police Ombudsman has decided to investigate.

Failure in contact

This is a Failure in Duty allegation. It includes incidents where the complainant has alleged a police officer; failed to keep arranged appointments, return telephone calls, or reply to correspondence. It also includes incidents when an officer failed to keep the complainant updated with progress of an investigation or police enquiries.

Failure in duty of care

This is a Failure in Duty allegation. Where it is alleged that the police officer failed to take appropriate action to ensure the safety or well-being of the complainant or third party for whom they have responsibility.

Failure in record management

This is a Failure in Duty allegation. It involves a failure of police to keep accurate, complete or up to date police records. It also includes the failure of officers to provide information or documentation relating to the complainant or a third party.

Failure to act impartially

This is a Failure in Duty allegation. The complainant alleges an officer failed to adopt an independent approach and/or failed to act in a fair and impartial manner.

Historical Investigation

This is an investigation (potentially criminal and /or misconduct) into the actions of police where the allegation(s) made are considered Grave or Exceptional, "Troubles" related (1969-1998) and predates the establishment of the Good Friday Agreement, 10 April 1998.

Ill-founded

This is a type of complaint closure. These are cases where it became clear during initial inquiries that an allegation was without bases or foundation.

Incivility

This is a category within allegations. It refers to allegations such as the police officer being rude, showing a lack of respect, being abrupt or displaying a general lack of sensitivity.

Informally resolved (Informal Resolution)

This is a process offered to complainants who have made less serious allegations, e.g. rudeness or incivility. It involves a senior police officer speaking to both the officer(s) involved and the complainant with a view to reaching a satisfactory resolution of the complaint. It requires that a record of the outcome has been obtained from police confirming that the matter has been resolved.

Malpractice

These allegations can include any allegation in relation to perjury, other allegations of falsehood, any allegation that evidence was obtained in an irregular manner or under duress and allegations of concealment or tampering with evidence.

Management Discussion/Training:

Management Discussion is an informal discipline sanction. It involves a discussion between the officer concerned and a more senior officer regarding the allegation. This category also includes a small number of recommendations that the officer concerned receives additional training or operational supervision based on the nature of the allegation.

Mishandling of property

This allegation category includes any allegation involving theft or loss of property (including money), unreasonable retention of property, damage to property, failure to account for money or property and improper disposal of property.

Oppressive Behaviour

This is an allegation type and includes situations where the complainant alleged that the officer has behaved in an oppressive manner. They can include allegations of oppressive conduct, harassment, and assault, including sexual assault.

Residual matters

A small number of residual matters are included in the number of allegations (usually 1-2% of allegations each year). A residual matter is one identified by the Office's Investigator, which has not been previously complained of by the complainant. Examples include failure to complete notebook records, anomalies in custody record, and failure to supervise situations adequately.

Section 55 referral

Not all matters the Police Ombudsman deals with come to us as complaints from members of the public. Certain public bodies, including the PSNI, the Policing Board, the Department of Justice and the Public prosecution Service can refer matters to us for consideration. This is done under section 55 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998.

Superintendent's Written Warning

This is a formal written warning from a police officer's Superintendent.

APPENDIX 4: DATA AVAILABILITY AND QUALITY

Statistical information on complaints and allegations is derived from the CHS, an integrated and comprehensive ICT system that covers all key aspects of receiving and processing a complaint. It captures data about the complainant, the complained against parties, the incident and allegations made. Data can be downloaded and exported to a number of commonly used software packages for analysis (Excel, Access, SPSS¹⁸). In addition the Office uses the DI Diver reporting tool and the CHS has a number of management reports run directly from a menu on the system.

The data used for this publication was extracted from the CHS on the 14th April 2016, and thus includes all information recorded on the system up to the 13th April 2016.

Data quality

CHS data quality is considered to be high. The system has been designed to limit the incidence of inaccurate data through the use of measures such as logical validation checks, drop down menus for data input and a minimum of free text input. The Police Ombudsman has a dedicated team who assure the quality of CHS content. All data input is completely auditable and allows for an effective quality control procedure to review and, where necessary, amend key data for the purposes of accurate reporting. When considered necessary, focused data cleansing exercises of key fields are also conducted. Additionally, complete audits of fields with small numbers associated are conducted.

As stated above, substantial validation and quality control procedures are in place to ensure that the data derived from CHS are of high quality. However, there is still the possibility of a small number of errors arising from data input, missing data, failure to update data and errors in communication. The Police Ombudsman estimates that the level of this error is so small that it has no impact on the quality of statistical reporting. However, where errors are identified, corrections are made to reports as soon as practicable. Further details are set out in the Police Ombudsman [statement of revision and errors strategy](#) .

Revisions

The statistics included in this bulletin are taken from a live system, and may be subject to future revisions. This means that total number of complaints and allegations may change slightly between those published in previous bulletins.

Revisions can be made for a number of reasons but are mainly due to more information coming to light during the natural course of the Office's work, and the

¹⁸ SPSS is a statistical software package developed for use by social scientists.

system being updated accordingly. This includes the identification of residual matters; allegations identified by the Investigator that were not previously complained about by the member of the public, such as, the failure of a police officer to complete their notebook, anomalies in custody records or failure to supervise adequately. They typically account for fewer than 2% of all allegations (approximately between 60 to 100 residual allegations annually).

The table below shows the scale of revisions made between statistics in this bulletin and those in the previous bulletin in June 2015. It demonstrates that the revisions have little impact on the overall trends presented in this bulletin.

Table 25: Revisions made to the number of complaints and allegations received between this publication and the previous publication in June 2015.

	Previously Published Figures (June 15)	Current Published Figures (June 16)	Scale of Revision (number)	Scale of Revision (%)
Total number of complaints				
2011/12	3,344	3,344	0	0.00%
2012/13	3,272	3,272	0	0.00%
2013/14	3,738	3,739	+ 1	0.03%
2014/15	3,367	3,369	+ 2	0.06%
Total number of allegations				
2011/12	6,007	6,007	0	0.00%
2012/13	5,284	5,285	0	0.00%
2013/14	6,171	6,177	+ 6	0.10%
2014/15	5,587	5,630	+43	0.77%

The Office's full strategy for revisions and errors can be found within the publications section of the [Office's website](#).

Data limitations

Because of the nature of some of the highly sensitive material handled by the Police Ombudsman in the investigation of cases, a small proportion of cases will have only limited information available on the CHS. On balance, the Police Ombudsman considers that the assurance of the privacy of the information and individuals associated with this small number of sensitive cases outweighs the need for full access to the data. In practice, the number of cases is so small that the restriction has no impact on the quality of statistical reporting.

Publication

This is an annual statistical bulletin, and publishes information in accordance with the obligation for the Police Ombudsman's Office to report performance on a financial year basis.

As the statistics were taken from a 'live' case handling system, the figures in this bulletin supersede those previously published.

The next annual statistical report is due to be published in June 2017. The exact date will be announced on the website at least four weeks prior to publication.

In addition to the annual bulletin, quarterly updates are published throughout the year. They provide top level information on the number of complaints and allegations received.

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Website: www.policeombudsman.org



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