

Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland:

Annual report on  
public awareness of the  
Police Complaints  
System in  
Northern Ireland,  
2017/18

March 2018

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## Introduction

This statistical report presents the findings from the Police Ombudsman's module in the October 2017 Omnibus Survey. The results from the survey are used to monitor public awareness and confidence in the Police Ombudsman's Office.

These questions are included in the Omnibus Survey which is conducted annually by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).

## Target Monitoring

The results are used by the Office to measure its performance against three targets in its Balanced Scorecard, in the "To enhance knowledge and understanding of the complaints system amongst key stakeholders" section. This year the Office met two of these targets.

### ***Maintain a level of at least 80% public awareness of the Office***

- Target met as 86% of respondents had heard of the Police Ombudsman

### ***Maintain a level of at least 80% awareness of the independence of the Office***

- Target met as 85% of respondents that had heard of the Police Ombudsman were aware that he is independent from the police

### ***Maintain a level of at least 80% confidence that the Office deals with complaints in an impartial way***

- Target not met as 76% of respondents that had heard of the Police Ombudsman were confident that he deals with complaints in an impartial way

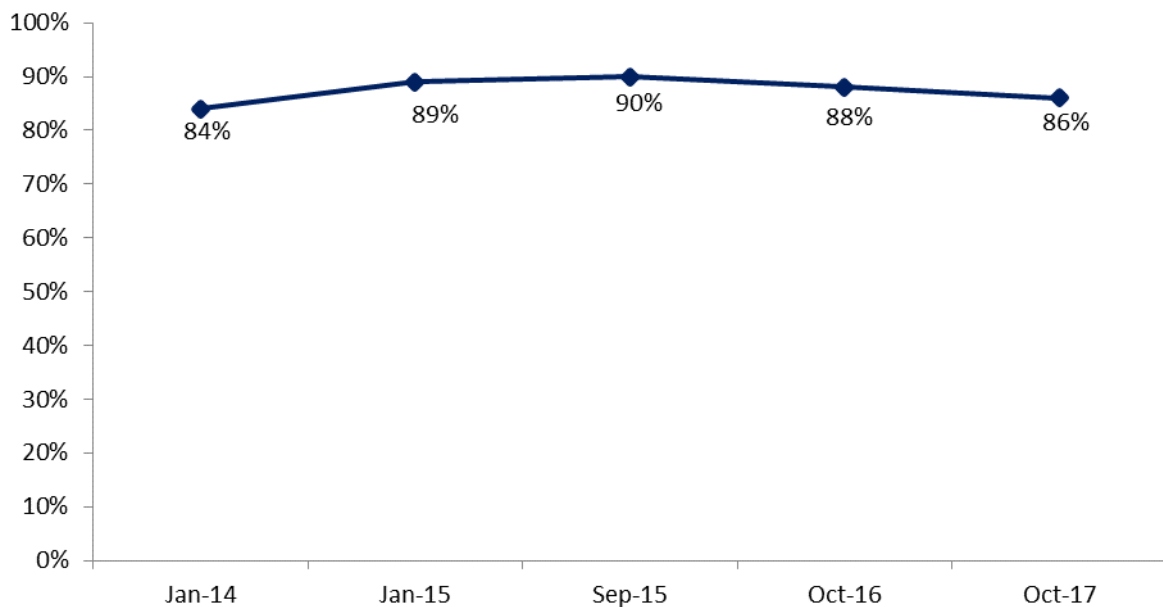
## Survey findings:

### Awareness of the Police Ombudsman

In October 2017, 86% of respondents stated that they had heard of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland.

Over the last five years, awareness levels have ranged from 84% to 90%. The current level of awareness (86%) is similar to that reported last year, however it has decreased from the 2015 survey when 90% of respondents had heard of the Police Ombudsman (Figure 1, Table 2).

**Figure 1: Level of awareness of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, 2014-2017**



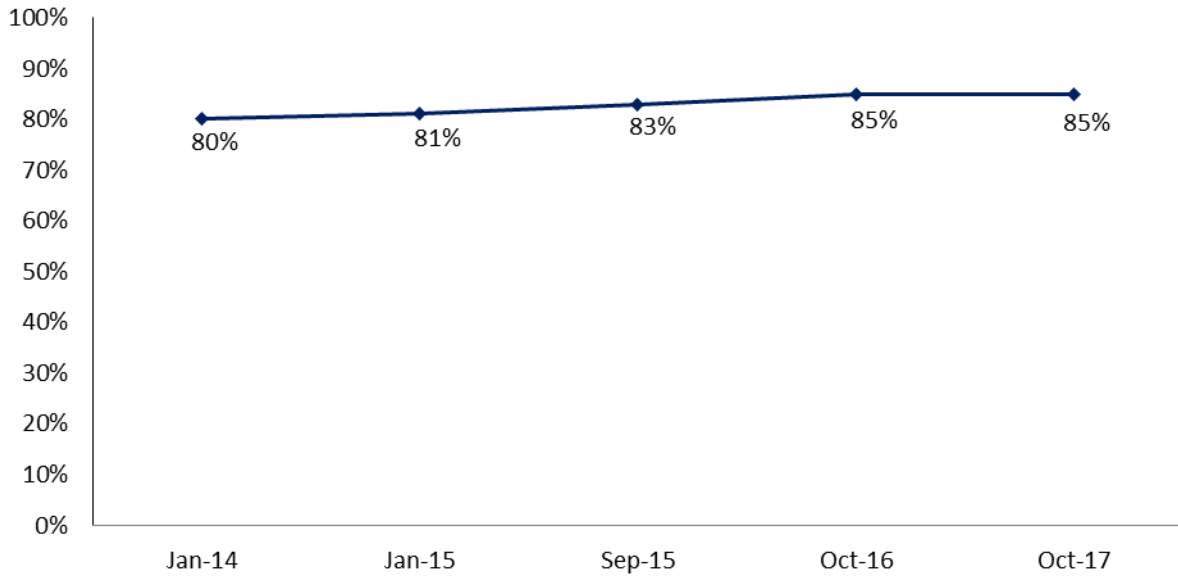
The following results in this report are based only on respondents that reported they had heard of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland.

## Independence of the Police Ombudsman

In October 2017, of those respondents who had heard of the Police Ombudsman, 85% thought he was independent of the police.

Over the last five years awareness of the independence of the Office has increased from 80% to 85%. (Figure 2, Table 3).

**Figure 2: Perception of independence of the Police Ombudsman, 2014-2017**



## Impartiality of investigation

In October 2017, just over three quarters (76%)<sup>1</sup> of respondents who had heard of the Police Ombudsman were confident that he deals with complaints in an impartial way.

Since 2014, confidence levels have ranged from 75% to 80%. The percentage of respondents stating they were 'very confident' has increased from 14% to 21% over the last five years (Table 1 & Table 4).

**Table 1: Level of confidence that the Police Ombudsman deals with complaints in an impartial way, 2014-2017**

	Jan-14	Jan-15	Sep-15	Oct-16	Oct-17
Very confident	14%	16%	18%	21%	21%
Fairly confident	61%	61%	62%	58%	55%
Not very confident	16%	16%	13%	16%	14%
Not at all confident	4%	4%	4%	3%	5%
Don't know/refusal	6%	3%	3%	3%	4%
Total	1025	998	992	835	833

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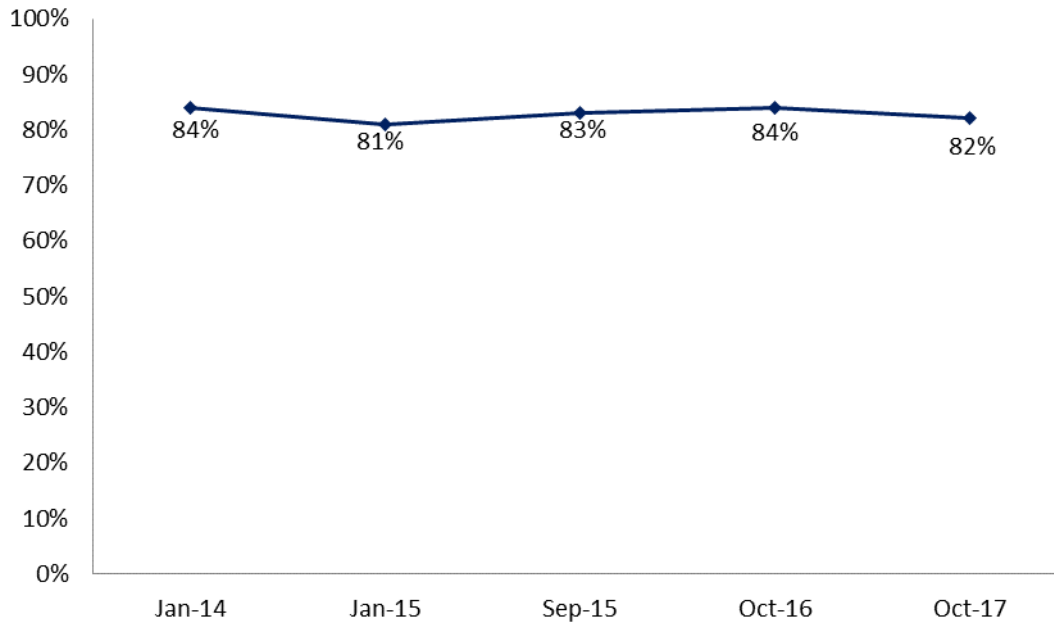
<sup>1</sup> % Very confident and confident combined

## Fairness of treatment

In October 2017, over four out of five (82%) respondents thought they would be treated fairly if they made a complaint.

Since 2014, the proportion of respondents who thought they would be treated fairly has remained fairly stable (Figure 3, Table 5).

**Figure 3: Perception of fair treatment when making a complaint, 2014-2017**

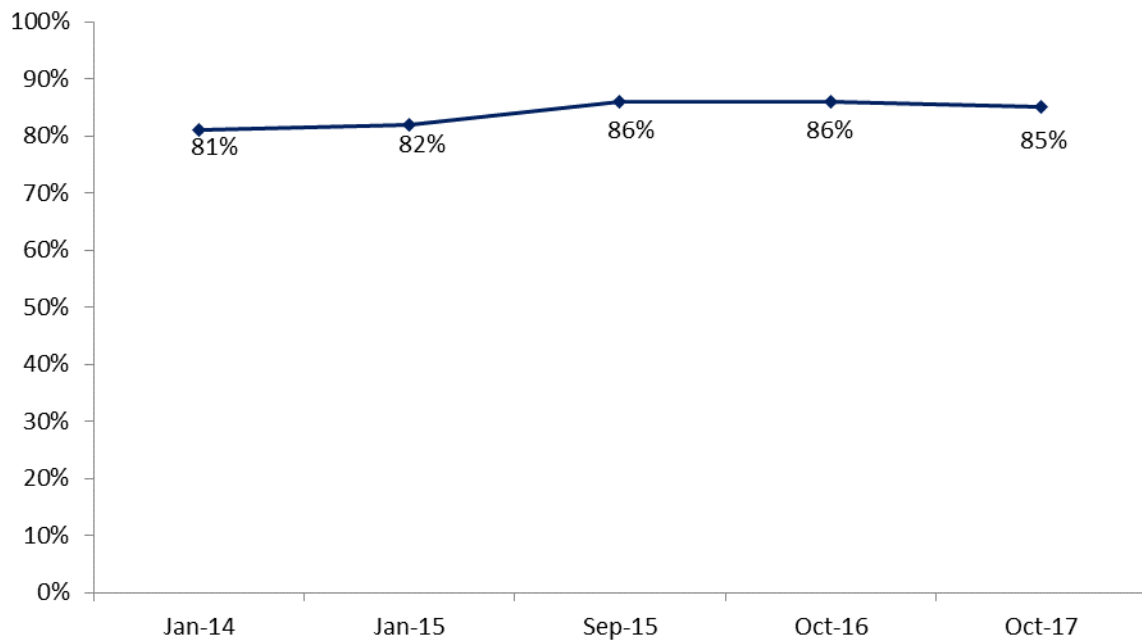


## Effect of Police Ombudsman on policing

In October 2017, 85% of respondents felt that the Police Ombudsman would help ensure that the police in Northern Ireland do a good job.

The percentage of respondents who felt that the Ombudsman would help police do a good job has remained fairly stable over the last three years and has increased from the levels reported in 2014 (Figure 4, Table 6).

**Figure 4: Belief that the Police Ombudsman will help ensure that the police do a good job, 2014-2017**





## Appendix 1: Tables of Results for key questions<sup>2</sup>

**Table 2: Have you heard of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland?**

	Jan-14	Jan-15	Sep-15	Oct-16	Oct-17
Aware	84%	89%	90%	88%	86%
Not aware	16%	11%	10%	12%	14%
Don't know/refusal	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Total survey respondents	1217	1114	1109	946	938

*Asked to all persons aged 16 and over*

**Table 3: Do you think the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland is part of the police or independent of the police?**

	Jan-14	Jan-15	Sep-15	Oct-16	Oct-17
Independent of the police	80%	81%	83%	85%	85%
Part of the police	14%	16%	14%	13%	13%
Don't know/refusal	5%	2%	3%	3%	2%
Total survey respondents	1025	998	992	835	833

*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**

% Confident/Very Confident (combined)	
Jan-14	75%
Jan-15	77%
Sep-15	80%
Oct-16	79%
Oct-17	76%

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

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

	Jan-14	Jan-15	Sep-15	Oct-16	Oct-17
Treated fairly	84%	81%	83%	84%	82%
Not treated fairly	10%	16%	12%	13%	13%
Don't know/refusal	6%	3%	5%	3%	4%
Total survey respondents	1025	998	992	835	833

*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-14	Jan-15	Sep-15	Oct-16	Oct-17
Yes	81%	82%	86%	86%	85%
No	12%	13%	10%	11%	11%
Don't know/refusal	7%	5%	4%	3%	4%
Total survey respondents	1025	998	992	835	833

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

<sup>2</sup> Additional tables showing the responses to these key questions by gender, age and religion of respondents are available in the accompanying spreadsheet.

## Appendix 2: Methodology and Notes

### Methodology:

Five questions were commissioned by the Police Ombudsman's Office for inclusion in the October 2017 NISRA Omnibus Survey.

The survey sample was drawn from the Pointer Database of private addresses. 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 periods were Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> October to Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> November 2017 and Monday 6<sup>th</sup> November to Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> December 2017. From an eligible sample of 1,870 individuals, 938 interviews were achieved, giving a response rate of 50%.

In previous years weighting factors were applied in order to compensate for sampling bias whereby the chances of individuals living in larger households being selected for interview was lower than for those in smaller households. The weighting adjusted the results to those that would have been achieved if the sample was drawn from a random sample of adults rather than addresses. Weighting factors were applied to this year's data in relation to the age profile of household member. The divergence from the census-based mid-year population estimates has become so marked that it is felt the use of the new weight outweighs this minor drawback.

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. 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.

### 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.

An excel spreadsheet has been published along with this report (Accompanying Excel Spreadsheet October 2017). The tables in this spreadsheet provide more trend information as well as a breakdown of the answers to each of the questions asked in the survey by gender, age and religion of respondents.

We are always keen to receive feedback on all our statistical publications. If you have any feedback or comments on this report we would like to hear them. Please contact us by email at: [info@policeombudsman.org](mailto:info@policeombudsman.org) or see our alternative contact details on the back page of this report.



Additional copies of this and other publications are available from:  
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These publications and other information about the work of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland are also available on the Internet at:  
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