



Department  
for Education

# **A survey of customers who contacted the Department for Education with regard to a complaint about a school: Year 2**

**Research Report**

**June 2015**

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## Background and Method

A customer survey was undertaken among complainants who contacted the Department for Education (the department) with a complaint about a school to explore their experience and satisfaction with the service. This report summarises the results for the second year of the survey, which covers the period from 1<sup>st</sup> August 2013 to 31<sup>st</sup> July 2014.

Over this period, which was the department's second year running this service, c1,900 complaints about schools were received. Of these just under 200 were accepted for further, more detailed consideration, while the remainder were referred back to the local school complaints process.

A short questionnaire was disseminated among complainants referred back to the local school complaints process, henceforth referred to as 'first stage' respondents. A longer questionnaire was disseminated among complainants whose complaint was considered by the SCU or other divisions, henceforth referred to as 'full complaint' respondents.

The method applied was largely the same as that applied at the end of Year 1, with some small differences. Firstly, the fieldwork was undertaken in two tranches, at the half-year interval and at the end of the year. Therefore, respondents were completing the survey closer to the time of receiving the service in Year 2. Secondly, while in Year 1 the department conducted a standalone opt-out exercise just before the research, in Year 2 the department offered customers the opportunity to opt-out in communications at the time of delivering the service.

The questionnaires used in Year 2 were identical to Year 1, with the exception of the removal of the general satisfaction indicator among first stage complainants in Year 2. This was removed on the basis that first stage respondents were considered not to be 'receiving a service', as such, making this question inapplicable.

Where complainants had provided an email address to the department, the initial invite to take part in the survey was by email and the survey was administrated online. Where only a postal address was held, or the respondent did not reply after two reminders by email, the questionnaire was administrated by post.

The first half of fieldwork (Phase A) was undertaken between and 8<sup>th</sup> July and 26<sup>th</sup> August 2014 and the second half (Phase B) between 9<sup>th</sup> September and 20<sup>th</sup> October 2014. Each phase, three e-mail reminders and one postal reminder were issued following the initial mailings. In the latter half of fieldwork, BMG research staff contacted non respondents by telephone where a telephone number was available, reminding them to complete the survey and undertaking a small number of interviews (20) by phone on request.

The final number of customers invited to take part, after BMG removed any ineligible cases (duplicates, insufficient contact details, etc) was 1,954. A total of 449 completed surveys were received, generating a response rate of 23% overall (not adjusted for any respondents gone away or not contactable on the details they provided).

First stage complainants, i.e. those referred back to the local school complaints process, made up a larger proportion of the total population of complainants in Year 2 compared to Year 1 (approximately 90% compared to 80%). This is reflected in the survey sample achieved: 89% of Year 2 respondents are first stage respondents and 11% are full complaint respondents, compared to 79% first stage and 17% full complaint in Year 1.

More detail on numbers mailed out to and returned from each respondent type is provided in the Technical Appendix.

The findings of this survey are reported as unweighted data and so it is important to take account of variations when interpreting findings that compare total samples.. For example, when looking at comparisons of Year 2 against Year 1, it is useful to be aware of the increased proportion of first stage respondents in the Year 2 sample compared to the Year 1 sample, as set out elsewhere in this report.

## Context

It is important to note that respondents to this survey differ from standard 'customer satisfaction' research participants for a number of reasons. Firstly, they are characterised by an often extreme strength of feeling on the topics that they seek a service in relation to. Most complainants to the department are parents; their complaint concerns treatment of their child(ren), and involves sensitive issues including bullying, Special Educational Needs, and perceived school misconduct. Secondly, where the department refers the complainant back to the school, the respondent often considers that the department has not provided them with a service, irrespective of this being the department's duty. Therefore, gathering feed-back on aspects of service can be problematic. Further, even where a complaint is fully considered and the customer receives an outcome from the department, the customer may still consider that they have not received an outcome since the outcome may not (yet) have led to a change impacting their personal circumstances or those of their child. This is reflected in the finding that, among the 51 full complaint respondents (i.e. who have received an outcome) in Year 2, 12% consider their complaint resolved but a larger 35% consider their complaint to be ongoing.

This report contains a small number of comparisons of findings across Year 1 and Year 2, and between the last 6 months and first 18 months of operation, where differences appear significant. The scope for analysis at the half year point is limited given sample size, but it was undertaken to test for any early indications of the impact of service developments introduced during this time. These service developments are summarised

below as context. The same survey in 2015 is likely to be important in establishing how these changes have fed through to the customer experience after they have bedded in.

The department has, in 2014:

- Restructured fortnightly team meetings to focus upon performance and continuous improvement.
- Introduced a live case tracker spreadsheet which case managers update daily, establishing the number of live cases, stage, age and ownership.
- Introduced Case Conferencing and a streamlined approach to decision quality-checking.
- Begun sending shorter, summarised decision reports to customers, to increase accessibility and speed up the decision-writing process.
- Increased the use of telephones (channel shift): First stage cases have been handed to the National Helpline to attempt clearance using the telephone. This aims to increase clarity on the need to exhaust the local process and enables staff to ask questions and provide guidance to complainants.
- Reviewed the end-to-end process and changed letter templates.

# Summary of Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis

## Key Drivers of Satisfaction

The multi-variate approach used (random forest) is described fully in a technical appendix available on request. The analysis was only undertaken among full complaint respondents this year, given that first stage respondents are no longer asked the overall satisfaction question.

The analysis indicates that this year, across all full complaint respondents who completed a survey, the strongest predictor of satisfaction was being **confident that consideration of the complaint was fair and impartial**<sup>1</sup> whereby those most confident had higher overall levels of satisfaction. Other strong predictors of satisfaction include the case manager having a clear understanding of the desired outcome, confidence in the staff doing their best to help, the case manager communicating an accurate reflection of the complaint, and confidence that the complaint was taken seriously.

Satisfaction with the time taken to reach an outcome was also an important variable among full complaint respondents, as it was last year. However, this year the results suggest that the most significant improvements in satisfaction are likely to be made through increasing confidence that consideration of the complaint was fair and impartial, and ensuring that communications reflect the accurate understanding of their complaint and what departmental staff can do to help.

## Satisfaction Levels

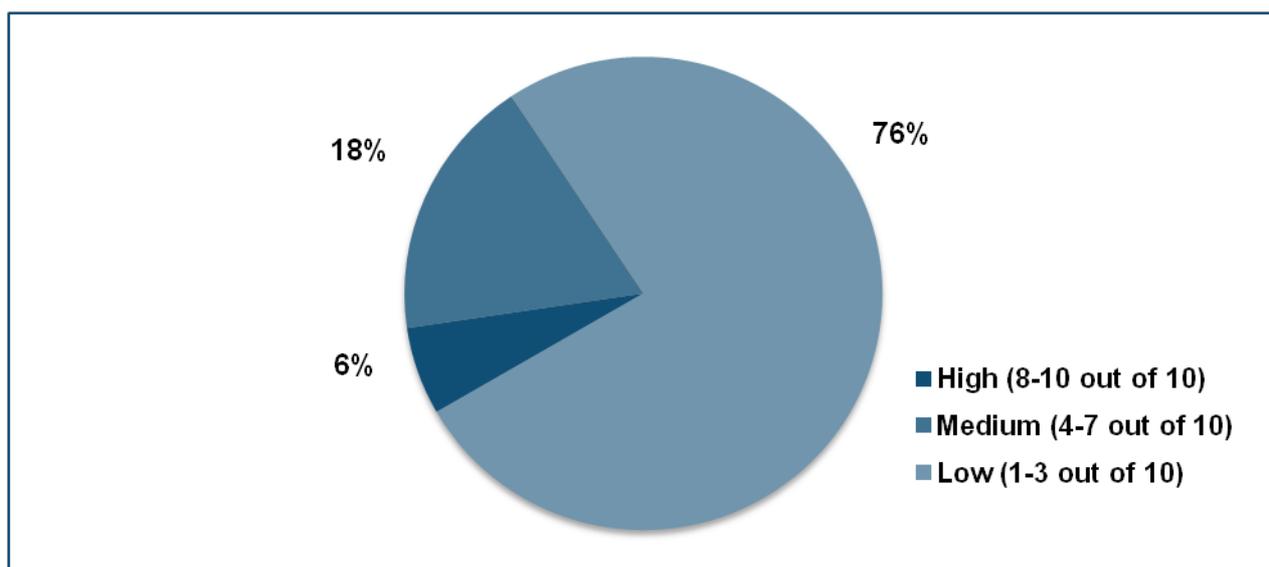
Rating their satisfaction with the overall service provided by the department on a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is very dissatisfied and 10 very satisfied, the overall mean rating among full complaint respondents was 2.5 (rounded to the nearest decimal place).

Approximately three quarters, or 76%, were dissatisfied overall (rating between 1 and 3 out of 10), 6% were satisfied (rating between 8 and 10 out of 10) and 18% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (rating between 4 and 7 out of 10).

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<sup>1</sup> In the questionnaire this is question Q4\_6.

**Figure 1: Satisfaction with the overall service provided by the department (full complaint respondents)**



Sample base: Full complaint respondents (51)

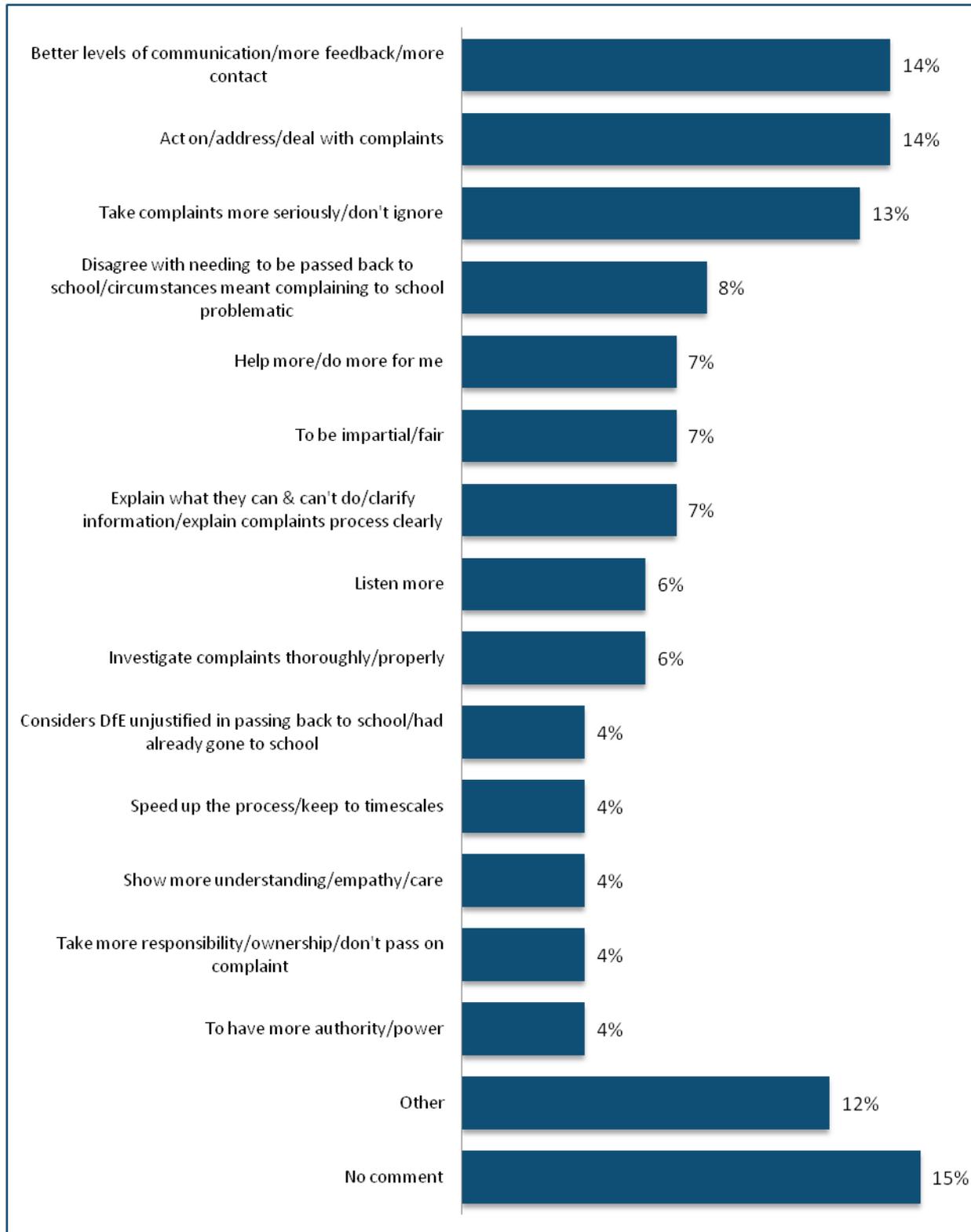
All respondents were asked to describe how the department could make them more satisfied with the service for making complaints about a school. As in Year 1, responses suggested that there is demand among customers for more communications from the service. As summarised in Figure 2 the most common response was for more contact/feedback or better levels of communication (14%), in addition to acting on or addressing complaints (14%), and taking complaints more seriously or not ignoring them (13%).

Other suggestions include greater impartiality (7%), more clarity on what can and cannot be achieved through the process (7%), more help (7%), more thorough investigation of complaints (6%) and to listen more (6%).

Around one in ten (9%) first stage respondents in Year 2 mentioned disagreeing with the need to be passed back to the school or the circumstances being too problematic to allow being passed back. In the most recent 6 months likewise 9% mentioned disagreeing with this. In both instances this is a higher proportion than the percentage saying this in Year 1 when 4% gave this response.

First stage respondents were significantly more likely to say 'help more/do more for me' (8%) than full complainants (0%). But levels of endorsement for a number of other suggestions were significantly higher among full complaint respondents than first stage. This is particularly so in respect of the need to be impartial/fair (20% of full complaint respondents mentioned this, compared to 5% of first stage respondents); the need to have a single point of contact/dedicated contact (12% compared to 2%); and the need to speed up the process or keep to timescales (12% compared to 3%).

**Figure 2: Views on how the department can increase satisfaction (all respondents)**



Sample base: All respondents (449). Note: Responses were collected on an unprompted basis, and thematically coded, into one or more codes, from verbatim responses. The chart includes responses mentioned by 4% or more respondents.

15% gave no comment on what could be improved, which is significantly higher than in Year 1, when 10% gave no comment.

Encouragingly, there has been a significant decrease in the proportion of respondents who suggest that the department should speed up the process/keep to timescales this year (4% in Year 2, from 7% in Year 1). The trend continues into the most recent 6 months, when only 2% suggested that the department should speed up the process/keep to timescales.

The survey looked at satisfaction with different aspects of service in more detail for full complaint respondents, since these have had most contact with the service. When asked to consider aspects of service from the case manager specifically, respondents expressed most satisfaction with the use of appropriate communication formats, 20% being satisfied and 44% either satisfied or neutral<sup>2</sup>. This compares with 32% who were satisfied or neutral in respect of having the same case manager throughout or a well-managed transition if there was a change of case manager; 28% who were satisfied or neutral concerning being kept informed on progress/requirements; and 24% who were satisfied or neutral about the case manager understanding the desired outcome.

Full complaint respondents were also asked to rate their satisfaction with the communications received from their case manager<sup>3</sup> across seven aspects: timeliness, transparency, accurate reflection of the complaint, clarity, politeness, professionalism, and tone. In each case they also rated the importance of this aspect.

Satisfaction ratings were highest for politeness, tone, clarity and professionalism.

Professionalism is one of the higher ranked aspects in terms of its importance, so higher than average satisfaction on this variable is positive.

However, other aspects considered highly important by customers generated lower than average satisfaction levels, including accurate reflection of the complaint and transparency. An improvement in these variables would be likely to generate higher satisfaction among those allocated a case manager.

## **Willingness to Advocate the Service to Others**

To explore advocacy of the service, all respondents were asked how they would speak to other people about the department and how it handles school complaints. As shown in Figure 3, 40% would be critical without being asked, 31% if they were asked, such that 70% (accounting for rounding) would be critical of the department overall. 18% would be neutral while 7% would speak highly about the department and how it handles school complaints (5% if they were asked and 2% without being asked).<sup>4</sup>

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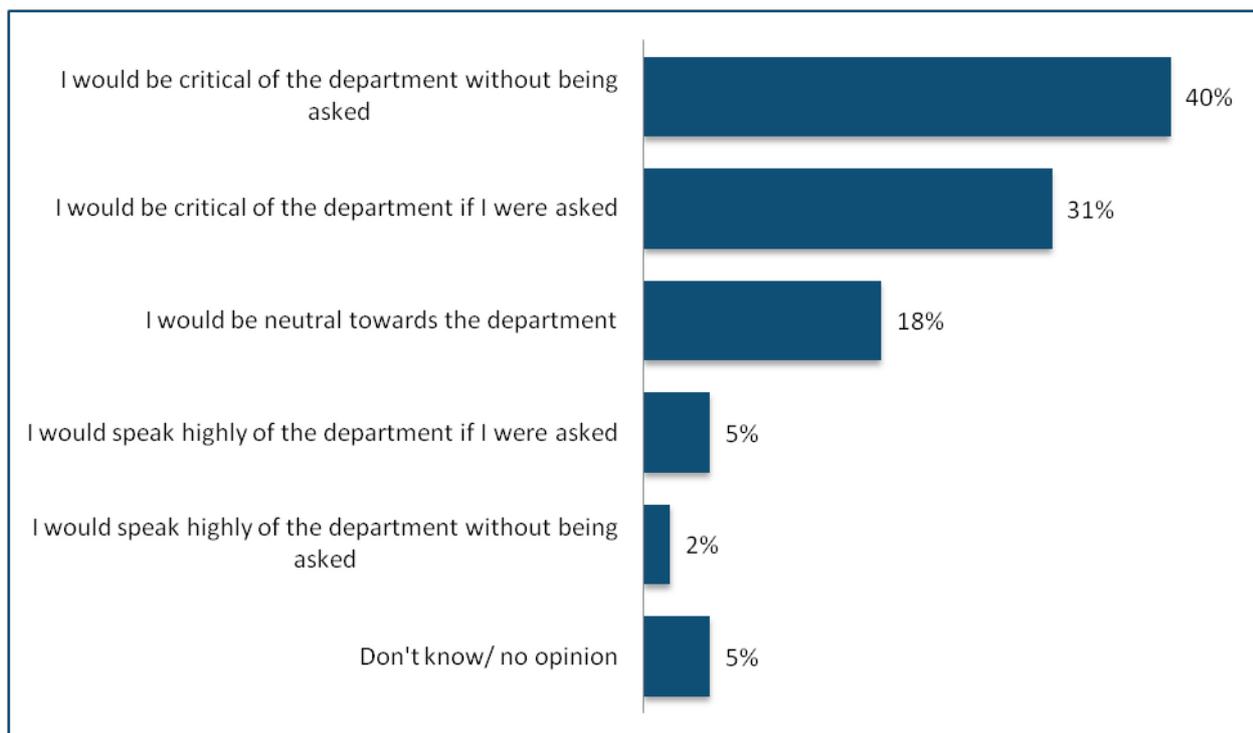
<sup>2</sup> Those rating 4-10 out of 10 in terms of satisfaction.

<sup>3</sup> Staff member allocated to a complainant where the complaint is being considered by the department.

<sup>4</sup> Please note that these findings are shown in summarised format in Figure 10 later in this report. Figure 10 combines these responses into three bandings (speak highly/neutral/critical) and also compares full and first stage complainants against each other.

5% were unsure or had no opinion here.

**Figure 3: Advocacy of the service (all respondents)**



Sample base: All respondents (449).

As last year, first stage respondents appear marginally more positive in terms of advocacy than full complaint respondents, but the differences are not statistically significant: 7% state that they would speak highly of the department either with or without being asked, compared to 6% of full stage respondents. In addition, 70% of first stage respondents would be critical of the department and how it handles school complaints, compared to 75% of full complaint respondents. These are minor differences, and contribute to a general picture of a customer base with largely homogenous views of the service.

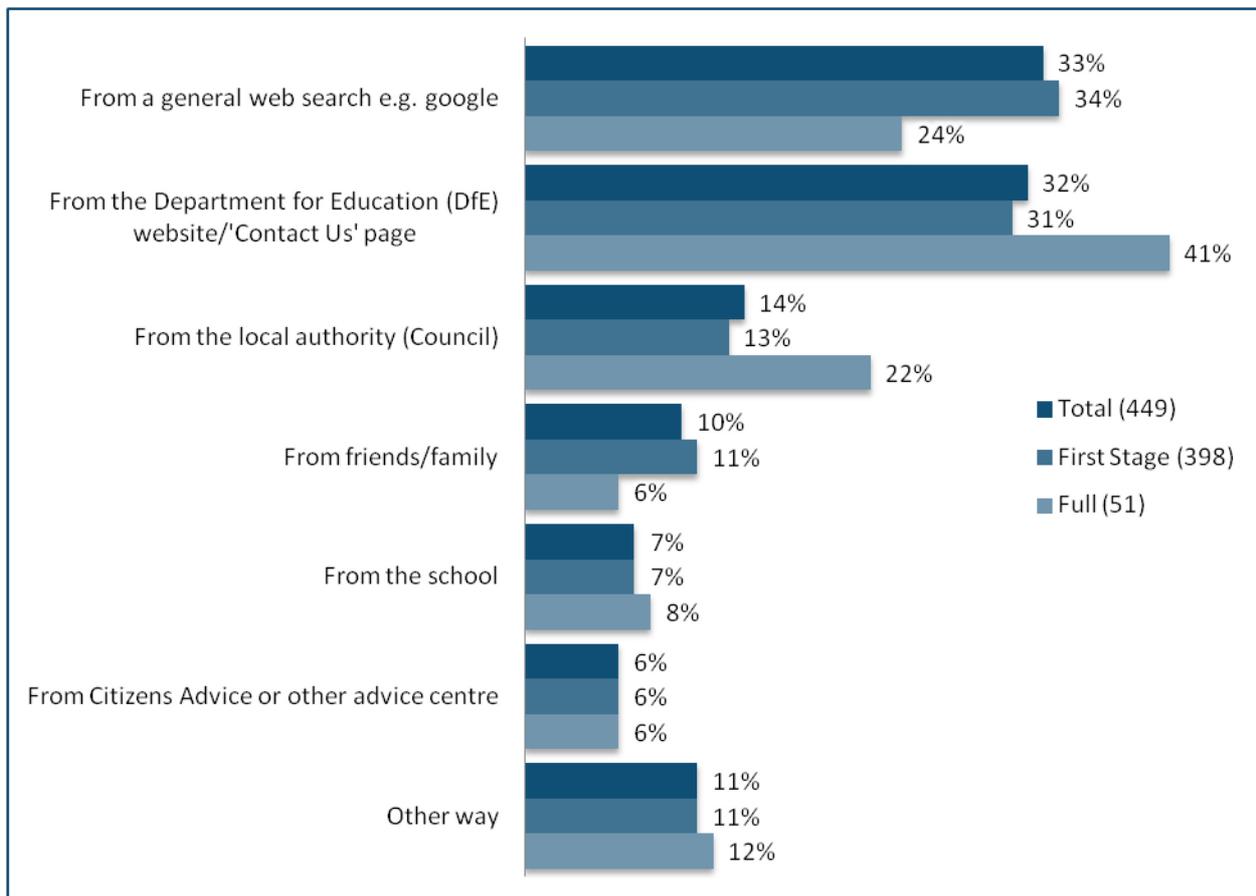
## Making Contact

For 84% of respondents, this was their first complaint (84% of first stage and 82% of full complaints). The remainder can be divided equally between those who had made one previous complaint (7%), and those who had made two or more previous complaints (7%). 2% could not recall. This question related to separate complaints, not contact about the same one. The number of respondents who had made a previous complaint was marginally higher in Year 2 (14%) than Year 1 (11%).

The largest proportion of respondents found out about how to make a complaint to the department about a school from a general web search (33%) and from the department's website or 'Contact Us' page (32%). Third most likely was from the local authority (14%).

As shown in Figure 4, these findings were similar among first stage and full complaint respondents, with no significant differences between the two groups.

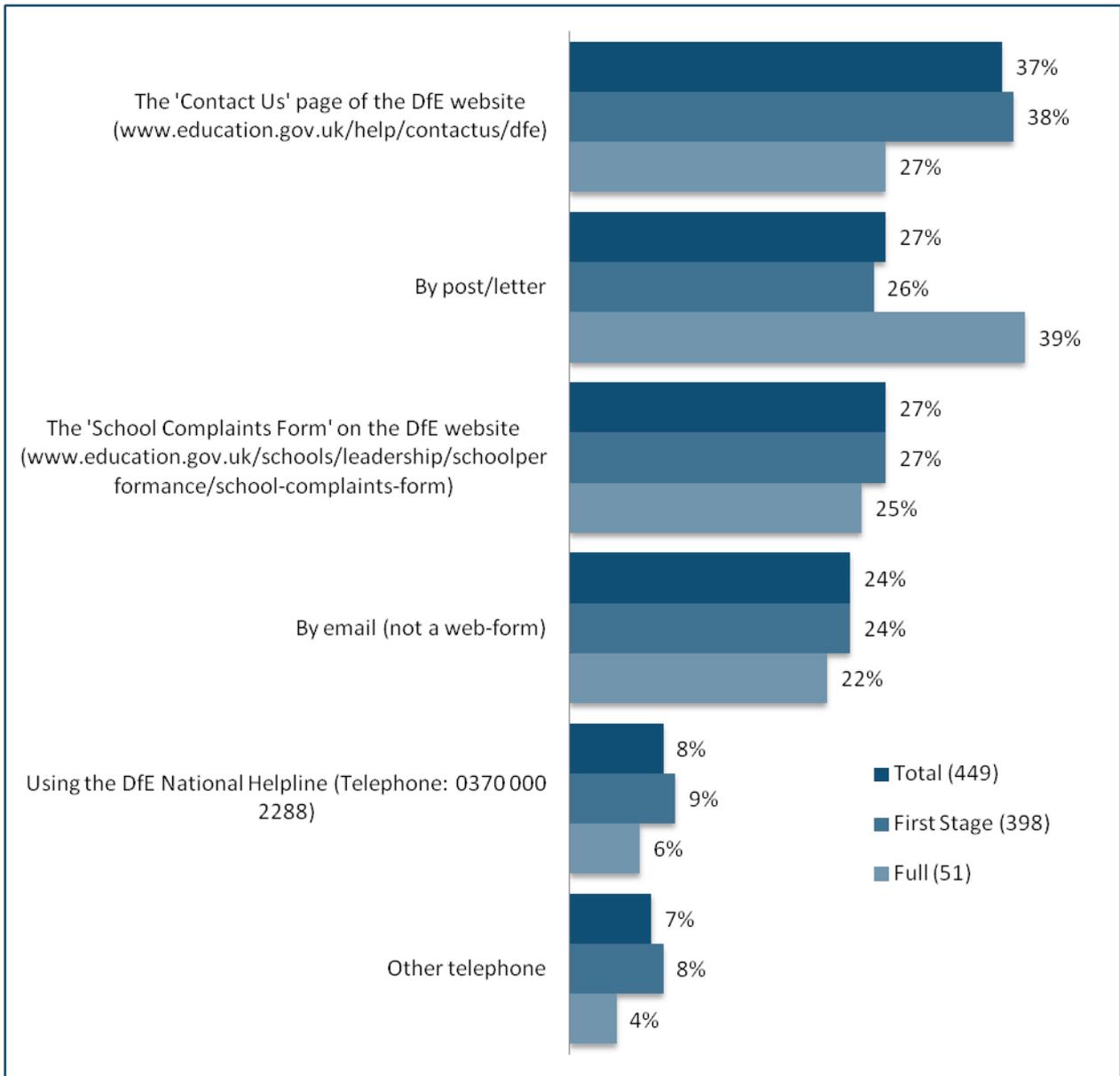
**Figure 4: How first found out about how to make a complaint (all respondents compared by complainant type)**



Sample bases: Shown in brackets

Looking at the next step of making a complaint to the department, it is common for complainants to use multiple channels to do this. The 'Contact Us' page remains the main channel in Year 2. As many as 37% contacted the department via the 'Contact Us' page of the website, 27% contacted the department by post, and a further 27% did so via the School Complaints form on the website. A further 24% contacted the department via other email communication (potentially mis-remembering their contact via the web-form, or referring to contact with EFA), 8% said that they used the National Helpline and 7% other phone communication.

**Figure 5: Channel(s) used to make the complaint (all respondents compared by complainant type)**



Sample bases: Shown in brackets. The chart includes responses mentioned by 4% or more respondents.

Significantly fewer complainants appear to have contacted the department by post in Year 2 (27%) compared to Year 1 (35%). This proportion is 25% in the last 6 months which is significantly lower than the 18 months previous, when 33% got in touch by post.

Conversely, significantly more are now contacting the department via the 'Contact Us' page of the website (31% in Year 1, increasing to 41% in the last 6 months).

Overall service satisfaction and advocacy levels do not differ between postal and online complainants, and throughout the survey responses generally continue to reflect similar views irrespective of the contact channel used.

On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is very difficult and 10 is very easy, the mean (average) rating for ease of finding information on how to make a school complaint was 4.4 overall (rounded to one decimal place). The mean rating was similar among first stage and full complaint respondents (4.4 and 4.3, respectively). Overall, 21% considered this easy, 45% difficult and 32% neither easy nor difficult.

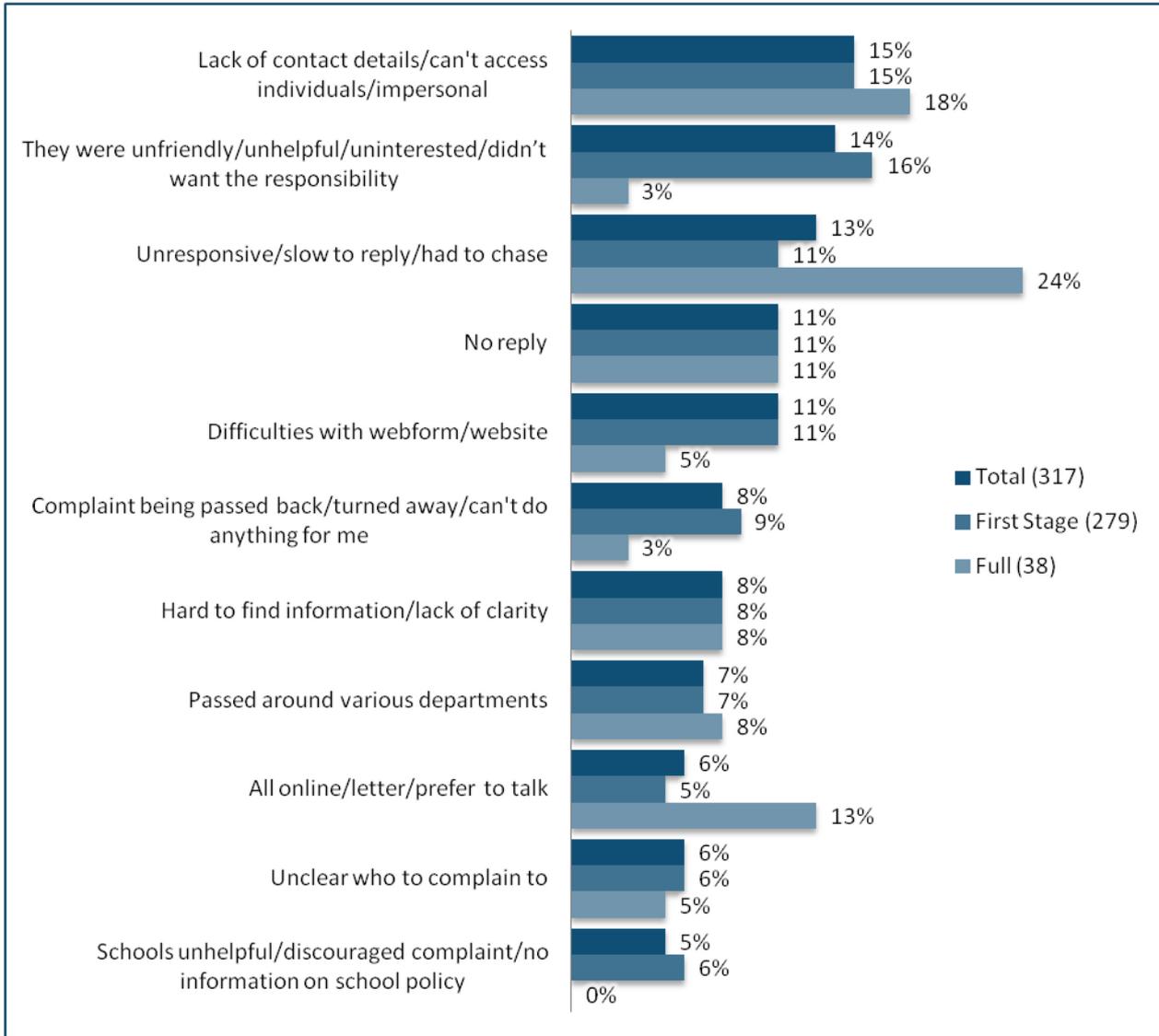
On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is very difficult and 10 is very easy, the mean rating for ease of making contact with the department was 4.7 overall, after rounding the average to one decimal place. Like last year, the results suggest that making contact is seen as very slightly easier than finding information on how to make a complaint: the rating for making contact was slightly but not significantly higher among first stage (4.8) compared to full complaint respondents (4.2). Overall, 26% considered it easy to make contact with the department, 44% difficult and 27% neither easy nor difficult.

Encouragingly, significantly fewer complainants reported that they found it difficult to make contact with the department in the last 6 months (38%) compared to the previous 18 months (45%).

Where respondents found making contact difficult, the most common reasons related to lack of contact details or not being able to access individuals/it being 'impersonal' (15%), followed by the department being unfriendly/unhelpful/uninterested/didn't want the responsibility (14%), and the service being unresponsive/slow to reply/had to chase (13%). A further reason given was the perception of the complaint being passed back/respondent turned away or that the service 'can't do anything for me' (8%).

Figure 6 summarises this feedback, showing themes mentioned by more than 4% of respondents in their verbatim responses. Full complaint respondents were significantly more likely to describe the service as unresponsive/slow to reply/had to chase (24%) than first stage respondents (11%). They were also more likely to want to talk or complain that it was all online/letter (13% compared to 5%); while first stage respondents were more likely to describe difficulty making contact in terms of the department being 'unfriendly/unhelpful/ not wanting the responsibility' (16%). This could relate to being passed back, given that only 3% of full stage respondents gave this kind of response.

**Figure 6: Reasons why making contact was considered difficult (unprompted responses)**



Sample base: Shown in brackets. All respondents who did not consider it easy to make contact with the department (rating ease of contact lower than 8 out of 10). The chart includes responses mentioned by 4% or more respondents.

# Main Report: Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis

## Key Driver Analysis

Random Forest analysis was applied where appropriate to help identify the main influences on satisfaction among customers. The Random Forest technique is suited to identifying drivers where the dependent variable (i.e. variable being tested) is categorical (does not have a numeric value), and for a sample base of this size.

The analysis indicates that across full complaint respondents who completed a survey in Year 2, the strongest predictor of satisfaction is **confidence that consideration of the complaint was fair and impartial** (Q14\_6 on the questionnaire), whereby fairness and impartiality is most likely to accurately predict overall satisfaction when all variable interactions in the model are taken into account.

Among other strong predictors of satisfaction are **satisfaction with the case manager having a clear understanding of the desired outcome** (Q17\_2) and **confidence that the staff did their best to help** (Q14\_7).

The relative 'influence' of the different variables across these samples is summarised in the Figures 7 and 8 below. The scale used is known as 'permuted variable importance'. This has no definable limits and the relative point of each variable on the scale is more important than the point on the scale in itself.

The zero point is important in that above this variables are considered to be important predictors of satisfaction, while at zero and below they are not. Thus the variables in bold text in Figure 7 are an influence on satisfaction, while the variables not in bold are not an influence according to this analysis.

Therefore, Figures 7 and 8 show that the complaint being seen to be considered in a way that is fair and impartial is the factor which is most likely to influence whether a respondent is satisfied or not with the service received, across full complaint respondents.

Please note that advocacy (how respondents talk to others about the department) was excluded from the variables tested for influence on satisfaction, on the basis of its close similarity to satisfaction, which would make the analysis tautological.

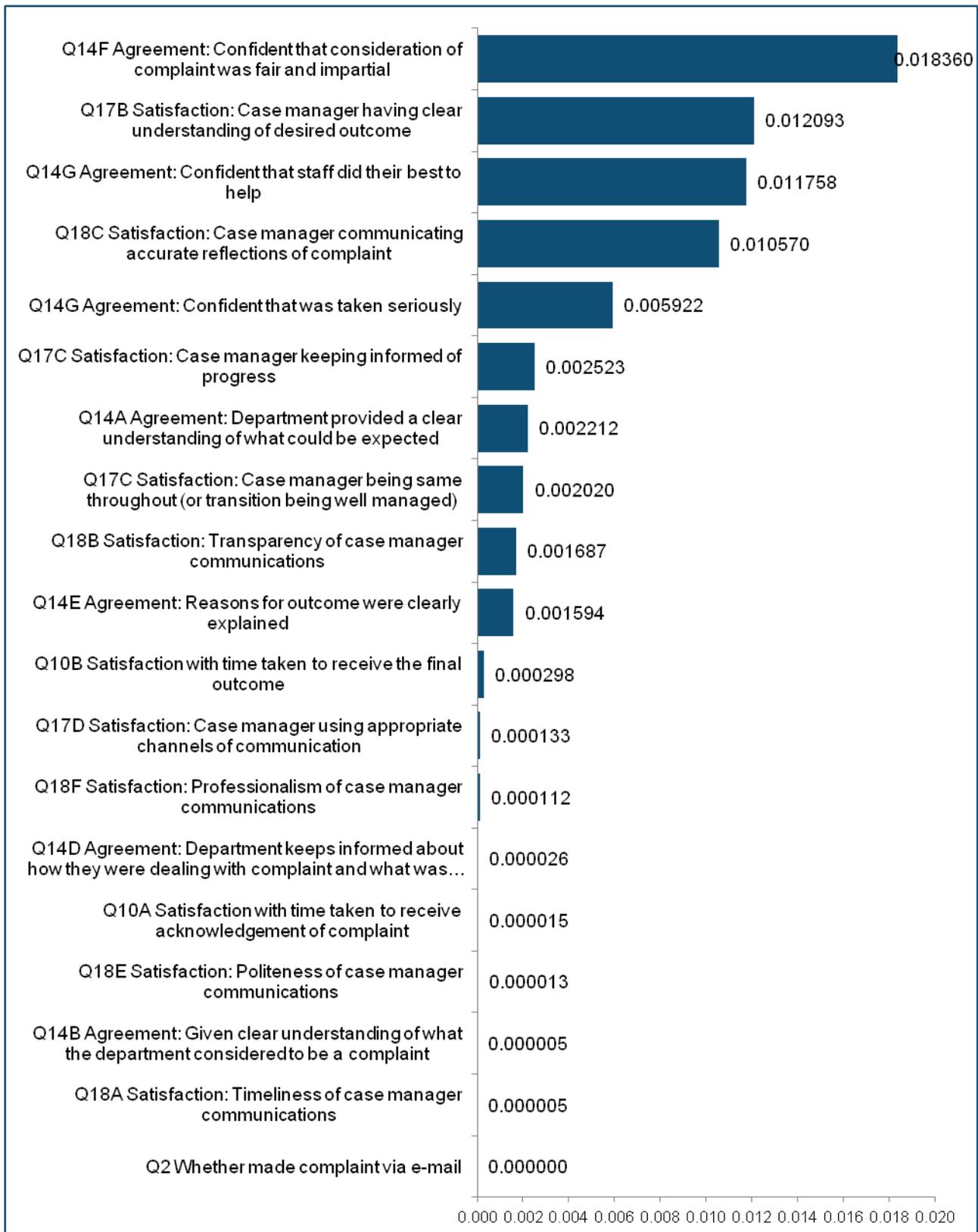
More detail on the technical aspects of the Random Forest analysis undertaken is available as a Technical Appendix.

**Figure 7: Relative influence of variables identified as influential on satisfaction using 'Random Forest' driver analysis (full complaint respondents): ALL VARIABLES**

Q14F Agreement: Confident that consideration of complaint was fair and impartial	0.018360	IMPORTANT VARIABLES	
Q17B Satisfaction: Case manager having clear understanding of desired outcome	0.012093		
Q14G Agreement: Confident that staff did their best to help	0.011758		
Q18C Satisfaction: Case manager communicating accurate reflections of complaint	0.010570		
Q14G Agreement: Confident that was taken seriously	0.005922		
Q17C Satisfaction: Case manager keeping informed of progress	0.002523		
Q14A Agreement: Department provided a clear understanding of what could be expected	0.002212		
Q17C Satisfaction: Case manager being same throughout (or transition being well managed)	0.002020		
Q18B Satisfaction: Transparency of case manager communications	0.001687		
Q14E Agreement: Reasons for outcome were clearly explained	0.001594		
Q10B Satisfaction with time taken to receive the final outcome	0.000298		
Q17D Satisfaction: Case manager using appropriate channels of communication	0.000133		
Q18F Satisfaction: Professionalism of case manager communications	0.000112		
Q14D Agreement: Department keeps informed about how they were dealing with complaint and what was required from complainant	0.000026		
Q10A Satisfaction with time taken to receive acknowledgement of complaint	0.000015		
Q18E Satisfaction: Politeness of case manager communications	0.000013		
Q14B Agreement: Given clear understanding of what the department considered to be a complaint	0.000005		
Q18A Satisfaction: Timeliness of case manager communications	0.000005		
Q2 Whether made complaint via e-mail	0.000000		UNIMPORTANT VARIABLES
Q8 Dealt with EFA	0.000000		
Q2 Whether made complaint via DfE National Helpline	0.000000		
Q2 Whether made complaint via other means	0.000000		
Q2 Whether made complaint via telephone	0.000000		
Q8 Dealt with other team or department	0.000000		
Q8 Dealt with Policy Division	0.000000		
Q3 Number of complaints previously made	0.000000		
Q2 Whether made complaint via schools complaint form on DfE website	-0.000003		
Q8 Dealt with SCU	-0.000003		
Q18G Satisfaction: Tone of case manager communications	-0.000005		
Q9B Time taken to receive the final outcome	-0.000006		
Q4_1 Ease of finding information about how to make a school complaint	-0.000008		
Q4_2 Ease of making contact with the department	-0.000011		
Q8 Dealt with MPCD	-0.000012		
Q6 Progress of current complaint	-0.000013		
Q18D Satisfaction: Clarity of case manager communications	-0.000015		
Q14C Agreement: Given clear understanding of the time the process may take	-0.000028		
Q9A Time taken to receive acknowledgement of complaint	-0.000040		
Q12 Sufficiency of the amount of contact with the department in relation to the complaint	-0.000041		
Q2 Whether made complaint via 'Contact Us' on DfE website	-0.000065		

**Sample base = 51 respondents**

**Figure 8: Relative influence of variables identified as influential on satisfaction using 'Random Forest' driver analysis (full complaint respondents): ALL VARIABLES WITH AN INFLUENCE ON SATISFACTION**



Sample base = 51 respondents

## First Stage Respondents

### Sample Overview and Complaint Context

#### Sample profile overview

Just over a third (34%) of first stage respondents were male, and 62% female. 4% declined to respond.

Just 2% of first stage respondents were aged 16 to 24 years, 17% were 25 to 34 and 36% 25 to 44, 30% were 45 to 54 and 8% 55 to 64, with just 3% aged 65 years or older (again 4% not providing a response here).

16% of first stage respondents described themselves as having a disability. This is a significantly larger percentage than in Year 1 when 9% confirmed this. The Census 2011 records 10% of adults aged 16 or older in England as having a disability which limits day to day activities 'a lot'.

### Making Contact

Just over a third of first stage respondents had found out about how to make a complaint via a general internet search (34%) and only slightly fewer from the department's 'Contact Us' page (31%). Smaller proportions mentioned the local authority (13%), friends/family (11%), the school (7%), and other ways (11%), which included Ofsted and parent partnerships.

Looking at access into the service, just under two fifths of first stage respondents used the department's 'Contact Us' page (38%) while just over a quarter used the School Complaints Form on the department's website (27%). A similar proportion contacted the department by post (26%). Just under one in ten used the department's National Helpline (9%) and 8% considered they had contacted the department via another telephone channel. These contact methods were largely similar to Year 1, with the exception of contact by post which had reduced significantly to 26% from 35% in Year 1. In the second half of the year, more first stage respondents had used the 'Contact Us' page (42%) than in the first half (32%).

Like last year it was common to have used multiple channels of access into the service. For example, among those known to have contacted the department through some online means, 45% specified that they had used the 'Contact Us' webpage, 32% the 'School Complaints Form' and 28% another email<sup>5</sup>, but also 12% considered that they had sent a letter and 6% had used the National Helpline.

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<sup>5</sup> Other email addresses are not publicised so this may figure may include emails that respondents have mis-sent to other parties, or it may refer to emails to the EFA service.

Respondents were asked to use a scale of 1 to 10 to rate ease of finding information on how to make a complaint to the department about a school, and ease of making contact with the department. Ease of finding information on how to make a complaint was rated at 4.4 out of 10 by first stage respondents (when the average is rounded to one decimal place). In percentage terms, 46% rated ease of finding information on how to make a complaint as difficult (1-3 out of 10), 22% as easy (8-10 out of 10) and 30% as neither/nor (4-7 out of 10). Slightly higher rated was ease of making contact, at 4.8 on average. This reflected 42% who rated making contact as difficult, 27% as easy and 28% as neither/nor.

Among first stage respondents who would be critical when speaking of the department, finding information was rated at 3.9 out of 10 and 4.0 out of 10 for making contact, while ratings for these were significantly higher among respondents who would be neutral or positive when speaking about the department.

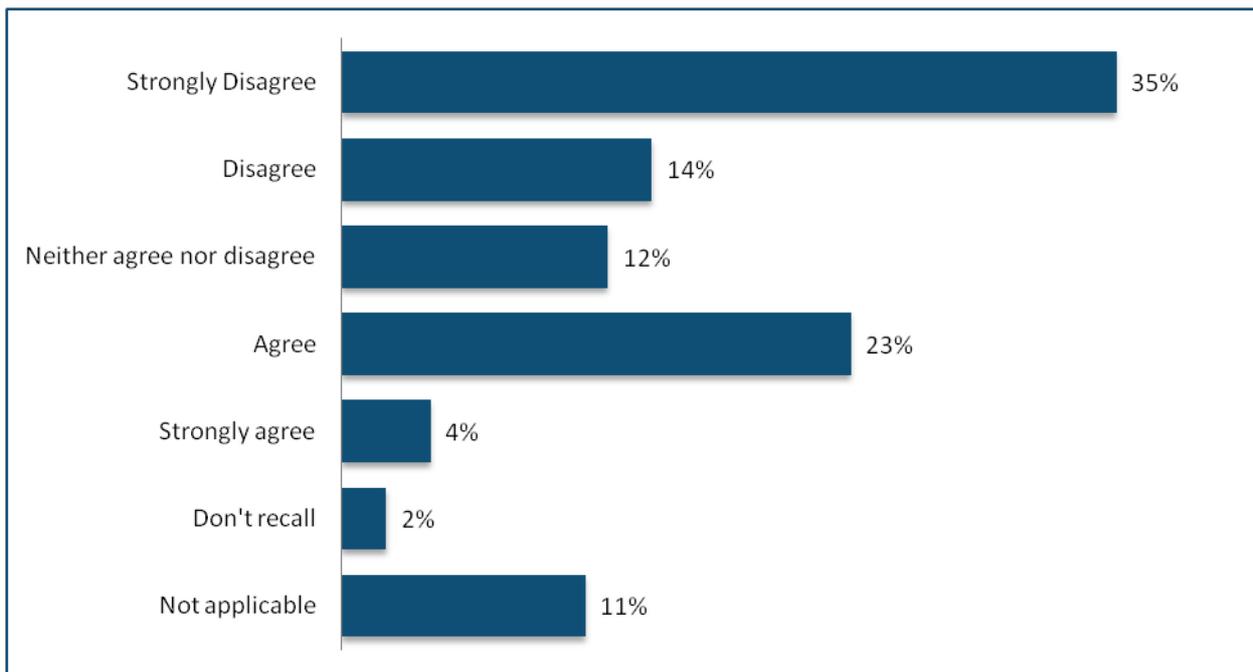
The two main reasons given by first stage respondents for finding it difficult to make contact were 'they were unfriendly/unhelpful/uninterested'(16%) and lack of contact details or not being able to access individuals (15%). Receiving no reply was mentioned by 11%. Likewise 11% mentioned unresponsiveness, a slow reply or having to chase, and 11% mentioned having difficulties with the website.

The fact that the complaint was passed back, or the respondent was 'turned away/they can't do anything for me' was mentioned as a reason why making contact was not easy by 9% of first stage respondents (similar to 12% last year). This reflects what was indicated in Year 1 responses which is that customers often cannot evaluate the service without reflecting their view of being passed back. A further 8% of first stage respondents described it being 'hard to find information/lack of clarity' while 7% considered that they had been passed around various departments.

## **Being 'Passed Back'**

Where first stage respondents were asked to consider the statement 'It was clearly explained why my complaint was being passed back to go through the school complaints process', 49% disagreed that this was the case (35% responding strongly disagree and 14% disagree). A lower proportion (27%) agreed that it had been clearly explained (4% responding strongly agree and 23% agree). The remaining 12% neither agreed nor disagreed, such that the overall balance of opinion was just slightly swayed towards disagreement (11% considered this question not applicable).

**Figure 9: Agreement with the statement 'It was clearly explained why my complaint was being passed back to me to go via the school complaints process' (first stage respondents)**



Sample base: All first stage respondents (398)

Since Year 1, there has been a significant increase in the proportion of first stage respondents disagreeing that it was clearly explained why they were passed back: 49% disagreed in Year 2 (35% stating strongly disagree and 14% disagree) compared to 36% in Year 1 (28% stating strongly disagree and 8% disagree).

There is a suggestion that explanations by phone may not be received as clearly as via the web 'Contact Us' form. 28% agreed with the statement "It was clearly explained why my complaint was being passed back to me..." where they contacted the department via the 'Contact Us' form, but this decreased significantly, to 15%, among those who used the National Helpline or other telephone communication to make contact.

Respondents critical of the service were particularly likely to disagree on this statement (59%), compared to only 15% of those who would speak positively about the department.

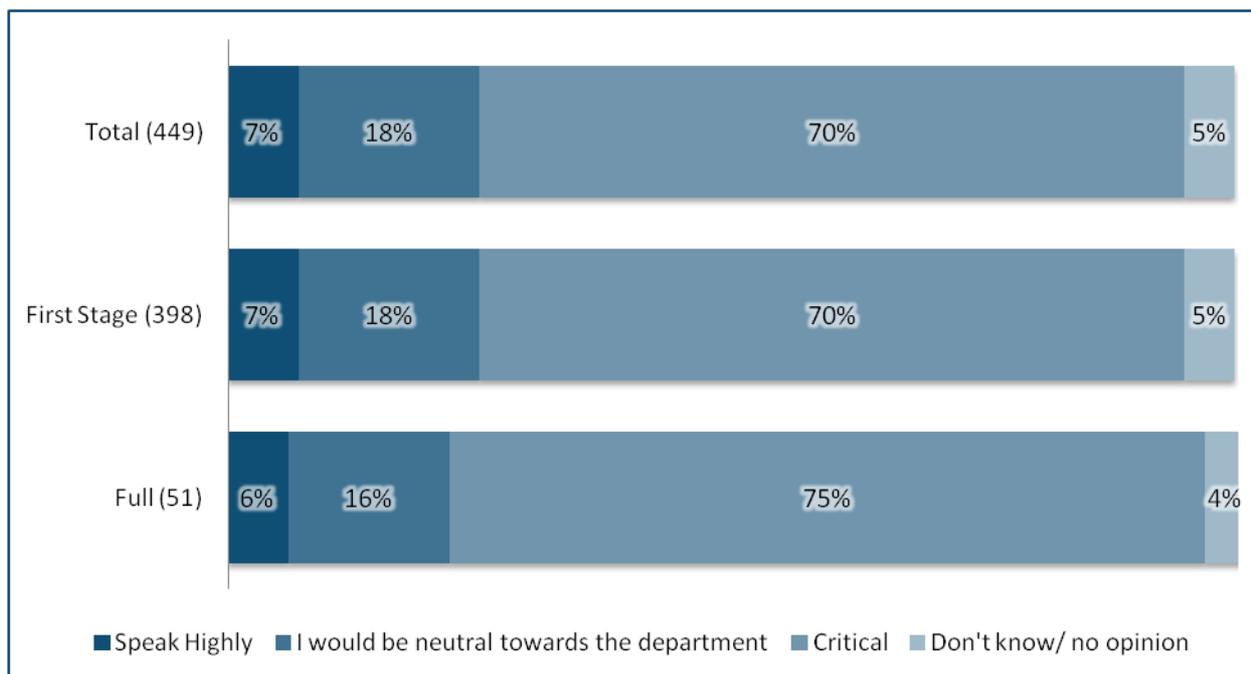
## Advocacy

Overall, first stage respondents were largely critical of the department and how it handles school complaints. Asked how they would talk of the service to other people, 40% would be critical without being asked and 30% would be critical if they were asked. 18% would be neutral while 5% would speak highly of the department if they were asked and 2% would speak highly even without being asked.

Figure 10 below shows a comparison of advocacy by first stage and full complaint respondents in Year 2. This reflects a fairly homogenous picture across the two types of

complainant (7% and 6% respectively would speak highly and 70% and 75% would be critical, when combining ‘if asked’ and ‘without being asked’).<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 10: Advocacy: How respondents would speak to others about the department (all respondents compared by complainant type)**



Sample base: Shown in brackets

First stage respondents suggested that ‘more contact’ should be a focal point for service improvement going forwards. When asked how the department could make them more satisfied with the service for people who wish to make a complaint about a school, 15% said better levels of communication/more feedback/more contact. This echoes the main suggestion given in Year 1, when a slightly higher 18% mentioned wanting this.

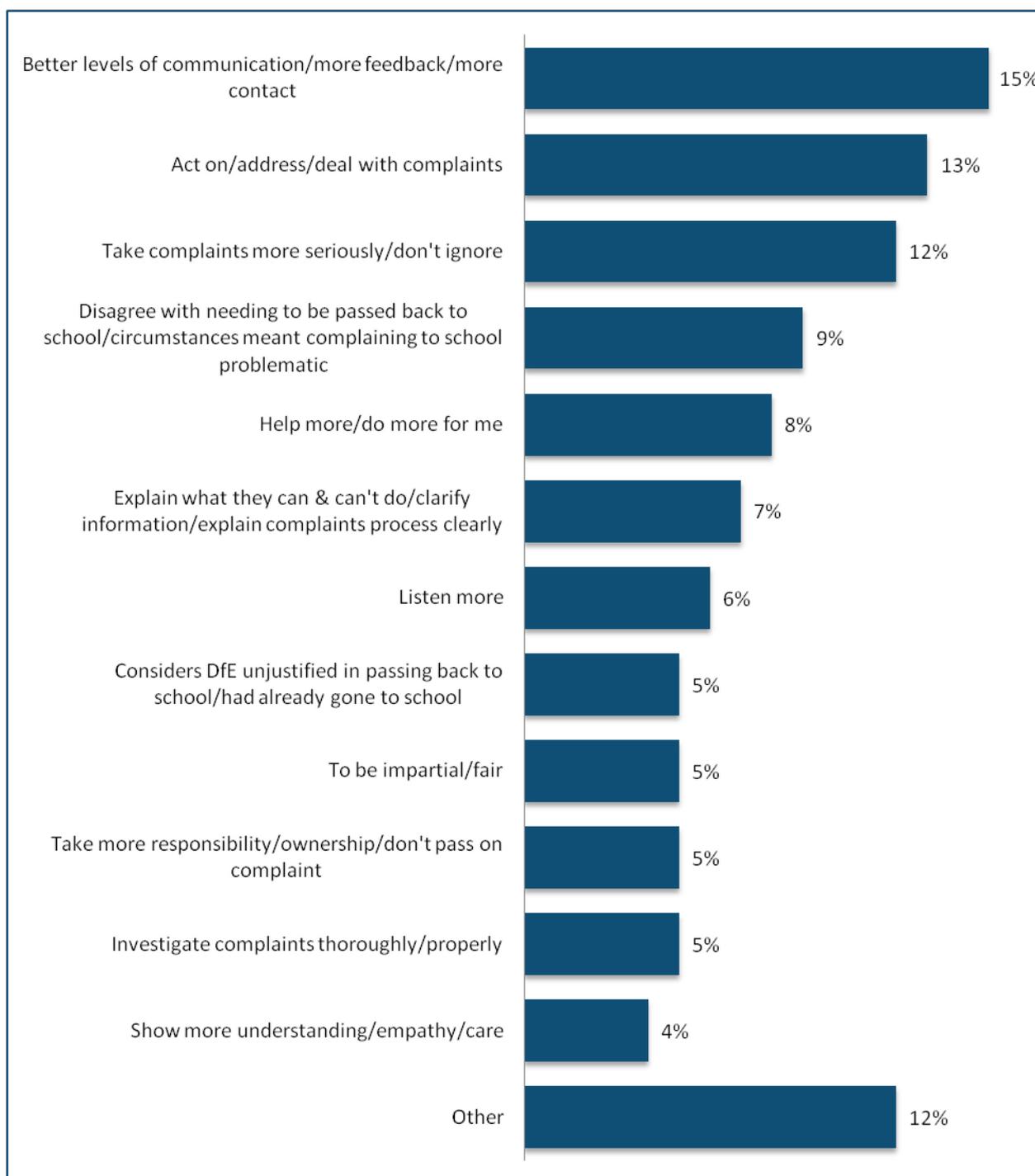
A further 13% felt that the service should ‘act on/address/deal with complaints’ and 12% that it should ‘take complaints more seriously/don’t ignore’.

Areas for improvement mentioned by less than 10% of first stage respondents included suggestion for the service to help more/‘do more for me’ (8%), to explain what can and cannot be done (7%), and to listen more (6%). 9% said here that they disagreed with being passed back, or that circumstances meant that complaining to the school was problematic.

A fuller list of coded suggestions for improving the service among first stage respondents is provided in Figure 11.

<sup>6</sup> Please note that these findings are shown in more detail in Figure 3 earlier in this report. Figure 3 is based on all respondents as a combined group (i.e. the top bar of Figure 10) but breaks the findings down into individual responses, such that ‘speak highly’ is broken down as ‘I would speak highly if I were asked’ and ‘I would speak highly without being asked’.

**Figure 11: Ways the department could improve satisfaction with the service – unprompted responses (first stage respondents)**



Sample base: All first stage respondents (398). The chart includes responses mentioned by 4% or more respondents.

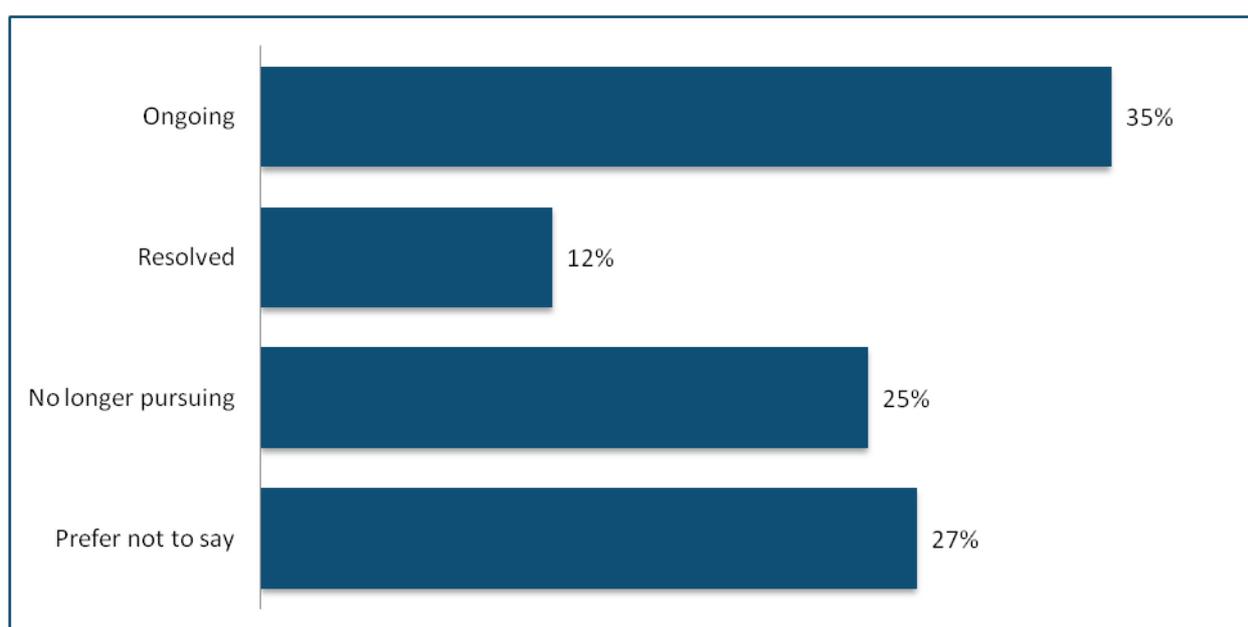
## Full Complaint Respondents

### Sample Overview and Complaint Context

#### Complaint context

Full complaint respondents were asked how they saw their complaint at the time of completing the survey, irrespective of the outcome received from the department. More than a third, or 35%, considered that their complaint was ongoing. A quarter (25%) said that they were no longer pursuing their complaint, while only 12% considered their outcome to be resolved. The remaining 27% declined to respond.

**Figure 12: Complaint status outside of the department's remit and outcome (full complaint respondents)**



Sample base: All full complaint respondents (51)

Compared to Year 1, significantly fewer full complaint respondents said that they were no longer pursuing their complaint (25% in Year 2 compared to 48% in Year 1). This is possibly a result of Year 2 respondents completing the survey closer to the time of complaint, although more also declined to respond in Year 2 (27% compared to 9% in Year 1).

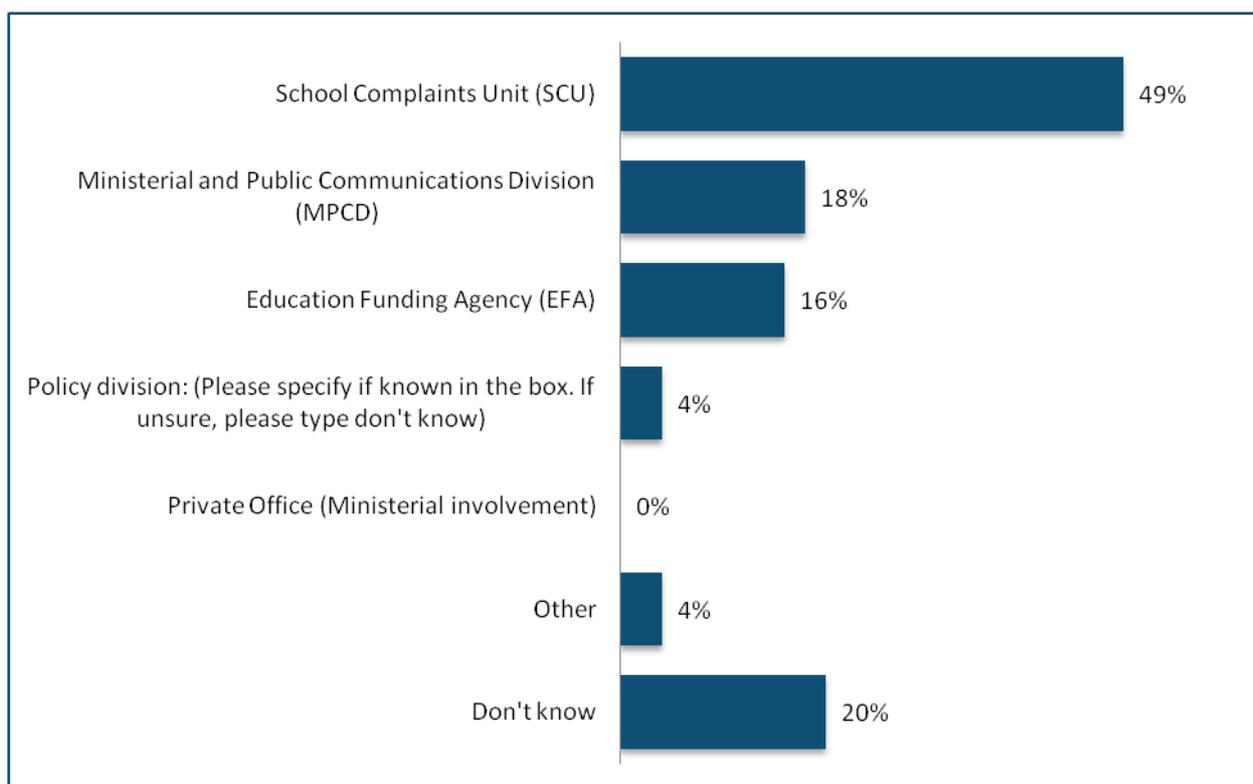
Of the 51 full complaint respondents in the survey, 43% stated that they remembered the process of being in contact with the department very well, 41% stated quite well, 10% stated not very well, and 6% not at all well (despite fieldwork being undertaken at the half-year point and at the end of the year).

Considering which team or teams of the department were involved in considering or dealing with their complaint, the most common response was the School Complaints Unit (SCU), mentioned by 49% of full complaint respondents. This was followed by the

Ministerial and Public Communications Division or MPCD (18%) and the Education Funding Agency (16%). Please note that respondents were allowed to offer multiple responses here and a small minority did so (such that Figure 13 adds up to 111%).

Responses were similar in Year 1 and Year 2, although significantly more respondents mentioned the Education Funding Agency in Year 2 (16% compared to 12% in Year 1).

**Figure 13: Team(s) of the department seen as involved in considering or dealing with the complaint (full complaint respondents)**



Sample base: All full complaint respondents (51)

### Sample profile overview

Three quarters of full complaint respondents were parents/guardians (75%), 6% were other types of complainant, and there was no information available for the remaining 20%. We anticipate that some of those uncategorised respondents are likely to be members of the general public, given that 23% of respondents were allocated to this category in the contact data in Year 1.

The majority of full complaint respondents were female (61%), while 33% were male. The remaining 6% declined to respond.

None of the respondents were aged 16 to 24 years, while 10% were 25 to 34 and 39% were 35 to 44. Almost a third (31%) fell into the 45 to 54 category, with 12% being aged 55 to 64. The remaining 8% declined to respond.

A minority of 6% of full complaint respondents considered themselves to have a disability. The Census 2011 records 10% of adults aged 16 or older in England as having a disability which limits day to day activities 'a lot'.

## **Making Contact**

Around two fifths (41%) of full complaint respondents first found out about how to make a complaint to the department about a school from the DfE website/contact us page. A further quarter (24%) found out from doing a general internet search. Around one fifth (22%) found out via the local authority. Fewer respondents mentioned other sources, including the school (8%), friends/family (6%), and Citizens Advice or another advice centre (6%) (see Figure 4 earlier in this report).

When making their complaint to the department, respondents used a range of channels, and in some cases more than one channel. The most popular channel was via post/letter (39%), followed by the 'Contact Us' page of the DfE website (27%), the 'School Complaints Form' on the DfE website (25%) and email (22%). Fewer respondents mentioned other channels, specifically the DfE National Helpline (6%), other telephone (4%). 2% of full complaint respondents used another channel, and 2% did not recall which channel they used to make their complaint. (See Figure 5 earlier in this report).

Commenting on how easy or difficult it was to find information on how to make a school complaint, on a scale of 1 to 10, full complaint respondents gave a mean score rating of 4.3, when the average is rounded to one decimal place. This broke down into 41% of respondents claiming it was difficult (1-3 out of 10), 16% easy (8-10 out of 10) and 43% neither/nor (4-7 out of 10).

Rating how easy or difficult it was to subsequently make contact with the department, respondents scored this similarly at an average of 4.2 out of 10. Almost half (53%) found it difficult, 24% found it easy, and 22% found it neither easy nor difficult. Reasons are set out in Figure 6 earlier in this report, which reflect a preference for a more personalised service, and perceptions of the service being slow to reply or not being able to help.

## **Quality of Service Received**

### **Satisfaction with time taken**

Full complaint respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with the time it took to receive an acknowledgement from the department, and the time it took to receive the final outcome according to the department, using a scale of 1 to 10 where 10 is very satisfied and 1 is very dissatisfied.

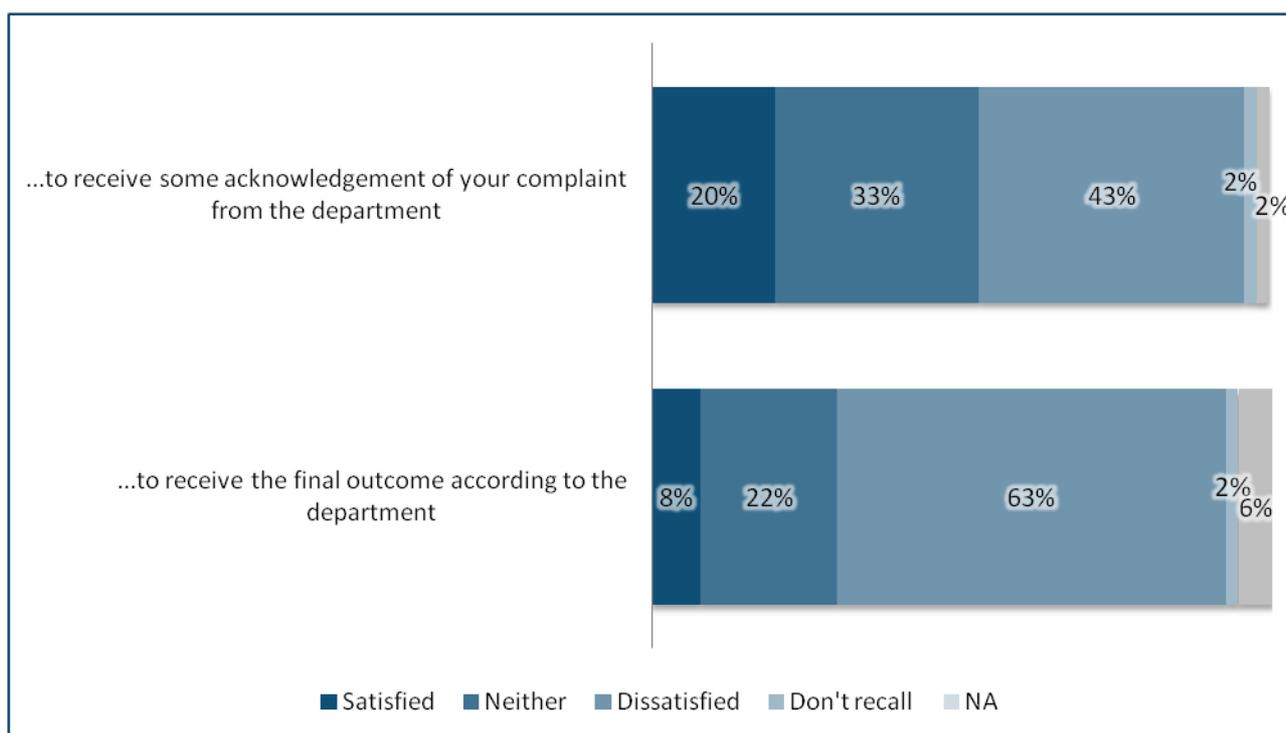
The mean rating given by full complaint respondents was 4.2 out of 10 in terms of the time to receive an acknowledgement from the department and 3.0 out of 10 in terms of receiving the final outcome from the department. Therefore, there are lower levels of

satisfaction with the length of time to a full outcome compared with the length of time to an initial acknowledgement.

In percentage terms, considering the time it took to receive some acknowledgement of the complaint, 43% were dissatisfied (rating 1-3 out of 10), 33% were neutral (rating 4-7 out of 10) and 20% were satisfied (rating 8-10 out of 10).

In relation to the time to receiving a full outcome, 63% were dissatisfied (rating 1-3 out of 10), 22% were neutral (rating 4-7 out of 10) and 8% were satisfied (rating 8-10 out of 10).

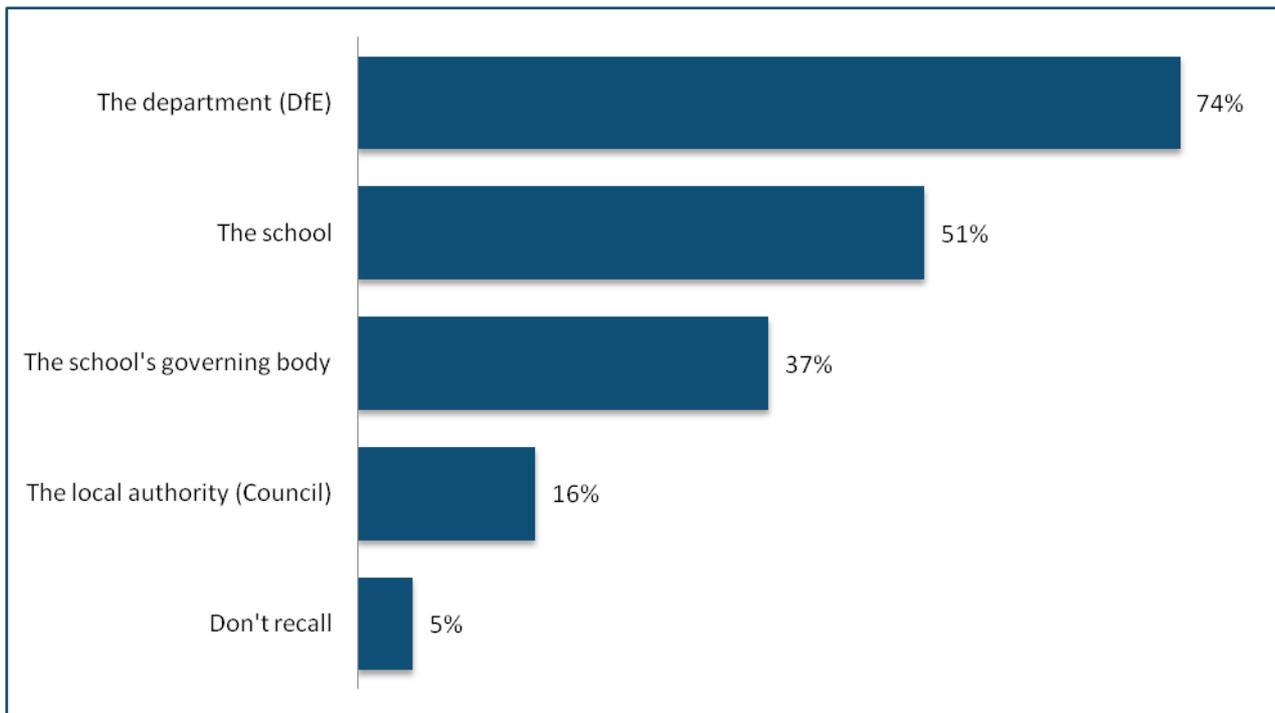
**Figure 14: Satisfaction with the length of time it took (full complaint respondents)**



Sample base: All full complaint respondents (51)

Where respondents considered that it took too long (a base of 43 respondents), 74% considered the department to be the cause of the delay. Respondents were permitted to state multiple parties. A further 51% stated the school, 37% the school's governing body, and 16% the local authority. Five percent could not recall.

**Figure 15: Party/parties considered to be the cause of the delay by those who felt that the process took too long (full complaint respondents who felt the process to outcome was too long) CAUTION – LOW BASE\***



Sample base: Full complaint respondents who considered the process too long (\*43)

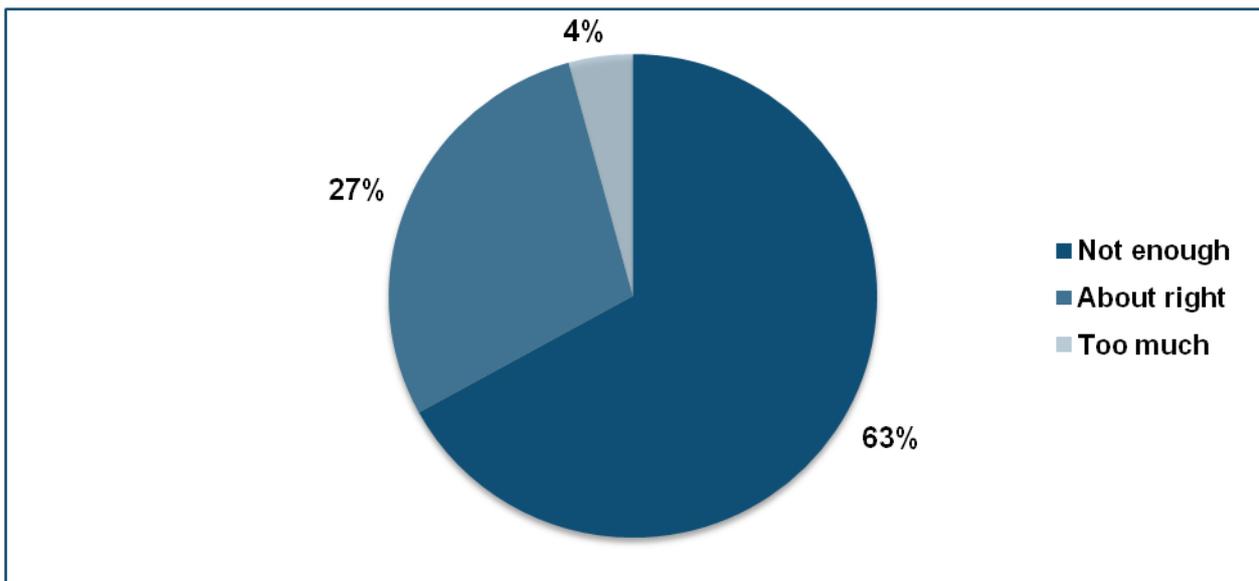
### **Other aspects of the service**

Responses from full complaint respondents suggest that they would like more contact overall from the department.

When questioned directly on this topic in the survey, 63% considered that the amount of contact they had with the department was not enough and 27% considered this about right.

Only 4% of the 51 full complaint respondents considered that they had had too much contact with the department in relation to their complaint.

**Figure 16: Whether the amount of contact with the department in relation to the complaint was not enough, about right or too much (full complaint respondents)**



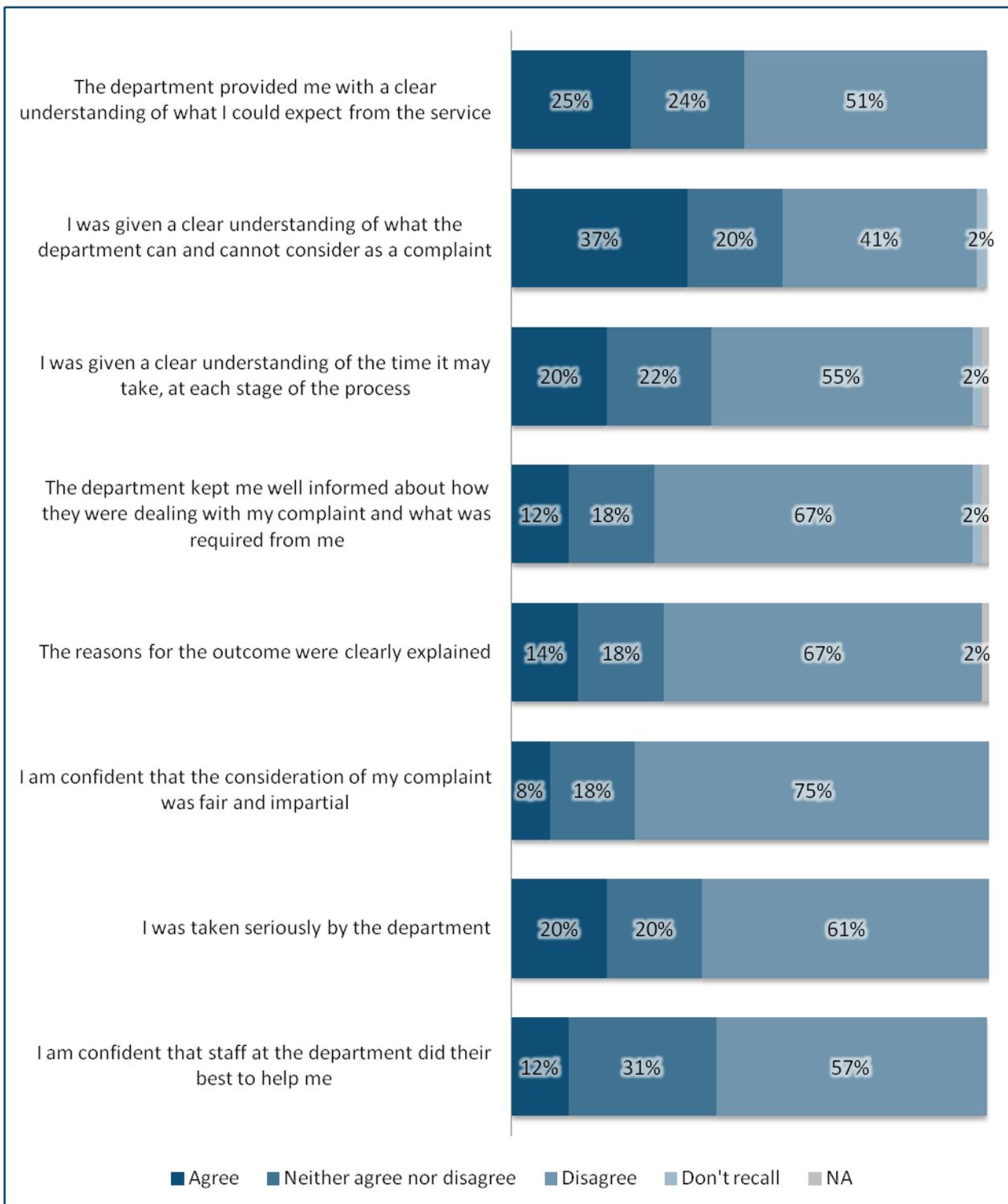
Sample base: All full complaint respondents (51)

Full complaint respondents were also asked to rate their satisfaction with a range of specific aspects of the service they received. Their feedback reflects varying levels of satisfaction by aspect of service, as set out in Figure 17.

Comparing the ratings of aspects of service against each other, respondents were most likely to agree that they were given a clear understanding of what the department can and cannot consider as a complaint (37% agree) and what could be expected from the service (25% agree).

Disagreement levels were highest with regard to having confidence that the consideration of their complaint was fair and impartial (75% disagree), that they were kept well informed (67% disagree), that the reasons for the outcome were clearly explained (67% disagree), and that they were taken seriously (61% disagree).

**Figure 17: Level of agreement with statements on aspects of the service received (full complaint respondents)**



Sample base: All full complaint respondents (51)

Those who disagreed with any of the statements listed in Figure 17 above, and who therefore felt that the service provided was not satisfactory in this area, were asked to detail why. Overall, the primary reasons for dissatisfaction largely appear to relate to perceptions of inaccurate timescales, information being vague, unclear or not detailed enough, and perceptions of a requirement for a more thorough or proper investigation.

As detailed above in this report, improving perceptions of fairness and impartiality in the consideration of complaints will be a key factor in increasing customer satisfaction overall going forwards. As shown in Table 1, respondents described their dissatisfaction on this aspect as being to do with bias towards a school (including cover-up), the department not taking it seriously or considering the case, or appearing not to investigate it fully or properly.

**Table 1: Reasons for disagreement on statements regarding aspects of service – unprompted (full complaint respondents).**

<b>Statement disagreed with CAUTION – LOW BASES</b>	<b>Reasons (responses over 10%)</b>
The department provided me with a clear understanding of what I could expect from the service (Base: 26)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information was too vague/unclear/not detailed enough (27%)</li> <li>• Not informed/received no explanations/information (19%)</li> <li>• Limited contact/communication (15%)</li> <li>• Informed that nothing could be done (15%)</li> <li>• Received no help/support (12%)</li> </ul>
I was given a clear understanding of what the department can and cannot consider as a complaint (Base: 21)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Timescales given were inaccurate (took longer) (33%)</li> <li>• Was ignored (14%)</li> <li>• Not informed/received no explanations/information (10%)</li> </ul>
I was given a clear understanding of the time it may take, at each stage of the process (Base: 28)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Timescales given were inaccurate (took longer) (36%)</li> <li>• Did not receive outcome/was forgotten (14%)</li> <li>• Information was too vague/unclear/not detailed enough (11%)</li> <li>• Not informed/received no explanations/information (11%)</li> </ul>
The department kept me well informed about how they were dealing with my complaint and what was required from me (Base: 34)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not informed/received no explanations/information (24%)</li> <li>• Limited contact/communication (21%)</li> <li>• Had to chase them for information (21%)</li> </ul>
The reasons for the outcome were clearly explained (Base: 34)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Received unsatisfactory reasons/explanation (15%)</li> <li>• Department did not understand complaint (12%)</li> </ul>
I am confident that the consideration of my complaint was fair and impartial (Base: 38)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Department was biased towards school (including cover-up) (21%)</li> <li>• Department did not understand/consider case or take it seriously (18%)</li> <li>• Incident wasn't fully/properly investigated (including lack of interest shown) (13%)</li> </ul>
I was taken seriously by the department (Base: 31)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incident wasn't fully/properly investigated (including lack of interest shown) (29%)</li> <li>• Department was biased towards school (including cover-up) (16%)</li> <li>• Department did not understand/consider case or take it seriously (16%)</li> <li>• Department made me feel like a problem/unimportant/ignored (13%)</li> <li>• Can't understand the reasoning behind decision/outcome contradicts evidence (10%)</li> </ul>
I am confident that staff at the department did their best to help me (Base: 29)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Department did nothing for me/no outcome (21%)</li> <li>• Limited contact/communication (10%)</li> <li>• Incident wasn't fully/properly investigated (including lack of interest shown) (10%)</li> <li>• Department had no knowledge of the complaint (10%)</li> </ul>

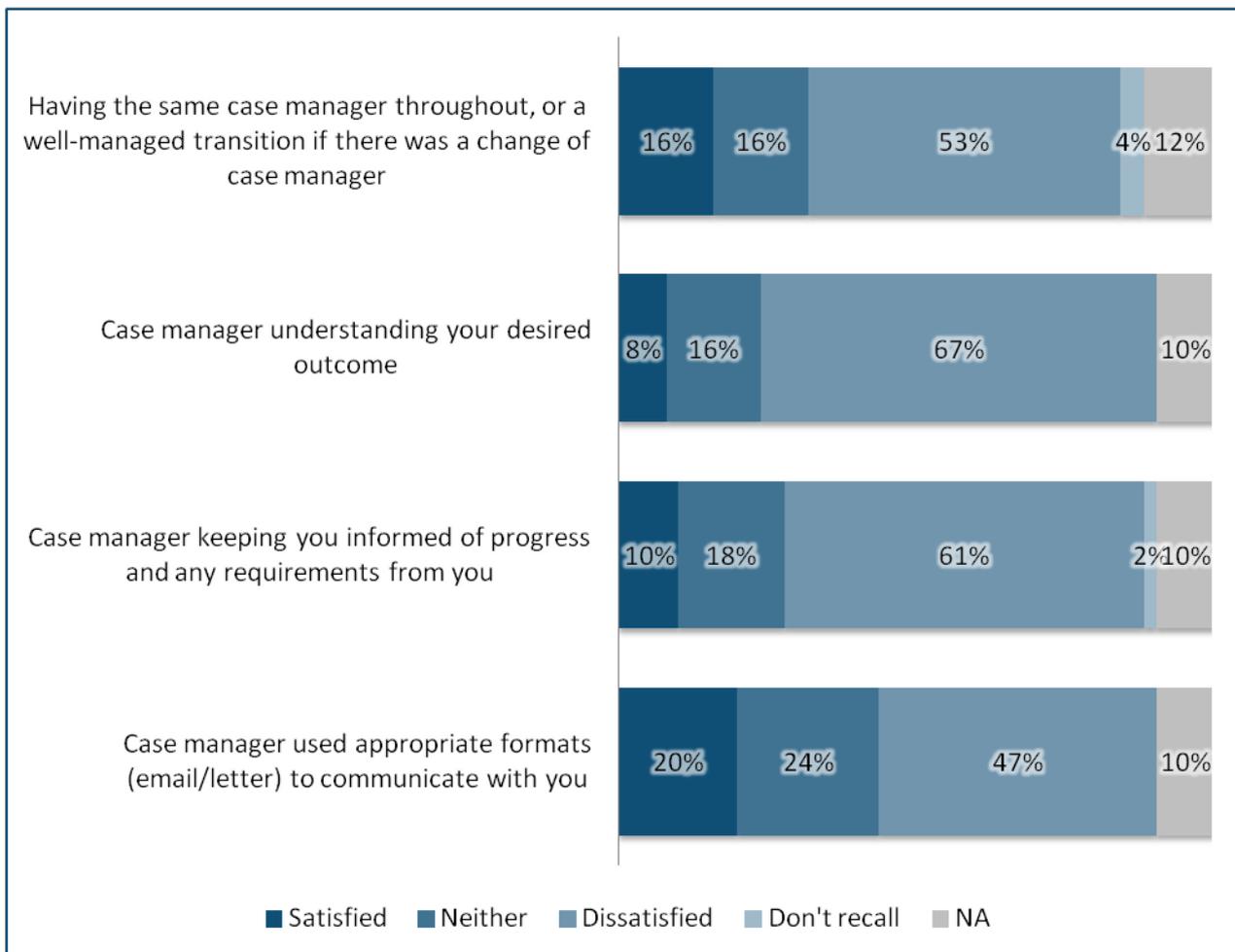
Sample base: Shown in brackets

Considering different aspects of the service received from the case manager, respondents were most satisfied with use of appropriate communication formats (20% satisfied i.e. rating this 8-10 out of 10 in terms of satisfaction). There was also a relatively high level of satisfaction with having the same case manager throughout or a well-managed transition if there was a change (16% satisfied and rating this 8-10 out of 10).

However, respondents were more likely to be dissatisfied than satisfied overall, particularly in relation to the case manager’s understanding of the desired outcome (67% dissatisfied, or 1-3 out of 10) and the case manager keeping complainants informed of progress and any requirements from them (61% dissatisfied).

The perception of the case manager having a clear understanding of the desired outcome was identified in the Key Driver analysis as one of the most important influences on overall satisfaction among full complaint respondents (See Figures 7 and 8 earlier in this report). Therefore, an improvement in this is likely to have a positive impact on satisfaction going forwards.

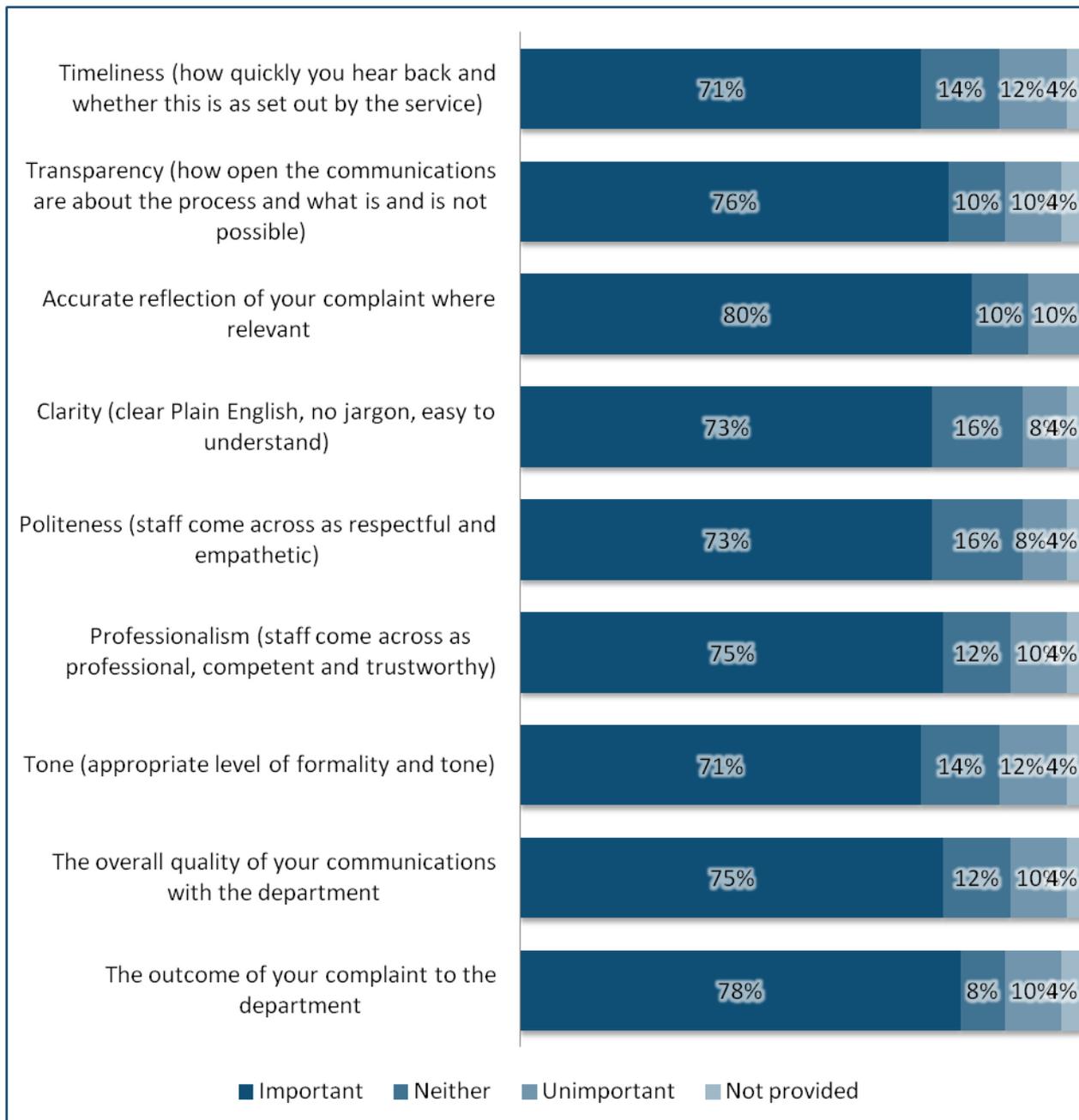
**Figure 18: Level of satisfaction with aspects of the service provided by the case manager (full complaint respondents)**



Sample base: All full complaint respondents (51)

When asked to rate how important each aspect of service is on a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is not at all and 10 is very important, complainants stated that accuracy in reflecting the complaint, the outcome of the complaint, and transparency were most important (rated 8-10 out of 10 by 80%, 78% and 76% of full stage respondents, respectively). This is followed by professionalism (75%), overall quality of communications (75%), clarity (73%) and politeness (73%). Tone and timeliness were rated as the least important aspects of service (71% rating these 8-10 out of 10 on a 1-10 importance scale).

**Figure 19: Perceived importance of aspects of the service (full complaint respondents)**



Sample base: All full complaint respondents (51). Note: Important denotes those rating 8-10 out of 10, neither = 4-7 out of 10, and unimportant = 1-3 out of 10

Figure 20 below shows satisfaction (ratings of 8-10 out of 10) against importance (also 8-10 out of 10) on aspects of service provided by the case manager. The ideal is for all variables to be as far right as possible (indicating strength on the satisfaction scale), and particularly those variables that are highest on the vertical scale, i.e. stated to be most important by respondents.

Overall, the department achieved the highest proportions of ‘good’ ratings on clarity (27%), tone (27%), politeness (27%) and professionalism (25%). All other aspects were rated as good by fewer than 14% of respondents. For example, on the aspect considered most important by respondents i.e. the case manager accurately reflecting the complaint, only 8% of respondents rated this aspect as good (8-10 out of 10).

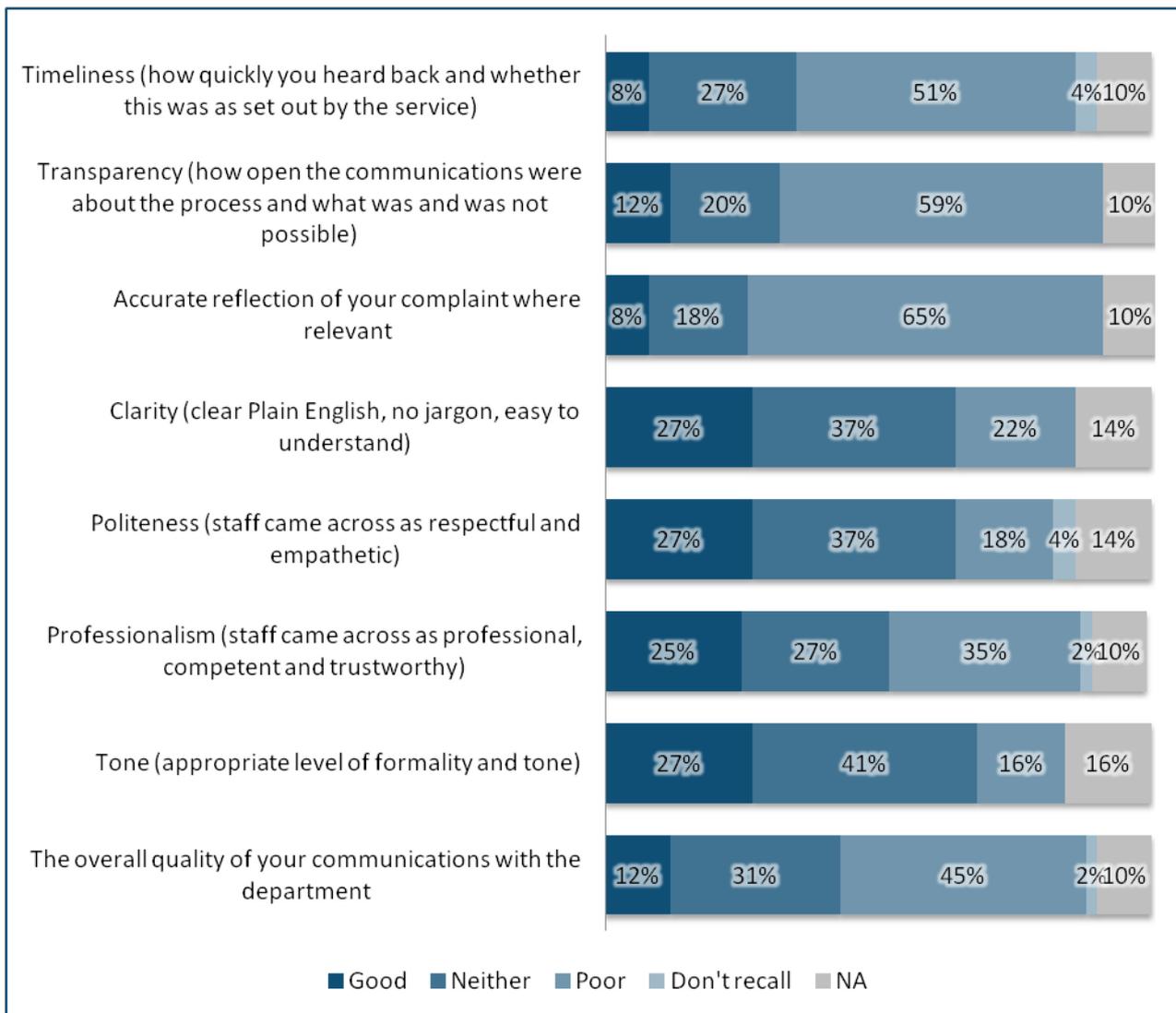
Figure 20 therefore represents an opportunity for service improvement through case managers, by increasing satisfaction with how accurately they are seen to reflect the complaint as well as transparency (i.e. how open the communications are about the process and what is and is not possible). These factors are likely to impact on perceptions of the complaint being dealt with in a thorough and impartial manner (more so than timeliness or tone for example), and in this sense they echo the findings reflected in the random forest analysis and the verbatim feedback, which emphasise the importance of these perceptions.

**Figure 20: Importance vs. Satisfaction ratings on aspects of service provided by the case manager (full complaint respondents)**



Sample base: All full complaint respondents (51). Combines Q18 & Q19, excl. outcome.

**Figure 21: Rating of the quality of communications with case manager across different aspects (full complaint respondents)**



Sample base: All full complaint respondents (51)

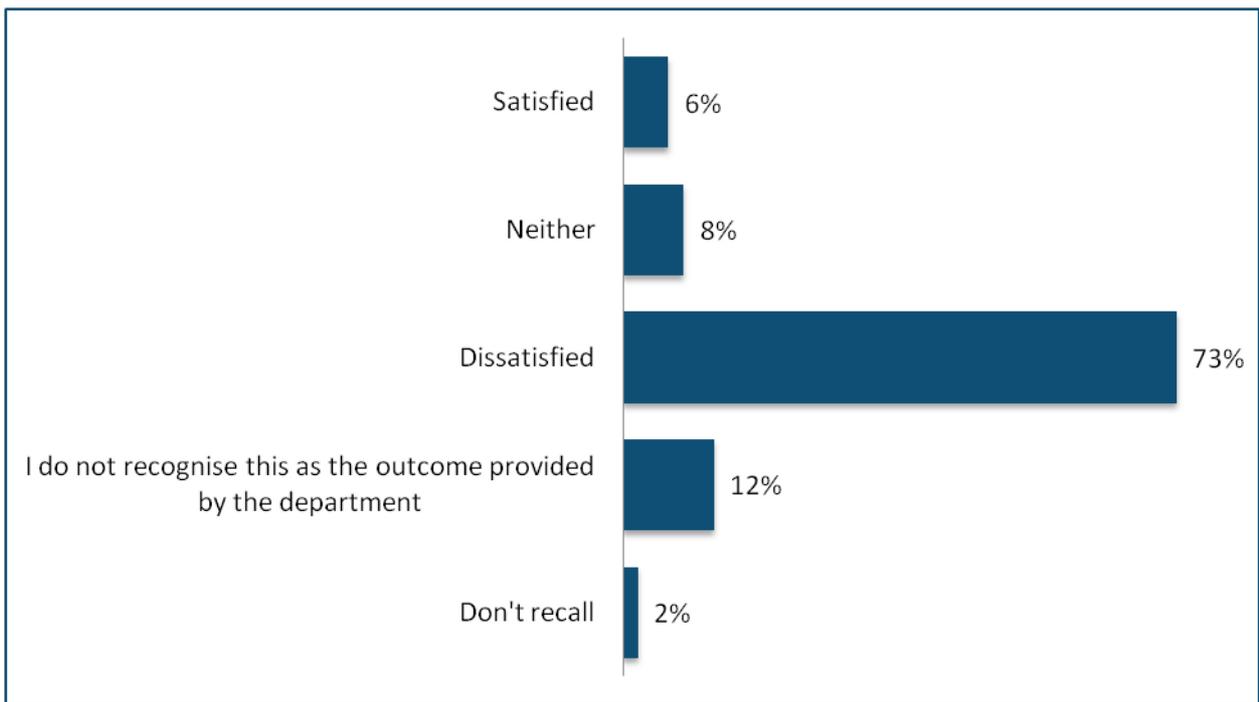
### Satisfaction and Advocacy

Full complaint respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with the outcome of their complaint, under the department’s school complaints process, using a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 was very dissatisfied and 10 was very satisfied. Respondents were informed that the word outcome in this question meant ‘the outcome communicated to you as upheld, partially upheld or not upheld’.

Of the 51 full complaint respondents, the mean rating was 2.2 on a scale where 1 is very dissatisfied and 10 very satisfied. 73% were dissatisfied with the outcome (giving a rating of 1-3 out of 10), 8% were neutral (rating 4-7 out of 10), and 6% were satisfied with the outcome (rating 8-10 out of 10).

14% did not provide a rating.

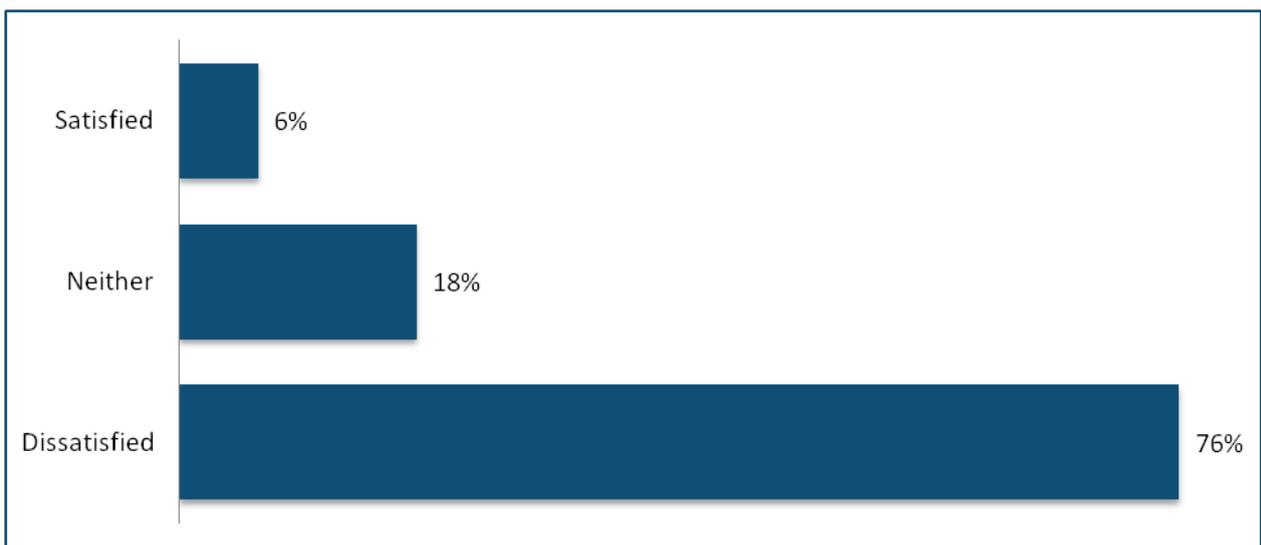
**Figure 22: Satisfaction with the outcome of the complaint under the department's school complaints process (full complaint respondents)**



Sample base: All full complaint respondents (51)

When full complaint respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with the overall service provided by the department on a scale of 1 to 10, the mean rating was 2.5 (when rounded to one decimal place). As shown in Figure 23, just over three quarters (76%) were dissatisfied (1-3 out of 10), while 6% were satisfied (8-10 out of 10) and 18% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (4-7 out of 10).

**Figure 23: Satisfaction with the overall service provided by the department (full complaint respondents)**



Sample base: All full complaint respondents (51)

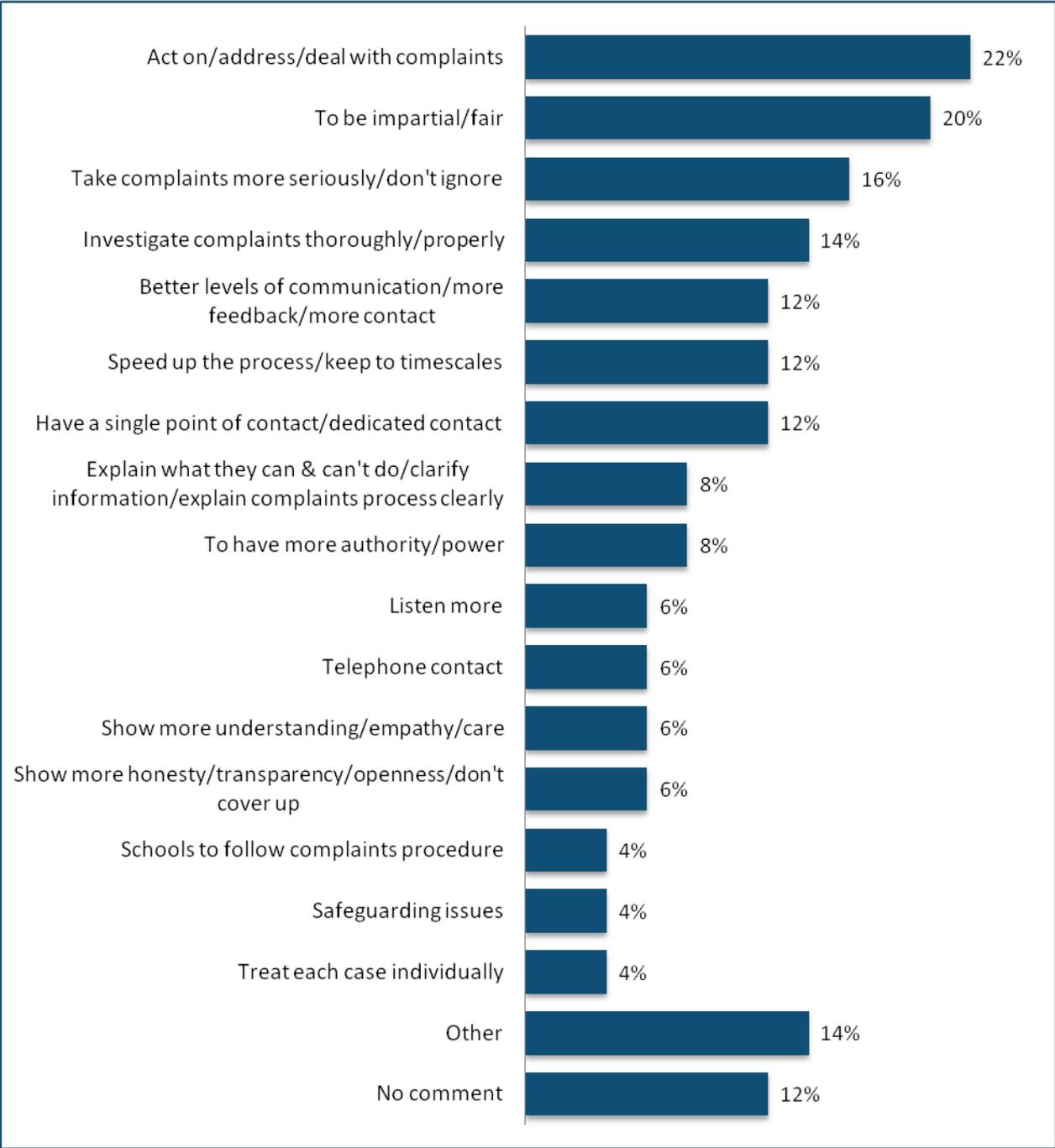
Three quarters (75%) of full complaint respondents claim they would be critical of the department and how it handles school complaints when speaking to other people. Specifically, 41% respond they would be critical without being asked, while a further 33% claim they would be critical if they were asked. Only 6% would speak highly of the department (if asked), while 16% would be neutral.

Respondents were asked how the department could make them more satisfied with the service. As shown in Figure 24, the main areas for improvement according to full complaint respondents were to 'act on/address/deal with complaints' (22%), be 'impartial/fair' (20%), 'take complaints more seriously/don't ignore' (16%), investigate complaints thoroughly/properly (14%), provide 'better levels of communication/more feedback/more contact' (12%), 'speed up the process/keep to timescales' (12%) and provide a dedicated/single point of contact (12%).

These were similar to suggestions by first stage respondents, as shown in Figure 11 earlier in this report, although levels of endorsement for many of the suggestions were significantly higher among full complaint respondents. For both types of respondent, the top-three suggestions included to 'act on/address/deal with complaints' and to 'take complaints more seriously/don't ignore', while for first stage respondents the other top-three suggestion was better levels of communication or more contact (15%) while for full stage this was being 'impartial/fair' (20%).

Areas for improvement mentioned by less than 10% by full complaint respondents included 'explain what they can and can't do/clarify information/explain complaints process clearly' (8%) and have more authority/power (8%).

**Figure 24: Ways the department could improve satisfaction with their service – unprompted responses (full complaint respondents)**



Sample base: All full complaint respondents (51). The chart includes responses mentioned by 4% or more respondents.

# Conclusions and Recommendations

## Driving Service Improvements

The survey reflects a largely similar picture to Year 1 in terms of views about the service, satisfaction with the service and advocacy. For example, 70% were critical of the department and how it handles school complaints, 18% neutral and 7% would speak highly. In Year 1 a similar 72% were critical, 16% neutral and 8% would speak highly<sup>7</sup>.

Notwithstanding, the findings include some early indications that developments introduced over the last 12 months may be beginning to have some positive effect. This is true in terms of ease of making contact and timeliness:

- Significantly fewer complainants reported that they found it difficult to make contact with the department in the last 6 months (38%) compared to the previous 18 months (45%). However, the overall mean satisfaction rating remains at just under 5 on a scale of 1 to 10 (4.7 in Year 2 and 4.8 in Year 1), and so it will be important to monitor this trend in 2015.
- There has been a decrease in the proportion of respondents suggesting unprompted that the department needs to speed up the process/keep to timescales (from 7% in Year 1, to 4% in Year 2, to 2% in the last 6 months). However, when full complaint respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with the time it took to receive an acknowledgement, and to a final outcome, their responses were very similar to Year 1. Therefore, it will be important to review this again in 2015, when the service changes introduced have had the opportunity to bed-in further.

In Year 2, more customers appear to be using the 'Contact Us' page to get in touch with the department and fewer by post (27% in Year 2 compared to 35% in Year 1). First stage respondents in particular tend to use online channels and this may be a factor here.

Views on the service do not tend to vary significantly by contact channel. However, care needs to be taken to ensure that increased telephone contact does not lead to respondents feeling less informed about why they are being passed back: The findings do not evidence causality between these two variables; however, in the case of first stage respondents, 49% disagreed in Year 2 that it was clearly explained why they were passed back, compared to a significantly lower 36% in Year 1. Agreement that it was clearly explained was higher among those who contacted the department via the 'Contact Us' form (28%) than those who used the National Helpline or other telephone communication to make contact (15%)<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> The remaining 4% and 5% respectively responded 'Don't know' to the question on advocacy.

<sup>8</sup> Please note that some respondents used multiple ways to make contact.

Overall, when asked to suggest areas of improvement (unprompted), the top three suggestions from customers, like last year, relate to more contact/feedback or better levels of communication, acting on or addressing complaints, and taking complaints more seriously. The most highly prioritised aspects of service (prompted), like last year included providing an accurate reflection of the complaint, and transparency.

But there were also some small changes this year in terms of how the data suggests that service improvements can best be driven among full complaint customers going forwards. The key driver analysis undertaken suggests that the department will make greatest strides in improving satisfaction now by increasing customers' confidence that consideration of the complaint is fair and impartial.

Among other strong predictors of satisfaction are the case manager having a clear understanding of the desired outcome and confidence that the staff did their best to help.

Combining respondents' stated priorities and suggestions, with the findings of the key driver analysis, a clear demand emerges for communications that:

- Reflect an accurate and thorough understanding of the customer's specific complaint.
- Reflect the work/efforts of case managers/staff to help the customer to reach an outcome.

These findings may be useful for example in informing the department's current review of letter templates.

## Considerations on Method

Undertaking satisfaction research among users of the department's school complaints service involves a number of challenges. The complaints dealt with are highly emotive and the *outcome* provided by the service is not synonymous with what a customer may see as a *resolution* due to the scope of the department's powers: Among those known to have received an outcome from the department and who gave a response indicating how they see their complaint at present, 16% described their complaint as resolved and 35% as 'no longer pursuing' but half (49%) still considered it ongoing. Feedback received from respondents to the survey also suggests that there is a perception among those 'passed back' to go through the local school complaints process (i.e. first stage respondents), that this does not equate to receiving a service, irrespective of any interactions with the service that have taken place<sup>9</sup>.

The impact of the change to half-yearly interviewing from end of year interviewing is not easily measured and there has not been a significant improvement in response rate or

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<sup>9</sup> This perception was highlighted by verbatim feedback to the survey's open questions and from communications from survey recipients to the research agency, via the helpline, email and in handwritten communications returned with questionnaires.

how well they remember the service, although a still significant 84% of the 51 full complaint respondents stated that they remember the process of being in contact with the service very or quite well. Other factors may influence response rate, including for example a change in opt-out procedures; the number of contacts who have provided inaccurate or insufficient contact details; the number of contacts who had made a previous complaint and may not wish to take part a second time; and the number who consider their complaint ongoing and therefore do not wish to take part until they see a change in theirs or their child's circumstances relating to the complaint. On this basis, we would recommend continuing the biannual approach to fieldwork in 2015 rather than returning to a single survey.

To continue to monitor trends quoted in this report which refer to total customer base would require the inclusion of both first stage and full complaint respondents in the 2015 survey, and this is the approach we would recommend.

# Technical Appendix

## Target Audience and Method

The target audience for the research was all those who contacted the department between August 2013 and July 2014, the second year in which the new School Complaint unit was operational. In this year of operation the department received c1,900 complaints about schools. Of these just under 200 were accepted for further more detailed consideration, while the remainder were referred back to the local school complaints process.

Service users were informed about the research through the following strapline. This was used on the bottom of the correspondence, and on the decisions cover letter, giving customers the provision to opt-out if they wished to do so.

*In the interest of continuous improvement, the Department for Education employs an external agency to monitor customer satisfaction. You may be contacted by the agency to ask your views about how the department has performed while handling the complaint. If you would prefer not to be contacted, please [either write to the address above or] email: [satisfactionsurvey.complaints@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:satisfactionsurvey.complaints@education.gsi.gov.uk)*

The contacts were extracted from the department's systems at the half-yearly point, and transferred securely to BMG Research, who undertook counts by key variables and removed approximately 80 contacts provided on the basis of duplicate contacts, or insufficient contact information.

The questionnaire was administered online or by post according to each respondent's initial mode of contact with the department. To maximise response rates respondents were given choice in how they could complete the survey. Three mailings/e-mailings were administered, and reminder calls were made among the minority of complainants where telephone numbers were available.

First stage respondents (i.e. those referred back to the local school complaints process) made up a larger proportion of complainants to the department in Year 2 compared against Year 1 (approximately 90% compared to 80%), and this is reflected in the sample achieved through the survey: 89% of Year 2 respondents are first stage and 11% full stage complainants, compared to 79% first stage and 17% full complaint in Year 1. The difference is particularly marked in the last 6 months, when the proportion of respondents representing first stage complaints increased to 93%.

Table 2 shows the numbers mailed and returned of each respondent type (full complaint and first stage complaint) for different time periods of the research.

**Table 2: Respondent Profile and Response Rates by Survey Phase and Year**

	Year 2 Phase A		Year 2 Phase B		Year 2 Total		Year 1 Total (indicative)	
Sent out	<b>767</b>		<b>1,187</b>		<b>1,954</b>		<b>1,485</b>	
	696 short	71 long	1,070 short	117 long	1,766 short	188 long	1,172 short	215 long
Received	<b>195</b>		<b>254</b>		<b>449</b>		<b>429</b>	
	171 short	24 long	227 short	27 long	398 short	51 long	340 short	71 long (18 N/A)
% response rate	<b>25%</b>		<b>21%</b>		<b>23%</b>		<b>29%</b>	
	25% first stage	34% full complaint	21% first stage	23% full complaint	23% first stage	27% full complaint	29% first stage	33% full complaint

## Sample Size and Robustness

The final sample invited to take part in the survey comprised 1,954 contacts, of whom 449 completed a survey. This equates to a response rate of 23% overall.

This sample size offers a maximum confidence level (margin of error) on a full base of +/- 4.6%. This is fairly robust, indicating that a response of 50% in the survey would be between 45.4% and 54.6% if it were asked of the full target population.

The confidence interval varies according to the number of people who respond to a particular question, and according to the response itself (the closer a response gets to 50% the larger the potential error in the survey result). Many of the questions are reported on a lower base of respondents than 429, which increases the margin of error. However where questions are reported at the upper or lower end of response scales (e.g. 90% as opposed to 50%), this reduces the margin of error.

The data is reported unweighted and therefore represents the real number of respondents in all cases. Weighting factors decrease the effective sample size of a sample, and the difference in responses across subgroups was not considered sufficient to justify using weighting factors on this data.

## Data Outputs

Six sets of data tabulations were produced based on the results of the survey. These were:

Year 2 only:

- A combined data set for questions common to the long and short questionnaires, including both full complaint and first stage respondents.
- A filtered report based on full complaint respondents.
- A filtered report based on first stage respondents.

Years 1 and 2 combined:

- A combined data set for questions common to the long and short questionnaires, including both full complaint and first stage respondents.
- A filtered report based on full complaint respondents.
- A filtered report based on first stage respondents.

Data were tabulated by variables including:

- Complainant type (First stage or Full complainant)
- Complaint Outcome (Not upheld/Partially/Upheld, from DfE records)
- Considers Complaint (Ongoing/ Resolved/ Not Pursuing)
- Complaint Completing Group (SCU/Other)
- Respondent type (Parent/Other incl. General public/not known)
- Satisfaction/Advocacy of the department
- Gender
- Age
- Impairment
- Ethnicity
- Phase of research (where A was the first 6-month tranche of Year 2 and B was the second 6-month tranche)
- Other time series comparisons (Combined Year 1 and Year 2 data)

Where the subgroup base is too low, or the data analysed showed no significant variation by subgroup at the 95% level of significance (a 19 in 20 chance of being true across the population targeted), variations between subgroups have not been drawn out in this written report, or they have been drawn out with a note underlining that they are to be treated as indicative.

The data used in this report is rounded up or down to the nearest whole percentage point. It is for this reason that, on occasions, tables or charts may add up to 99% or 101%. Where tables and graphics do not match exactly to the text in the report this

occurs due to the way in which figures are rounded up (or down) when responses are combined.

Multi-variate analysis approaches were also used in analysing the results. A full technical report, detailing the Random Forest approach applied, is available on request.



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