



Customer Satisfaction with OfTel's Complaint Handling

Wave 4, October 2003

Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 Oftel's Consumer Representation Section (CRS) is responsible for answering and where possible dealing with or referring business and residential consumer complaints or enquiries. On average CRS receive around 8,000 contacts per month however, during this 6 month period this rose to almost 11,000. Around 85% of these are from residential consumers and 15% from businesses. Most contacts are complaints (80%) and 20% are enquiries. Approximately three-quarters of Oftel's contacts are received by phone and a quarter in writing.

1.2 This is the final wave of research prior to Ofcom. The survey was designed to assess how satisfied customers are with the way in which Oftel handled their complaint or enquiry, and how Oftel's performance compares with other companies and organisations. This report makes comparisons to data from the previous waves.

1.3 This report is based on the key findings from the fourth wave of research of business and residential consumers' perceptions of Oftel's complaints handling procedure. The survey was conducted over a six-month period between May and October 2003, amongst 513 consumers.

1.4 The sample was drawn at random from Oftel's database of consumers who had contacted Oftel and comprised customers who made that contact during the preceding month.

1.5 To ensure a representative sample was achieved, quotas were applied to the type of customer (business/residential), method of contact (phone/letter/email/fax) and type of contact (complaint/enquiry). In order to achieve a larger and more robust sample of business contacts, business consumers were also over-sampled and then re-weighted to their natural proportion. Please see footnote for further sample details¹.

1.6 The survey was conducted on behalf of Oftel by Continental Research during May '03 – October '03. This report has been prepared by Oftel² based on the results provided by Continental Research.

1.7 The report covers:

- Method and type of contact

¹ The survey was conducted amongst a sample of consumers contacting Oftel with a complaint or enquiry. As businesses make up around 20% of contacts to Oftel these were over-sampled in the survey to produce a sufficiently robust sample to allow analysis of the results and then re-weighted back to their natural proportion. The error margin for this survey of 513 consumers is about 3-4%, but is higher amongst smaller subgroups. Results referred to as 'significantly' different, have been tested at the 95% level of confidence and hence are outside of the error margins and therefore can be considered real changes. All data shown is weighted data. Unweighted base sizes are shown on charts and tables to show the number of consumers who were asked the question.

² The report should not be seen as recommended best buys and should not therefore be relied upon when making purchase decisions. Oftel has conducted its own checks on the data in this report and whilst we consider it to be correct, Oftel accepts no liability in respect of any of the results provided to it by Continental or any decisions taken by any person in reliance on the report.

- Time taken to respond
- Satisfaction with complaint handling
- Benchmarking results and comparisons with other companies
- Suggestions for improvement to procedure

1.8 A copy of the questions is attached in Annex A.

Chapter 2

Summary

Headline figures

- Three-quarters of all contacts were satisfied with the overall service they received, rising to 83% amongst those handled by Oftel.
- Strengths remain being accessible, having staff that are polite and keen to assist and high satisfaction with time taken to deal with complaints/ enquiries.
- Just over three-quarters of consumers that had made a recent complaint to another company said Oftel's handling was on a par with or better than the other company.

Around 6 in 10 consumers are receiving responses within Oftel's target timescales, highest amongst written contacts (including email)

2.1 Just under two-thirds (63%) of email contacts have remembered receiving responses within Oftel's target of 2 days during the course of this study. This figure is broadly similar to that amongst consumers who wrote to Oftel by letter (68%). However, consumers calling Oftel were less likely to think that their contact had been dealt with or referred on that same day (54%).

Consistently high levels of satisfaction with complaint handling, with improvement across most areas within the last 2 years

2.2 Three-quarters (74%) of consumers were satisfied with Oftel's overall handling of their complaint/enquiry. This figure rises to 83% amongst those contacts dealt with in-house (as opposed to those referred to other companies/organisations).

2.3 The most notable rises in satisfaction were amongst businesses, where this rose from 60% of all business contacts in April '02 to its current level of 77%. Most consumers are experiencing higher levels of satisfaction now than previously.

Oftel claims similar or above levels of satisfaction in comparison to the government department average

2.4 Around three-quarters (77%) of consumers who contacted Oftel and had previously contacted other companies/organisations claimed that Oftel's handling was on a par with if not better than the other company contacted. This rises to 83% amongst Oftel handled cases – little change from previous waves.

2.5 Results from the benchmarking exercise indicate that Oftel generally compares well to the average benchmark for government organisations, in particular for satisfaction with the handling of complaints where 83% of Oftel handled cases were satisfied compared to 64% average.

2.6 Oftel continues to compare well to the top performer with courtesy of staff (97% for Oftel compared to 100% for the top performer), and the ease of getting through to staff (94% for Oftel compared to 98% for the top performer).

Chapter 3

Method and type of contact

Complaint/enquiry

3.1 Oftel has conducted research into consumers' perceptions on the quality of its customer service for 2 years. During this time the issues consumers have contacted Oftel for advice/assistance have varied. This quarter the top issues are:

- ADSL availability
- Text messaging asking to call premium rate numbers
- Information on new 118 directory enquiry numbers
- Changes to mobile price plans/packages

Resolving complaints/enquiries

3.2 Awareness of the status of contacts has risen significantly since Oftel began monitoring its performance. Currently 72% of contacts dealt with by Oftel (and not referred elsewhere) were aware that no further action was being taken – a rise from 59% in April '02.³ While this means that just under 3 in 10 of these consumers (15% of all contacts) are under the impression that Oftel is still dealing with their complaint/enquiry, it indicates that procedural changes implemented during this period may have assisted to reduce this confusion. Further analysis of this group indicates that the majority contacted Oftel by phone.

Contact reference number

3.3 It is Oftel's policy to ensure that all consumers who contact them are given either a contact name or a reference number. Overall the proportion of consumers remembering being given this information has remained stable since April '02 at around 7 in 10 (69%).

³ Interviews were conducted during the month following contact with Oftel, therefore contacts which had been resolved would have taken between 1 day and a maximum of 6 weeks.

Chapter 4

Time taken to respond to initial contacts

4.1 Similar to results reported in April 2003, 57% of contacts claimed to have received a response within Oftel's target time-scales. Due to slight changes to the survey, results for phone and written contacts from the first two surveys are not directly comparable to the latest results.

Meeting Oftel's targets

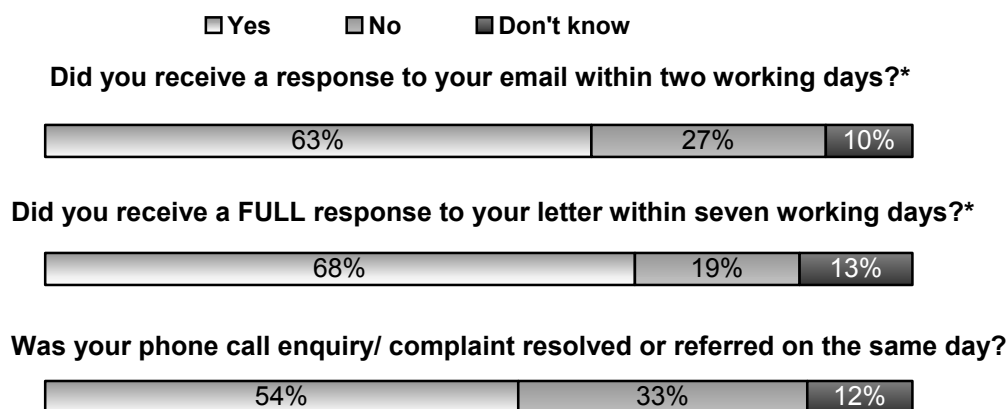
4.2 Throughout this study those who made written contacts (including email) appear most likely to remember receiving a response within the time-scales Oftel has set. Consistently high proportions of email contacts remember receiving a response within Oftel's 2 day target. However, this wave indicates a slight fall (from 77% to 63%) which is consistent with the lower response rate reported in Oftel's statistics that show that 79% of replies were sent in 2 days compared to 89% 6 months ago. The lower levels may reflect the increased number of contacts directed to Oftel during this period, which were combined with lower staffing levels at this time. The differences between the research data and Oftel's statistics may relate to the time-lapse between emails being sent and accessed by the recipient.

4.3 The proportion of written contacts (via letter) receiving a full reply within seven days (allowing for postage), remains stable at around 7 in 10 (68%), again lower than reported in Oftel statistics which indicate full replies were sent to 94% of letters within 4 days.

4.4 Around half (54%) of all phone contacts said their enquiry/complaint was resolved or referred on the same day and a further 12% were unsure. However, 99% of calls during this period were dealt with on the same day they were made, according to Oftel's statistics.

Figure 4a: % consumers received reply within Oftel's target

Base: All consumers contacting Oftel, May'03 - Oct '03 (Base: email 59, phone 382, letter 70)



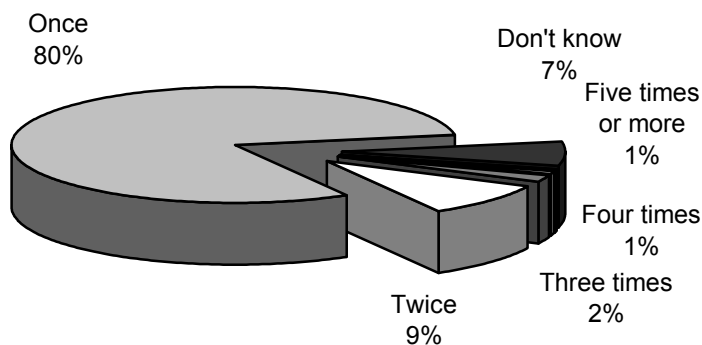
* apply caution as base size less than 100

Telephone queuing system

4.5 Oftel uses an automated queuing system which consumers will be forwarded to if an advisor is unavailable. During the period May to October 2003 a fifth of phone contacts were held in a queue when they called Oftel. This figure is broadly similar to last wave, which is perhaps surprising given the higher proportion of contacts Oftel received during this final period of research. Similar to previous findings, the vast majority (94%) of consumers held on to speak to an advisor. Overall, it appears that the queuing system is not a barrier to consumers wishing to contact Oftel.

4.6 8 in 10 consumers phoning Oftel called just once before speaking to an advisor as shown in figure 4b. While this has fallen from 85% in November 2002 this may well be a reflection of the increased level of calls received during this period combined with low staffing levels. However, overall consumers do not appear to experience problems contacting Oftel by telephone.

Figure 4b: Average number of times consumer called before speaking to advisor
Base: All consumers contacting Oftel by phone, May '03 – Oct '03 (Base: 382)



Chapter 5

Satisfaction with complaint handling

Overall satisfaction

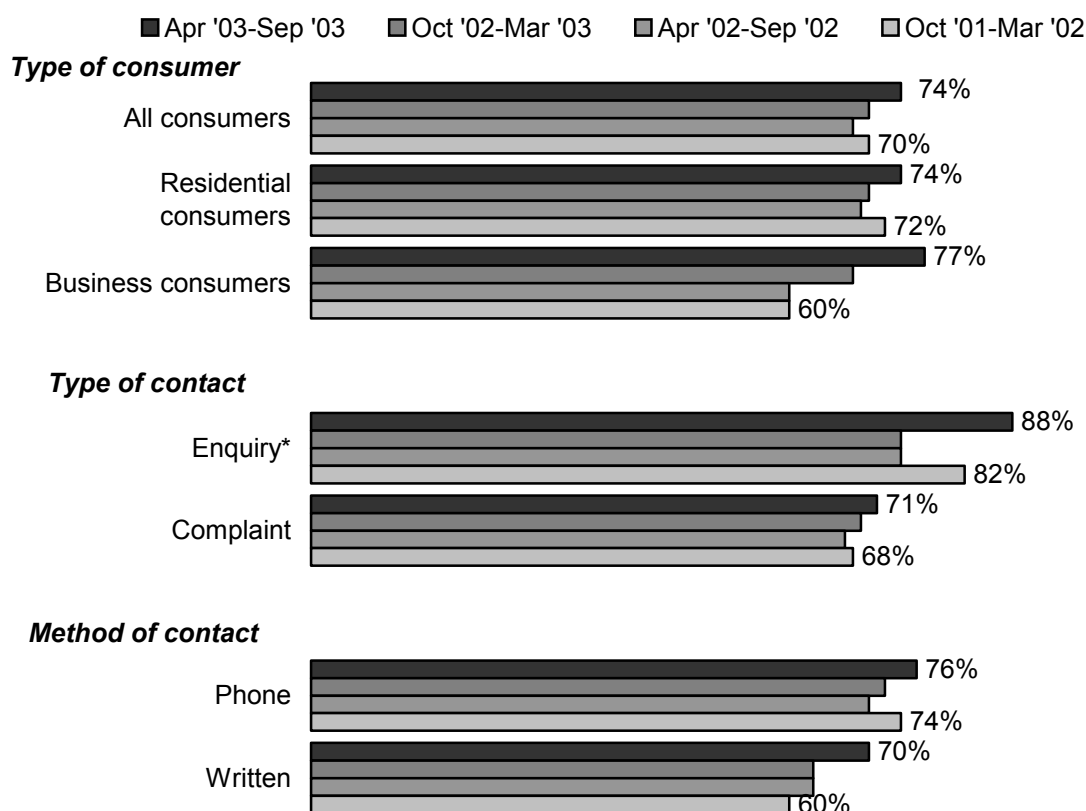
5.1 Overall, during the last 2 years a consistent level of satisfaction has been maintained, with around 7 in 10 consumers satisfied with the overall handling of their complaint/enquiry. This figure rises amongst consumers whose complaint/enquiry was dealt with in-house – currently standing at 83%.

5.2 Satisfaction has risen across most groups of consumers between April '01 and October '03, as shown in figure 5a. Most notable are rises in satisfaction amongst businesses rising steadily from 60% in April '02 to its current level of 77% and written contacts (60% to 70%). However, these have not had a great impact on overall satisfaction levels given their lower proportion of the overall level of contacts – 15% from businesses and a quarter received in writing.

5.3 Satisfaction with the overall handling has been consistently higher amongst those phoning Oftel than those writing (including email), 76% and 70% respectively. As noted in previous reports this lower level of satisfaction may be linked to the longer timeframes for dealing with written queries/complaints and may not be directly linked to the level of service received.

Figure 5a: % satisfied with overall handling of complaint/enquiry

Base: All consumers contacting Oftel, May '03 – Oct '03 (Base: 513, 'don't knows' have been excluded)



*Base size less than 100 so apply caution

5.4 Of the quarter (26%) of consumers who felt that their complaint/enquiry was not dealt with satisfactorily, half (51%) had been referred to another source and therefore, overall satisfaction may have been affected by the onward handling of their complaint/enquiry. Consumers who were not satisfied with their complaint handling gave various reasons for this, these are outlined in figure 5b.

Figure 5b: Main reasons for dissatisfaction with complaint handling

Base: All dissatisfied with Of tel's handling of the complaint/ enquiry, May '03 – Oct '03 (Base: 131)

Reasons given for dissatisfaction	%
Weren't able to resolve my complaint	20%
Have no teeth to act/ disappointed they can do nothing	17%
Never got back to me	15%
Did nothing except pass on the message to phone company	14%
Criticism of staff dealing with complaint	13%
Said they weren't able to help	11%
Not kept sufficiently informed	9%
Wasn't satisfied with outcome	3%
Other	12%
Don't know	7%

5.5 Around a third of reasons for dissatisfaction were within Of tel's control – such as 'never getting back to the consumer', 'criticism of staff', 'not kept informed'. This equates to just under 1 in 10 contacts (9%). However, over half of these consumers were not dealt with solely by Of tel and therefore may have been referring to the onward handling.

5.6 Results from previous surveys identified a group of consumers who were under the impression Of tel was still dealing with their complaint/enquiry, when in fact all respondents' cases have been closed. In this wave around 1 in 10 contacts Of tel defined as 'dealt with in-house' were still expecting further action. These consumers were asked what they were expecting Of tel to do. The results are summarised in the table below and suggest that most of these consumers were actually aware that the situation was out of Of tel's control, or that another company was exploring their complaint/enquiry. However, a small proportion was concerned that Of tel had not responded. Following the survey Of tel was able to respond to these consumers personally to clarify the situation of their complaint/enquiry.

Figure 5c: Actions consumers are expecting Of tel to take

Base: Closed cases who are expecting Of tel to take further action, May '03-Oct '03 (Base: *54)

Actions still expecting Of tel to take	Actual number of responses
Nothing, they are powerless	14
Resolve the situation/get a result	12
Reply/respond to my email	11
Nothing the phone company/other organisation is dealing	6
Other	7
Don't know	6

Totals more than 54 as some consumers mentioned more than one aspect

Satisfaction with various aspects of process

5.7 As stated above three-quarters of consumers were satisfied with the service they received from Oftel, rising to 83% amongst those Oftel was able to deal with in-house. The following examines satisfaction with various aspects of the service.

Contacting Oftel

5.8 Throughout the survey we have seen consistently high levels of satisfaction with contacting Oftel, as shown in figure 5d – during the final period 9 out of 10 (91%) consumers were satisfied with the ease of getting hold of someone. This is consistent with high proportions of consumers who made one call to reach the complaints team (80%), and the 4 in 5 who spoke to an advisor immediately without being held in a queue.

Advisors

5.9 The following section explores satisfaction with advisors – whether they were ‘polite and paid attention’ and ‘interested and keen to assist’, and as such focuses on consumers who contacted Oftel by phone.

5.10 This wave confirms previous findings, suggesting that one of Oftel’s strengths is that telephone advisors are polite and pay attention to callers, 95% of phone contacts were satisfied with this aspect of their complaint/enquiry. 85% of consumers contacting Oftel by phone were satisfied that the advisor was interested and keen to assist.

Process

5.11 During the early phases of this research it was noted that some consumers were dissatisfied with the explanation of what action was being taken, and even less satisfied with being kept informed of progress. In light of these findings Oftel implemented various changes to procedure with an aim to improving consumers’ awareness of the status of their complaint/enquiry.

5.12 These changes appear to have had an impact on satisfaction with these areas, as shown in figure 5d. Currently almost 3 in 5 (58%) of those claiming to require further advice/action are satisfied with being kept informed of progress – an increase of 13 percentage points since April ’02, while satisfaction with the explanation of action to be taken also rose from 71% to 79% during the same period.

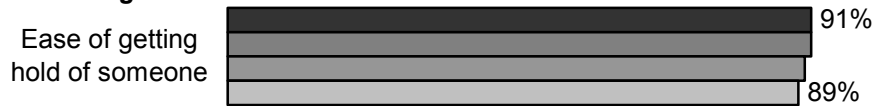
5.13 Other aspects of the process such as length of time taken to deal and Oftel keeping its promises, appear to have risen although these are within the error margins of the survey and therefore may not be real increases. However, satisfaction with both of these aspects has remained at relatively high levels.

Figure 5d: % satisfied with aspects of complaint handling process

Base: All consumers contacting Oftel, May '03 - Oct '03 (Base: 513, 'don't knows' have been excluded)

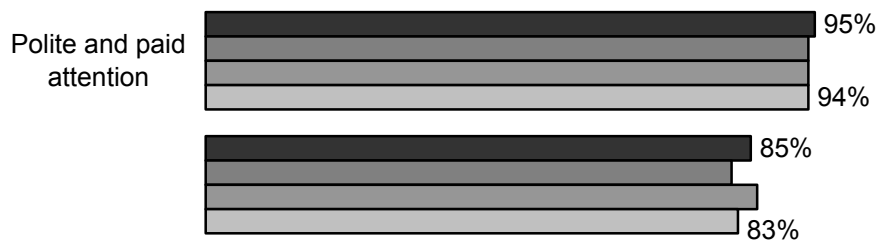
■ Apr '03-Sep '03 ■ Oct '02-Mar '03 ■ Apr '02-Sep '02 □ Oct '01-Mar '02

Contacting Oftel

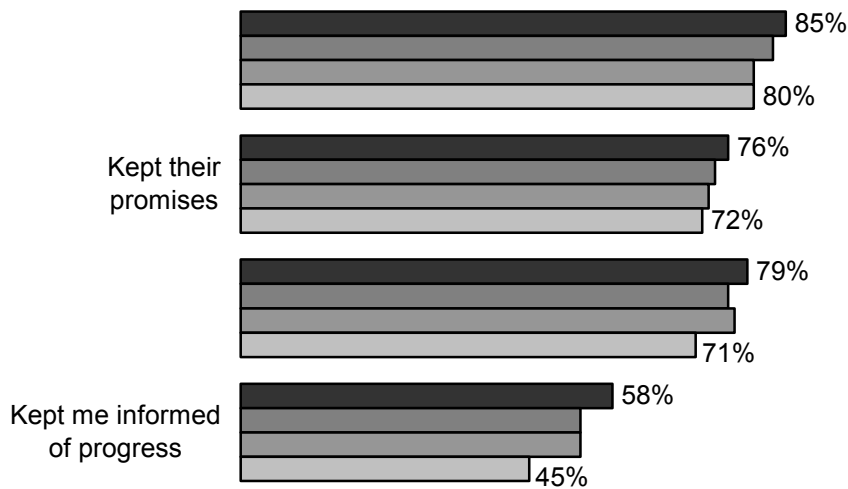


Advisors

(based on telephone contacts)



Process



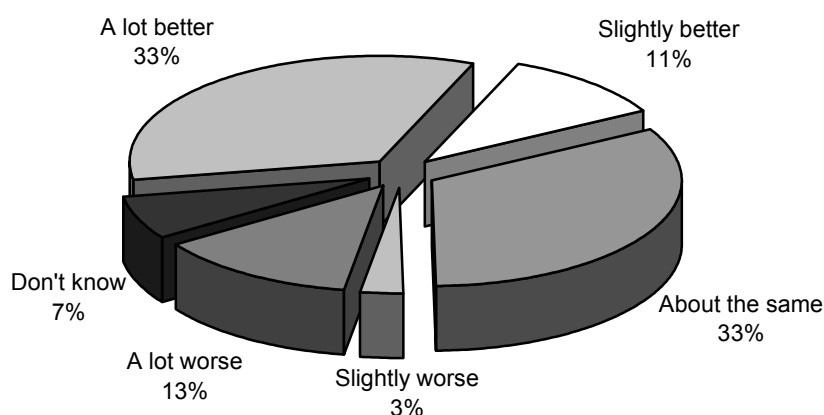
Chapter 6

Benchmarking and general comparisons

6.1 During the period May to Oct '03 just over three-quarters (77%) of contacts that could recall a comparable experience, said Oftel had dealt with their contact better, or on a par with the other company they had contacted, as shown in figure 6a. Consistently high levels of preference for Oftel's handling of complaints/enquiries have been reported since this survey began in April '02. However, this does mean that a proportion (16%) of these consumers, have experienced a better service elsewhere.

Figure 6a: Oftel's complaint handling compared to other organisations

Base: All consumers contacting Oftel and ever contacted another company/organisation, May '03 - Oct '03 (Base: 214)

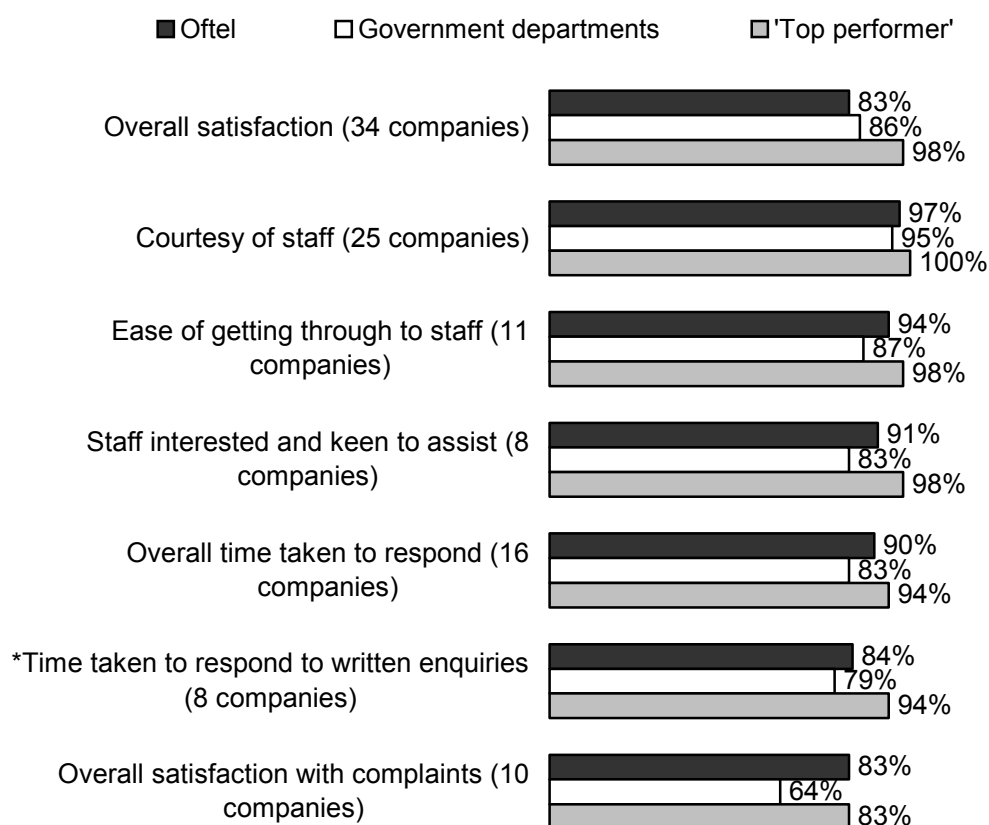


Benchmarking

6.2 Oftel submitted responses to key questions from wave 3 to an externally run benchmarking group. Results are collected and compared on a 6 monthly basis. Each organisation receives a report stating *their* position in relation to the group, the average benchmark and the named 'top performer' for each aspect. Currently 34 government organisations submit data to this group.

6.3 The following chart shows Oftel's position in relation to the government department average and the 'top performer' for each aspect.

Figure 6b: Oftel's satisfaction results (amongst Oftel handled contacts) benchmarked against the average for government departments and 'top performer'



*** small base so apply caution to results**

6.4 As last wave on the whole Oftel compares well to the average benchmark for government departments. As precise sample sizes for each organisation's survey are not published, we are unable to accurately establish whether these differences are significant, however, they give an indication of areas of strength and weakness in comparison to other organisations.

6.5 Overall satisfaction (83% amongst Oftel handled cases during wave 3) remains broadly similar to the government average (86%) but based on estimations of base sizes is likely to be significantly lower than the top performer (98%).

6.6 On the other hand, Oftel's overall satisfaction figure relating to complaints handling is equal to that submitted by the top performer (83%).

6.7 Oftel continues to compare well to the 'top performer' on ease of contact, and the courtesy of staff.

Chapter 7

Improvements to the procedure

Consumer suggestions

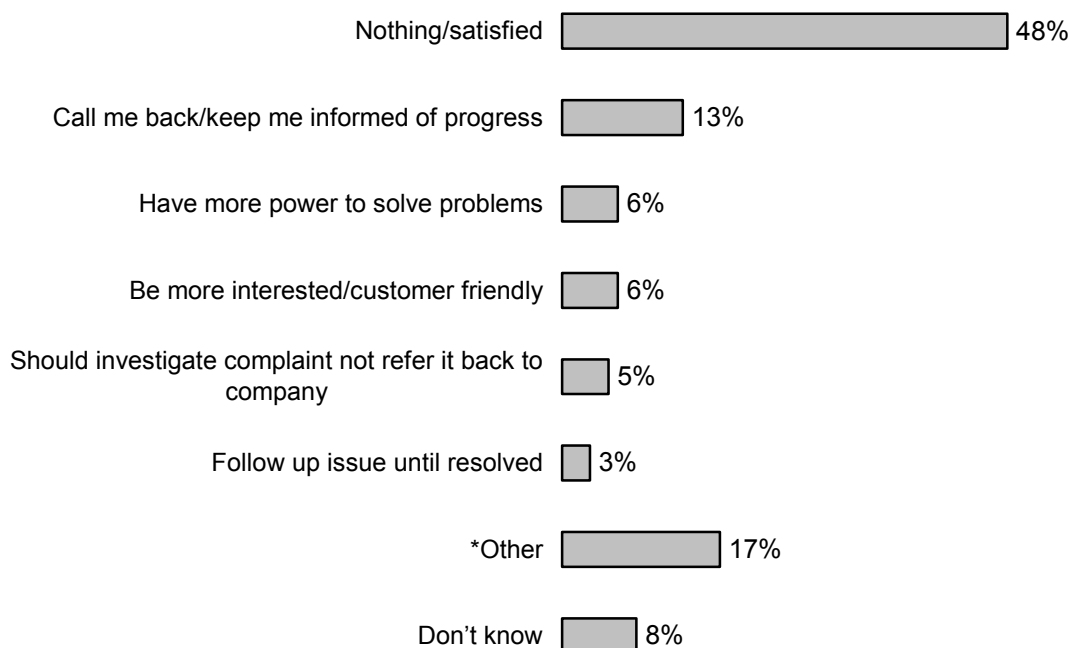
7.1 Most consumers who contacted OfTel thought that in their experience OfTel handled their contact on a par with, if not better than, other organisations and 83% of those contacts dealt with by OfTel were satisfied with the overall handling of their complaint/enquiry. In addition, consistently high levels of satisfaction have been reported for most aspects of the service received by consumers, with the exception of being kept informed of progress. This appears to be one area in which consumers remain slightly less satisfied with.

7.2 In light of these findings – what suggestions did consumers have for further improving the service?

7.3 Half (48%) of all contacts from this phase of the research said they were satisfied and had no additional suggestions for improvement, a significant rise from 1 in 5 at the start of this survey suggesting an improvement in service during this time. A further 8% did not know how their experience could have been improved – either suggesting that it couldn't be, or that there was nothing immediately obvious to them. The main suggestion that consumers had for improving the service was for OfTel to call them back and keep them informed of progress.

Figure 7a: Suggestions for improving OfTel's complaint handling procedure

Base: All consumers contacting OfTel, May '03 - Oct '03 (Base: 513)



** suggestions with 2% or less included in 'other'*

Totals add to more than 100% as some consumers made more than one suggestion

Annex A

Questionnaire

ASK ALL

Q1. When you contacted Oftel was this to make a complaint or enquiry? If you have contacted Oftel more than once recently over different issues, please could you just concentrate on the most recent reason for contacting them.

Complaint
Enquiry

ASK ALL

Q2. And in what month did you make that enquiry/complaint?

ASK ALL

Q3. And how did you initially contact Oftel?

Phone
Letter
Email/website
Fax

ASK ALL

Q4. Which of these best describes the way your enquiry/complaint was handled?

Oftel referred me to my telephone company
Oftel referred me to someone else, not my telephone company
Oftel handled my enquiry/complaint and did not refer me elsewhere
None of these

ASK ALL

Q5. And has your enquiry/complaint now been resolved or is it still being dealt with?

Resolved
Still being dealt with

ASK ALL

* Q6. Overall, how satisfied were you with the way in which Oftel handled your enquiry/complaint?

Very satisfied
Fairly satisfied
Not very satisfied
Not at all satisfied

ASK ALL DISSATISFIED

Q7. Why weren't you satisfied?

ASK ALL

Q8. And how satisfied were you with the following aspects of your enquiry/complaint?

Very satisfied
Fairly satisfied
Not very satisfied
Not at all satisfied

- * a) Ease of getting hold of someone to deal with it
- * b) They were polite and paid attention
- * c) They sounded interested and keen to assist
- d) They explained what action they would take
- e) They kept me informed of progress
- f) They kept their promises, eg contacted me when they said they would
- * g) They dealt with my enquiry/complaint in a reasonable amount of time

ASK ALL EMAIL CONTACTS

Q9. When you contacted OfTel by email, did you receive a response within two working days?

Yes
No

ASK ALL LETTER CONTACTS

Q10. When you wrote to OfTel, did you receive a FULL reply within seven working days?

Yes
No

ASK ALL PHONE CONTACTS

Q11. When you phoned OfTel, was your complaint/ enquiry resolved or referred to another company or organisation that same day?

Yes
No

ASK ALL PHONE CONTACTS

Q12. And if your call was placed in a queue, were you told what position you were in the queue?

Was in queue and told which position
Was in queue but not told which position
Not in queue – got through to person immediately
Don't know

ASK ALL IN QUEUE

Q13. Did you hold in the queue or did you hang up?

Held on until got through to a person

Held on for a bit then hung up

Hung up immediately

Don't know

ASK ALL PHONE CONTACTS

Q14. How many times in total did you ring before you got through to a person?

Once

Twice

Three times

Four times

Five times or more

Don't know

ASK ALL

Q15. Were you given a contact name or reference number for your enquiry/complaint?

Yes

No

ASK ALL

Q16. Have you ever contacted any other company or organisation to make an enquiry/complaint?

Yes

No

ASK ALL CONTACTED ANY OTHER COMPANY OR ORGANISATION

Q17. Thinking about the most recent time you contacted another company or organisation to make an enquiry/a complaint, would you say that Oftel's overall handling of your enquiry/complaint was better, worse or about the same as the way in which the other company or organisation handled your enquiry/complaint? Is that a lot or slightly...

Oftel a lot better

Oftel slightly better

About the same

Oftel slightly worse

Oftel a lot worse

Don't know/can't remember

ASK ALL

Q18. What could Oftel have done to improve the way in which they handled your enquiry/complaint?

ASK IF COMPLAINT/ENQUIRY STILL BEING DEALT WITH AND CLASSIFIED AS DEALT WITH IN HOUSE

Q19. Finally, you mentioned that your enquiry/complaint was still being dealt with. What, if anything, do you still expect OfTel to do about resolving the situation.

PROBE FOR ALL

Q20. And would you be happy for us to provide your details to OfTel, as they may wish to contact you about this matter?

Yes

No

*** questions submitted for benchmarking group**