

Office of the Telecommunications Ombudsman

Customer Satisfaction 2006

Report

By

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. Now in its fourth year of operation the Office of the Telecommunications Ombudsman (Otelo) is an ombudsman service for public communications providers (PCPs) and their customers.
- 1.2. The main focus of the 2006 Customer Satisfaction Research remains simple and broadly in line with previous research undertaken in 2004 and 2005, namely to examine whether those who have approached Otelo consider it is achieving its aim of providing a service that is independent, easy to use, free of charge, transparent and effective. Otelo also wished to consult its member companies and ascertain their views on both the operational and strategic implications of being a member of Otelo.
- 1.3. Enquirers are those that have contacted Otelo with a query or seeking advice but have not (possibly as yet) gone on to make a complaint about their telecom service provider. Some 205 enquirers completed a postal survey and 98 telephone interviews with enquirers were also undertaken.
- 1.4. The complainants group is made up of members of the public that went on to make an official complaint to Otelo about their service provider. A total of 294 surveys were returned by the complaints group.
- 1.5. In addition, the Complaints Managers from 11 member companies and the Senior Managers from 7 member companies were interviewed. These interviewees were drawn from large and smaller member companies, some of which had only recently joined Otelo.
- 1.6. The majority of survey respondents in the 2006 research had contacted Otelo about a fixed-line or carrier pre-select company – 7 out of 10 enquirers and over 6 out of 10 complainants. Problems with internet service providers (ISPs) were also common among complainants, with around 1 out of 4 contacting Otelo about their ISP.
- 1.7. Billing and charging was at the heart of many respondents' problems and was reported by 7 out of 10 complainants and 7 out of 10 postal enquirers, but by less than 4 out of 10 telephone enquirers. Customer service problems, disconnection or reconnection, mis-selling or misinformation and loss of service were also common problems.

Key Findings from the Enquirers Surveys

- 1.8. In keeping with all 3 years' research findings, speaking to Otelo staff was closely linked to satisfaction levels. Enquirers who spoke to someone at Otelo largely satisfied with their experience and with friendliness and helpfulness of staff rated particularly highly. Those who did not tended to be less satisfied. The majority of postal enquirers who approached Otelo were advised to go back to their member company and give them another chance to resolve the problem. When they did so 1 out of 2 had their problem resolved with 1 out of 4 stating that the problem was resolved the way they wanted.
- 1.9. Postal enquirers' perception of the outcome of their query or complaint was on balance negative and slightly more so than had been the case in 2005.

- 1.10. Overall, figures relating to satisfaction are broadly similar to those in 2005; a majority of enquirers were satisfied overall but there were significant differences between telephone enquirers and those responding to the postal survey, with the latter group tending to be more dissatisfied. The initial reason for contacting Otelo e.g. looking to get their case moving, the group's more negative perceptions of the outcome and the smaller proportion who spoke to someone at Otelo seems largely to explain the lower level of satisfaction.
- 1.11. A majority of the postal enquirers would be willing to recommend Otelo to others although there has been a slight fall from the 2005 figure. However, slightly more would consider going back to Otelo if experiencing similar problems compared to 2005.

Key Findings from the Complainants Survey

- 1.12. The majority of complainants who responded to the survey had spoken to a member of the Otelo staff about their complaint and held overwhelmingly positive views of this contact. They were particularly satisfied with the friendliness, helpfulness and knowledge of the people at Otelo, but slightly less so about their authority to deal with the complaint.
- 1.13. General satisfaction with Otelo's processes was high, with 3 out of 4 complainants satisfied overall. Respondents were particularly satisfied with the explanation given at the outset and the extent to which they were kept updated. They were less satisfied about ease of access to the investigating officer and the extent to which the case was resolved through mediation or negotiation, although even in relation to these aspects the majority of complainants were satisfied. Compared to 2005 there have been consistent, and in some cases significant, increases in the proportion of complainants that were satisfied and very satisfied.
- 1.14. Around 3 out of 5 complainants considered that the outcome of their case had been in their favour with 3 out of 10 considering that it was completely in their favour.
- 1.15. The most frequently sought remedies were an apology and financial compensation, with financial compensation being the most commonly awarded. Around the same proportion of complainants that had hoped for financial compensation were awarded it (around 7 out of 10). Apologies were less forthcoming and while over 7 out of 10 had hoped to receive an apology just under 3 out of 5 complainants had actually done so.
- 1.16. Overall satisfaction levels among complainants were high, with over 7 out of 10 satisfied overall and over 2 out of 5 very satisfied. This year's figures show a small improvement relative to last year, with the proportion of complainants who were very satisfied increasing by 4%.
- 1.17. Key drivers affecting overall satisfaction levels were whether complainants had spoken to someone at Otelo, the extent to which Otelo provided updates on the progress of their case and satisfaction with their case outcome.

- 1.18. The majority of complainants viewed their experience of Otelo positively and would recommend the service to others or would approach Otelo again themselves if encountering similar problems in the future.

Key Findings from the Member Company Consultation

- 1.19. Overall, the working relationship between member companies and Otelo were considered to be very good and Otelo staff were considered to be helpful and knowledgeable. Some of the miscommunication problems that were suggested by last year's research appear to have been addressed and largely resolved.
- 1.20. Most companies were happy and generally very happy with the processes Otelo use to investigate a case and the requirements that are placed on them as a company defending the cases. However, there was one area where a small number of interviewees were dissatisfied; this related to the timescales that member companies are set to complete various stages of Otelo's complaints process. The timescale for submitting the case file was the particular concern.
- 1.21. While membership charges were seen as very reasonable, the issue of the case charge remained contentious. All 4 of the Senior Managers representing smaller companies thought the case fee to be high and in one case this issue was leading the company to consider moving to another ombudsman scheme.
- 1.22. A small number of companies felt that Otelo occasionally takes on cases that are outwith its remit, invariably because the member company considers they have not been given a reasonable opportunity to resolve the case 'in house'. However, it does appear that for some of the similar concerns expressed last year have now been addressed.

Conclusions & Recommendations

- 1.23. This is now the third year that Otelo has undertaken research into how members of the public view the services they provide. The results in 2004 were good and in 2005 were even better. Overall, and starting from an already very high base line, this year's results suggest that performance has improved yet again with a considerable majority of those members of the public that used the service satisfied and a significant proportion very satisfied.
- 1.24. This all suggests that from the general public's perspective Otelo should essentially carried on 'doing what it is doing'. In addition, it appears that Otelo has also moved to address some of the concerns member companies expressed last year and that, where this has happened, the benefits are starting to be felt.
- 1.25. Given the generally very positive findings, Otelo may wish to consider how it can achieve best value from its research budget over the next few years e.g. it might consider undertaking some of the customer satisfaction monitoring in house but perhaps consider more extensive consultation with its member companies.

- 1.26. In addition, where customer dissatisfaction does exist it often stems from a misunderstanding of, or frustration with, Otelo's powers. It may be worth reviewing all literature (including the website) to ensure that Otelo's wider remit, and in particular its capacity to influence the policy and practice of member companies, are fully but clearly explained.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1. Now in its fourth year of operation the Office of the Telecommunications Ombudsman (Otelo) is an ombudsman service for public communications providers (PCPs) and their customers.
- 2.2. A PCP is a company which provides an electronic communications network or service to members of the public including small businesses and includes telecommunications companies and Internet Service Providers (ISP).
- 2.3. Otelo currently has 255 member companies which together account for 96% of the fixed line telephone market, over 55% of the mobile telephone market and 33% of the ISP market¹.
- 2.4. Otelo's primary objective is to receive and investigate complaints from members' domestic and small business customers; and by means of issuing final decisions, to reach fair and balanced outcomes for those complaints. On its website the organisation describes its role as 'to investigate complaints fairly. We listen to both sides of the story and look at the facts. The service is free and independent'.²
- 2.5. Before making a complaint to Otelo, customers must first have taken their complaint through their member company's' complaints procedures and the case must effectively be 'deadlocked' i.e. the company has stated that it can do no more to try and resolve the complaint. If Otelo considers that a complaint is within its remit, the Otelo team will investigate the case and the Ombudsman will consider whether the member company must take any action. Member companies have undertaken to honour the Ombudsman's decision.
- 2.6. Depending on their own requirements and the nature of their case, members of the public who use the Otelo service are likely to fall into one of the following 3 broad groups:
 - Those whose complaints have been accepted for investigation by Otelo, and have either been through the investigation process and received the Ombudsman's final decision or have had their case resolved through assisted negotiation by the Ombudsman;
 - Those who made an enquiry and whose complaints were within Otelo's terms of reference but who did not return a complaint form;
 - Those who made an enquiry to Otelo but, for whatever reason, Otelo was not able to investigate their complaint e.g. either because their communications company is not a member or because they had not yet given their service provider an opportunity to resolve the problem.

¹ <http://www.otelo.org.uk>

² <http://www.otelo.org.uk>

- 2.7. This is now the third consecutive year in which Otelo has undertaken research into how satisfied these Otelo users are with the service the organisation provides. As a result it is now possible to examine not just how people thought Otelo performed within the last year but also how that performance relates to the findings from the previous years' research i.e. to consider whether any trends are starting to emerge.
- 2.8. To this end, and where appropriate and informative, this years findings will be compared with those from previous years and from 2005 in particular³ and the technical appendix to this report presents the results for 2005 as well as 2006.

Aims and Objectives of the 2006 Research

- 2.9. The main focus of this year's research remains simple and broadly in line with that of 2004 and 2005, i.e. to examine whether those who have approached Otelo consider it is achieving its aim of providing a service that is independent, easy to use, free of charge, transparent and effective.
- 2.10. In addition, and in keeping with last year's study, Otelo also wished to consult its member companies and ascertain their views on both the operational and strategic implications, of being a member of Otelo.

Research Methods

- 2.11. As outlined above this is the third year in which this research has been undertaken. In 2005 some of the questions in the survey of Otelo users were refined in response to the 2004 research findings. However, no particular survey design issues emerged in 2005 and as a result this year's questionnaire survey remained essentially the same.⁴

Enquirers

- 2.12. The enquirers group is made up of members of the public that made contact with Otelo (seeking advice, information etc) but for some reason did not go on to lodge an official complaint against their service provider.
- 2.13. Their views were gathered in 2 different ways with the method employed dependant on the way in which the enquirer had chosen to contact Otelo i.e. those that had telephoned Otelo to make their enquiry were asked to participate in a telephone survey while those that had written to Otelo were sent a postal survey.
- 2.14. Craigforth was provided with the contact details of a random sample of all the enquirers who had contacted Otelo over 2 specific periods: between October and December 2005, and between January and March 2006.

³ Due to slight changes in the methodology adopted it is not always possible to make a direct comparison with the findings from 2004.

⁴ In this year's survey a few questions had additional options to the list of possible answers available e.g. new service providers

- 2.15. A total of 502 postal surveys were issued, all with a covering letter from Otelo and a reply paid envelope. Half of the surveys were issued in February 2006 and the remainder in April 2006. In both cases a reminder was sent to those that had not responded to the initial mail out. The survey was closed on the 19th May 2006.
- 2.16. A total of 205 surveys were returned, a response rate of 41% and identical to that achieved in the previous year.
- 2.17. The telephone survey of enquirers was undertaken in the first 5 months of 2006. Otelo staff provided Craigforth with the contact details of members of the public who had contacted Otelo within the previous month. In all cases Otelo staff had asked the enquirer if they would be willing to participate in the study before their contact details were provided to the study team.
- 2.18. Telephone enquirers had, therefore, all had very recent contact with Otelo and were able to give the research team a very current impression of their experience. It should be noted, however, that the contact could be ongoing and that these enquirers may go on to lodge a complaint i.e. that at some point in the future a member of the telephone enquirer group could go on to become a complainant.
- 2.19. A total of 98 telephone enquirer interviews were achieved in the January-May 2006 period with an average of around 20 undertaken per month. This is the same number of interviews as undertaken in 2005. Interviews were undertaken during normal working hours but also during the evening or at the weekend if the enquirer preferred⁵. The interview schedule used is included within the appendix to this report.

Complainants

- 2.20. The complainants group is made up of members of the public that went on to make an official complaint to Otelo about their service provider. For the purposes of this study a random sample of all complainants who contacted Otelo during 2 specific periods, between October and December 2005, and between January and March 2006, and whose Otelo case was closed, was used.
- 2.21. Otelo sent complainants a letter from the Ombudsman which explained about the research and gave them the opportunity to decline to participate. Contact details for those who did not 'opt out' were passed on to the study team.
- 2.22. A total of 496 postal surveys were issued, all with a covering letter from Otelo and a reply paid envelope. Half of the surveys were issued in February 2006 and the remainder in April 2006. In both cases a reminder was issued to those that had not responded to the initial mailing. The survey was closed on the 19th May 2006.
- 2.23. A total of 294 surveys were returned, a response rate of 59% and again very similar to that achieved in the previous year, when the response rate had been 58%.

⁵ The enquirers preference was ascertained by the Otelo staff before passing their contact details on to Craigforth.

Member Companies

- 2.24. As in 2005, Otelo also asked the study team to consult with some of its member companies and gather their views on a range of both operational and wider strategic issues. In order to cover both these aspects Craigforth conducted telephone interviews with Complaints Managers (i.e. those with responsibility for their companies day to day handling of complaints and for working directly with Otelo) but also with a small number of Senior Managers i.e. those responsible for taking decisions concerning which ombudsman scheme to join and able to give their companies view on issues such as charging structures. The interview schedule used for each group is included within the appendix to this report.
- 2.25. Otelo e-mailed all of the Complaints Managers for their member companies, informing them that the research was being undertaken and inviting them to participate. Contact details were also passed on to the Craigforth team.
- 2.26. Craigforth selected a range of companies to approach including some companies that had participated last year and a random sample of other companies. Complaints managers were initially contacted by e mail and then follow up telephone calls were made. When a Complaints Managers was willing to participate a suitable time to conduct the full telephone interview was agreed.
- 2.27. A total of 11 Complaints Managers were interviewed this year, compared to 20 in 2005. Overall, it proved difficult to get member companies to agree to participate in the study and in many cases it was not possible to make any contact at all (e.g. no response was received when email or telephone requests for interviews were sent). In other cases Complaints Managers did make contact with the study team but declined to take part, often because their company had never actually had a complaint lodged against them and they did not feel they had anything significant to contribute to the research.
- 2.28. Similar problems were experienced with the Senior Managers, although it should be stressed that, as with the Complaints Managers, key personnel in a number of companies gave very willingly and generously of their time.
- 2.29. Overall around 35 companies were approached at the senior manager level and again the sample was drawn from previous interviewees and a random sample of other member companies. Seven interviews were achieved (compared to 5 in 2005).
- 2.30. It should be noted that some issues arose regarding the accuracy of member company contact details supplied to Craigforth by Otelo and this also affected response rates among member companies.

3. WHO WERE THE ENQUIRERS AND THE COMPLAINANTS?

- 3.1. This chapter sets out the main characteristics of those who responded to the surveys of enquirers and complainants.
- 3.2. The vast majority of those surveyed and those that responded were domestic customers. Of the postal enquirers, only 9% of the total sample was small businesses and only 8% of the respondents, a higher proportion of the telephone enquirer respondents were small businesses (18%). However the proportion of small businesses among the complainants was extremely low (only 3% of the total sample and 2% of the respondents).

Personal Characteristics

- 3.3. As outlined in the previous chapter, a total of 294 complainants and 205 enquirers participated in the postal survey. In addition a further 98 enquirers took part in the telephone survey.
- 3.4. A breakdown of respondents by gender is shown in the table below. Overall the gender profile is relatively evenly balanced with 53% of all those participating being male and 47% female. This is broadly in line with the profile of the total sample, of which 56% were male and 44% female.

Sex of respondents

Sex	Enquirers		Complainants
	Postal survey	Telephone survey	
Male	58%	41%	54%
Female	42%	59%	46%
Base (n)	204	98	290

Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

- 3.5. The proportion of male respondents was higher among the postal enquirers, 3 out of 5 of whom were men. In contrast, 3 out of 5 of the participants in the telephone survey of enquirers were female⁶.
- 3.6. Overall, there has been some change in the gender profile of respondents compared to the 2005 research (in which the gender distribution was even more evenly balanced) but shows a return to a very similar gender distribution to that found in 2004.
- 3.7. In line with the 2004 and 2005 results, a clear majority of respondents were aged between 36 and 65 years. This group accounted for 7 out of 10 of both the complainants and the postal enquirers but was slightly less dominant among the telephone enquirers, just over 6 out of 10 of whom belonged to the 36 to 65 age group⁷.

⁶ The differences in sample and method should be noted. Participants in the telephone survey were recruited over the telephone and were more likely to be female on balance (of the total collected sample of 260, 137 were female).

⁷ Again, the differences in sample should be noted when considering these patterns.

Age of respondents

	Enquirers		Complainants
	Postal survey	Telephone survey	
25 and under	1%	6%	3%
26-35	9%	24%	11%
36-45	24%	25%	23%
46-55	21%	23%	29%
56-65	27%	16%	19%
66+	19%	5%	14%
Base (n)	198	95	292

Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

- 3.8. A higher proportion of the respondents to the telephone survey of enquirers belonged to younger age groups; 3 out of 10 were aged 35 and under, compared to just 1 out of 10 of the postal enquirers (10%) and just over 1 out of 10 of the complainants (14%). Correspondingly, telephone enquirers are less likely to belong to the 66+ age group – just 5%, compared to 19% of postal enquirers and 14% of complainants.
- 3.9. The 14% of complainants that fell into the older age group shows a marked increase from the previous year in which only 6% of complainants were aged 66 years or over.
- 3.10. The housing tenure profile of respondents is set out in the table below. In keeping with the previous years' research a considerable majority of respondents (around 4 out of 5) live in the owner occupied sector. This was slightly more pronounced amongst complainants (83%) and slightly less so among telephone enquirers (77%).
- 3.11. Overall, however, the proportion of respondents living in the owner occupied sector is above the national average (in 2003/04 around 7 out of 10 of British households lived in the owner occupied sector)⁸.
- 3.12. Around 1 out of 5 of the telephone survey respondents rent their accommodation, with just over 1 out of 10 renting from a council. This is a higher proportion than among the groups that responded to the postal surveys and may in part be a reflection of the difference in the age profile of respondents i.e. younger people may be more likely to rent and may be more likely to respond to a telephone rather than a written survey.

⁸ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk>

Tenure of respondents

	Enquirers		Complainants
	Postal survey	Telephone survey	
Owner occupier	79%	77%	83%
Tenant of council	4%	11%	3%
Tenant of housing association, private landlord	12%	9%	12%
Other	5%	1%	2%
Base (n)	198	91	289

Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

- 3.13. Almost all respondents to all 3 surveys reported that English was their first language with that majority particularly marked among the telephone survey respondents. Around 1 out of 20 of those responding to both postal surveys (enquirers and complainants) reported that English was not their first language⁹.

English as first language

	Enquirers		Complainants
	Postal survey	Telephone survey	
Yes	95%	99%	95%
No	5%	1%	6%
Base (n)	197	94	272

Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

- 3.14. Over 9 out of 10 respondents reported their racial or ethnic background as 'White', ranging from 92% of the complainants up to 97% of those that responded to the enquirers telephone survey. Most belonged to the 'White English' category – over 7 out of 10 complainants and postal enquirers (72% in both cases), and almost 4 out of 5 telephone enquirers (87%). Relative to the previous year there have been slight increases in the proportion of white respondents that identified themselves as being of Welsh or Scottish origin.
- 3.15. The remainder of respondents belonged to a range of other racial or ethnic groups, but with only 2% or less of all respondents falling within most of the categories listed in the table below.

⁹ A report by the then Department for Education and Skills (DfEE) in 2001, found that there was no reliable data on the number of people living in Great Britain for whom English was not their first language.

Racial or ethnic background

		Enquirers		Complainants	Census 2001
		Postal survey	Telephone survey		
White	English	72%	87%	72%	
	Welsh	7%	4%	5%	
	Scottish	8%	3%	8%	
	Irish	2%	1%	2%	
	Other British	-	1%	1%	
	Any other White	6%		4%	
Total White		95%	97%	92%	92%
Mixed		-		1%	
Asian or Asian British	Indian	<1%	1%	2%	
	Pakistani	<1%		1%	
	Bangladeshi	-		-	
	Any other Asian	<1%		1%	
Black or Black British	Caribbean	1%	1%	1%	
	African	2%		1%	
	Any other Black	-	1%	<1%	
Chinese/ Other Ethnic Group	Chinese	<1%		1%	
	Any other	-		-	
Total Ethnic Minority		5%	3%	8%	8%
Base (n)		193	93	287	58,789,194

Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

- 3.16. Based on a comparison with the 2001 Census returns, the profile of respondents to the complainants and postal enquirers' surveys is similar to that for the UK as a whole. However, relative to the national profile there is an under-representation of non white groups among the telephone respondents¹⁰; only 3% of this group were non white as opposed to around 8% of the UK population.
- 3.17. Overall around 1 out of 6 respondents reported having one or more forms of disability. Postal respondents were much more likely to report having a disability - 19% of enquirers and 16% of complainants respectively while this accounted for only 8% of the telephone enquirer respondents. In part this will be a reflection of the relative difference in age profiles of the postal and telephone survey respondents, i.e., postal respondents tend to be older than telephone respondents. It also seems likely that respondents with certain types of disability such as a hearing impairment, will tend to make written contact with Otelo rather than by using the telephone¹¹.

¹⁰ Note that this is among those that responded to the survey and is not based on analysis of the profile of those using the Otelo service overall, for which no information is available on ethnicity etc.

¹¹ as outlined in the method section the medium through which Otelo customers were surveyed mirrored the way in which the customer had initially made contact with Otelo

Type of disability

	Enquirers		Complainants
	Postal survey	Telephone survey	
Impaired hearing	8%	-	6%
Poor sight/ blindness	5%	-	2%
Problems with physical mobility	9%	3%	7%
Other disability	7%	5%	6%
None reported	81%	92%	84%
Base (n)	205	98	294

Percentages do not sum to 100% due to multiple responses (i.e. people reporting multiple disabilities)

4. THE MEMBER COMPANIES AND THEIR CUSTOMERS' PROBLEMS

- 4.1. This chapter gives information on which member companies respondents had complained about and the basis on which the complaint was made.

Type of Company and Actual Company

- 4.2. The majority of respondents in the 2006 research had contacted Otelo about a fixed-line or carrier pre-select company – 7 out of 10 enquirers and over 6 out of 10 complainants. Problems with internet service providers (ISPs) were also common among complainants, with around 1 out of 4 contacting Otelo about their ISP.
- 4.3. Compared to the findings from the 2005 research, a significantly lower proportion of respondents contacted Otelo about a problem with a mobile telephone company. In 2005 around 1 out of 5 enquirers (in both the postal and telephone surveys), and 2 out of 5 complainants, had contacted Otelo about their mobile phone company. This year, this fell to just over 1 out of 10 postal enquirers and just over 1 out of 10 complainants, although the proportion remained similar among telephone enquirer respondents (1 out of 5).
- 4.4. There has also been a substantial reduction in the proportion of telephone survey respondents that were making an enquiry about their ISP (from 1 out of 5 down to 1 out of 10).
- 4.5. In contrast, the proportion of respondents that had contacted Otelo about a fixed line or carrier pre-select company increased significantly across all survey groups. This suggests a notable change to the profile of the type of company Otelo deals with, away from mobile phone providers and with an increasing domination of fixed line or carrier pre-select companies. The figures for all 3 years, based on survey group surveyed are displayed in the charts below¹².

¹² In all cases percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding and multiple responses

Figure 1: Postal Enquirers 2004-2006 - Type of company

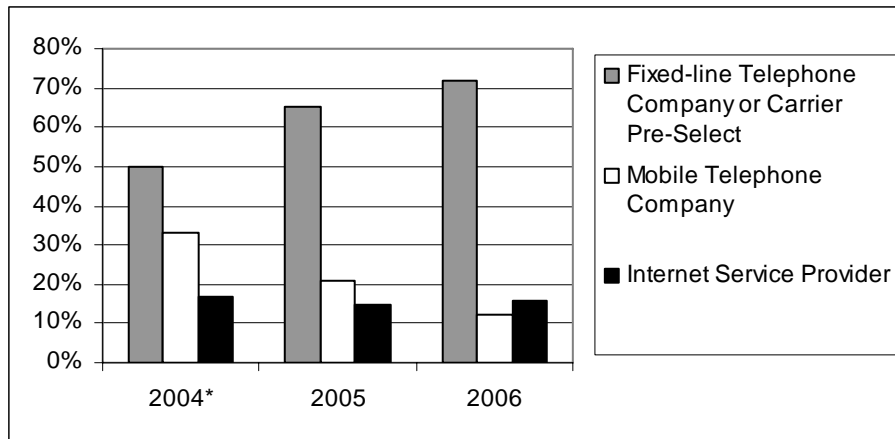


Figure 2: Telephone Enquirers 2004-2006 - Type of company

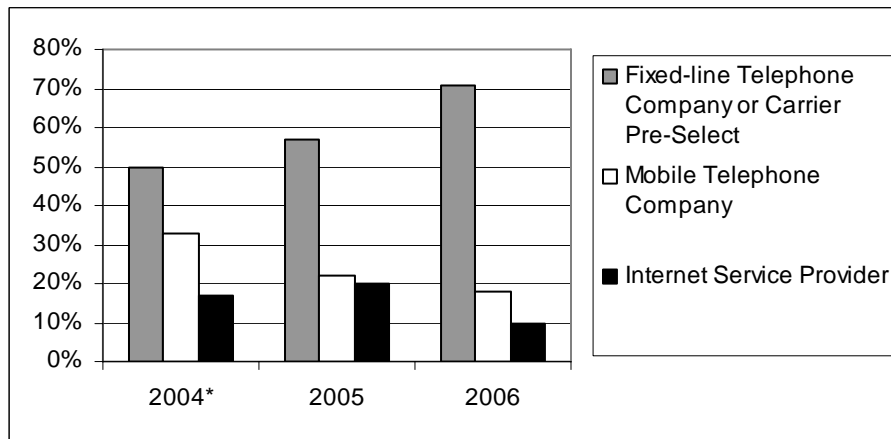
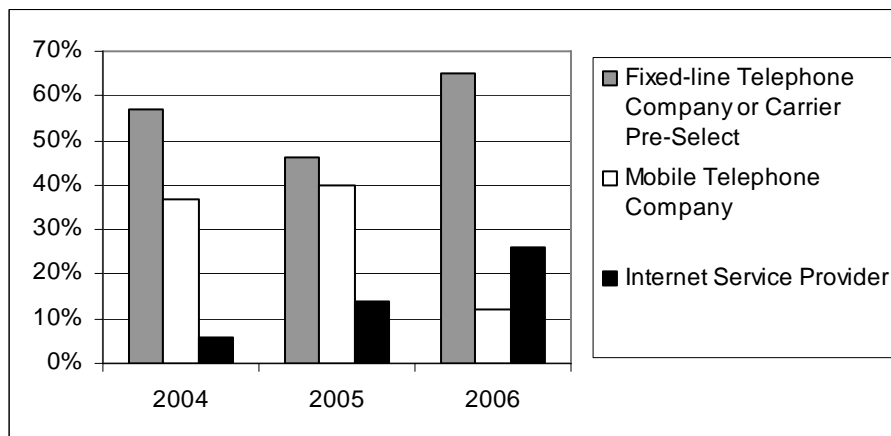


Figure 3: Complainants 2004 – 2006 – Type of company



Problems with Member Companies

- 4.6. Billing and charging continues to be at the heart of many respondents' problems and was reported by 7 out of 10 complainants and 7 out of 10 postal enquirers, but by less than 4 out of 10 telephone enquirers.
- 4.7. Customer service problems were also mentioned frequently by complainants (by 3 out of 5) and by postal enquirers (1 out of 2) although was much less of an issue this year for the telephone enquirer respondents (1 out of 10).
- 4.8. Disconnection or reconnection, and mis-selling or misinformation were also key problems with around 1 out of 3 of both the complainants and the postal enquirers reporting having had these problems. Problems around the loss of service were also reported by around 1 out of 3 of the postal enquirer respondents.

- 4.9. A specific category to cover problems with autodiallers was introduced in this year's survey and around 1 out of 10 of the complainants reported that this had been a problem in their case.

All problems experienced with member companies

	Enquirers		Complainants
	Postal survey	Telephone survey	
Billing/ charging	68%	56%	73%
Customer service	51%	11%	61%
Mis-selling/ misinformation	27%	18%	32%
Disconnection/ reconnection	27%	16%	30%
Loss of service	31%	15%	19%
Equipment faults	16%	13%	11%
Autodiallers	3%	1%	9%
Privacy	2%	1%	3%
Something else	13%	5%	10%
Base (n)	205	97	292

Percentages do not sum to 100% due to multiple responses

- 4.10. Postal enquirers and complainants were asked to identify the single most serious problem among those that had led them to contact Otelo. The largest group of respondents selected billing and charging here, with 2 out of 5 complainants (39%) and a similar proportion of postal enquirers (36%) identifying this as the single most important problem they had experienced.
- 4.11. This was closely followed by customer service which was identified as the most serious problem by 1 out of 4 complainants and 1 out of 4 postal enquirers.

Single most serious problem – Postal survey

	Enquirers	Complainants
Billing/ charging	36%	39%
Customer service	26%	26%
Mis-selling/ misinformation	10%	12%
Loss of service	14%	6%
Disconnection/ reconnection	3%	6%
Equipment faults	3%	3%
Autodiallers	1%	4%
Privacy	1%	1%
Something else	6%	3%
Base (n)	185	262

Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

- 4.12. Respondents to all 3 surveys were also asked how long they had been pursuing their complaint before contacting Otelo and in line with the previous years' results the pattern of responses shows some marked differences between the groups.

- 4.13. Complainants were likely to have pursued their complaint for the longest time before contacting Otelo, with the vast majority having done so for over 3 months (4 out of 5 complainants). Almost 1 out of 3 had spent 6 months or longer trying to resolve their problem (31%).
- 4.14. In contrast, telephone enquirers were likely to have pursued their complaint with their provider for the shortest period, with almost 1 out of 3 having spent less than a month trying to resolve the problem before contacting Otelo. Only just over 1 out of 3 of the telephone enquirers had been complaining for over 3 months before making contact.
- 4.15. The distribution is more evenly spread among the postal enquirers group; while over 3 out of 5 respondents had spent 3 months or more trying to resolve their complaint with the member company, around 1 out of 3 had contacted Otelo within 3 months.
- 4.16. Although the figures overall are similar to those of the previous year there appears to have been a slight shift towards customers spending longer pursuing their problem with the member company before making contact with Otelo.

Duration of complaint to company - pre-Otelo

	Enquirers		Complainants
	Postal survey	Telephone survey	
Under a month	13%	32%	2%
1 - 2 months	19%	17%	11%
3 -4 months	27%	18%	32%
5 - 6 months	17%	7%	21%
Over 6 months	21%	10%	31%
Not really sure/ don't remember	2%	15%	4%
Base (n)	201	98	289

Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

Information Provided about How to Complain

- 4.17. Since 2003, the Telecoms industry regulator (OFCOM) has required public communications providers to provide customers with an approved Code of Practice¹³ and respondents to the survey of complainants and the survey of postal enquirers were asked whether their member company made them aware of its respective Code.
- 4.18. Complainants were less likely to report having been made aware of their company's Code (just 1 out of 3) while a higher proportion of the enquirers reported being made aware of the Code (almost 1 out of 2).

¹³ www.ofcom.org.uk

- 4.19. Arguably it is of some concern that a majority of all respondents reported that they had not been made aware of their companies Code of Practice although it should be noted that these figures are likely to in part reflect the degree of customer recall or awareness and do not necessarily reflect company practice. Either way, and although there has been some improvement compared to the previous year, it would appear there is still some room for improvement in this area but it is difficult to determine whether company practice or customer awareness measures should be targeted.

Made aware of Code of Practice on complaints handling? – Postal survey

	Enquirers	Complainants
Yes	48%	33%
No	44%	55%
Not sure/ don't remember	8%	11%
Base (n)	202	289

Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

- 4.20. Among the minority of respondents who recalled being made aware of their company's Code of Practice. A bill from the company complained about was the most common source of information on this; over 1 out of 2 enquirers and 1 out of 3 complainants cited this source.
- 4.21. A telephone conversation with the company was the second most common source among complainants and was mentioned by 1 out of 5 of this group, compared to just 1 out of 10 of the enquirers.
- 4.22. OFCOM was the second most common source of the Code of Practice among enquirers – 2 out of 5 enquirers found out about their company's Code through OFCOM compared to 1 out of 10 complainants.
- 4.23. Just 14% of complainants and 4% of enquirers reported being sent a copy of the Code of Practice during the period in which they were complaining to their provider. Again, it is difficult to determine whether this low rate reflects company practice or customer recall or awareness.

How Enquirers and Complainants were made aware of the Code of Practice – Postal survey

	Enquirers	Complainants
Information on a bill sent by the company	53%	35%
Telephone conversation with the company	10%	20%
The regulator/ OFCOM	19%	10%
The company sent a copy during my complaint	4%	14%
The company's website	4%	12%
Other	18%	6%
Not sure/ don't remember	2%	3%
Base (n)	97	92

Percentages do not sum to 100% due to multiple responses

- 4.24. Respondents were also asked whether they had been advised that they could take their complaint to Otelo once they had spent 12 weeks pursuing the matter with their member company i.e. once the time period fell within Otelo's terms of reference
- 4.25. Very few respondents reported being advised of this by their member company – just 1 out of 5 postal enquirers and only 1 out of 10 complainants.

Advised that could refer to Otelo after 12 Weeks? – Postal survey

	Enquirers	Complainants
Yes	19%	11%
No	78%	85%
Not sure/ don't remember	2%	4%
Base (n)	203	292

Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

- 4.26. Of the small proportion of complainants who reported being advised of this, over half said it had occurred at the 'deadlock' stage, when the company told them it could do no more. Less than 1 out of 3 reported being advised of this during the complaints process and no complainant reported being advised of this at the outset of their complaint.
- 4.27. Around 2 out of 5 postal enquirers reported being advised that they could take their complaint to Otelo after 12 weeks at an 'Other' stage – analysis of the literal responses here shows that almost all in this category read about the '12 week' rule on their company's bill. Almost 1 out of 4 was advised at the 'deadlock' stage with 1 out of 5 being advised during the complaints process¹⁴.

Stage at which advised – Postal survey

	Enquirers	Complainants
When I first complained to the company	6	-
During the company's complaints process	8	9
When the company told me it was unable to resolve my complaint or could do no more	9	18
Not sure/ don't remember	1	2
Other	15	4
Base (n)	39	33

¹⁴ However it should again be noted that numbers remembering are small.

5. INITIAL CONTACT WITH OTELO AND THE OTELO WEBSITE

- 5.1. This section of the report examines respondents' initial contact with Otelo, including sources of information about the organisation. It also includes data about customers' use of the Otelo website.

Sources of Information about Otelo

- 5.2. As in 2005, respondents had learned about Otelo from a wide range of sources, but with information on member company bills now the most frequently mentioned source amongst all 3 groups of respondents¹⁵. This was more pronounced amongst enquirers than complainants – around 2 out of 5 enquirers learned about Otelo from information on their company's bill, compared with 1 out of 5 of the complainants.
- 5.3. Among complainants the second most commonly mentioned source of information was OFCOM. More complainants than enquirers learned about Otelo from OFCOM – almost 1 out of 5 complainants compared with just over 1 out of 10 telephone enquirers and just under 1 out of 10 postal enquirers.
- 5.4. Just under 1 out of 5 of both the complainant and postal enquirer respondents reported that they already knew about Otelo. While these figures are slightly higher than for last year the underlying trend has not shown any real increases over the 3 years for which this research has been undertaken e.g. at 18% the proportion of postal enquirers that reported they already knew about Otelo in 2004 was the same as reported in this round of the research.
- 5.5. Amongst telephone enquirers, member company information (including the company's Code of Practice), was a common source of information; 15% reported finding out about Otelo in this way compared to just 7% of postal enquirers and 4% of complainants.
- 5.6. Other more commonly mentioned sources among all 3 groups of respondents included the Otelo website or Internet, the telephone directory, CAB or another advice centre, and friends, family or colleagues.

¹⁵ In 2005 the proportion of complainants who already knew about Otelo or found out about the organisation via the internet was slightly higher.

Sources of Information about Otelos

	Enquirers		Complainants
	Postal survey	Telephone survey	
A bill sent by the company complained about	43%	37%	21%
I already knew about Otelos	18%	6%	18%
The regulator/ OFCOM	8%	13%	19%
The Otelos website/ from the internet	9%	11%	17%
The telephone directory	7%	10%	6%
The company's code of practice on complaint handling	5%	15%	4%
Another leaflet sent by the company	2%		
A CAB, trading standards, other advice centre	4%	8%	10%
Friends, colleagues, family	6%	6%	7%
Another company	3%	6%	4%
A letter from the company complained about, saying they could not do any more about my complaint	2%	-	5%
A professional adviser	2%	-	4%
Press, radio, TV	1%	-	4%
From Consumer Direct	Na	Na	2%
Elsewhere	4%	2%	5%
Base (n)	203	98	292

Percentages do not sum to 100% due to multiple responses

First Contact with Otelos

- 5.7. Respondents to all 3 surveys were asked about the stage at which they had contacted Otelos. This is significant since the terms of reference allow Otelos to investigate only those complaints which have either reached 'deadlock' within the member company's complaints process, or those which have been ongoing for 12 weeks or longer.
- 5.8. Very few respondents overall, and none of the telephone enquirer respondents, had contacted Otelos before complaining to their member company.
- 5.9. The majority of enquirers contacted Otelos after complaining to their company but before receiving a decision; nearly 7 out of 10 postal enquirers and well over 9 out of 10 telephone enquirers contacted Otelos at this stage.
- 5.10. The proportion of all 3 groups of respondents contacting Otelos at this (potentially still quite early) stage is higher than in 2005; 5% higher in the case of complainants and 7% higher in the case of the postal enquirers. However, the most marked rise is among telephone enquirers, 95% of whom reported contacting Otelos at the pre-decision stage in 2006 compared with only 74% in 2005.

- 5.11. The response amongst complainants is more mixed; just under 1 out of 2 respondents had contacted Otelos after complaining to their member company but before receiving a decision (47%), while just over 1 out of 2 contacted Otelos after 'deadlock' had been reached (51%).

Time of first contact with Otelos

	Enquirers		Complainants
	Postal survey	Telephone survey	
Before I had complained to the company	2%	-	2%
After I had complained to the company but before I had received their decision	68%	95%	47%
After the company had made their decision, and I decided I wanted to take my case to the Ombudsman	30%	5%	51%
Base (n)	202	98	287

Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

- 5.12. Respondents were also asked how they first contacted Otelos. The response amongst enquirers largely reflects the sampling selection, with the vast majority (80%) of postal enquirers first contacting Otelos by letter or fax and almost all telephone enquirers (97%) contacting Otelos by telephone in the first instance.
- 5.13. Contact methods were more mixed amongst complainants. Telephone was the most frequently mentioned method and was used by almost 2 out of 3 complainants. Complainants were more likely to use the telephone for initial contact than in 2005 (64% in 2006 compared with 57% in 2005). Around 1 out of 5 complainants first contacted Otelos by letter or fax.
- 5.14. Few respondents used alternative methods of contact such as the online contact form or email. Perhaps surprisingly the proportion of complainants using email has dropped significantly since 2005 (from 17% in 2005 to only 7% this year). The introduction of the online form, which was used by 7% of complainants, may account for some of this decrease.

Method of first contact with Otelos

	Enquirers		Complainants
	Postal survey	Telephone survey	
By telephone	13%	97%	64%
By letter/ fax	80%	1%	22%
By email	6%	2%	7%
Using the online form	1%	-	7%
By text phone	-	-	-
Somebody else contacted them on my behalf	1%	-	1%
Base (n)	204	98	290

Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

Reasons for Contacting Otelo

- 5.15. The complainants' and postal enquirers' survey asked respondents to select from a list of reasons for contacting Otelo.
- 5.16. Figures here suggest that respondents' key motivation for contacting Otelo was overwhelmingly related to registering their complaint and 'getting the process moving'. Interestingly this was more pronounced among enquirers; 3 out of 4 enquirers gave this reason compared to around 2 out of 3 complainants. Enquirers may include many people for whom Otelo can not go on to investigate a complaint i.e. their case may fall outwith the remit of the organisation. This make give rise to the potential for dissatisfaction and these issues will be explored in Chapter 6.
- 5.17. The second most common reason for contacting Otelo among both groups was to get specific advice about what to do next regarding their complaint. Around 2 out of 5 in both groups reported that this was why they had contacted Otelo.
- 5.18. These findings are broadly similar to those from last year's research, although complainants were more likely to contact Otelo for general advice this year – 11% compared to 3% in 2005.

Reasons for first contacting Otelo

	Enquirers postal survey	Complainants
To register my complaint and get the complaint process moving	74%	67%
To get specific advice about what I should do next	39%	42%
To give me advice about making a complaint to my company	15%	16%
To give me an indication about the strength of my case, to see if it was worth making a complaint to Otelo	8%	18%
To get general advice about what telecoms companies/ ISPs normally do/ don't do ("can they do that?")	11%	11%
To send me a form/ leaflet on how to complain to Otelo	5%	17%
To give me an indication about the strength of my case, to see if it was worth making a complaint to the company	7%	9%
To give me an idea of the time a complaint might take	4%	4%
Base (n)	204	291

Percentages do not sum to 100% due to multiple responses

- 5.19. The data gathered as part of the telephone enquirers' survey suggests that the vast majority of this group (79 out of 98) were looking for more general advice about complaining to their company. Some telephone enquirers were looking for more specific information or solutions to their problem but overall the telephone enquirers seem to contact at an earlier stage in the process of taking up a complaint than the other groups.

Initial Reception

- 5.20. Respondents' satisfaction with Otelo's initial handling of their query or complaint was typically high and was in keeping with previous years' research. Figures for both the postal and telephone enquirers have been combined and are displayed in the first of the tables below¹⁶. The subsequent table provides the equivalent responses among the complainants. The proportion of respondents who answered each of the questions varied considerably on a case by case basis and as a result there are considerable variations in the base number for each question.

Satisfaction with first contact with Otelo – Enquirers (postal & telephone combined)

Enquirers	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither /nor	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Base
Staff spoken to	72%	18%	6%	-	4%	158
The leaflet/ form sent	34%	29%	18%	6%	13%	141
Explanation/ advice given	43%	21%	14%	7%	15%	258
Speed of initial response	56%	25%	8%	3%	7%	263
Explanation about the powers of Otelo	49%	20%	15%	5%	11%	244
The Otelo website	39%	17%	35%	4%	6%	54

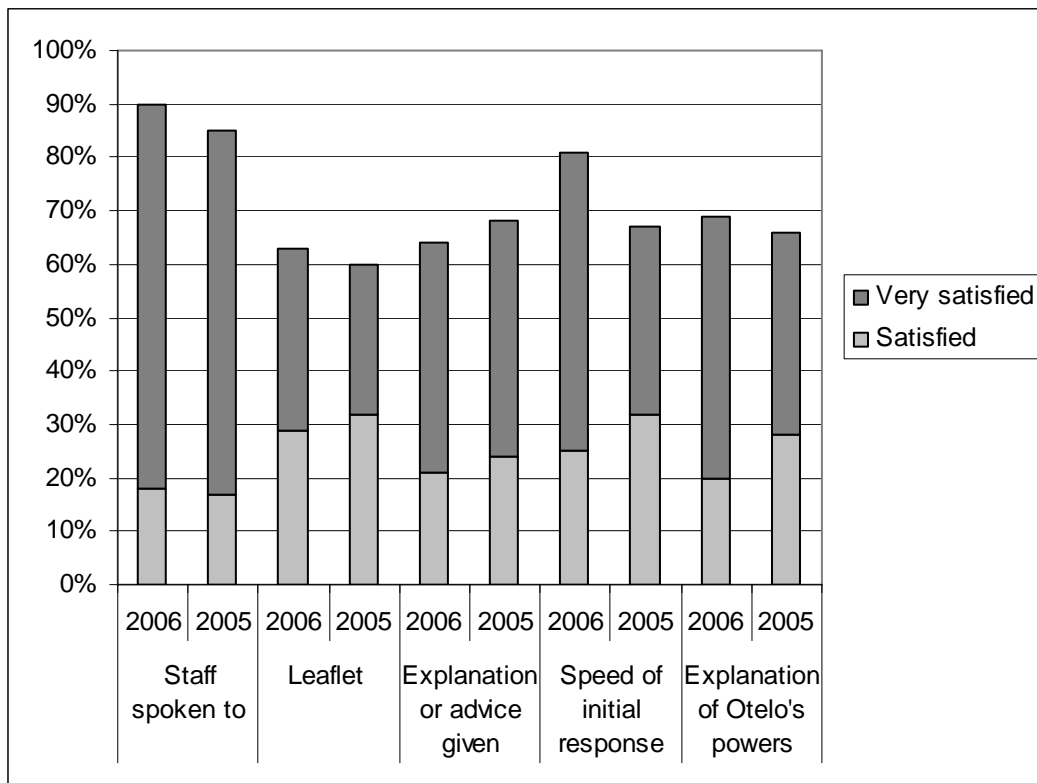
Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

- 5.21. Satisfaction with the staff spoken to was extremely high once again, with 9 out of 10 enquirers satisfied and a substantial majority very satisfied (72%).
- 5.22. On balance, the enquirers reported high satisfaction levels with all aspects of initial reception and:
- 4 out of 5 enquirers were satisfied with the speed of initial response, with the majority of these being very satisfied (56% of all respondents);
 - 7 out of 10 were satisfied with the explanation of Otelo's powers that was given, and 1 out of 2 enquirers were very satisfied (49%);
 - Over 3 out of 5 were satisfied with the explanation or advice they were offered with 2 out of 5 being very satisfied; and
 - Over 3 out of 5 were satisfied with the leaflet they received and almost as many were satisfied with the website, although the proportion of enquirers very satisfied with these aspects of the initial contact was lower than in the other survey groups.
- 5.23. While overall levels of dissatisfaction are low any dissatisfaction expressed was highest in relation to the explanation and advice given. Just over 1 out of 5 enquirers were dissatisfied with this aspect of the initial contact and 1 out of 6 reported being very dissatisfied. Around 1 out of 5 respondents were dissatisfied with the leaflet or form sent, and 1 out of 6 with the explanation of Otelo's powers

¹⁶ The figures on a group by group basis are provided with the appendices to this report

- 5.24. Another feature of the limited dissatisfaction expressed specifically by enquirers was that where it did arise they were likely to be very dissatisfied and in all but one category (that relating to the website) with twice as many enquirers being very dissatisfied as opposed to fairly dissatisfied.
- 5.25. Overall there have been some encouraging improvements in reported satisfaction compared to the 2005 survey and some key figures are displayed in the chart below.

Figure 4: Percentage of Enquirers satisfied or very satisfied with first contact 2005 & 2006



- 5.26. Satisfaction has increased in 4 of the 6 categories surveyed as follows:
- Satisfaction with the staff spoken to is up from 85% to 90% and the very satisfied group has increased from 68% to 72%;
 - Satisfaction with the leaflet sent has increased slightly from 60% to 63%;
 - Satisfaction with the speed of initial response has increased markedly from 67% to 81% and the proportion of enquirers that were very satisfied has increased from 35% to 56%; and
 - While satisfaction with the explanation of the powers of Otelos has increased slightly from 66% to 69%, the proportion that was very satisfied has seen a more significant increase, from 38% in 2005 up to 49% in 2006.

- 5.27. The pattern relating to dissatisfaction is slightly more mixed although overall the trend is positive. Dissatisfaction has decreased in all categories except that relating to the advice and information given (where it increased from 17% to 22%).
- 5.28. Moving on to consider the responses given by the complainants, the results suggest that Otelo has achieved even higher satisfaction ratings with first contact among the complainants group than among the enquirers.

Satisfaction with first contact with Otelo – Complainants

Complainants	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither /nor	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Base
Staff spoken to	70%	19%	5%	3%	3%	221
The leaflet/ form sent	61%	22%	10%	4%	2%	241
Explanation/ advice given	60%	26%	7%	4%	3%	250
Speed of initial response	55%	31%	7%	4%	3%	263
Explanation about the powers of Otelo	51%	31%	9%	4%	5%	259
The Otelo website	42%	37%	15%	2%	5%	62

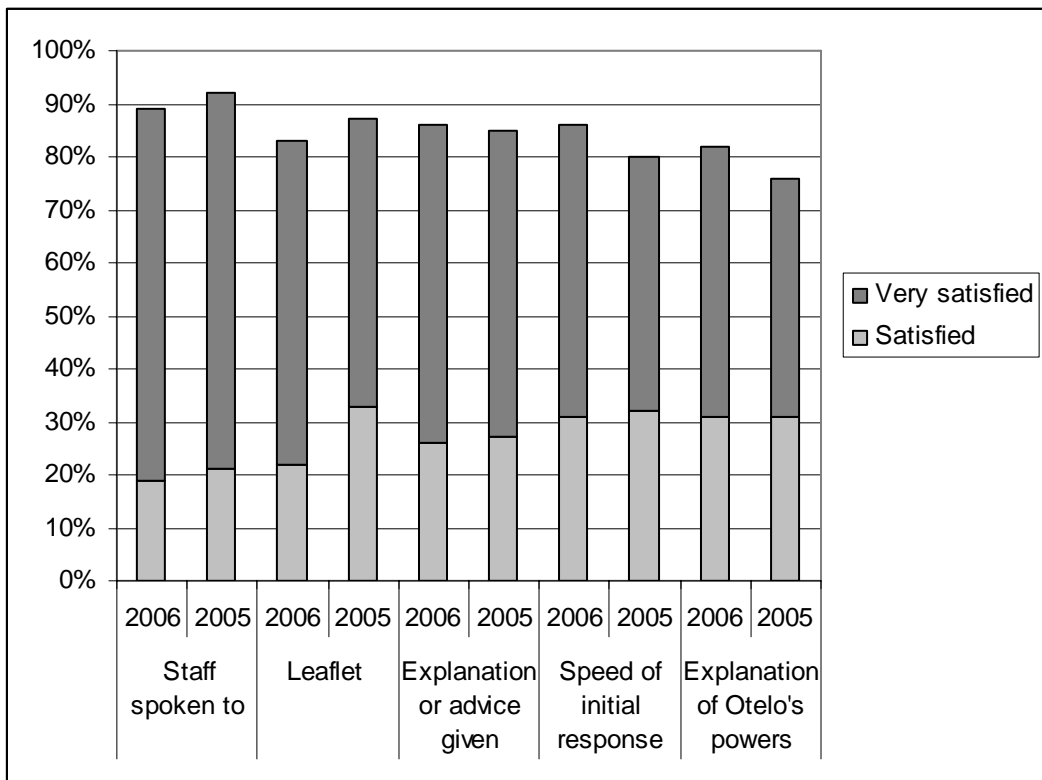
Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

- 5.29. In relation to almost all aspects of initial reception, complainants were more satisfied than enquirers and very few respondents expressed any dissatisfaction:
- Almost 9 out of 10 respondents were satisfied with the staff they spoke to with 7 out of 10 being very satisfied;
 - Almost 9 out of 10 were satisfied with the explanation and advice they received with 3 out of 5 being very satisfied;
 - Almost 9 out of 10 were satisfied with the speed of initial response, although a slightly lower proportion than in most other categories were very satisfied (55%);
 - Just over 4 out of 5 complainants were satisfied with the leaflet or form sent to them, with 3 out of 5 being very satisfied;
 - Over 4 out of 5 were satisfied with the explanation of Otelo's powers, with a little over half being very satisfied' and
 - Of the small proportion of respondents who commented on the website (62 complainants), almost 4 out of 5 were satisfied.
- 5.30. Dissatisfaction with initial reception was extremely low, ranging from 6% to 9%. It was highest in relation to the explanation of Otelo's powers with 9% dissatisfied and 5% very dissatisfied.

5.31. Again when this years results are compared with those from 2005 there are some encouraging improvements with figures displayed in the chart below:

- Satisfaction has increased in 3 out of the 6 categories surveyed (explanation/advice given, speed of initial response and explanation about the powers of Otelos);
- It has remained the same in one category (the website) but fallen back slightly in 2 categories (staff spoken to and the leaflet sent). However, it should be acknowledged that the declines are small and from an initially high base figure, e.g. satisfaction with staff spoken to has fallen from 91% to 89% and with the leaflet from 87% to 83%; and
- In 5 out of the 6 categories the proportion of the satisfied complainants that reported they were very satisfied has increased e.g. those that were very satisfied with the speed of initial response has risen from 48% to 55% and with the website from 35% to 42%.

Figure 5: Percentage of Complainants satisfied or very satisfied with first contact 2005 & 2006



Other Advice Taken

5.32. The postal survey of enquirers and the survey of complainants asked respondents about any other advice they had accessed during the course of their complaint.

- 5.33. The majority of respondents did not make use of other sources of advice. This was particularly the case among enquirers with just 3 out of 10 using other advice sources, compared with almost 2 out of 5 complainants. Again, complainants' potentially more lengthy or complicated interactions with their member company might result in them being more likely to access a range of advice.
- 5.34. Among enquirers who *did* take advice from sources other than Otelo, OFCOM was the most commonly mentioned (11%). Among complainants who took other advice, OFCOM(15%), unpaid help from colleagues, friends or relatives (11%) and CAB or other advice centres (11%) featured most strongly.

Other sources of advice – Postal survey

	Enquirers	Complainants
No one	69%	61%
OFTEL/ OFCOM/ Government department/ agency	11%	15%
Unpaid help from friend, colleague, relative	8%	11%
CAB/Trading Standards/ other advice centre	7%	11%
A lawyer/ law centre	4%	7%
Another telecoms company or ISP	2%	1%
Another professional adviser e.g. accountant, surveyor	1%	1%
Other	5%	4%
Base (n)	199	291

Percentages may not sum to 100% due to multiple responses

- 5.35. Of those who did access other sources of advice, around 1 out of 3 continued to use their other advisor while Otelo was dealing with their case. Marginally more complainants (36%) than enquirers (32%) did so although it should be noted that enquirers that reported using other sources of advice were much less likely to answer this question than complainants who did so.

Use of other advice during Otelo process – Postal survey

	Enquirers	Complainants
Yes	32%	36%
No, not at all.	68%	64%
Base (n)	38	112

Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

The Otelo Website

- 5.36. Respondents to all 3 surveys were asked about their general satisfaction with the Otelo website. Response rates are relatively low for all questions about the website with just 17% of postal enquirers, 19% of telephone enquirers and 21% of complainants answering. As the response rates are low the data is presented in number rather than percentage form.

- 5.37. Overall, the vast majority of complainants were satisfied with the website (49 out of 62), as were the vast majority of the telephone enquirers (17 out of 19). Satisfaction was lower among respondents to the postal survey of enquirers, with the largest proportion (17 out of 35) being neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the website.

Satisfaction with the Otelos website

	Enquirers		Complainants
	Postal survey	Telephone survey	
Very Satisfied	6	15	26
Fairly Satisfied	7	2	23
Neither/ Nor	17	2	9
Fairly Dissatisfied	2		1
Very Dissatisfied	3		3
Base (n)	35	19	62

- 5.38. The postal survey of enquirers also asked a range of questions about their visit to the website¹⁷. The majority had discovered the Otelos website via a search engine or during their search for information on telecoms complaints online (22 out of the 32 respondents that answered this question).

Source of information on the Otelos website – Postal survey

	Enquirers (n)
Through a search engine/ I was looking for information on telecoms complaints on the internet	22
From a reference in an Otelos publication	4
Through a link in another website	2
From a reference in another publication	1
By word of mouth	1
Other	2
Base (n)	32

- 5.39. All but 4 enquirers had visited the website 3 times or less (31 of 35), with the largest group having visited just once (18 of 35).

How many times visited – Postal survey

	Enquirers (n)
Once	18
Two or three times	13
Four or more times	4
Base (n)	35

¹⁷ in order to keep the complainant survey to a reasonable length they were not asked the comparable questions and the enquirers have been used as a sample

- 5.40. Eighteen of the 35 respondents reported that they found what they were looking for without much difficulty. A further 5 found what they were looking for with difficulty, or did not manage to find everything they were looking for, and 11 out of 35 did not manage to find what they wanted.

Found what wanted?

	Enquirers (n)
Yes, and I found much more of interest too	3
Yes, I found what I was looking for without much difficulty	15
Yes, I found what I was looking for but with some difficulty	2
To some extent - I found some of what I was looking for but not all	3
Not relevant – I was just browsing	1
No	11
Base (n)	35

- 5.41. In comparing the Otelo website to others they had used, most respondents (20 out of 35) rated it as ‘good’, with 12 finding it to be neither good nor poor and 2 rating it as ‘very poor’.

The Otelo website in comparison to others – Postal survey

Overall, how do you rate the Otelo website in comparison to others you visit?	Enquirers (n)
Excellent	-
Good	20
Neither good nor poor	12
Poor	-
Very poor	2
Base (n)	35

- 5.42. Albeit that the captured sample that actually used the website in both 2005 and 2006 is small the general distribution of responses about the website has remained broadly similar.
- 5.43. Both postal enquirers and complainants were also asked about the online complaints form facility. Only a very small proportion of enquirers had completed the complaints form, with most just looking for information (20 out of 35). A more significant proportion of complainants completed the online form – over 2 out of 5 of those who reported using the website.
- 5.44. A small number of respondents (4 enquirers and 3 complainants) reported difficulty in completing the online form and 10 respondents indicated that they could not find the form on the website.

Completed the online complaints form - Postal survey

	Enquirers	Complainants
Yes	8	44
No – I tried to complete it but found it difficult	4	3
No – I couldn't find it	3	7
No – I was just looking for information	20	26
Not sure/ don't remember	-	17
Base (n)	35	97

5.45. The Otelos website provides a completed example form and events log to help those making their complaint online. Respondents were asked whether they viewed these examples, and how helpful they found them to be. While, the extremely low numbers involved should be noted the following points emerged:

- Interestingly, enquirers were relatively more likely to have viewed the example form than complainants – 1 out of 2 enquirers had done so compared to less than 2 out of 5 complainants who responded;
- The majority of enquirers and complainants who commented said that they found the example form useful;
- Fewer still respondents reported viewing the example event log – 4 out of 11 enquirers and 14 out of 50 complainants; and
- Of those who viewed it, 3 out of 4 enquirers and 11 out of 14 complainants found the example log useful.

Viewed example complaints form – Postal survey

	Enquirers	Complainants
Yes	6	19
No	4	23
Not sure/ don't remember	2	9
Base (n)	12	51

Viewed example event log – Postal survey

	Enquirers	Complainants
Yes	4	14
No	5	22
Not sure/ don't remember	2	14
Base (n)	11	50

5.46. Of those who responded, the majority of complainants and enquirers found the form easy to complete (all but 2 of the 10 enquirers and 30 out of 51 complainants). However, 17 complainants had some difficulty in completing it and 1 found it very difficult. A further 5 respondents (2 enquirers and 3 complainants) were unable to complete the form.

Online complaints form easy to complete

	Enquirers	Complainants
I completed it easily	8	30
I had some difficulty but managed to complete it	-	17
I found it very difficult to complete	-	1
I was unable to complete it	2	3
Base (n)	10	51

- 5.47. Complainants and postal enquirers were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements about the online complaints form. The overall response here was low, particularly among enquirers with only 7 or 8 people responding to each statement. A larger but still relatively small proportion of complainants responded (between 35 and 56 people per statement).
- 5.48. Both enquirers and complainants agreed that the questions asked in the online form were easy to answer (7 out of 8 enquirers and 50 out of 56 complainants), and that the instructions were easy to follow (6 out of 8 enquirers and 41 out of 50 complainants).
- 5.49. Views were more mixed in relation to difficulty in moving backwards and forwards between pages of the online form. Of 8 enquirers, 2 agreed that it was difficult to move between pages, with 4 disagreeing and 2 neither agreeing nor disagreeing.
- 5.50. Amongst the 48 complainants who responded, 19 did not find it difficult, 16 did find it difficult, while 13 neither agreed nor disagreed that it was difficult.
- 5.51. As might be expected, of the 7 enquirers who responded, 5 found that Otelo could not deal with their complaint. This applied to just 3 of the 35 complainants.

The Online complaints form – Enquirers Postal survey

Enquirers	Agree strongly	Agree	Neither/nor	Disagree	Disagree strongly	Base (n)
The questions were easy to answer	2	5	-	-	1	8
It was difficult to go backwards and forwards between pages	1	1	1	4	-	7
The instructions were easy to follow	2	4	2	-	-	8
Otelo could not deal with my complaint according to the online form	2	3	1	-	1	7

The Online Complaints Form – Complainants Postal survey

Complainants	Agree strongly	Agree	Neither/nor	Disagree	Disagree strongly	Base (n)
The questions were easy to answer	16	34	4	2	-	56
It was difficult to go backwards and forwards between pages	1	15	13	15	4	48
The instructions were easy to follow	11	30	6	3	-	50
Otelo could not deal with my complaint according to the online form	1	2	7	15	10	35

6. THE EXPERIENCE OF ENQUIRERS

The 2006 Enquirers

- 6.1. As outlined in the introductory chapter the 2006 customer satisfaction study has repeated all the key elements of last year's research with enquirers' views explored through a postal survey of those who contacted Otelo by letter, and a telephone survey of enquirers who contacted Otelo by telephone. The 2004 research included only a postal survey of enquirers who had contacted Otelo by a variety of means and as a result a direct comparison with the 2005 and 2006 results is not always possible.
- 6.2. In this chapter the experience of those contacting Otelo with an enquiry is explored in greater detail. Previous years' research found that people who had spoken to someone at Otelo about their enquiry tended to be more satisfied overall. To allow further examination of this key finding the results of the postal and telephone surveys are presented separately¹⁸.

Enquirers' experience of people at Otelo

- 6.3. While all those who contacted Otelo by telephone had clearly spoken to someone, this was not the case among postal enquirers and in fact around 3 out of 4, had not spoken to anyone at Otelo at all. Around 1 out of 6 had spoken to Otelo staff when making an initial enquiry, and roughly the same proportion had spoken to Otelo staff at a later stage.

Spoke to the people at Otelo? - Enquirers

	Postal Survey
Yes, when I made my initial enquiry	16%
Yes, at a later stage	14%
No, I did not speak to anyone at all	73%
Base (n)	205

Percentages do not sum to 100% due to multiple responses

- 6.4. Among those postal enquirers who did speak to someone at Otelo, the majority were satisfied with the service they received. Again the number of responses is low and the data has been presented as numbers in the table below. Nevertheless the figures suggest that, much in keeping with 2005:
- The majority of enquirers were satisfied in 5 out of the 6 aspects of Otelo's people explored;

¹⁸ the different basis on which the sample was developed limits the capacity to draw comparisons with the 2004 results.

- The only exception was the staff's authority to deal with their problem where satisfaction levels have fallen since last year; however among those who expressed a view more were satisfied than dissatisfied; There appears to be a tendency for respondents to have a strong positive or negative response in relation to contact with Otelo's people. In all aspects the number of people that were very satisfied exceeded those that were fairly satisfied and those that were very dissatisfied equalled or exceeded those that were fairly dissatisfied.

Enquirers' satisfaction with Otelo people – Postal survey

	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither/nor	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Base
Friendliness	32	12	3	-	2	49
Helpfulness	23	21	1	-	6	51
Knowledge – knew what they were talking about	22	17	4	3	3	49
Reliability – always did what they said they would	17	10	6	-	4	37
Understanding of my problem – knew what I was on about	19	17	7	3	5	51
Authority to deal with my problem	16	5	9	4	9	43

Advice given by Otelo and Enquirers' Actions

- 6.5. In the majority of cases Otelo staff advised enquirers to refer back to their service provider and give them another chance to sort out the problem – this was the case for almost 2 out of 3 postal enquirers and around 9 out of 10 telephone enquirers.
- 6.6. A small proportion of enquirers (around 1 out of 10 in each group) were advised to fill in and return a complaints form to Otelo.
- 6.7. Around 1 out of 10 of the postal survey respondents also reported that they had not been told to go back to Otelo if their company did not resolve the problem. There were no equivalent reports among the telephone enquirers.
- 6.8. There is a significant contrast between the advice offered by Otelo and enquirers' reasons for contacting them. As outlined in the previous chapter, around 3 out of 4 enquirers reported contacting Otelo in order to register their complaint and 'get the process moving'. Further analysis shows that of these 151 people or 7 out of 10 were advised to go back to their company to give them another chance to sort out the problem.

Advice Given – Enquirers

	Postal survey	Telephone survey
To get back in touch with the company and give them another chance to sort out the problem – but return to Otelo if they did not resolve my problem/if they gave me a “deadlock letter”	65%	88%
To get back in touch with the company and give them another chance to sort out the problem – Otelo did not tell me I could return to them if the company did not resolve my problem	12%	-
The problem was outside Otelo’s terms of reference, and I should seek legal or other advice	9%	1%
My company was not a member of Otelo, and I should use another form of redress/contact?	1%	-
To return a signed and completed complaint form to Otelo, with supporting documents	12%	9%
Other		1%
Base (n)	185	97

Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

- 6.9. Most of the postal enquirers who were advised to return a complaints form (17 out of 23) reported that they did so. Nevertheless, Otelo’s records suggest that, since they remain within the enquirers group, Otelo did not take on and investigate these enquirers’ complaints. Inevitably, this has the potential to give rise to some dissatisfaction even if Otelo are working completely within their processes and remit. Under these circumstances Otelo will need to clearly explain why the complaint cannot be investigated but realistically it may not be possible to eliminate dissatisfaction altogether.

Reasons for not returning a complaint form – Enquirers

	Postal Survey
I could not be bothered/ it was not that big a problem	1
From the advice Otelo gave me I was not confident my complaint would be successful/ would be upheld	1
From Otelo’s advice I was not confident that a formal complaint would get me enough cash compensation to make it worthwhile	1
From Otelo’s advice I was not sure that they could get the company to fix the problem or to give me compensation	3
Otelo’s procedures seemed very bureaucratic and off-putting	2
Otelo did not seem truly independent of the telecoms industry – I was not confident I would get a fair and balanced resolution	1
I did return a signed and completed complaints form to Otelo	17
Base (n)	23

Percentages do not sum to 100% due to multiple responses

- 6.10. For the few who did not return the form the reasons given included a lack of confidence that doing so would result in the problem being fixed or in compensation being paid, and that Otelo’s procedures seemed bureaucratic and off putting.

Outcome and Satisfaction with Action by Member Company

- 6.11. Enquirers were asked about what action they took after receiving advice from Otelo.
- 6.12. When considering the findings here the comparatively earlier stage in the process at which telephone enquirers' tend to contact Otelo should be borne in mind. In addition, telephone enquirers were contacted within 1 to 2 weeks of speaking to Otelo and therefore, among those who went back to their company, few had received an answer yet. This was the case for almost 1 out of 2 of the telephone enquirers compared to just 1 out of 10 postal enquirers.
- 6.13. Around 1 out of 5 of the telephone enquirers was yet to take any action i.e. they had not yet gone back to their service provider. (This was not offered as an option in the postal survey).
- 6.14. Almost 1 out of 2 of the postal enquirers and almost 3 out of 10 telephone enquirers had gone back to their company, which dealt with the problem.
- 6.15. Just under 1 out of 4 postal enquirers (23%) had gone back to their company, but reported getting nowhere. Among this group 2 out of 3 were still considering what to do next while the remaining 1 out of 3 had given up.

After contacting Otelo – Enquirers

	Postal survey	Telephone survey
I went back to the company and they dealt with the problem	48%	29%
I went back to the company and got nowhere and gave up	8%	2%
I went back to the company and got nowhere and I am still considering what to do	15%	1%
I went back to the company, and am still waiting to hear from them	12%	46%
I complained to the regulator/ OFCOM	7%	-
I sought advice from elsewhere/ did something else	2%	3%
I did nothing/ gave up	7%	
I have done nothing yet		19%
I gave up		-
Base (n)	164	98

*Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding
Shading appears where the question was not asked in that format*

- 6.16. When postal enquirers had sought further action from their service provider the problem had been resolved in the way the enquirer wanted in only 1 out of 4 cases by the time at which they completed the survey. In 1 out of 2 cases the service provider reportedly could not resolve the problem satisfactorily, or had not done so yet.

- 6.17. For those cases where a resolution had been achieved there had been a range of outcomes. For example::
- 1 out of 5 had been offered an apology or explanation;
 - 1 out of 10 were not charged the full amount owed, and a roughly similar proportion had their bill refunded or waived entirely; and
 - Over 1 out of 10 received a goodwill payment for their inconvenience.
- 6.18. These figures suggest that compared with 2005 a slightly higher proportion of enquirers achieved a satisfactory outcome (27% this year as opposed to 21% in 2005). The proportion that received an apology also increased slightly (from 12% to 19%).

Action taken by telephone company or ISP – Enquirers

	Postal survey
Resolved my problem the way I wanted	27%
Offered me an apology/ explanation	19%
Did not charge me the full amount	10%
Gave me time to pay what I owe	1%
Waived my bill entirely/ I got a full refund of my bill	12%
Offered me a discount on my bills	4%
Gave me an ex-gratia payment for my trouble/ inconvenience	14%
Refunded my expenses	6%
Offered me a gift	1%
Could not resolve it to my satisfaction/ have not resolved it yet	50%
Base (n)	171

Percentages do not sum to 100% due to multiple responses

- 6.19. Figures for enquirers' overall satisfaction levels with the action taken by their service provider for all 3 years that have been surveyed are displayed in the table below. Compared to 2005 this year has seen an overall increase in the proportion of enquirers that were satisfied with the action taken.
- 6.20. The increased level of satisfaction is particularly marked among telephone enquirers where over 1 out of 4 respondents reported being completely satisfied compared with just under 1 out of 10 in 2005. Amongst postal enquirers however there has been little change, just over 1 out of 10 were completely satisfied in 2006 compared to just under 1 in 10 9% in 2005.
- 6.21. The proportion of those who were not fully satisfied, but found the action taken by their member company acceptable, remained very similar to the previous year.
- 6.22. Around 1 out of 5 postal enquirers reported that, although they were not completely satisfied, some action had been taken. Again this was in line with the findings from 2005.

- 6.23. Around 1 out of 6 of both the postal enquirers and the telephone enquirers were not at all satisfied with the action taken by their member company; these figures were roughly in keeping with those from the 2005 research.
- 6.24. The largest proportion of postal enquirers, almost 1 out of 3 (31%), reported that no action was taken by their member company. However, just 6% of telephone enquirers reported that no action had been taken - a substantial reduction from 22% that fell within this category in 2005.

Satisfaction with action taken by telephone company or ISP – Enquirers

	Postal Survey		Telephone Survey		2004
	2006	2005	2006	2005	
I was completely satisfied	12%	9%	26%	8%	13%
I was not completely satisfied, but the action taken was acceptable	22%	21%	9%	7%	23%
I was not completely satisfied, but some action was taken	19%	19%	4%	1%	12%
I was not at all satisfied with the action taken	17%	16%	14%	14%	23%
I was not at all satisfied and no action was taken	31%	35%	6%	22%	31%
I am not sure, it is too early to say			40%	49%	
Base (n)	167	139	98	90	128

*Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding
Shading appears where the question was not asked in that format*

- 6.25. Respondents to the postal survey of enquirers were asked to identify which body did most to resolve their problem(s) with their service provider. A significant proportion of respondents – around 2 out of 5 – did not respond to this question. This was also the case in 2005 and written notes on returned surveys again suggested a reluctance to choose any of the available options with many inserting the equivalent of “I did the most”.
- 6.26. Of the 119 enquirers who did respond, the largest proportion (43%) felt that their service provider did most to resolve the problem, although Otelo was a close second (40%).
- 6.27. These findings are in keeping with previous years’ research, and it is important to note that for the majority of these enquirers, Otelo’s advice was to go back to their member company.

Which body did most to resolve problem – Enquirers

	Postal Survey
Otelo did most	40%
My adviser/ another agency did most	13%
The regulator/OFCOM did most	3%
The telephone company or ISP did most	43%
Base (n)	119

Enquirer Outcomes and Perceptions of Otelo and its Role

- 6.28. Enquirers responding to the postal survey were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements about Otelo's role in resolving their complaint. These statements produced some very mixed responses, and it should also be noted that the response rate varied quite considerably (from between 28% to 62% of all those who returned their survey)
- 6.29. Some respondents do find 'statement' questions off-putting, but the low response may also suggest that some enquirers struggled to identify Otelo's role in their case.
- 6.30. The table below displays the responses. Key points to note include:
- On balance respondents disagreed that "Otelo were excellent, they gave me advice that helped me with my problem" – over 2 out of 5 respondents disagreed with this statement with 1 out of 3 disagreeing strongly;
 - Of those who had a view one way or the other respondents tended to agree (48 out of 93) that it was "impossible to say" whether Otelo's involvement had made a difference;
 - Reaction to the statement that the member company "changed their tune" upon learning of Otelo's involvement were very mixed. Just over 2 out of 5 agreed, while almost 2 out of 5 disagreed;
 - Responses to "Otelo made no difference at all" were similarly quite evenly split ;
 - Although accounting for a minority of all respondents, among those who had a view more strongly disagreed that Otelo were "very helpful" and that "I was better able to deal with the company on my own" than agreed;
 - There was a concentration of responses at either end of the scale in response to the statement that "Otelo were useless" , with 1 out of 4 agreeing and 1 out of 4 disagreeing;; and
 - Almost 1 out of 2 respondents reported that Otelo had not been able to deal with their case.
- 6.31. There was a low response in relation to the statement regarding Otelo "talking to the company/ industry to persuade them to change their policy". This is perhaps to be expected, since enquirers are usually less involved with Otelo than complainants and may be less aware of the actions Otelo may take in relation to member companies.

The role of Otelo – Enquirers Postal survey

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither /nor	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Base(n)
Otelo were excellent - they gave me advice which helped me with my problem	17%	17%	23%	9%	34%	128
It is impossible to say - I have no idea whether Otelo's involvement made any difference or not	27%	25%	24%	14%	11%	93
Once my company became aware that I had contacted Otelo it changed its tune and settled my complaint quickly	19%	24%	20%	11%	27%	102
Otelo made no difference at all - the company still refused to give me what I wanted	28%	19%	10%	24%	19%	96
Otelo were very helpful, giving me advice about my case, and I was better able to deal with the company on my own	9%	19%	25%	15%	31%	98
Otelo were completely useless - they just spoke to me and I heard nothing more from them	27%	10%	14%	17%	29%	82
Otelo and my advisers helped to sort out my problem	12%	14%	23%	14%	37%	73
Otelo said my case was not one they could deal with	22%	22%	14%	12%	29%	80
Otelo will be talking to the company/ industry to persuade them to change their policy	2%	2%	35%	19%	42%	43

- 6.32. Enquirers' perceptions of the outcome of their query or complaint were more negative on balance than in previous years. The table below shows figures for all 3 years.
- 6.33. At 2 out of 5, the proportion that felt the outcome was in their favour has fallen year on year and this year only around 1 out of 5 (19%) felt that the outcome was completely in their favour.
- 6.34. There has been a corresponding increase in the proportion who considered the outcome to be against them; almost 1 out of 2 postal survey enquirers in this year's research felt this to be the case although the proportion who felt that the outcome was entirely against them has remained the same as last year at 27%.

Perceived outcome for Enquirers – Postal survey

	2006	2005	2004
Completely in enquirer's favour	19%	25%	27%
On balance in enquirer's favour	19%	21%	24%
On balance it was a draw	14%	11%	15%
On balance against enquirer	20%	16%	9%
Completely against enquirer	27%	27%	25%
Base (n)	156	133	104

Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

- 6.35. The survey went on to gather enquirers overall levels of satisfaction with Otelo and the results, along with those for 2005 and 2004 are displayed in the table below. Again this year's results are broadly in line with those from 2005.
- 6.36. The majority of enquirers (56%) are satisfied with their experience of Otelo overall, with almost 2 out of 5 (37%) being very satisfied. Figures for this year show a slight increase in those who are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (from 12% to 19%) and small reduction in the proportion of enquirers who are dissatisfied (from 30% down to 26%).
- 6.37. In this year's findings, the satisfaction levels reported by the telephone and postal enquirers show some marked contrasts. Most notably while almost all telephone enquirers were satisfied (96%) and 75% were very satisfied with Otelo overall the postal enquirers were actually marginally more likely to be dissatisfied (36% were satisfied, with 37% being dissatisfied) and a significant minority (27%) were very dissatisfied.
- 6.38. It should be recognised that there may be factors that could account, in part at least, for the differing satisfaction levels between the groups. Most notably respondents to the postal survey were unlikely to have achieved what they were looking for when they first contacted Otelo i.e. 74% of the postal enquirers reported that they first contacted Otelo to register their complaint. The very fact that they remain within the enquirers group means that this did not happen and this failure to achieve their initial objective is likely to have affected their overall satisfaction. It should also be borne in mind that most did not speak to anyone at Otelo.
- 6.39. In contrast, the survey of telephone enquirers suggested that they were more likely to be looking for general advice and as a result arguably had less specific objectives and perhaps 'lower' expectations about what Otelo could offer them.
- 6.40. In addition, respondents to the postal survey were unlikely to have spoken to a member of the Otelo staff. The previous years' research has illustrated how this impacts on satisfaction; satisfaction with staff spoken to is high and this appears to be closely linked to overall satisfaction. For instance, among those postal enquirers who spoke to Otelo when they made their initial enquiry, 3 out of 5 were satisfied with Otelo overall, compared with just only 1 out of 6 among those who did not .

- 6.41. Finally, outcome also has a significant impact on satisfaction levels. For example, 2 out of 3 among the postal enquirers who felt that the outcome was in their favour reported that they were satisfied with Otelo overall compared with just 1 out of 5 who felt that the outcome was against them.

Overall Enquirer satisfaction with Otelo

	2006			2005 Postal and Telephone Survey	2004 Postal Survey
	Combined Postal and Telephone Survey	Postal Survey	Telephone Survey		
Very Satisfied	37%	18%	75%	38%	42%
Fairly Satisfied	19%	18%	21%	21%	24%
Neither/ Nor	19%	28%	1%	12%	16%
Fairly Dissatisfied	7%	10%	1%	10%	6%
Very Dissatisfied	19%	27%	2%	20%	12%
Base (n)	286	189	97	154	140

Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

Lasting Impressions of Otelo

- 6.42. Almost 1 out of 2 of the postal enquirers would recommend Otelo to others who experience similar problems with a service provider and 1 out of 4 stated that they would definitely do so. However, the proportion of enquirers willing to recommend Otelo has dropped slightly since 2005 and there was a corresponding rise in the proportion who were not sure whether they would recommend Otelo or not.
- 6.43. Around 1 out of 3 respondents said that they would not be willing to recommend Otelo to others, with 1 out of 5 stating that they would definitely not do so. This proportion is roughly in keeping with the results from 2005.

Enquirers' willingness to recommend Otelo – Postal survey

	2006	2005	2004
Yes, definitely	25%	33%	58%
Yes, probably	24%	21%	23%
Not sure	18%	13%	8%
Probably not	14%	14%	4%
Definitely not	18%	20%	7%
Base (n)	197	183	156

Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

- 6.44. Despite the drop in those willing to recommend Otelo to others, a slightly higher proportion of enquirers this year were willing to use Otelo again (up from 50% to 54%). Around 1 out of 3 would not use Otelo again, with 1 out of 5 saying they would definitely not do so.

Enquirers' willingness to use Otelo again – Postal survey

	2006	2005	2004
Yes, definitely	32%	27%	56%
Yes, probably	22%	23%	24%
Not sure	15%	17%	9%
Probably not	10%	17%	8%
Definitely not	21%	17%	3%
Base (n)	196	180	153

Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

- 6.45. Postal enquirers were asked about how their experience had affected their confidence in Otelo. Views were very much split as was the case last year and can be summarised as follows:
- 2 out of 5 (39%) felt that their confidence in Otelo had decreased;
 - Just over 1 out of 4 (27%) felt that their confidence had increased – for 1 out of 10 it had greatly increased;
 - For 1 out of 3 their confidence remained the same as at the start of the process.
- 6.46. Therefore a significant minority reported a decrease in confidence in Otelo, with 1 out of 4 reporting that their confidence had greatly decreased. Again, this lack of confidence may be largely linked to outcome; around 3 out of 5 enquirers who felt that the outcome of their query or complaint was against them on balance reported a decrease in confidence, compared with less than 1 out of 5 of those who felt they achieved a positive outcome.

Enquirers' Confidence in Otelo – Postal survey

	2006	2005	2004
Greatly increased	12%	14%	35%
Increased	15%	16%	25%
Remained the same	33%	29%	24%
Decreased	14%	15%	9%
Greatly decreased	25%	26%	8%
Base (n)	193	174	145

Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

Summary

- 6.47. The research methods used in 2006 were the same as in the previous year i.e. a postal survey of enquirers who contacted Otelo by mail/fax and a telephone survey of those who made initial contact by telephone.
- 6.48. Only a small proportion of respondents to the postal survey had spoken to someone at Otelo. In keeping with all 3 years' research findings, speaking to Otelo staff was closely linked to satisfaction levels, with the group who did not speak to anyone being significantly less satisfied.

- 6.49. Enquirers who did speak to someone at Otelo were once again largely satisfied with their experience, with friendliness and helpfulness of staff rated particularly highly.
- 6.50. Again in keeping with the 2005 research, the majority of enquirers were advised to go back to their member company and give them another chance to resolve the problem even though the majority of postal enquirers' contacted Otelo wanting to register their complaint. Telephone enquirers were more likely to be looking for general advice.
- 6.51. A small proportion of enquirers were advised to return a complaints form with the majority of postal enquirers who had received this advice reported having done so. Among the telephone enquirers, the majority had also returned a form or planned to do so.
- 6.52. When the postal enquirers went back to their service provider 1 out of 2 had their problem resolved with 1 out of 4 stating that the problem was resolved the way they wanted. The majority of telephone enquirers who went back to their member company were yet to hear of an outcome.
- 6.53. Most enquirers were not satisfied with the action taken by their service provider, although the proportion that was satisfied had increased between 2005 and o 2006. This rise was particularly marked among the telephone enquirers.
- 6.54. Of those who expressed an opinion, postal enquirers were most likely to say that their company had done the most to resolve their problem, with Otelo coming a close second. However many struggled to identify whether Otelo's involvement had made any difference.
- 6.55. Postal enquirers' perception of the outcome of their query or complaint was on balance negative and slightly more so than had been the case in 2005.
- 6.56. Overall, figures relating to satisfaction are broadly similar to those in 2005; a majority of enquirers were satisfied overall but there were significant differences between telephone enquirers and those responding to the postal survey, the later of whom were more dissatisfied. The initial reason for contacting Otelo, the group's more negative perceptions of the outcome and the smaller proportion who spoke to someone at Otelo are likely to partly explain the lower level of satisfaction.
- 6.57. A majority of the postal enquirers would be willing to recommend Otelo to others although there has been a slight fall from the 2005 figure. However, slightly more would consider going back to Otelo if experiencing similar problems compared to 2005.
- 6.58. Postal enquirers views were split about whether their confidence in Otelo had increased or not as a result of their experience while 1 out of 3 felt that it had remained the same. Views appear to be closely linked to whether enquirers had a positive or negative outcome in their case.

7. THE EXPERIENCE OF COMPLAINANTS

- 7.1. The views of complainants were explored through a postal survey of those whose cases were closed (the sample was drawn from those who initially contacted Otelo between October and December 2005 or between January and March 2006). The survey largely replicated that undertaken in 2004 and 2005 and therefore results are essentially comparable.
- 7.2. This chapter examines the findings from the 2006 survey with some analysis and comparison with previous years' results when appropriate.

Complainants Views of Otelo People

- 7.3. Almost 3 out of 4 complainants (74%) spoke to someone at Otelo about the problem they were experiencing with their service provider. In the majority of cases this was at the point of initial enquiry but 1 out of 5 reported speaking to the person investigating their complaint at a later stage.
- 7.4. The proportion of complainants who reported speaking to someone at Otelo increased slightly (by +5%) from 2005, but is still lower than that in 2004 when 9 out of 10 complainants (90%) had spoken to someone. These reductions may, in part at least, be a reflection of Otelo's increased caseload.
- 7.5. In keeping with the 2005 findings, a significant proportion of complainants, around 1 out of 5, did not recall who they spoke to at Otelo, although this is not necessarily any cause for concern. It may simply be a reflection of the different stages of the process e.g. many people are in contact with their service provider's complaints team and in many cases the Otelo enquiry team as well as those investigating their complaint at Otelo.

Speaking to the people at Otelo – Complainants

	2006	2005	2004
Yes, when I made my initial enquiry	57%	51%	70%
Yes, to the person who investigated my complaint	21%	16%	42%
Yes, to someone senior/ the Ombudsman	3%	2%	8%
Yes, but I am not sure who it was I spoke to	18%	21%	15%
No, I did not speak to anyone at all	26%	31%	10%
Base (n)	290	284	123

Percentages do not sum to 100% due to multiple responses

- 7.6. The overwhelmingly positive views held by complainants about Otelo staff have been a consistent theme throughout the 3 years of this research. Once again this year, the vast majority of complainants had found dealing with people at Otelo to be a very positive experience. The figures are presented in the table below and the key points to note are:
- In each of the 6 staff related aspects of the process covered in the survey, at least 3 out of 4 complainants were satisfied with the service they had received;
 - Around 9 out of 10 complainants were satisfied with the friendliness and helpfulness of people at Otelo;

- Over 4 out of 5 complainants were satisfied with the reliability of the people they spoke to at Otelo, and a high proportion, 2 out of 3, were very satisfied; and
 - 4 out of 5 complainants were satisfied with the degree to which Otelo staff they spoke to understood their problem with as many as 3 out of 5 being very satisfied.
- 7.7. Around 3 out of 4 were satisfied with people at Otelo’s authority to deal with their problem, although satisfaction was lowest in relation to this aspect of their contact with the staff. This is in line with the previous years’ research and also the results from the enquirers’ survey (see chapter 6).
- 7.8. However the level of dissatisfaction was generally very low, ranging from 5% in relation to friendliness up to 14% in relation to people at Otelo’s authority to deal with complainants’ problems. In this latter case almost 1 out of 10 complainants were very dissatisfied.

Satisfaction with the person or people spoken to at Otelo – Complainants

	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither /nor	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Base (n)
Friendliness	67%	26%	2%	2%	3%	212
Helpfulness	67%	23%	4%	3%	3%	206
Knowledge - knew what they were talking about	64%	23%	5%	5%	3%	206
Reliability - always did what they said they would	66%	19%	8%	4%	3%	201
Understanding of my problem - knew what I was on about	60%	20%	8%	8%	4%	205
Authority to deal with my problem	56%	20%	11%	6%	8%	199

Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

Otelo Information

- 7.9. The information provided by Otelo was also considered to be of a high standard, and in each case a majority of respondents reported being very satisfied. Results are displayed below and the key points to note are that:
- Over 4 out of 5 complainants were satisfied that the information provided was easy to get, was provided when needed and was easy to understand;
 - Over 3 out of 4 complainants were satisfied that the information provided was comprehensive and told them everything they needed to know; and
 - The proportion of complainants that was dissatisfied with any aspect of the information provided was low and never exceeded 8%. No more than 3% of complaints were very dissatisfied with any aspect of the information provided.

Satisfaction with the Information Provided by Otelo – Complainants

	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither /nor	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Base (n)
Readily given/easy to get	55%	28%	12%	3%	3%	269
Timely/given when needed	52%	29%	13%	3%	3%	263
Clear/ easy to understand	53%	30%	11%	3%	3%	270
Comprehensive/told me everything	53%	24%	15%	5%	3%	268

Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

Keeping in Touch

- 7.10. Around 3 out of 5 complainants reported that one or more people in Otelo had contacted them looking for further information after they had registered their complaint. This is a slight increase in the proportion of complainants that reported being contacted in previous years.
- 7.11. In almost 3 out of 4 of these cases, contact was made by the Otelo officer investigating their complaint. A much smaller proportion of people reported either being contacted by the Ombudsman or were not sure who had contacted them.

Contacted by Otelo for more information – Complainants

	2006	2005	2004
Yes, by the investigating officer	45%	34%	39%
Yes, by the Ombudsman	10%	6%	14%
Yes, by somebody else/ not sure who it was	14%	18%	13%
No	38%	46%	44%
Base (n)	291	281	125

Percentages do not sum to 100% due to multiple responses

- 7.12. Findings from both of the previous years' research along with other customer satisfaction studies¹⁹ suggested a close link between complainants being updated about the progress of their case and their level of expressed satisfaction. Those who found themselves 'chasing' information about progress were generally more likely to be dissatisfied.
- 7.13. Encouragingly then, over 4 out of 5 of this year's complainants reported that Otelo had contacted them with a case update at least once, a higher proportion than in either of the previous 2 years. Just under 1 out of 3 reported being contacted once, 1 out of 3 twice and almost 1 out of 5 (18%) reported that they had been contacted 3 times or more.

¹⁹ e.g. Report on research 2ID Community Awareness of and Satisfaction with Existing Mechanisms for Making Complaints Regarding Services delivered by State Government Agencies in Western Australia, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, 2003

Updated by Otelo on progress - Complainants

	2006	2005	2004
Yes, it contacted me once	31%	32%	35%
Yes, it contacted me twice	33%	32%	17%
Yes, it contacted me three or more times	18%	12%	13%
No	16%	21%	31%
No reply	2%	3%	5%
Base (n)	294	289	131

Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

Note: 'No reply' has been included in this table to allow comparison with the previous years' data.

- 7.14. The majority of complainants reported that they had not needed to contact Otelo to find out about progress in their case – just 1 out of 3 did so, continuing the decline from previous years and presumably reflecting the increasingly proactive approach being taken by Otelo staff.

Complainant contact with Otelo to chase progress – Complainants

	2006	2005	2004
Yes	32%	36%	48%
No	64%	62%	50%
No reply	3%	2%	2%
Base (n)	294	289	131

Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

Note: 'No reply' has been included in this table to allow comparison with the previous years' data.

- 7.15. All of the respondents who reported 'chasing' Otelo for progress information said they had done so by telephone, with just under half also doing so by letter. Of those who had phoned, 3 out of 5 did so once or twice, while 1 out of 4 called 3 times or more. Around 1 out of 6 (15%) could not recall how many times they had phoned Otelo.
- 7.16. Of those who wrote to Otelo to 'chase' progress, 1 out of 2 did so once or twice, with over 1 out of 4 doing so 3 times or more. A further 1 out of 4 could not remember how many times they had written.
- 7.17. When complainants telephoned Otelo a slight majority reported getting through straight away, and only a small minority found that they always had to leave messages. Albeit that the number of respondents answering this question is small the figures suggest there may have been some slight improvement in performance in this area.

Ease of access to investigating officer – Complainants

	2006	2005	2004
Always get through straight away	52	48	17
Sometimes get through/sometimes had to leave messages	27	33	29
Always had to leave messages	6	5	9
Base (n)	85	86	55

7.18. However among those who reported having a reason to leave a message at any point in their case the findings were less positive, although it should be noted that the base number here is low. Of 29 cases, only 1 person reported receiving a response to their message within the same day, 10 were contacted within 24 hours and 8 more than 24 hours later. Of some concern are the 10 complainants that reported that their call was not returned.

Speed of telephone response from Investigating Officer - Complainants

If telephone messages left, did officer ring back	2006	2005	2004
Always within the same day	1	3	7
Always within 24 hours	10	9	8
Usually within 24 hours but sometimes longer	8	9	14
Sometimes did not return call	10	14	8
Base (n)	29	35	37

7.19. Of those who wrote to Otelco a small majority reported receiving an acknowledgement within 7 days (just over 1 out of 2) while 1 out of 3 reported that this was sometimes the case. Around 1 out of 10 reported that they had never received an acknowledgement²⁰.

Speed of written response from Investigating Officer - Complainants

Reply/acknowledgement within 7 days	2006	2005	2004
Always	35	34	16
Sometimes	22	25	12
Never	8	12	2
Base (n)	65	71	30

Speed of Case

7.20. The length of the complaints process is often considered to be another key factor affecting customer satisfaction. In particular, dissatisfaction may arise where there is a disparity between the length of time a complainant expects the process to take and the reality. Among complainants who responded, cases tended to take longer to reach a conclusion than they had expected.

²⁰ However, It should be noted that more complainants responded to this question than reported writing a letter

- 7.21. Around 7 out of 10 complainants had expected their case to be resolved within 2 months, with almost 1 out of 5 expecting it to take less than a month. However, only just over 2 out of 5 reported that their case had been resolved within 2 months or less. Resolution in under a month had been achieved in just 4% of cases. The proportion whose case took over 6 months to resolve²¹, although small, was 4 times that of the proportion who expected the process to take this long.

Length of case – expected and actual

	(a) Expected	(b) Actual
Less than 1 month	17%	4%
1-2 months	53%	38%
3-6 months	28%	41%
7 months and over	2%	8%
Base (n)	282	264

Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

- 7.22. This timescale issue inevitably presents challenges. Many necessary elements in the case investigation process, such as the timescales for provision of case files and for preparing further representations by the member companies, inevitably contribute to the length of time a case will take. Equally, to keep the process on track Otelo is reliant on member companies responding within the established timescales.
- 7.23. It may be that if Otelo is providing updates in an increasing proportion of cases, the potential for dissatisfaction resulting from the difference between expected and actual timescales will be lower. Nevertheless, it is important, that the expectations of those complainants who expect an impossibly speedy resolution of their case are managed accordingly.

Satisfaction with Otelo Process

- 7.24. Complainants were also asked about their satisfaction with specific aspects of Otelo's *process*. These questions seek to separate out satisfaction with 'process' from satisfaction with 'outcome'. The 2004 and 2005 research findings suggested that complainants' satisfaction with the outcome of their case may colour views of the process and that this was particularly the case for complainants who felt the outcome achieved had been negative.
- 7.25. The results are displayed in the table below and show that satisfaction levels with most aspects of the Otelo process were high. This was particularly the case in relation to the explanation given about what to expect, with almost 9 out of 10 complainants satisfied and a majority very satisfied. Almost 7 out of 10 complainants were satisfied with the extent to which they were kept up to date and with the efficiency of the process. The overall level of service was rated as satisfactory by 3 out of 4 complainants with 1 out of 2 complainants reporting that they were very satisfied.

²¹ There may be a propensity among complainants to over estimate the length of their 'Otelo case' - many will have been through sometimes lengthy and complicated internal member company procedures before going to Otelo and the boundaries between the 2 may become blurred.

- 7.26. Bearing in mind the overall high levels of satisfaction, satisfaction levels were comparatively lower when it came to such aspects as being able to access to the officer investigating their case (62% satisfied) and the extent to which Otelo attempted to resolve the complaint through mediation or negotiation (64% satisfied.). In relation to the latter around 1 out of 5 complainants were dissatisfied and most of these tended to be very dissatisfied.
- 7.27. Compared to 2005 research findings, the proportion of complainants that were satisfied has increased in 2006 in all but one aspect (the explanation at the start of the process – which has essentially remained the same from an already very high level). There have also been some very encouraging increases in the proportion of complainants that were very satisfied; the very satisfied group increased in all areas with rises ranging from 6% up to 12%.

Complainant satisfaction with Otelo process – Pre- Decision

	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither /nor	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Base (n)
Explanation of what to expect given at the start of the process	54%	32%	7%	4%	4%	280
Extent to which I was kept updated	43%	32%	13%	8%	4%	273
Ease of access to investigating officer	41%	21%	25%	7%	7%	227
Extent to which Otelo attempted to resolve the complaint through mediation/ negotiation	42%	22%	15%	7%	14%	250
Efficiency of the process	48%	25%	12%	8%	8%	271
Speed	37%	31%	15%	8%	9%	271
Overall level of service	50%	26%	11%	5%	9%	280

Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

Outcome and Benefits Awarded

- 7.28. The survey then turned to the subject of the outcome of the complaint. In 3 out of 5 cases complainants felt that the outcome was in their favour and while this represents a small decrease from the proportion in 2005 it remains higher than that in 2004. The proportion of complainants that were completely satisfied remained constant at around 1 out of 3.
- 7.29. In line with the slight decrease in the proportion who felt that the outcome was favourable, there was a slight increase in the proportion who felt the outcome had gone against them. Almost 3 out of 10 complainants reported a negative outcome while around 1 out of 10 felt that on balance it had been a draw.

Outcome of complaint - Complainants

	2006	2005	2004
Completely in complainant's favour	34%	34%	28%
On balance in complainant's favour	26%	29%	17%
On balance it was a draw	11%	11%	16%
On balance against complainant	14%	13%	15%
Completely against complainant	15%	13%	25%
Base (n)	293	285	129

Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

7.30. Complainants' satisfaction with the Ombudsman's report was good overall, with 3 out of 5 satisfied (57%) and 1 out of 5 very satisfied (22%). This is entirely in keeping with figures from the 2005 research.

7.31. However, a significant minority, over 1 out of 4, was dissatisfied with the report with over 1 out of 10 very dissatisfied – again almost identical to last year's findings. Yet it should be noted that 9 out of 10 of those dissatisfied reported an outcome that was either 'on balance against me' or 'completely against me' again suggesting a very strong association between levels of satisfaction and (perceived fairness of) outcome.

Complainant satisfaction with Ombudsman's report

	2006	2005	2004
Very satisfied, exceeded my expectations	22%	22%	13%
Fairly satisfied, met my expectations	35%	35%	29%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, met some but not all my expectations	16%	17%	20%
Fairly dissatisfied, did not meet my expectations	14%	12%	13%
Very dissatisfied, none of my expectations were met	13%	14%	26%
Base (n)	291	283	128

Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

Benefits Awarded

7.32. Complainants were asked about the benefits they had hoped to be awarded as a result of complaining to Otelco, and were also asked about the benefits they had actually received. An apology and financial compensation were the most sought after, in each case by around 7 out of 10 complainants. Around 1 out of 3 complainants were hoping to be released from their contract.

7.33. Among those who responded to the question, financial compensation was the most commonly awarded benefit; indeed the same proportion of complainants that had been seeking financial compensation received it. This also applied to contract release with around 1 out of 3 complainants being released from their contract.

7.34. Almost 3 out of 5 complainants had received an apology. There was some disparity between expectation and outcome in this area since more than this (7 out of 10) had hoped for an apology. While a greater proportion of the 2006 complainants reported receiving an apology than had done so in 2005 (58% as opposed to 48%) it remains worth noting that complaints research has shown an apology can be a powerful remedy.

Benefits awarded – hoped and actual – Complainants

	Hoped to be awarded	Actually awarded
An apology	72%	58%
An improved service	15%	4%
New equipment e.g. handset	1%	1%
Release from contract	34%	33%
Financial compensation	70%	69%
Other	20%	18%
Base (n)	284	242

Percentages do not sum to 100% due to multiple responses

- 7.35. Many of those who answered 'other' were also looking for financially related settlements – e.g. reimbursement of contract charges or a clear credit rating (e.g. where the customer had withheld payment).
- 7.36. Where a financial award was received it was most commonly of between £25 and £50. This year saw a higher proportion of recipients receiving an award within this range than was the case in 2005. Around 1 out of 4 had either received under £25 or £50 or more. Only 1 out of 10 had been awarded more than £100.

Financial awards – Complainants

	2006	2005	2004
Up to £25	26%	35%	40%
£25 to £50	48%	36%	22%
£50 to £100	13%	16%	22%
£100 and over	11%	13%	14%
Not sure/ Don't remember	2%	1%	1%
Base (n)	166	184	72

Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

Complainants' Satisfaction

- 7.37. Overall satisfaction levels among complainants were high, with over 7 out of 10 satisfied overall and over 2 out of 5 very satisfied. This year's figures show a small improvement (from an already high level) relative to last year, with the proportion of complainants who were very satisfied increasing by 4%.
- 7.38. Nevertheless, just over 1 out of 5 complainants were dissatisfied and around 1 out of 10 very dissatisfied. Both overall levels of dissatisfaction and the proportion that were very dissatisfied have reduced only slightly compared to 2005 levels.

Complainants' overall satisfaction with Otelo

	2006	2005	2004
Very Satisfied	45%	41%	31%
Fairly Satisfied	26%	29%	26%
Neither/ Nor	8%	7%	14%
Fairly Dissatisfied	11%	10%	11%
Very Dissatisfied	11%	14%	19%
Base (n)	291	286	130

Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

- 7.39. Further analysis of complainants' responses identified a number of key factors affecting overall satisfaction:
- Unsurprisingly, those with very positive outcomes were more likely to be satisfied; for instance, almost all of those who felt the outcome was completely in their favour were satisfied compared to less than 1 in 10 who felt the outcome was completely against them;
 - Satisfaction was highest amongst those complainants who spoke to the Otelo officer investigating their case – 3 out of 4 of this group were satisfied overall with 1 out of 2 very satisfied, whereas only 2 out of 3 of the complainants who didn't speak to anyone were satisfied;
 - Satisfaction is likely to decrease when cases take longer to resolve. Over 4 out of 5 of those with cases resolved in less than a month were satisfied. This dropped to just over 3 out of 4 among those with cases that took 1-2 months and 7 out of 10 of those whose case took 3-6 months. Only 1 out of 3 complainants with cases taking 7 months or longer were satisfied;
 - There was a higher rate of satisfaction among those who did not have to 'chase' information about the progress of their case with Otelo. Just over 7 out of 10 of those had no need to contact Otelo for further information were satisfied overall compared with 3 out of 5 of those who did; and
 - Closely linked with this, satisfaction increased in proportion to how many times complainants had been contacted with updates by Otelo. The proportion of complainants who were satisfied was almost 7 out of 10 among those who were contacted once, rising to almost 4 out of 5 of those who were contacted twice. Almost 9 out of 10 of those contacted 3 times or more were satisfied.
- 7.40. A considerable majority of complainants would be willing to recommend Otelo to others experiencing similar difficulties and 3 out of 5 said they would definitely do so. The proportion who would not recommend Otelo was very low, with just 7% saying they would definitely not do so. The profile of responses is almost identical to last year as shown below.

Complainants' willingness to recommend Otelo

	2006	2005	2004
Yes, definitely	60%	60%	49%
Yes, probably	20%	20%	17%
Not sure	4%	4%	9%
Probably not	8%	9%	10%
Definitely not	7%	8%	16%
Base (n)	293	286	129

- 7.41. Around 8 out of 10 complainants would also be willing to use Otelo again with the proportion willing to do so again similar to that in 2005.

Complainants' willingness to use Otelo again

	2006	2005	2004
Very likely	65%	65%	51%
Fairly likely	14%	16%	14%
Neither/ nor	5%	2%	8%
Fairly unlikely	8%	8%	12%
Very unlikely	9%	10%	15%
Base (n)	294	286	130

Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

Confidence in Otelo and the Telecoms Industry

- 7.42. Three out of 5 complainants (59% of the total) reported that their confidence in Otelo had increased as a result of their experience representing a slight improvement on last year's findings. However, just over 1 out of 5 (22%) report said their confidence in the organisation had decreased and around 1 out of 8 (13%) reported a great decrease in confidence.

Complainants' confidence in Otelo

	2006	2005	2004
Greatly increased	37%	33%	22%
Increased	22%	23%	22%
Remained the same	18%	20%	21%
Decreased	9%	10%	15%
Greatly decreased	13%	14%	22%
Base (n)	293	285	130

- 7.43. Despite a largely positive experience of Otelo for the majority of complainants, most reported that their confidence in the telecoms industry as a whole had decreased. Over 1 out of 2 said their confidence had decreased with almost 1 out of 3 saying their confidence had greatly decreased.
- 7.44. For around 1 out of 4 complainants confidence remained much the same while just under 1 out of 5 felt it had increased. Few complainants reported greatly increased confidence in the industry as a result of their experience.

- 7.45. Many complainants may feel rather 'bruised and battered' by the process of complaining about their Telephone Company or ISP, and it should be noted that many will have been through a relatively lengthy and potentially complicated process before reaching Otelo. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that their confidence in the telecoms industry is low. However, the very different impression they have of Otelo suggests they consider Otelo to be separate from the wider industry.

Confidence in the Telecoms industry – Complainants

	2006	2005	2004
Greatly increased	6%	4%	7%
Increased	12%	11%	11%
Remained the same	26%	29%	23%
Decreased	24%	27%	23%
Greatly decreased	32%	30%	36%
Base (n)	288	285	129

Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding

Summary

- 7.46. The survey of complainants conducted this year essentially repeated the previous 2 years' research into the opinions of this group and as a result the data gathered over the 3 years is largely comparable.
- 7.47. The majority of complainants who responded to the survey had spoken to a member of the Otelo staff about their complaint and held overwhelmingly positive views of this contact. They were particularly satisfied with the friendliness, helpfulness and knowledge of the people at Otelo, but less so about their authority to deal with the complaint.
- 7.48. Complainants were also positive about the information Otelo provided; it was widely considered to be easy to get hold of, given at the right time, and to be clear and easy to understand.
- 7.49. Around 3 out of 5 complainants were contacted for further information by Otelo, and those who spoke to the investigating officer at this stage were more likely to be satisfied with Otelo overall.
- 7.50. Over 4 out of 5 of this year's complainants reported that Otelo had contacted them with a case update at least once, a higher proportion than in either of the previous 2 years. Receiving case updates was again closely linked to levels of satisfaction overall – these increased with the frequency of updates from Otelo. On the other hand those who reported having to 'chase' progress with Otelo were less likely to be satisfied.
- 7.51. The results suggest there may be some ongoing problems relating to consistency in the returning of calls, although the number of responses here is low and the findings may not be indicative of a wider problem.

- 7.52. On balance, cases took longer to reach resolution than complainants had expected. As the length of the case will be dictated in part at least by necessary aspects of process there is the potential for dissatisfaction over timescales for resolution if complainants' expectations are not managed accordingly.
- 7.53. General satisfaction with Otelo's processes was high, with 3 out of 4 complainants satisfied overall. Respondents were particularly satisfied with the explanation given at the outset and the extent to which they were kept updated. They were less satisfied about ease of access to the investigating officer and the extent to which the case was resolved through mediation or negotiation, although even in relation to these aspects the majority of complainants were satisfied. Compared to 2005 there have been consistent, and in some cases significant, increases in the proportion of complainants that were satisfied and very satisfied.
- 7.54. Around 3 out of 5 complainants considered that the outcome of their case had been in their favour with 3 out of 10 considering that it was completely in their favour.
- 7.55. Complainants' satisfaction with the Ombudsman's report was also relatively high with 3 out of 5 satisfied and 1 out of 5 very satisfied. However, a significant minority (around 1 out of 4) were dissatisfied although this was almost exclusively associated with those who reported having a negative outcome.
- 7.56. The most frequently sought remedies were an apology and financial compensation, with financial compensation being the most commonly awarded. Around the same proportion of complainants that had hoped for financial compensation were awarded it (around 7 out of 10). Awards tended to be of between £25 and £50. Apologies were less forthcoming and while over 7 out of 10 had hoped to receive an apology just under 3 out of 5 complainants had actually done so.
- 7.57. Overall satisfaction levels among complainants were high, with over 7 out of 10 satisfied overall and over 2 out of 5 very satisfied. This year's figures show a small improvement relative to last year, with the proportion of complainants who were very satisfied increasing by 4%.
- 7.58. Key drivers affecting overall satisfaction levels were whether complainants had spoken to someone at Otelo, the extent to which Otelo provided updates on the progress of their case and satisfaction with their case outcome.
- 7.59. The majority of complainants viewed their experience of Otelo positively and would recommend the service to others or would approach Otelo again themselves if encountering similar problems in the future.
- 7.60. On balance, most reported that their confidence in Otelo had increased, while the opposite was true of their confidence in the wider telecoms industry.

8. THE VIEWS OF MEMBER COMPANIES

- 8.1. Membership of Otelo now stands at 255 and as in the 2005 research the study team were asked to undertake consultation with a sample of these member companies. Issues to consider included reasons for joining Otelo among newer members, and their views on the terms and conditions associated with membership. These types of issues were explored with a representative that held responsibility for taking strategic decisions concerning the company's complaints handling policy. For the purposes of this report this group has been called the Senior Managers.
- 8.2. Members were also consulted on a range of more day to day operational issues and were asked to give their views on different aspects of the Otelo investigation process (such as putting together a case file, the provisional and final reports etc) and were also asked to comment on how their staff found working with the Otelo staff team. These issues were explored with a member of staff with direct responsibility for managing the complaints handling function within their company. They are referred to here as the Complaints Managers.
- 8.3. It should be noted that in smaller companies these 2 areas of responsibility may effectively be held by the same individual. In such cases the appropriate member of staff will only have been interviewed once but issues outwith the immediate scope of that single interview may have been covered e.g. some of the senior managers interviewed on behalf of smaller companies may also have effectively been their companies Complaints Manager and may, therefore, have commented on operational issues.
- 8.4. The interview schedules used for the Senior and Complaints Manager interviews are provided within the appendices to this report.

The Member Companies Consulted

- 8.5. Seven companies were interviewed at senior manager level. Two of the interviewees had also participated in last year's research and were contacted because they had raised some particular issues or concerns with the research team at that time. Both of these interviewees represented larger companies.
- 8.6. Of the 5 companies that were new to the research all were also relatively new to Otelo i.e. they had joined within the last 1-2 years. One of these was a larger company and 4 were small or medium sized²². Of the 11 companies that were interviewed at Complaints Manager level, 6 had also participated in last year's research.²³ Of the 5 companies that were new to the research only 3 have had a customer complaint taken up by Otelo. Six of the Complaints Managers represented larger companies and 5 represented small or medium sized companies.

²² these companies will be referred to as the smaller companies in this report

²³ In 2 of these 6 cases a different member of staff represented the company in this year's research.

- 8.7. One of the larger companies was interviewed at both Complaints Manager and Senior Manager level but with different company representatives taking part.

Why Join Otelo?

- 8.8. All the senior managers stressed the importance their company placed on dealing with complaints effectively and fairly but also felt there were clear advantages in being associated with an external and independent organisation that customers can call upon once internal dispute resolution processes were either exhausted or in deadlock.
- 8.9. All also noted, however, that with legislation²⁴ now requiring telecommunication companies to be a member of an ombudsman scheme to achieve registered OFCOM telecommunications provider status the decision is effectively about which scheme to join. In essence and for the time being at least, the choice is between membership of Otelo or the Communications and Internet Services Adjudication Scheme (CISAS).
- 8.10. Five of the seven companies consulted at senior manager level had joined Otelo within the last 1-2 years. One of these was a larger organisation and the remaining 4 were small or medium sized companies. In the case of the larger company there were a range of reasons for joining Otelo including confidence in the organisation and its staff (based on preliminary discussions) and the service that was being made available to both the company itself and to its customers.
- 8.11. Among the small and medium sized companies all stated that their primary reason for selecting Otelo had been the size and make up of the existing membership base. The current membership of many of the industry leaders and particularly those, such as BT, with a significant public profile was seen as lending credibility to Otelo and would be likely to induce a correspondingly high level of confidence among consumers:

'in truth we followed the big guys....the ones like BT...I had a look at both websites²⁵ and Otelo just had more of the names that everyone knows...'

- 8.12. Generally, this association with the industry 'giants' was considered to be more important than any more specific differences in membership terms or conditions between the Otelo and CISAS schemes.
- 8.13. Positively it was reported that joining Otelo had been a straightforward process that for the smaller companies had simply involved the completion and return of a form. When it had been necessary to make contact with Otelo staff they were considered to have been both helpful and knowledgeable. Overall the joining up phase appears to be handled very efficiently and only positive feedback was given in this area.

²⁴ The Communications (2003) Act

²⁵ meaning Otelo and CISAS

- 8.14. However, on a note of caution, it is also clear from interview evidence that one result of the limited investment (in terms of time etc) that had gone into selecting and joining Otelo was an ambiguity about longer term membership. As long as being a member of Otelo was seen as being in the best interests of their company they would remain but should an alternative appear more advantageous they would have no concerns about transferring to another organisation.
- 8.15. Many of those interviewed in 2005 had been directly involved in the setting up of Otelo, had made significant investment of time and in some cases other resources and as a result their companies often had a strong and ongoing commitment to supporting the organisation and seeing it flourish. Equally, the added value that came along with Otelo membership, such as the information and advice function available for customers, was valued.
- 8.16. Among the longer standing members interviewed this year that commitment remains but many of the newer members made it clear that if, for whatever reason, they felt that an alternative organisation was a better option for their company, they would transfer. The issue that appeared most likely to lead them to reconsider their membership was charging structures. This will be discussed in further detail below.

Understanding of Otelo Terms and Conditions

- 8.17. Given the primary motivation for selecting Otelo it is perhaps unsurprising that the smaller companies had not necessarily conducted extensive research into the terms and conditions of Otelo membership, or indeed of other alternatives. Of the 5 new member companies interviewed, 4 reported that at the point when they had joined they had limited awareness of the conditions of membership and had not really given great consideration to the possible implications for their company (the exception being the larger company). This referred in particular to charging mechanisms, which will be discussed in further detail below.
- 8.18. Equally, and as noted earlier in this report, a number of other company managers approached as part of the research stated that while they would be happy to help in principle, in practice they felt they had little to contribute. This was usually because they had little, if any, awareness of Otelo's processes and in reality felt they could not comment beyond the 'sign up' process.
- 8.19. All of the 5 new companies that were interviewed had now had a customer's complaint taken up by Otelo. The larger company and one of the smaller companies reported that they had been familiar with all the necessary procedures and were 'ready' when the first complaint was taken up by Otelo. The 3 other smaller new member companies said they had effectively familiarised themselves with how the system worked during the first complaint and effectively 'learnt on the job'. That said all 3 stated that Otelo had been very helpful and in one case given a very considerable amount of support.

- 8.20. All 3 of these senior managers felt that, in hindsight, it would have been better if they had had a greater understanding of what would happen, and in particular what would be required of their company, before the event. While 2 senior managers thought that the responsibility for this situation essentially lay with themselves (e.g. they recalled having been invited to visit the Otelo offices but had not been able to take up the invitation at the time, they had further information from Otelo but it had not been read carefully etc) the other Senior Manager felt that Otelo could perhaps do more to get new members 'up to speed'.

Working Relationships and Communication

- 8.21. One of the themes to emerge from last year's research was that while there were generally good working relationships between member companies and Otelo some interviewees also thought there was room for improvement, especially in the area of communication. Overall, this year's research suggests that improvements have been made in this area.
- 8.22. In particular, a few of the larger companies interviewed suggested that over the last year they have resolved some of the miscommunication problems that had been occurring between their own and the Otelo staff team; this often seemed to be associated with the member company themselves having a dedicated team that worked on Otelo cases. As a result there was a high level of mutual understanding of each others policies and procedures and strong, one to one, working relationships had often developed. A number of the interviewees reported that they have named members of staff that usually deal with all of the complainants made against their company and that this generally helps things to run more smoothly. In the case of the larger company that has joined Otelo more recently there was evidence that a similarly effective working relationship is starting to develop.
- 8.23. While there was less evidence of these closer working relationships with smaller companies this is probably unrealistic, not least because smaller companies are likely to have only a small number of cases investigated by Otelo. Relationships were nonetheless reported as being good overall, with Otelo staff generally considered to be helpful and knowledgeable.
- 8.24. However, one area in which it was suggested that improvements could still be made related to keeping member companies informed when there are delays in the investigation of one of their customer's cases. A number of companies (at both Complaints and Senior Manager level), reported that occasionally there are significant but unexplained hold ups in the processing of a case.
- 8.25. While it was generally thought that these delays were probably for very valid reasons, some member companies reported feeling left 'out of the loop' and on occasions left to chase Otelo for an update or explanation. A few interviewees suggested that an automated letter system that notified companies of the delay could be sufficient to resolve this problem.

- 8.26. One other small area of concern related to staff working hours and accessibility. As noted above the Otelo staff were generally highly regarded and there was considerable evidence of strong and constructive working relationships between member company and Otelo staff. However, there was concern from one company that it can sometimes be difficult to contact staff. The interviewee thought this was probably the result of staff working from home or outwith normal working hours.

Timescales

- 8.27. Member companies were asked to give their views on various 'component parts' that together make up the investigation of a case by Otelo. These included the putting together of the case file, the investigation phase, the provisional report, further representations and the final report.
- 8.28. Overall, most companies were happy and generally very happy with most elements of the process. However, there was one area where a small number of interviewees were dissatisfied (2 Complainants Managers and 2 Senior Managers); this related to the timescales that member companies are set to complete various stages of Otelo's complaints process.
- 8.29. The timescale that was considered to be most challenging and in a few cases unfairly so, was for the submission of the case file. When a complaint is taken on by Otelo the member company is given 10 working days in which to complete and submit a file containing all the necessary evidence in the case. The average time taken to complete a case file varied considerably from company to company, ranging from only a few hours in some cases up to around a working week in others. For many companies meeting the target time was not considered to be a problem but a few companies reported difficulties in accessing all the necessary evidence e.g. voice recordings of telephone conversations between the company and the customer, within the required timescale.
- 8.30. Conversely, one interviewee suggested that companies were given too long to complete other elements of the process e.g. to respond to the provisional report and that perhaps the overall length of the case could remain the same but the turn around times assigned to each of the component parts be reconsidered.
- 8.31. One related, but relatively minor issue to emerge concerns the time from which 'the clock starts ticking'. Two companies reported that on a few occasions a number of cases have been passed to their company all at once, perhaps because a member of staff has a period of leave coming up and is 'clearing their desk'. Alternatively a new case may arrive with the company just before a holiday period when staffing levels tend to be low or very late in the working day. Although the companies appreciate that they should still respond within the designated timescales there was some feeling that Otelo could be more flexible under these types of circumstance.

Further Representations

- 8.32. The aspect of process where there appears to be the highest, albeit minority, dissatisfaction concerns the making of further representations. Once the Ombudsman has issued a provisional report both parties (company and customer) are able to make further representations. However, 4 of the Complaints Managers reported feeling that further representations made by companies were not really taken into account and that in reality it was exceptional to have the provisional decision overturned:

'it comes across as if they've already made up their mind, so they're sticking to it'

- 8.33. There were also some concerns that member companies are not able to see and respond to further representations made by the customer and that this has the potential to leave inaccurate information unchallenged.
- 8.34. Of course it may be that decisions are rarely overturned because they rarely should be and that as a result further representations made quite correctly do not affect the Ombudsman's ruling in the case. One member company suggested that if further representations are not taken into account member companies would value an explanation as to why not, not least to improve their own performance in the future. It might be that further explanation might also help to reduce member company dissatisfaction.

Charging Structures

- 8.35. Senior Managers were asked to comment on the direct costs associated with membership of Otelo. As in the 2005 research findings there was a general consensus that the principle underpinning the current charging model was a good one and there was general support for the combination of membership fee and individual case charge.
- 8.36. While all Senior Managers stated that they would always like to see costs reduced, the membership fee was considered to be reasonable and smaller companies particularly valued being able to become a member of Otelo at a relatively minimal charge.
- 8.37. However, as in 2005, the issue of the case fee charge was much more contentious. All 4 of the Senior Managers representing smaller companies thought the case fee to be high and in one case completely unreasonably so. It was generally felt that if a case was relatively complicated and effectively went through the whole process e.g. through investigation and on to provisional and final report, the case fee seemed to be realistic at least and companies could see what they were getting for their money.
- 8.38. However, when cases were resolved much more quickly and easily e.g. if the case related to the customer's misunderstanding of the contract they had entered into, the charge was considered to be very high:

'my MD wants to know why we're being charged all this money when we've never really been found at fault...and we're just asking people to stick to the contract...and that's what Otelo tells the customer.....I'm finding that harder to explain each time.....'

- 8.39. The solution was generally seen as being a sliding scale of charges with companies charged dependent on how far through the process a complaint went. There was less support than last year for the 'polluter pays' principle i.e. companies being charged according to whether the outcome in the case is in their favour or not.
- 8.40. As a result of their concerns about case charges 3 out of the 4 smaller new members had investigated the alternative provider of ombudsman services for the telecoms industry. Two of the three said they were still some way from making a change and would be likely to remain with Otelo for the next year at least. However, one of the newer companies suggested that unless this issue could be resolved they would be seriously considering a change in the near future.

Taking on Cases

- 8.41. Another issue that emerged last year, and that is still a concern for a small number of those consulted this year, relates to Otelo taking on cases that the member company feels are outwith its remit. This is invariably because the member company considers they themselves have not been given a reasonable opportunity to resolve the case 'in house' and that the customer has not exhausted the companies own complaints processes at the point when Otelo takes on their case.
- 8.42. Although 3 interviewees (2 Complaints and 1 Senior Manager) reported ongoing problems in this area it does appear that for some other companies these issues may have been resolved e.g. one company reported that Otelo now checks back with the company to ensure the customer has gone through the correct processes before agreeing to take on their case.

The Future.....

- 8.43. Finally, a couple of the interviewees were aware that Otelo is undergoing a period of growth and change. Both were fully in support of these developments for a number of reasons, including the potential it gives the organisation to retain key staff and further ensure its financial viability.
- 8.44. However, one interviewee noted that there can also be certain risks associated with a period of expansion and was keen to see that none of the existing strengths of the organisation are jeopardised and that the currently high standards applied to dealing with telecoms related cases do not drop.

Summary

- 8.45. Membership of Otelo now stands at 255 and, as in 2005, the study team were asked to undertake consultation with a sample of these member companies. A total of 18 interviews were undertaken with a range of Senior Managers and Complaints Managers.
- 8.46. While the larger companies interviewed had either been involved in the early days of Otelo or had undertaken quite a lot of preparatory work before joining smaller companies tended to have joined quickly and without having given particular consideration to the terms and conditions of membership.

- 8.47. Overall, the working relationship between member companies and Otelo were considered to be very good and Otelo staff were considered to be helpful and knowledgeable. Some of the miscommunication problems that were suggested by last year's research appear to have been addressed and largely resolved.
- 8.48. Most companies were happy and generally very happy with the processes Otelo use to investigate and the requirements that are placed on them as a company defending the cases. However, there was one area where a small number of interviewees were dissatisfied (2 Complainants Managers and 2 Senior Managers); this related to the timescales that member companies are set to complete various stages of Otelo's complaints process. The timescale for submitting the case file was the particular concern.
- 8.49. Some companies did not feel that further representations made after the issuing of the provisional report were really taken into account. There were also some concerns that member companies are not able to see and respond to further representations made by the customer and that this has the potential to leave inaccurate information unchallenged.
- 8.50. While membership charges were seen as very reasonable, the issue of the case charge remained contentious. All 4 of the Senior Managers representing smaller companies thought the case fee to be high and in one case this issue was leading the company to seriously consider moving to another ombudsman scheme.
- 8.51. A small number of companies felt that Otelo occasionally takes on cases that are outwith its remit, invariably because the member company considers they have not been given a reasonable opportunity to resolve the case 'in house'. However, it does appear that for some members similar concerns expressed last year have now been addressed.

9. CONCLUSIONS FROM THE 2006 RESEARCH

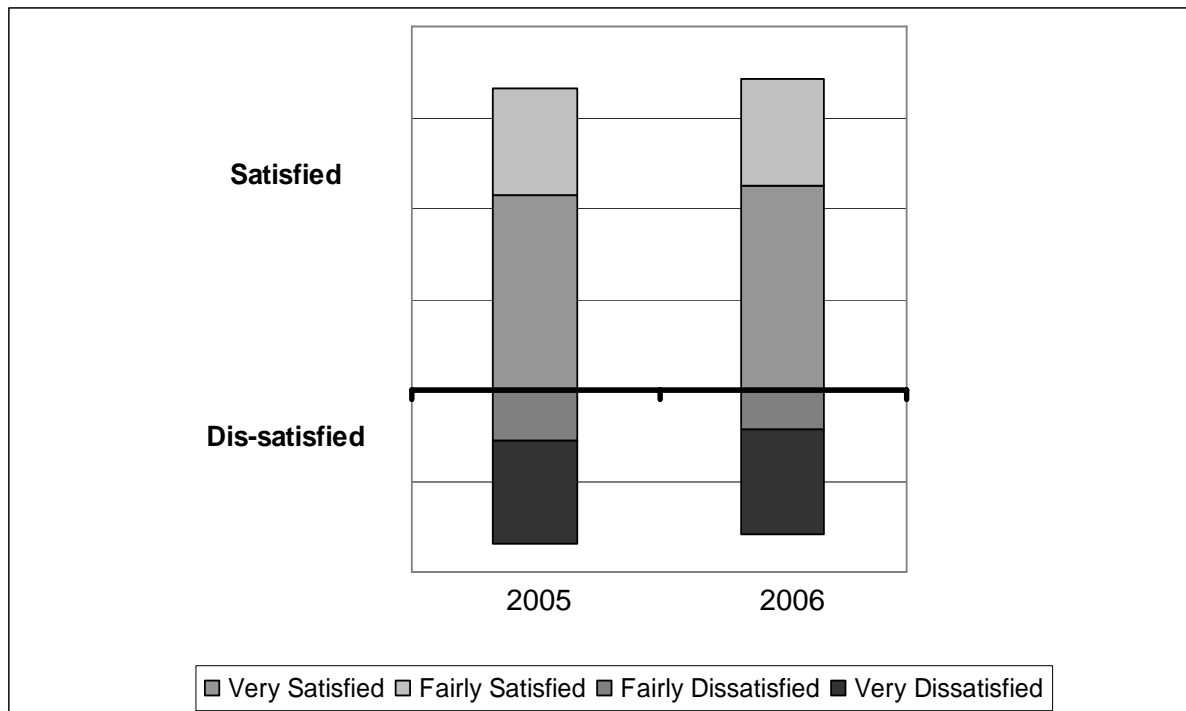
- 9.1. This is now the third year that Otelo has undertaken research into how members of the public view the services they provide and the second in which they have also consulted a sample of their member companies.
- 9.2. The results in 2004 were good and in 2005 were even better. Overall, and starting from an already very high base line, this year's results suggest that performance has improved yet again with a considerable majority of those members of the public that used the service satisfied and a significant proportion very satisfied. The charts below display overall satisfaction levels among both enquirers and complaints with the service they received and the conclusions taken from the survey of each group are summarised.

Conclusions about Enquirers

- 9.3. The research methods used in 2006 were the same as in the previous year i.e. a postal survey of enquirers who contacted Otelo by mail/fax and a telephone survey of those who made initial contact by telephone.
- 9.4. Only a small proportion of respondents to the postal survey had spoken to someone at Otelo. In keeping with all 3 years' research findings, speaking to Otelo staff was closely linked to satisfaction levels, with the group who did not speak to anyone being significantly less satisfied.
- 9.5. Enquirers who did speak to someone at Otelo were once again largely satisfied with their experience, with friendliness and helpfulness of staff rated particularly highly.
- 9.6. Again in keeping with the 2005 research, the majority of enquirers were advised to go back to their member company and give them another chance to resolve the problem even though the majority of postal enquirers' contacted Otelo wanting to register their complaint. Telephone enquirers were more likely to be looking for general advice.
- 9.7. A small proportion of enquirers were advised to return a complaints form with the majority of postal enquirers who had received this advice reported having done so. Among the telephone enquirers, the majority had also returned a form or planned to do so.
- 9.8. When the postal enquirers went back to their service provider 1 in 2 had their problem resolved with 1 out of 4 stating that the problem was resolved the way they wanted. The majority of telephone enquirers who went back to their member company were yet to hear of an outcome.
- 9.9. Most enquirers were not satisfied with the action taken by their service provider, although the proportion that was satisfied had increased between 2005 and o 2006. This rise was particularly marked among the telephone enquirers.
- 9.10. Of those who expressed an opinion, postal enquirers were most likely to say that their company had done the most to resolve their problem, with Otelo coming a close second. However many struggled to identify whether Otelo's involvement had made any difference.

- 9.11. Postal enquirers' perception of the outcome of their query or complaint was on balance negative and slightly more so than had been the case in 2005.
- 9.12. Overall, figures relating to satisfaction are broadly similar to those in 2005; a majority of enquirers were satisfied overall but there were significant differences between telephone enquirers and those responding to the postal survey, the later of whom were more dissatisfied. The initial reason for contacting Otelo, the group's more negative perceptions of the outcome and the smaller proportion who spoke to someone at Otelo are likely to partly explain the lower level of satisfaction.

Overall Satisfaction with Otelo, 2005 & 2006 - Enquirers



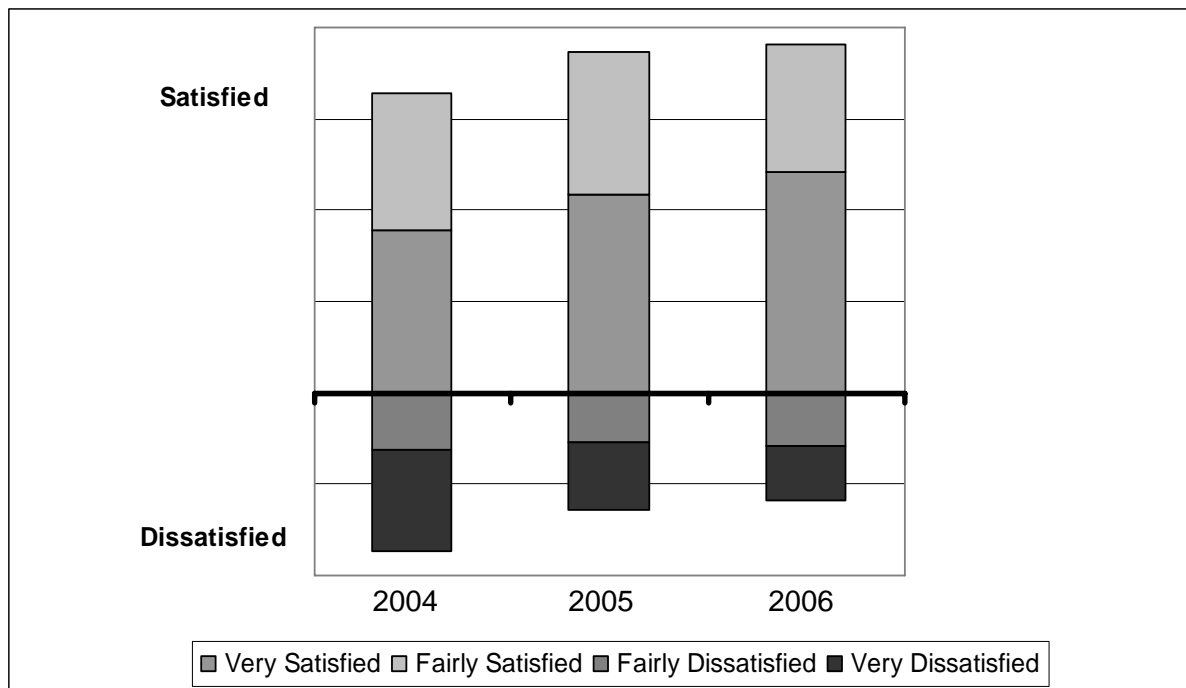
- 9.13. A majority of the postal enquirers would be willing to recommend Otelo to others although there has been a slight fall from the 2005 figure. However, slightly more would consider going back to Otelo if experiencing similar problems compared to 2005.
- 9.14. Postal enquirers views were split about whether their confidence in Otelo had increased or not as a result of their experience while 1 out of 3 felt that it had remained the same. Views appear to be closely linked to whether enquirers had a positive or negative outcome in their case.

Conclusions about Complainants

- 9.15. The survey of complainants conducted this year essentially repeated the previous 2 years' research into the opinions of this group and as a result the data gathered over the 3 years is largely comparable.
- 9.16. The majority of complainants who responded to the survey had spoken to a member of the Otelo staff about their complaint and held overwhelmingly positive views of this contact. They were particularly satisfied with the friendliness, helpfulness and knowledge of the people at Otelo, but less so about their authority to deal with the complaint.
- 9.17. Complainants were also positive about the information Otelo provided; it was widely considered to be easy to get hold of, given at the right time, and to be clear and easy to understand.
- 9.18. Around 3 in 5 complainants were contacted for further information by Otelo, and those who spoke to the investigating officer at this stage were more likely to be satisfied with Otelo overall.
- 9.19. Over 4 out of 5 of this year's complainants reported that Otelo had contacted them with a case update at least once, a higher proportion than in either of the previous 2 years. Receiving case updates was again closely linked to levels of satisfaction overall – these increased with the frequency of updates from Otelo. On the other hand those who reported having to 'chase' progress with Otelo were less likely to be satisfied.
- 9.20. The results suggest there may be some ongoing problems relating to consistency in the returning of calls, although the number of responses here is low and the findings may not be indicative of a wider problem
- 9.21. On balance, cases took longer to reach resolution than complainants had expected. As the length of the case will be dictated in part at least by necessary aspects of process there is the potential for dissatisfaction over timescales for resolution if complainants' expectations are not managed accordingly.
- 9.22. General satisfaction with Otelo's processes was high, with 3 out of 4 complainants satisfied overall. Respondents were particularly satisfied with the explanation given at the outset and the extent to which they were kept updated. They were less satisfied about ease of access to the investigating officer and the extent to which the case was resolved through mediation or negotiation, although even in relation to these aspects the majority of complainants were satisfied. Compared to 2005 there have been consistent, and in some cases significant, increases in the proportion of complainants that were satisfied and very satisfied.
- 9.23. Around 3 out of 5 complainants considered that the outcome of their case had been in their favour with 3 out of 10 considering that it was completely in their favour.

- 9.24. Complainants' satisfaction with the Ombudsman's report was also relatively high with 3 out of 5 satisfied and 1 out of 5 very satisfied. However, a significant minority (around 1 out of 4) were dissatisfied although this was almost exclusively associated with those who reported having a negative outcome.
- 9.25. The most frequently sought remedies were an apology and financial compensation, with financial compensation being the most commonly awarded. Around the same proportion of complainants that had hoped for financial compensation were awarded it (around 7 out of 10). Awards tended to be of between £25 and £50. Apologies were less forthcoming and while over 7 out of 10 had hoped to receive an apology just under 3 out of 5 complainants had actually done so.
- 9.26. Overall satisfaction levels among complainants were high, with over 7 out of 10 satisfied overall and over 2 out of 5 very satisfied. This year's figures show a small improvement relative to last year, with the proportion of complainants who were very satisfied increasing by 4%.

Overall Satisfaction with Otelo, 2004-2006 - Complainants



- 9.27. Key drivers affecting overall satisfaction levels were whether complainants had spoken to someone at Otelo, the extent to which Otelo provided updates on the progress of their case and satisfaction with their case outcome.
- 9.28. The majority of complainants viewed their experience of Otelo positively and would recommend the service to others or would approach Otelo again themselves if encountering similar problems in the future.

- 9.29. On balance, most reported that their confidence in Otelo had increased, while the opposite was true of their confidence in the wider telecoms industry.

Conclusions about Member Companies

- 9.30. Membership of Otelo now stands at 255 and, as in 2005, the study team were asked to undertake consultation with a sample of these member companies. A total of 18 interviews were undertaken with a range of Senior Managers and Complaints Managers.
- 9.31. While the larger companies interviewed had either been involved in the early days of Otelo or had undertaken quite a lot of preparatory work before joining smaller companies tended to have joined quickly and without having given particular consideration to the terms and conditions of membership.
- 9.32. Overall, the working relationship between member companies and Otelo were considered to be very good and Otelo staff were considered to be helpful and knowledgeable. Some of the miscommunication problems that were suggested by last year's research appear to have been addressed and largely resolved.
- 9.33. Most companies were happy and generally very happy with the processes Otelo use to investigate and the requirements that are placed on them as a company defending the cases. However, there was one area where a small number of interviewees were dissatisfied (2 Complainants Managers and 2 Senior Managers); this related to the timescales that member companies are set to complete various stages of Otelo's complaints process. The timescale for submitting the case file was the particular concern.
- 9.34. Some companies did not feel that further representations made after the issuing of the provisional report were really taken into account. There were also some concerns that member companies are not able to see and respond to further representations made by the customer and that this has the potential to leave inaccurate information unchallenged.
- 9.35. While membership charges were seen as very reasonable, the issue of the case charge remained contentious. All 4 of the Senior Managers representing smaller companies thought the case fee to be high and in one case this issue was leading the company to seriously consider moving to another ombudsman scheme.
- 9.36. A small number of companies felt that Otelo occasionally takes on cases that are outwith its remit, invariably because the member company considers they have not been given a reasonable opportunity to resolve the case 'in house'. However, it does appear that for some members similar concerns expressed last year have now been addressed.

Recommendations

- 9.37. The 2005 satisfaction survey concluded by recommending that Otelo essentially carried on 'doing what it was doing'. Given the ongoing improvements, this year's findings suggest that it has done so and to good effect. Equally, it appears that Otelo has also moved to address some of the concerns member companies expressed last year and that, where this has happened, the benefits are starting to be felt.
- 9.38. Clearly, there remain areas that some members would like to see reconsidered, such as case charges, but overall the member company consultation suggests that most see Otelo as a valued partner with good staff and processes. Equally, the vast majority of the members of the public that responded to the survey gave Otelo a high approval rating.
- 9.39. A small number of customers were dissatisfied and in some cases this may be at least to some extent avoidable. In other cases dissatisfaction may stem from factors that are effectively outwith Otelo's control or about which Otelo cannot compromise e.g. on making fair adjudications. The first of the two recommendations that conclude this report relates to these types of circumstance.

Recommendation 1 - Manage expectations and understanding

- 9.40. As noted elsewhere in this report, both the research findings and our experience of complainants' satisfaction suggest that Otelo may always have a small 'core' of dissatisfied users. In some cases this may be because the outcome of the case was not as they would have wished. In other cases it may be that their original expectation about what Otelo could do for them was not realistic i.e. they may have thought that Otelo has greater powers to affect the behaviour of its member companies than it does.
- 9.41. This being the case it may be worth considering whether there are ways in which these expectations can be managed and the understanding of Otelo's role increased. For example, Otelo could review all literature (including the website) to ensure that its remit and powers are clearly stated and explained. In particular, it may be worth looking at explanations as to why Otelo might not be able to take on a case and what capacity (or otherwise) they have to influence a member company's policy and procedures. Equally, since some customers had expected their case to be dealt with more quickly it may be worth reviewing the explanations given on the time a case is likely to take and why.
- 9.42. If a customer is looking for Otelo to take on a case but for some reason this is not possible a very clear explanation setting out the reasons why may help to at least reduce, if not eliminate, dissatisfaction. A letter may be the clearest way to do this and is particularly important for those who contacted Otelo by post or those customers who have completed a complaints form. For those making initial contact by telephone a letter may not always be appropriate but a short 'summary' at the end of the call could be useful.

- 9.43. It may also be worth reviewing the information available to new and existing members to ensure that it makes clear the range of services Otelo offers i.e. in effect what member companies are getting for their money. For example, while this year's sample of telephone enquirers is comparatively small, findings from 2004 and 2005 also suggested that many enquirers were contacting Otelo seeking quite general advice about their rights and about how to complain to their company.
- 9.44. In effect, therefore, Otelo may be providing information that ought to be (and indeed may be) offered by the member company. Should this service not be available to their customers member companies could find themselves having to deal with a greater volume and range of enquiries.

Recommendation 2 – Reconsider research priorities and methods

- 9.45. The consistently high level of customer satisfaction found across all three years of research may give Otelo the confidence and opportunity to reconsider its research programme and in particular to assess whether annual customer satisfaction research necessarily gives the organisation best value for its research budget.
- 9.46. For example, it may be that Otelo could consider taking some of the customer satisfaction monitoring and particularly the data collection 'in house'. Methods adopted could include:
- Short satisfaction surveys with 'telephone enquirers' using the survey method adopted in this study;
 - A short postal survey could be issued at the close of each case. To achieve an optimum response rate this would ideally be issued separately from other documentation and as soon as possible after the end of the case but while still allowing time for any outcomes to be put in place; and
 - An online survey covering website content would be the most effective way to reach those customers making use of the website.
- 9.47. If Otelo has concerns about impartiality, a third party could be invited to analyse and report on the findings periodically. Alternatively, if Otelo does not wish to go down this route it may be that conducting a customer satisfaction survey every 2 years rather than annually may be sufficient to ensure standards are being maintained.
- 9.48. Should this free up any additional resources Otelo might wish to consider whether it is now time to undertake some more comprehensive consultation/research with its member companies. Although it proved difficult to recruit member telephone interviewees this year those that did participate were often very pleased to have been given the opportunity to share their views.

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