



## **IPCC investigations:**

**a survey seeking feedback from complainants and police personnel**

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our colleagues in casework and investigations for their input during the design stage of the project. We are also very grateful to staff in professional standards departments (PSDs) for assisting us with the distribution of the survey questionnaires. We extend our special thanks to all the police personnel and members of the public who took part in this study.

## Key findings

This paper presents findings from two surveys seeking feedback on IPCC Investigations. The first surveyed complainants who had had their complaint dealt with by an IPCC Independent or Managed Investigation. The Second surveyed police officers and staff who subject to one of these types of investigation. The main findings are as follows.

- Ten (14%) of the 70 eligible complainants and 78 (30%) of the 264 eligible police personnel took part in the survey. Two of the complainants and a quarter of the police personnel had experienced an IPCC Independent investigation, while the rest experienced a managed investigation.
- The majority of complainants and police personnel were provided with information at the start of the investigation which sufficiently met their needs.
- All complainants and two thirds of police personnel reported receiving updates during the investigation process, with most receiving one at least every three months.
- While the majority found the information contained in these updates useful, most would have liked to have received them more frequently. Police personnel would have liked more direct updates from the IPCC instead of, or in addition to, those provided by PSDs.
- Around half of complainants and police personnel said they were provided with verbal feedback at the end of the investigation. For police personnel, this was usually provided by police colleagues. Most had a full or partial understanding of the outcome of the investigation.
- While nearly all the complainants received the investigation report, only 18% of police personnel said they received copy. The routine receipt of a report, and an opportunity to discuss its findings, was suggested as an area for IPCC improvement.

- Half of police personnel felt the investigation was conducted in a fair manner. Three out of the ten complainants felt the investigation was conducted in a fair manner.
- Over half of police personnel felt the investigation was handled sensitively. Four out of the ten complainants also felt the investigation was handled sensitively.
- Over half of the police personnel stated that the investigation was conducted in a timely manner. Two out of the ten complainants felt that this was the case.
- Of the 16 police personnel who reported being subject to criminal or disciplinary actions and who answered these questions, six thought the investigation was 'fair' and eight said it was handled 'sensitively'.
- Over half of police personnel were very or fairly satisfied with the outcome of the investigation, while just under half were satisfied with the quality of the investigation. In contrast, just one of the ten complainants was satisfied with the outcome of investigation, while two were happy about the quality of the investigation. Suggestions for improvements included greater consistency in the information provided by the IPCC and ensuring that investigators had adequate knowledge of police procedures.
- Respondents who agreed that the investigation was conducted in a 'timely manner' were more likely to say that they were satisfied with the *outcome* and *quality* of the investigation<sup>1</sup>.
- Those subject to an independent investigation were more likely to view it as 'fair' and 'sensitive' and were more likely to state that they were satisfied with the *outcome* and *quality* of an investigation than those who experienced a managed investigation<sup>2</sup>.
- For both complainants and police personnel, 'a thorough investigation' was ranked as most important in terms of an IPCC investigation.

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<sup>1</sup> This is based on small sample sizes and is not statistically significant

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## Background

The IPCC has a legal duty to help increase public confidence in policing through an improved system of resolving complaints about the police<sup>3</sup> and in so doing, deliver an effective and trusted complaints system that is always improving. In order to do this, we need to listen and be responsive to those individuals we have contact with, drawing on their experiences to help us to identify mechanisms for improving performance across the system. An important element of this process is the collection of feedback from those individuals who have direct experience of the complaints process. This information will feed into the IPCC Balanced Scorecard, the formal mechanism by which we monitor how well we are performing.

In 2008, as part of the National Audit Office's (NAO) Value for Money review of the IPCC, the NAO commissioned a study which explored levels of satisfaction among those with experience of the IPCC. This included complainants and police officers linked to an IPCC independent investigation. The study highlighted concerns that individuals had with the investigative process and generally confirmed the findings of the IPCC stock take, that the current police complaints system does not deliver what users want in terms of finding out what has happened rather than only apportioning blame. A need for regular feedback from service users had been recognised by the IPCC and was reinforced by the NAO's review.

## Aim

This study sought to gain feedback from those individuals who have had direct experience of the complaints system. This was either as a complainant who had their complaint investigated by the IPCC, or a member of police personnel who had been the subject of a IPCC investigation. As a study, our intention was also to test the validity of the questionnaires to ensure that they were easy to understand, relevant and would capture information which adequately meets the IPCC's needs.

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<sup>3</sup> 'Making the New Police Complaints System Work Better: Statutory Guidance', Independent Police Complaints Commission (2005), p11.

# Methodology

## Questionnaires

Two separate self-completion questionnaires, one for police personnel and one for complainants, were developed in consultation with colleagues in relevant IPCC directorates. Questionnaires were posted directly to complainants using the contact details available on the IPCC's internal Case Tracking Management System (CTMS). Officers were contacted via their force PSD. Complainants were sent a reminder letter and replacement questionnaire three weeks after the initial mail out. Respondents had five weeks to complete and return the questionnaires.

## Sample

Both complainant and police personnel samples were drawn from the CTMS. The sample included all complainants and police personnel linked to managed and independent investigations which had been closed during the 12 month period, 1 December 2007 to 30 November 2008. Complainants who could be identified as bereaved relatives were excluded from the sample<sup>4</sup>.

A list of possible participants were then sent to relevant colleagues in casework and investigations who were asked to notify us if they felt any individuals should be excluded from the sample. Grounds for exclusion included:

- Individuals who were known to have serious physical or mental health issues which colleagues felt could have been exacerbated by inclusion in the survey.
- Cases where there were ongoing issues related to the individual or investigation such as an outstanding inquest or ongoing related investigation.
- Sensitive cases involving, for example, terrorism or covert investigations.

As a result of this consultation exercise, 62 of the 353 police personnel and 24 of the 100 complainants were excluded from the sample.

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<sup>4</sup> It was decided that a postal survey was not the most appropriate method for obtaining feedback from bereaved relatives but the IPCC does plan to undertake a future study with this group.

# Response

Postal questionnaires, and studies which require people to recall events that have occurred some time in the past, inherently have lower response rates than those which are conducted in person. Taking into account the limitations of the survey design, we anticipated a response rate of around 30%. The response rate for police personnel was as anticipated, 78 (30%) of the 264 eligible<sup>5</sup> individuals returned a questionnaire. The response for complainants was considerably lower, only ten (14%) of the 70 eligible<sup>6</sup> complainants returned a questionnaire.

# Limitations

There are several limitations which need to be taken into account when considering the findings of these surveys, such as:

- Sample design – excluding certain individuals from the sample, such as bereaved relatives, means that we risk missing the views of important sub-populations who may have unique experiences of the complaints process. While we felt that a postal questionnaire was not the most appropriate method for contacting these individuals, we do recognise the importance of seeking their views and plan a future study of bereaved relatives which will explore their particular needs.

We are also aware that while our study concentrated on police personnel who had been the subject of an IPCC investigation, there will be other officers and police staff who, while not under investigation themselves, should be kept updated of its progress. For example, those police personnel interviewed as witnesses. The lack of information on the CTMS prevented us from identifying these individuals but their inclusion needs to be considered in the future.

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<sup>5</sup> We were informed by PSDs that they were unable to identify or locate 27 of the original 291 police personnel and therefore the questionnaires were returned to us. There may be other individuals who did not receive questionnaires, but who we were not informed about.

<sup>6</sup> Six of the 76 complainant questionnaires were returned to us as 'not known at this address'.

- Non-response – the significance of a low response rate is that there may be differences between responders and non-responders which will impact on how accurately the findings of the study reflect the views and experiences of the survey population as a whole. For example, those who were very unhappy with their experience may be more likely to respond to the survey than those who felt their experience was ‘ok’.
- Timeliness - some investigations lasted several years and so we are asking people to recall things that happened a considerable time ago. This is likely to have an impact on their ability to accurately report how they felt at that time. We only sent questionnaires to individuals whose investigation had been closed ensuring that any inquests and/or criminal/misconduct proceedings had been completed. This led to a considerable gap between an investigation being completed and some people having received the feedback questionnaires. This may not only affect the quality of the information they provide but also their willingness to respond. We need to consider whether the completion of the IPCC investigation report would be a more appropriate point at which to conduct the survey. While sending a questionnaire out at this stage would be timely, those receiving it may still be waiting for further proceedings to progress, such as inquests and criminal or misconduct hearings.

## Findings

### Complainants

#### Respondent characteristics

- Seven of the ten complainants who returned a questionnaire were male and three were female. Nine reported being from a White ethnic background and the average age of respondents was 45 years.
- Six of the respondents had made their complaint directly to the police force concerned, two had complained directly to the IPCC and two had made a complaint via a solicitor. Only one of the complainants was represented by a solicitor during the investigation process.

- Two of the ten complainants had had their complaint independently investigated by the IPCC and the remaining eight had experienced a managed investigation.

### **Information provision at the start of the investigation**

- Eight complainants reported being provided with information at the start of the investigation about how it would be conducted. These individuals had all had their investigation managed by the IPCC. Of the remaining two, who had both experienced an IPCC independent investigation, one said they had not received any information at the start and the other could not remember whether or not such information had been provided.
- Of those who had received information, seven said the information came directly from the IPCC: three received information face-to-face; three received written information; and one received information over the telephone. One person received information directly from their solicitor. This was the only person who reported that the information they received at this stage 'fully met their needs'. The remaining seven individuals said the information they received 'partly met their needs'.

### **Updates during the investigation process**

- All ten complainants reported receiving updates during the investigation; eight received these updates directly from the IPCC; one from their solicitor; and one from a police investigator.
- Two of the respondents reported receiving updates every month, five every two to three months and two less frequently. Six of the respondents said they found the information included in the updates 'useful'. Eight of the respondents said they would have liked to have received more updates.

### **Information provided at the end of the investigation**

- Five of the ten complainants reported being provided with verbal feedback at the end of the investigation; four from IPCC staff and one from their solicitor.

Four of these five individuals reported that the feedback was 'very' or 'fairly' useful.

- Eight individuals said they had received a copy of the investigation report and five of these said they had found it 'easy to understand'. One person, linked to a managed investigation, said they found the report difficult to understand.
- One of the two individuals whose complaint had been the subject of an independent investigation said they did not receive any verbal feedback and did not see a copy of the report.
- Six of the ten complainants felt the investigation addressed the points they had raised in their complaint. Two of these said they had met them 'fully' and four said they had been 'partly' met.
- Seven of the complainants said they 'fully understood' what the outcome was of the investigation, one person said they 'partly understood' and one person 'did not understand'.

### **Communication with the IPCC**

- Six of the ten complainants said they found IPCC staff to be 'polite', three said they were 'neither polite nor impolite' and one said they found staff to be 'impolite'.
- Three people found staff to be 'helpful', five said they were 'neither helpful nor unhelpful' and two people said IPCC staff were 'unhelpful'.
- The most common methods of communication with the IPCC were telephone and letter.
- Seven people said it was 'fairly' or 'very easy' to contact people at the IPCC. Two said that the IPCC 'responded quickly' to their enquiries, three people said the time taken was 'neither quick nor slow' and five said that the IPCC responded 'slowly'.

### **Views on the fairness, sensitivity and timeliness of the investigation process**

- Three of the ten respondents said they felt the investigation was conducted in a 'fair' manner, the remaining seven said they did not feel that the investigation was 'fair'.
- Four complainants thought the investigation was handled sensitively while six did not.
- Two respondents 'agreed' that the investigation was carried out in a timely manner. Seven respondents 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' with this statement.

### **Levels of satisfaction with the investigation**

- Seven of the ten respondents were 'fairly' or 'very' dissatisfied with the *outcome* of the investigation, two respondents said they were 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' with the *outcome* and one respondent reported being 'fairly satisfied'. For these individuals, levels of satisfaction did not appear to be related to the outcome of the investigation.
- Six respondents said they felt 'fairly' or 'very' dissatisfied with the *quality* of the investigation, two were 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' and two respondents reported being 'very' or 'fairly satisfied' with the investigation quality.
- Three complainants reported that criminal or disciplinary actions were taken against police personnel as a result of the investigation. Two of these individuals felt that the investigation was not conducted in a fair manner and that their case was not handled sensitively.

### **Views on priorities for the investigation process**

Based on their own experience of an IPCC investigation, respondents were asked to rank the following statements in terms of importance: a quick investigation; a thorough investigation; provision of clear information at the start; provision of frequent updates; and a full explanation of the investigation's findings. Six of the eight respondents who answered this question felt a 'thorough investigation' was the most important factor and five of the respondents felt that a 'quick investigation' was least important.

## **Respondents' suggestions for improvement**

Respondents were asked if they felt there was anything the IPCC could do to improve its work in the future. Comments were received from eight complainants and most of these tended to focus on specific details of their complaint. However, these did highlight some common themes including: a perceived lack of independence of both IPCC and police investigators; a feeling that IPCC investigations are unnecessarily lengthy, causing needless additional distress; and the need for direct communication during and at the end of an investigation. Some of these points are illustrated in the comments which follow:

*"...When I eventually received your 30-40 page report I was only given three days to understand, digest and respond. This was totally unacceptable..."*

The IPCC should *"...invite the complainant to a meeting in person so that vital information and any relevant history is not missed. I did not get the chance to discuss the report which is flawed in some areas..."*

## **Police personnel**

### **Respondent characteristics**

- Of the 78 police personnel who responded to the survey, 81% (63) were male and 19% (15) were female. Eight (11%) of the 73 individuals whose ethnicity was known reported being from an ethnic minority background. The average age of respondents was 37 years old.
- Half (39) of the respondents stated the investigation was linked to a complaint and 33 were linked to an investigation into a death or serious injury.
- Around a quarter (20) of the respondents had experienced an IPCC independent investigation and the remaining 58 individuals were linked to a managed investigation.

- Of the 76 respondents who answered this question, 66 (87%) had been issued with a Regulation 9 (or similar) notice stating that they were under investigation for possible misconduct and ten had not.
- Respondents had served an average of 11 years with the police service prior to the investigation.
- Twenty individuals reported being subject to misconduct or criminal proceedings as a result of the investigation.

### **Information provision at the start of the investigation**

- A total of 49 (73%) of the 67 respondents who answered this question stated they had been provided with information at the start of the investigation about how it would be conducted. Three of the 20 individuals who were subject to an independent investigation said they had not received any information at the start.
- Of those who had received information at the start of the investigation, most reported receiving it from their PSD (58%) or a staff representative (31%). Fourteen of the 19 individuals who were subject to an independent investigation said they had received information at the start. Half of these said the information had been provided directly from IPCC staff.
- 83% of individuals said the information they received fully (46%) or partly (37%) met their needs.

### **Updates during the investigation process**

- Two thirds of police personnel recalled receiving updates during the investigation. Of the 26 individuals who said they did not receive any updates, five were subject to an independent investigation. Three individuals who had not received any updates said they did not require any.
- Of the 52 individuals who did receive updates, most (58%) received them from their PSD. Thirteen people (26%) reported receiving updates directly from the IPCC, six of these were subject to an independent investigation. When asked

who they would have liked to receive updates from, individuals were most likely to say their PSD (45%) or directly from the IPCC (43%).

- 63% of those who received updates said they had received them at least once a month (21%) or every two to three months (37%). Sixteen people said they had received updates less frequently than every three months, two of these individuals were subject to an independent investigation.
- Over half (54%) of individuals who had received updates said they would like to have received them more frequently and two thirds described the information they received in the updates as 'useful'.

### **Information provision at the end of the investigation**

- Over half of the individuals said they had received verbal feedback at the end of the investigation, most commonly from their supervisor / line manager (44%) or from their PSD (37%). Nine individuals reported receiving verbal feedback directly from the IPCC - eight of these had been subject to an independent investigation. A total of 72% found the feedback 'very' or 'fairly' useful.
- Fourteen (18%) of the 78 respondents remembered receiving a copy of the investigation report - seven of these were linked to an independent investigation. Ten of the 14 individuals said they found the report 'easy to understand'. No respondents said they found it difficult to understand.
- Ninety-two percent of individuals said they 'fully' (62%) or 'partly' (30%) 'understood what the outcome was' of the investigation. Six individuals said they did not understand what the outcome was; one of these had been subject to an independent investigation.

## **Communication with the IPCC**

- Of the 34 individuals who reported having direct contact with IPCC staff, the majority (73%) said they found staff to be 'polite' or 'neither polite nor impolite' (15%). Over half (56%) said IPCC staff were helpful. Four individuals said they found IPCC staff were 'impolite' and eight said they had been 'unhelpful'.
- Very few respondents (11) had initiated contact with the IPCC and most of these said they found it very or fairly easy to do so.

## **Views on the fairness, sensitivity and timeliness of the investigation process**

- Half (39) of the respondents said they felt the investigation was conducted in a 'fair' manner, 31% (24) said they felt the investigation had not been conducted fairly and 15 individuals said they 'didn't know'. Twelve of the 20 individuals subject to an independent investigation said they felt it had been conducted in a 'fair manner'.
- Fifty-eight percent of respondents (45) felt the investigation was handled sensitively, a third (26) felt it was not handled sensitively and seven individuals said they 'didn't know'. Fifteen of the 20 individuals subject to an independent investigation said they felt the investigation was 'handled sensitively'.
- Half of the 68 respondents 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that the investigation was 'carried out in a timely manner'. Twenty-seven individuals (40%) 'strongly disagreed' with this statement. Thirteen of the 20 individuals subject to an independent investigation said they felt the investigation was timely.
- Six of the 16 police personnel who reported being subject to criminal or disciplinary actions and who answered this question felt that the investigation was conducted in a 'fair' manner and eight felt that their case had been handled sensitively.

## **Levels of satisfaction with the investigation**

- Over half (55%) the respondents were 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied with the *outcome* of the investigation and 23% per cent reported being 'fairly' (4%) or

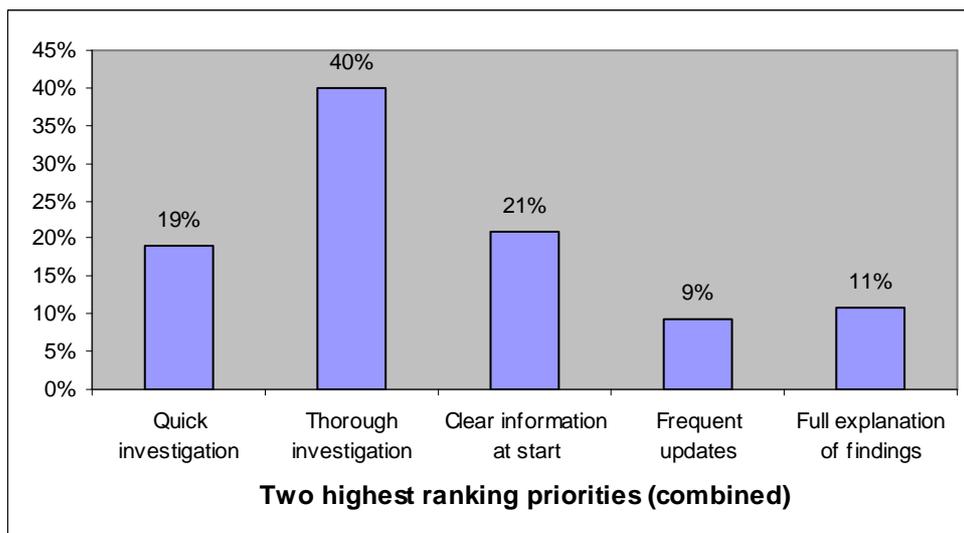
'very' (14%) dissatisfied with the *outcome*. Only three of those subject to an independent investigation were dissatisfied with the outcome.

- When asked about the *quality* of the investigation, 47% said they were 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied with the *quality* and 32% per cent reported being 'fairly' or 'very' dissatisfied. Five of those subject to an independent investigation said they were 'dissatisfied' with the *quality* of the investigation.
- Of the 43 respondents who reported being satisfied with the *outcome* of the investigation, six (14%) said they were dissatisfied with the investigation *quality*.
- Respondents who agreed that the investigation was timely were much more likely to say they were satisfied with the outcome and quality of the investigation.

### **Views on priorities for the investigation process**

Based on their own experience of an IPCC investigation, respondents were asked to rank the following statements in terms of importance: a quick investigation; a thorough investigation; provision of clear information at the start; provision of frequent updates; and a full explanation of the investigation's findings. Figure 1 shows that 40% of police personnel ranked a 'thorough investigation' as either the most or second most important factor in an investigation followed by the provision of 'clear information at the start'.

**Figure 1: Investigation priorities for police personnel**



### **Respondents' suggestions for improvement**

Respondents were asked if they felt there was anything the IPCC could do to improve its work in the future. A total of 41 individuals responded to this question and their responses were grouped into eight key areas:

- **Communication**

Six individuals said that an opportunity for direct communication with IPCC staff could improve the experience of individuals under investigation.

- **Information provision at the start of the investigation**

Responses from five people related to the information they had received at the start of the investigation. Suggestion for improvements included:

- Greater clarity about what an IPCC investigation entails, why the IPCC are involved and how an IPCC investigation differs from one carried out by the PSD.
- Notifying an individual that they are under investigation as soon as is practicable and providing more detailed information on the Regulation 9 notice.
- Provision of a specific, named point of contact at the IPCC where any queries could be directed.

- **Provision of updates**

Fourteen respondents made comments relating to the provision of more frequent and routine updates, especially the receipt of updates directly from the IPCC in addition to, or instead of, those received from their colleagues. It was suggested that the IPCC should take responsibility for ensuring that updates are provided, and should supply individuals with a clear time frame for when and how they will receive such information. If the IPCC is unable to provide updates, an explanation for this should be provided to the person under investigation.

- Information provision at the end of the investigation

Suggestions for improvements on information provision at the end of the investigation were made by eight people, these included:

- Ensuring that all those under investigation are formally told that the investigation has been completed, what the outcome was and are routinely provide with a copy of the final report.
- Providing sufficient and proportionate information at the end of the investigation. As one officer stated .... *"it is important to get more than a one line email stating 'no case to answer' when you have spent a year on restricted duties with no redress"*.
- Allowing an opportunity for individuals to meet directly with the IPCC to discuss the findings, seek clarification and raise any concerns.

- Timeliness

Eleven people commented on issues relating to the timeliness of the investigation, with a number stating that the time taken to complete the investigation seemed disproportionate to the matter under investigation. Individuals also stated that where delays did occur, the IPCC should ensure that individuals are provided with an explanation about why these delays occurred.

- Sensitivity

Comments made by nine individuals suggested a lack of confidence in the IPCC's awareness and sensitivity of the impact an investigation has on those involved, both professionally and personally. A number stated that a more timely investigation could have significantly reduced the stress and anxiety experienced

by them and their families. One officer who was told by the IPCC that delays in the investigation were due to '*staffing issues versus workload*' described the adverse effect such delays had on his well being.

- Consistency

Three individuals referred to a lack of consistency in the information provided to them by the IPCC, receiving update letters to say that an investigation was ongoing after they had been told it had been completed. There were also examples of inconsistencies between information received from their force and that provided by the IPCC.

- Investigation quality

Two officers stated that IPCC investigators did not have adequate knowledge of police procedures to enable them to undertake an appropriate, relevant and realistic investigation, unnecessarily prolonging the investigation.

## Conclusion

Most respondents received information at the start of the investigation and were provided with updates which they found to be clear and useful. Many of those who did not receive updates viewed this as a significant omission. The routine provision of proportionate and consistent information during and at the end of an investigation, and an opportunity for more direct contact with IPCC staff, were highlighted as important areas for improvement.

In our sample, police personnel were more likely to view an investigation as fair and sensitive than complainants, as were those subject to an independent rather than a managed investigation. Around half of respondents did not agree that the investigation was carried out in a timely manner. These individuals were more likely to state that they were dissatisfied with the outcome and quality of the investigation than those who felt the investigation was timely<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> These findings should be treated with caution. They are observations based on small sample sizes and have not been subject to any statistical testing.

It is not possible to say from these findings whether there is any direct link between the outcome of an investigation and levels of satisfaction. However, it is worthy of note that around half of the police personnel who reported having been subject to criminal or disciplinary actions also stated that they felt the investigation was handled sensitively and that they were satisfied with the outcome and quality of the investigation.

When respondents were asked to provide feedback on how they felt the IPCC could improve its work in the future, speeding up investigations and ensuring they are proportionate to the matter under investigation were clearly viewed as important. Ensuring that individuals receive explanations for delays and demonstrating sensitivity to the impact these delays can have on the individuals involved, were also seen to be significant in improving the overall experience of an IPCC investigation.

## Next steps

Consultation with colleagues about how the surveys can be integrated into routine casework procedures will follow, along with discussion about how findings from the surveys can be most appropriately disseminated to colleagues. As part of this consultation we will also seek colleagues' views on when would be the most appropriate stage to send out the questionnaires i.e. on completion of the investigation report or after case has closed. In the long term, we hope to discuss how the feedback questionnaires could be incorporated into CTMS procedures.

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**May 2009**