



# APPEALS SURVEY

## REPORT

**2005**

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Content	Page Number
1. Introduction	2
2. Research Objectives	2
3. Approach	2
4. Customer samples	3
5. Structure of report	3
6. Management Summary	3 - 4
7. Current Position	4
8. Recommended Areas for Improvement	5
9. Survey Results	6 - 7
10. Access and Contact	8 - 16
11. Response Times	17 - 19
12. Service Quality	20 - 24

# **APPEALS SURVEY REPORT 2005**

## **1. Introduction**

Veterans Agency's (VA) Corporate Plan 2005/2010 confirms the Agency's mission to deliver modern, high-quality, customer-focused services to war disablement pensioners, war widows/widowers, their dependants and carers and other veterans and in-Service beneficiaries of AFCS; and to deliver them consistently, efficiently and effectively in recognition of the many extraordinary and unique personal sacrifices made in defence of the nation.

In 2005, VA issued questionnaires to measure the perceptions of customers who had a decision on an appeal in the preceding six months. The results are detailed in this report and provide the Agency with the opportunity to compare results with the previous year's surveys, establish if trends have developed and identify areas where improvements can be made.

## **2. Objectives**

The objective of this customer research is to help VA establish the needs of current and future customers with particular emphasis on ensuring that the Agency identifies:

- The level of satisfaction with VA services
- The cause of any dissatisfaction
- Customer choices
- Customer preferences
- Customer priorities
- Customer ideas for improvement

## **3. Approach**

VA uses up to date research information to identify the needs and views on all aspects of customer service in both the main customer base and each of several customer groups. The aspects of service delivery on which information is needed include:

- Access and contact
- Response times
- Service quality
- Service Improvements

## **4. Customer Samples**

The questionnaire was issued in March 2005 to 498 customers who received a decision notification between September 2004 and February 2005. Of the 498 issued, 260 were returned – of those 53% had received a non-favourable decision on their appeal.

## **5. Structure of the report**

The report is structured following the main headings of the survey questionnaires issued:

- Access and contact
- Response times
- Service quality

The category of “Fairly easy” has been omitted from this year’s survey to try and provide a more accurate reflection of customer perception of the service provided by the Agency.

## **6. Management Summary**

92% of customers stated that it was either “Very easy” or “Easy” to obtain their appeal form, with 71% stating the Appeal form was “Very easy” or “Easy” to complete, an 8% decrease from last years results.

Of the 72 customers who advised they had difficulties completing the appeal form, 40% stated that the form was too complicated, an increase of 7% on last years results.

46% of customers are aware that the Veterans Agency has a Website, 5% more than in 2004.

Of the 120 customers aware of the Website, 59% advised that they had not used it (49% in 2004).

When asked if they were aware that a full explanation of the appeals process is held on the Agency Website, of those replying there was an even split of 50%. This has improved on last years results when 76% of customers advised that they were not aware of the explanation on the website.

59% of customers stated that the Agency should provide them with an update on their Appeal every 8 weeks or less. The Agency currently updates customers every 12 weeks.

73% of those who completed and returned the questionnaire had telephoned us during the time their appeal was being dealt with and were positive about their telephone experiences.

A new question this year - “Did you write to us during the time your appeal was being dealt with” was asked. 39% customers stated that they had.

47% of those who had written to the Agency did not feel they were receiving the services detailed in the Whitehall Standards, which states that a full reply should be issued to correspondents within 10 working days. However, 74% of customers stated that they considered the time taken to receive a full reply was “Excellent”, “Good” or “Acceptable”.

80% of customers who telephoned or e-mailed the Agency stated that the time taken to respond to their enquiry was “Excellent”, “Good” or “Acceptable” - an increase of 7% from last year.

89% of customers stated they did not have the process explained to them prior to making an appeal. 93% received the Notes for Guidance Booklet along with the appeal form. 95% of customers stated that the written information given to them during the appeals process was “Easy to understand” and “Factually correct” - an 11% increase from last year.

When asked about the overall service received from the Agency, 84% stated “Excellent”, “Good” or “Acceptable” compared to 79% last year.

## **7. Current Position**

As a result of last years’ recommendations, Operational areas continue to review the manner and frequency of interim letters issued to customers. In many cases, the ongoing reduction in appeals processing times has removed the need for additional updates.

All press releases, notifications and leaflets now carry Agency e-mail address and web address. Search engines identify Agency Website from a growing number of ‘Keywords’ and usage is increasing.

Awareness levels of procedures and processes for appeals and advice given will be monitored in the current Helpline management check package.

The Agency has recently developed awareness within the Internet and Website areas; this should be reflected in future survey reports.

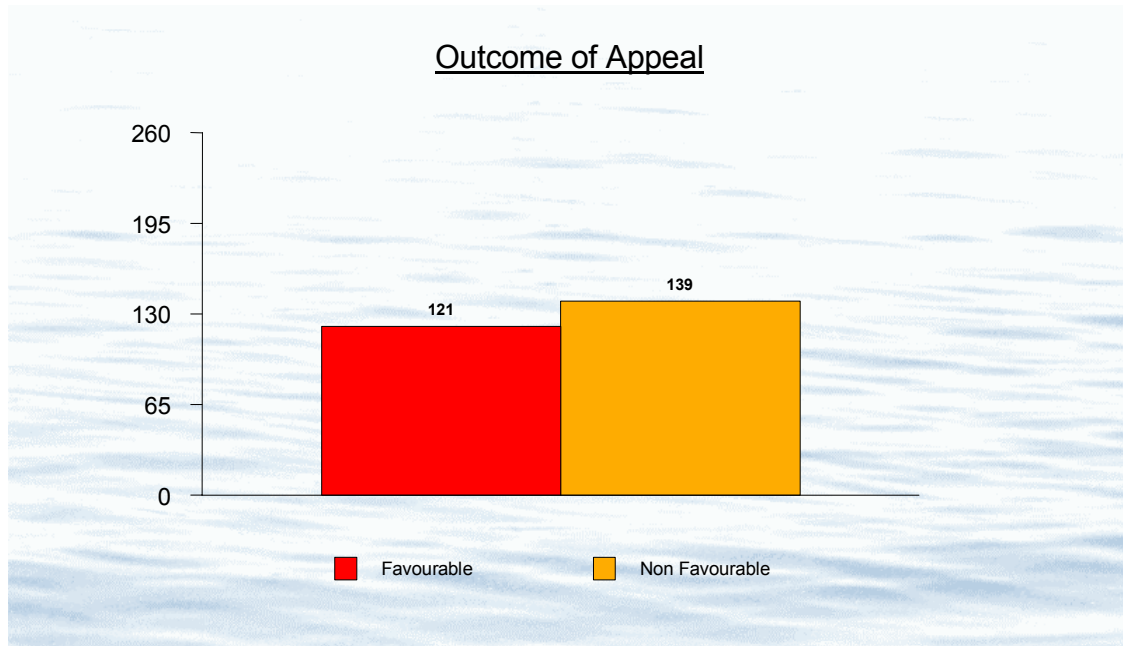
## **8. Recommended Areas for Improvement**

1. Consider reviewing / simplifying the War Pension Appeal form.
2. Consider the use of PIN numbers to access secure information on the Website.
3. Ensure customers are kept informed at reasonable intervals during protracted cases. (59% of customers taking part in this year’s survey believe the Agency should provide them with an update every 8 weeks or less).

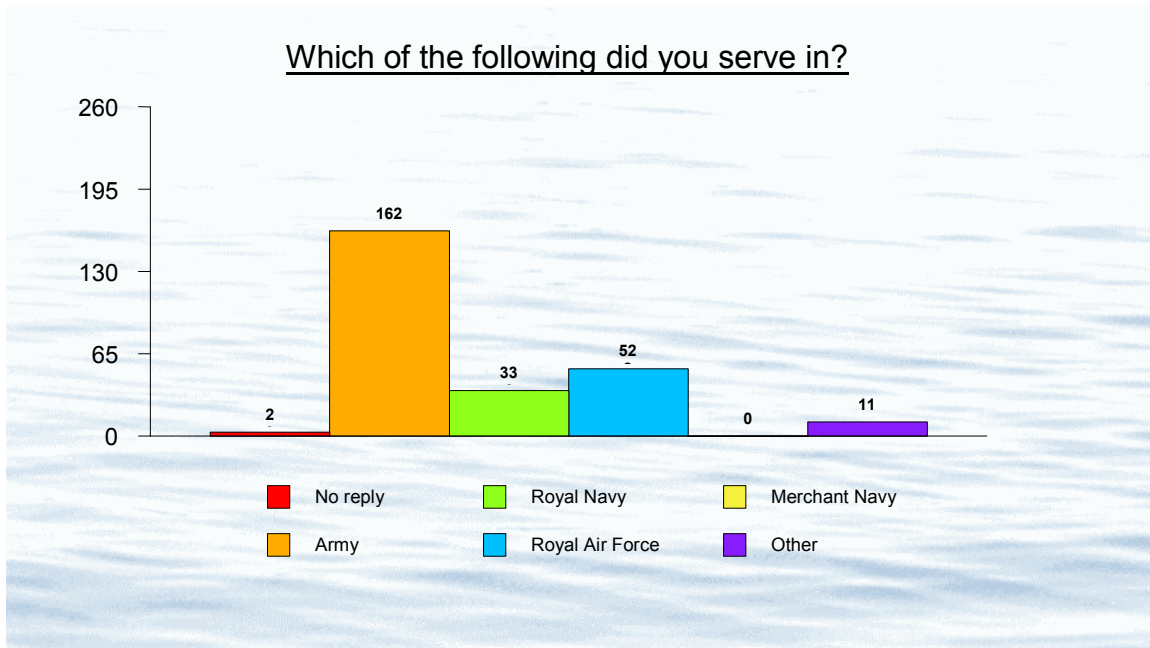
## 9. Survey Results

The presentation of the analysis follows the same order as the questionnaire issued. Although the questionnaires were issued randomly we are able to separate responses in respect of favourable and non-favourable decisions and cross analyse using age segmentation where appropriate. Whilst each question is analysed using age segmentation, this has not been included in the report where the customer age range does not impact the results.

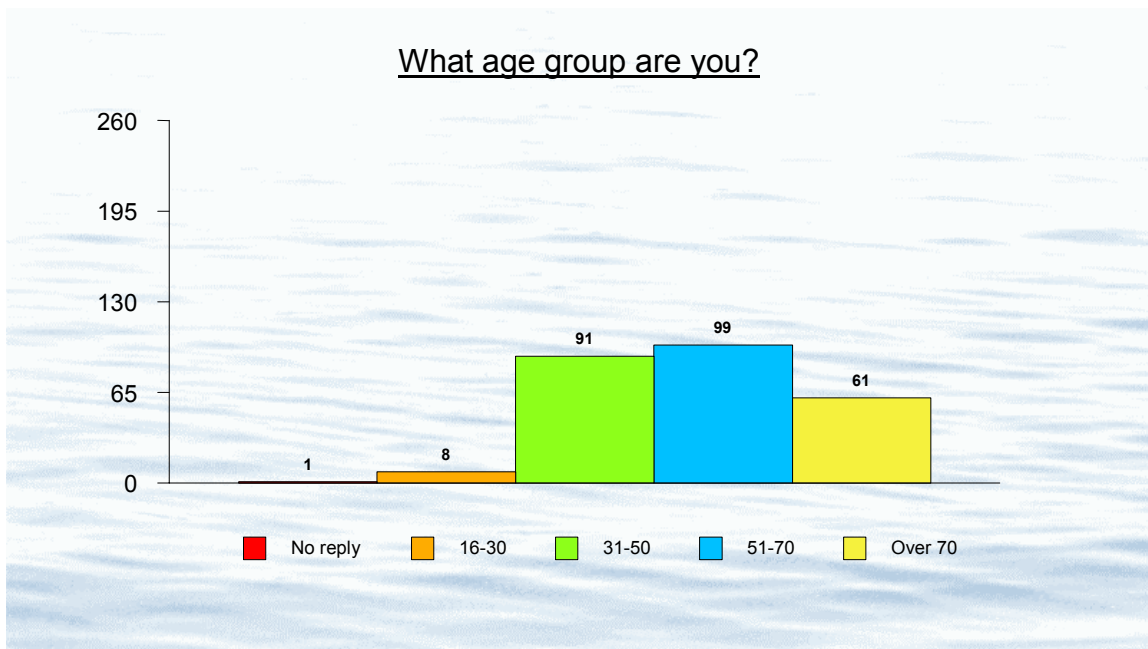
### DEMOGRAPHICS



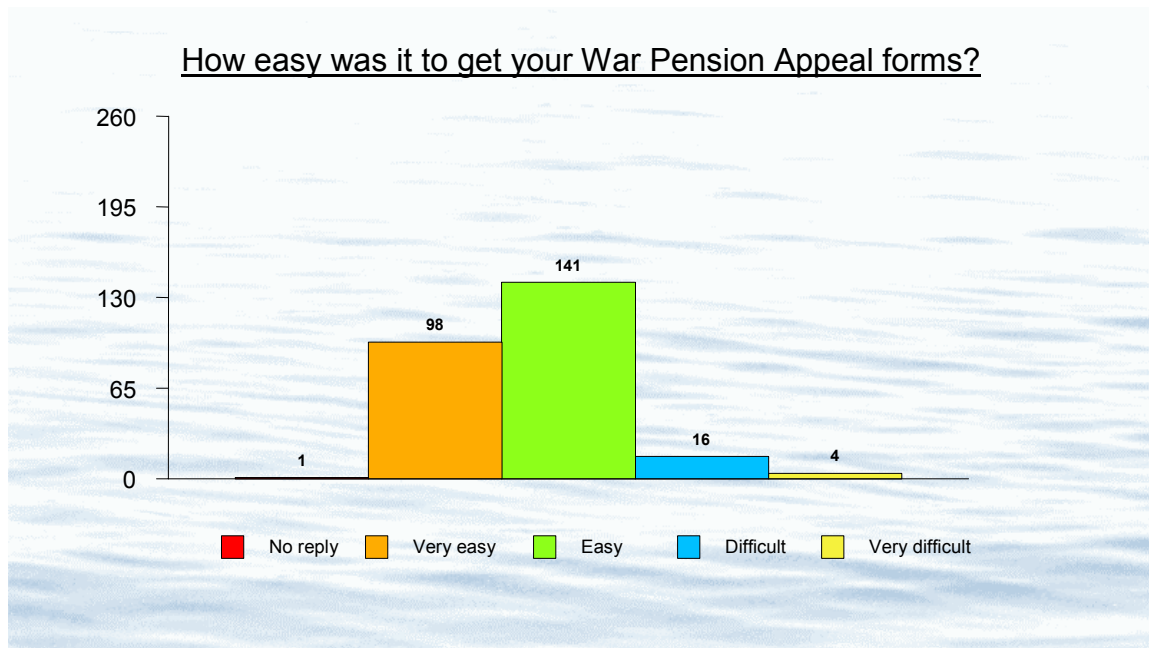
Of the 260 respondents to the survey 53% had received a non favourable outcome to their appeal, 47% received a favourable decision.



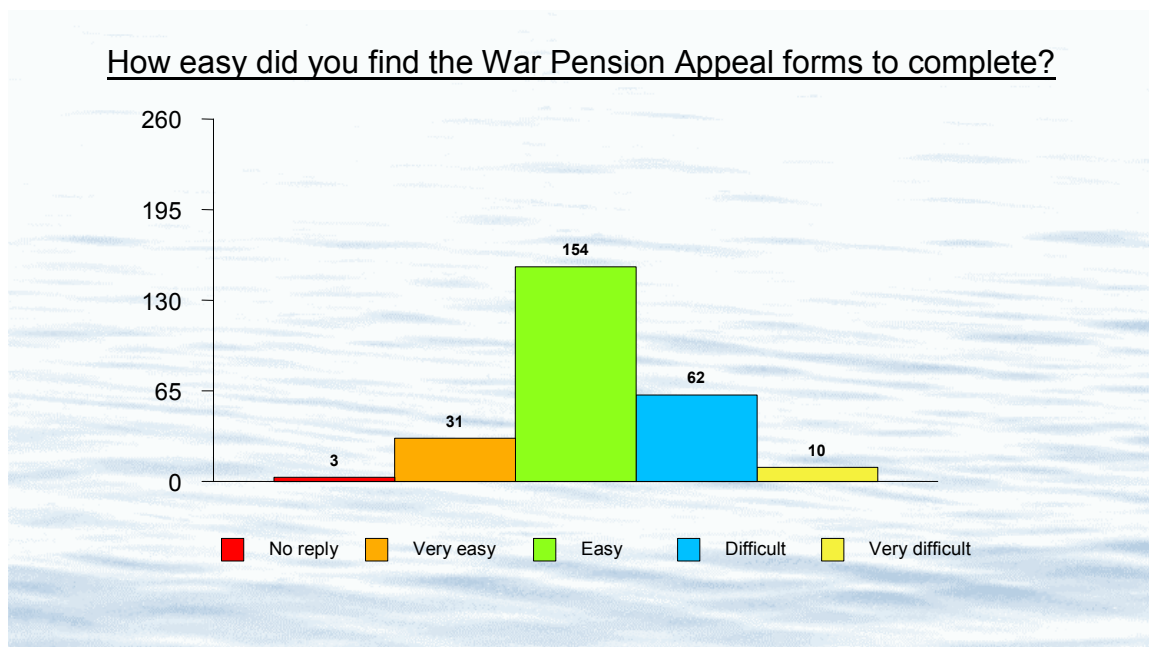
62% of respondents served in the Army.



## PART 1: ACCESS AND CONTACT

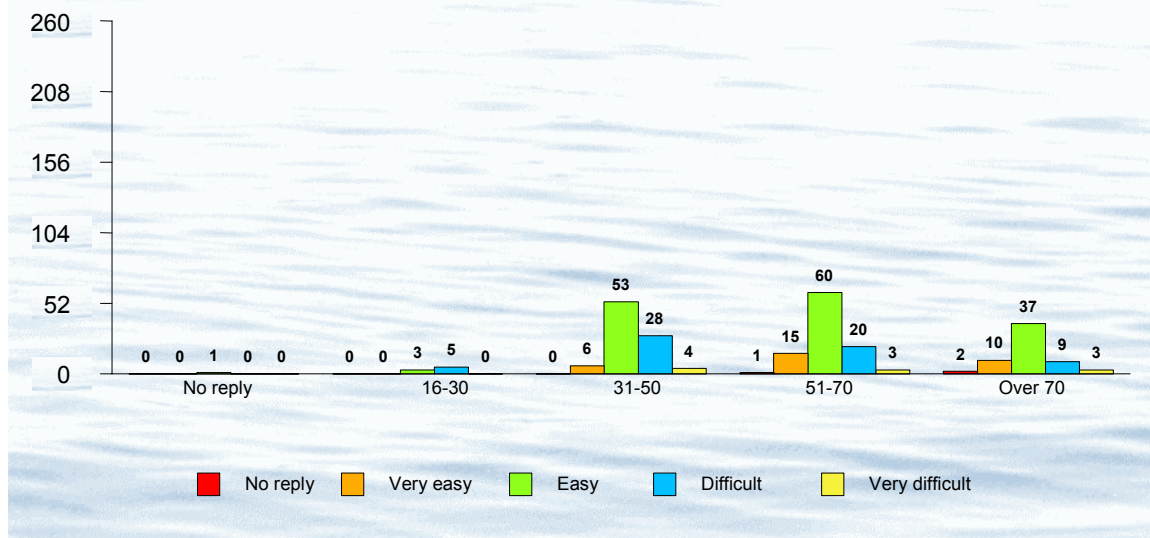


As in 2004, results show that 92% of customers found it “Very easy” or “Easy” to obtain their appeal form. A decrease of 2% when compared to last year’s results. Results also show that 6% of customers found the form difficult to obtain, which has increased by 2% compared to last year’s figure of 4%.



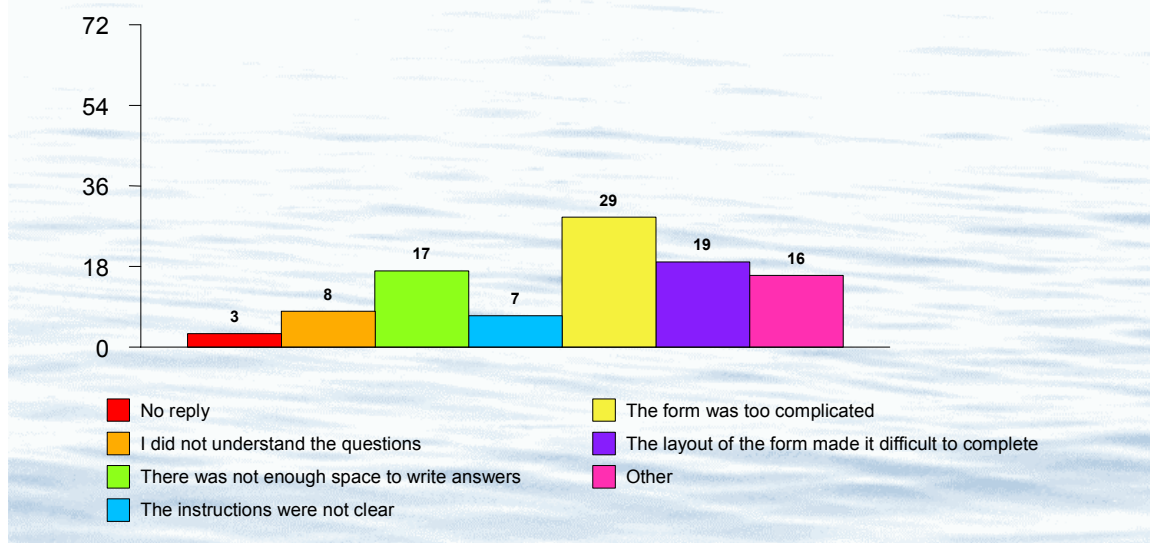
71% of customers stated that the appeal form was “Very easy” or “Easy” to complete. 28% of respondents found the appeal form “Very Difficult” or “Difficult” to complete – a rise of 10% on last years survey

How easy did you find the War Pension Appeal forms to complete? by age group.



When analysed by age group 63% of customers aged 16-30 found the form “Difficult” or “Very difficult” to complete, although the majority within each age group found the Appeal form easy to complete.

If you had difficulties completing the appeal forms what were they?



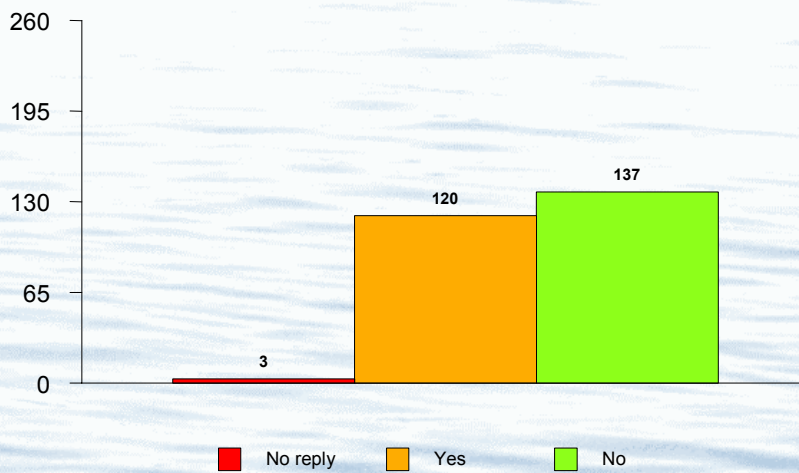
Of those having difficulties, 40% of customers stated that the form was too complicated. 26% found the layout made it difficult to complete and 22% advised of other difficulties.

*"Every time you send me a form you always have to fill in the same information, there seems to be a lot of duplication "*

*"The wording of some questions were confusing"*

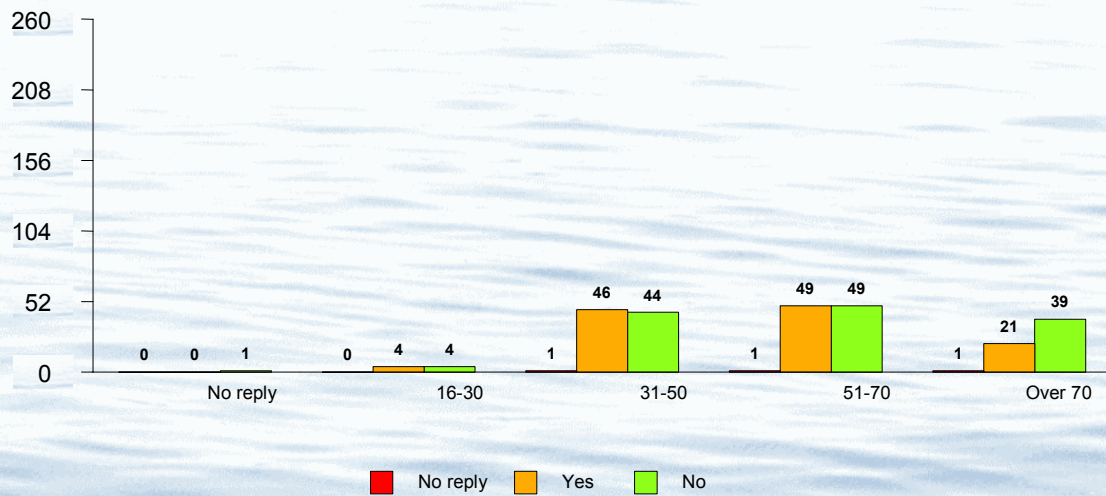
*"Information required was difficult to obtain particularly medical times and dates etc"*

Are you aware that the Agency has a Website on the Internet?

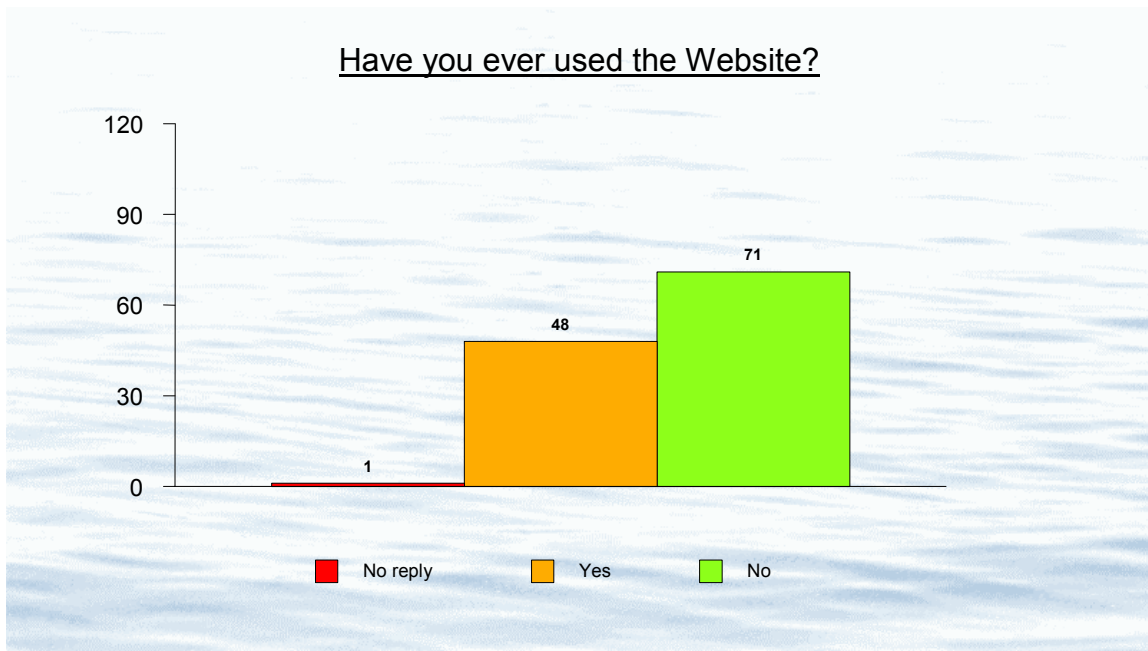


46% of customers were aware that the Agency has a Website, compared to 41% in 2004.

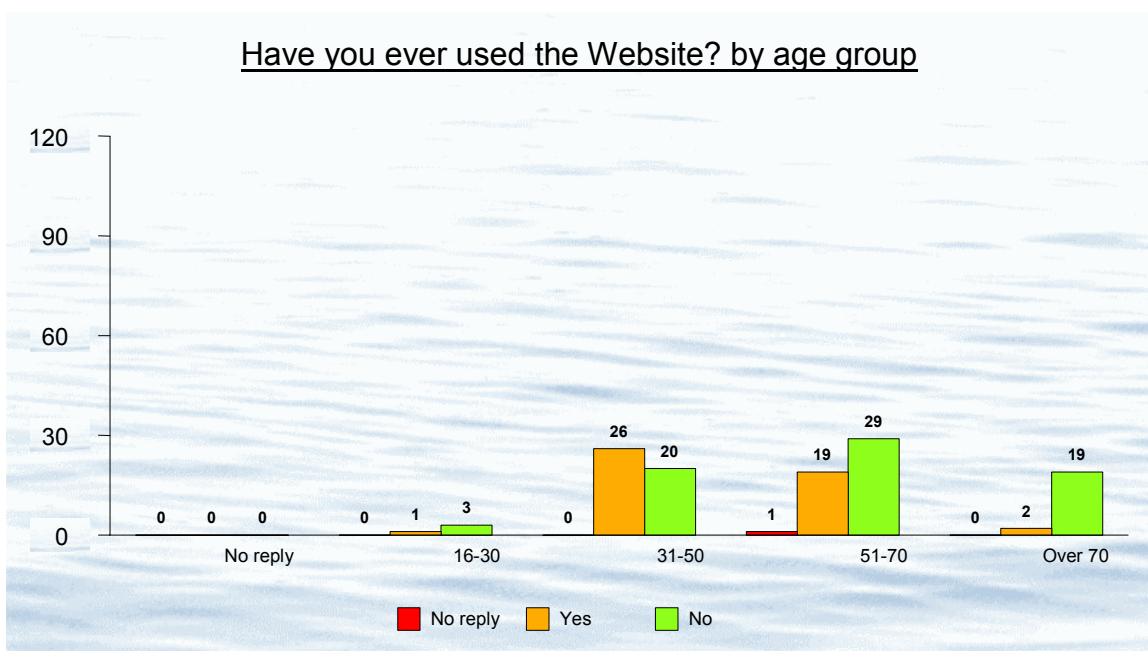
Are you aware that the Agency has a Website on the Internet? by age group.



51% of customers aged 70 and under were aware of the Website, compared to 35% of customers over 70.



Although 120 customers indicated that they were aware of the Website, only 40% advised that they had used it. This shows a decrease of 10% on last year's figure of 50%.



54% of customers who said they had used the Website are aged between 31 and 50.

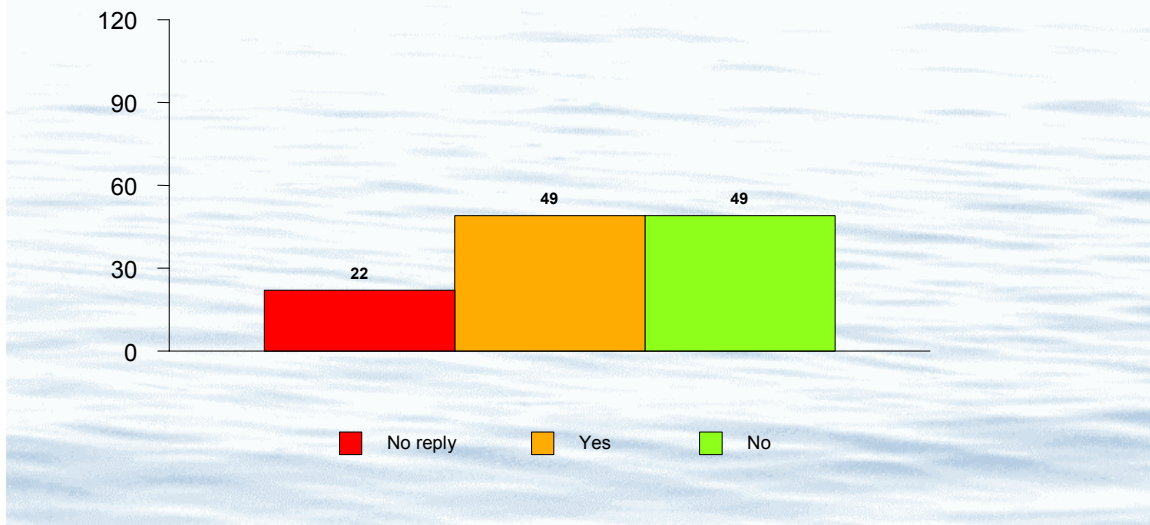
When customers were asked why they had not used the Website the majority replied that they did not have the facility to.

**Further comments included:**

*"Difficult to navigate"*

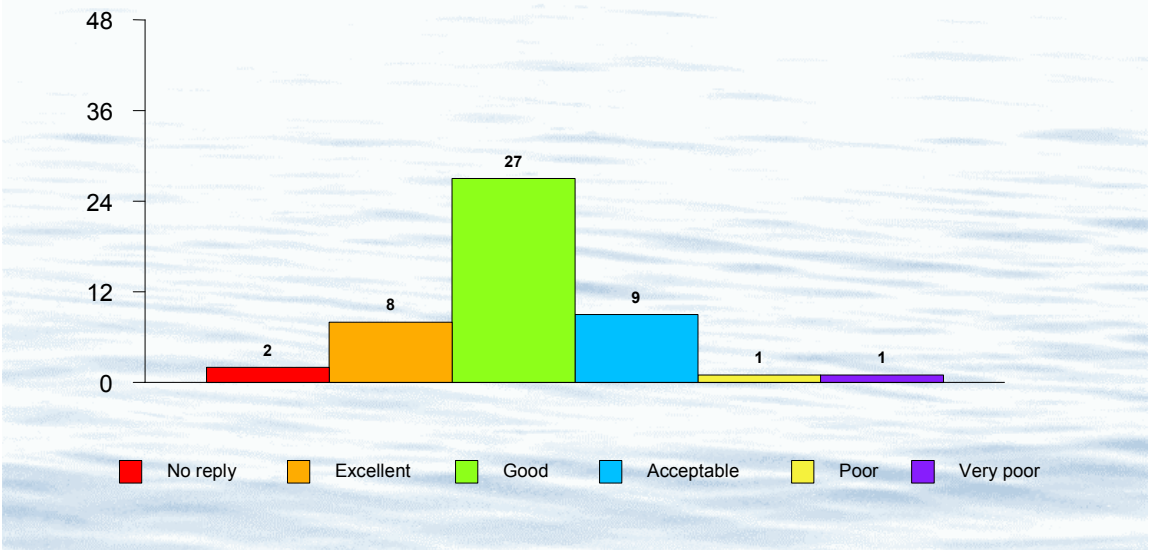
*"If you need an update on your case the Website is no good"*

Are you aware that there is a full explanation of the appeals process on the Agency's Website?



50% of respondents are aware that there is a full explanation of the Appeals process on the Website.

How would you rate the quality/quantity of the information on the Website?

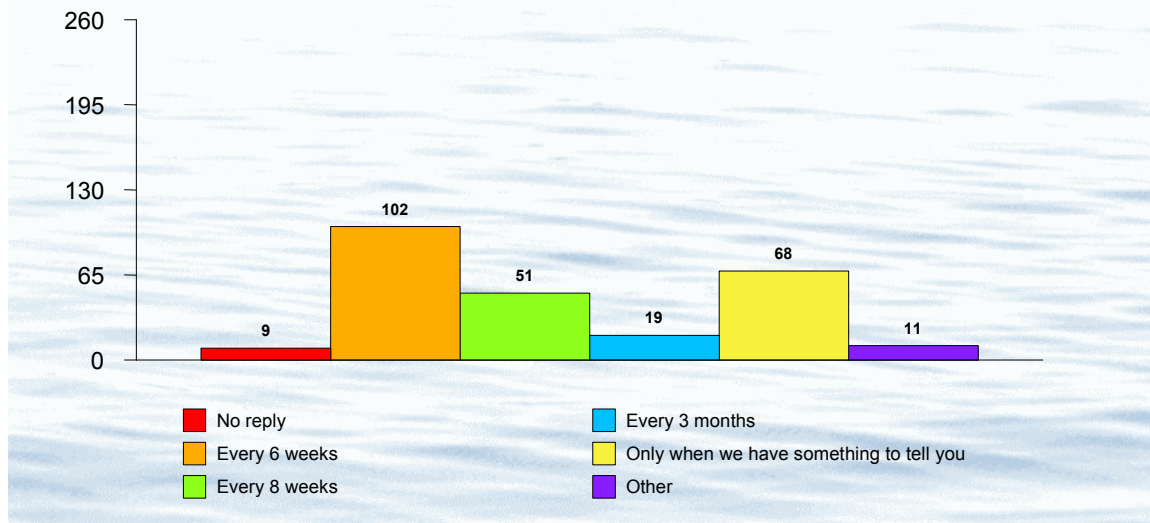


92% of customers stated that the information on the Website was "Excellent", "Good" or "Acceptable" - an increase of 22% compared to last year's survey.

**Further comments received from customers rating the information as "Poor" or "Very Poor" included:**

*"Links not working, too many PDF's, slow to down load. No info on pension rates/disability payments"*

We aim to send all your appeal papers to the Tribunal within an average of 120 working days. How often do you think we should provide you with an update?



59% think VA should update them every 8 weeks or less. 33% of customers stated they require an update every 3 months or only when the Agency has something to tell them. Results this year show a difference of opinion when compared to last year's survey when respondents within these two categories were split almost evenly.

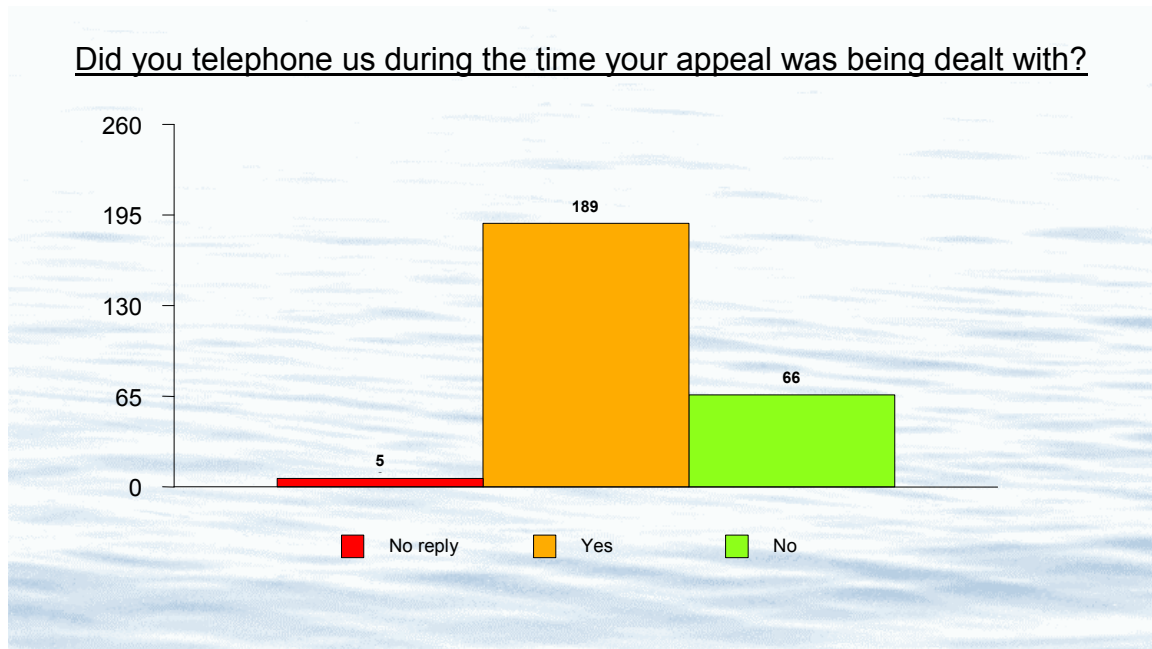
**Further comments in the "Others" category included:**

*"Once a month"*

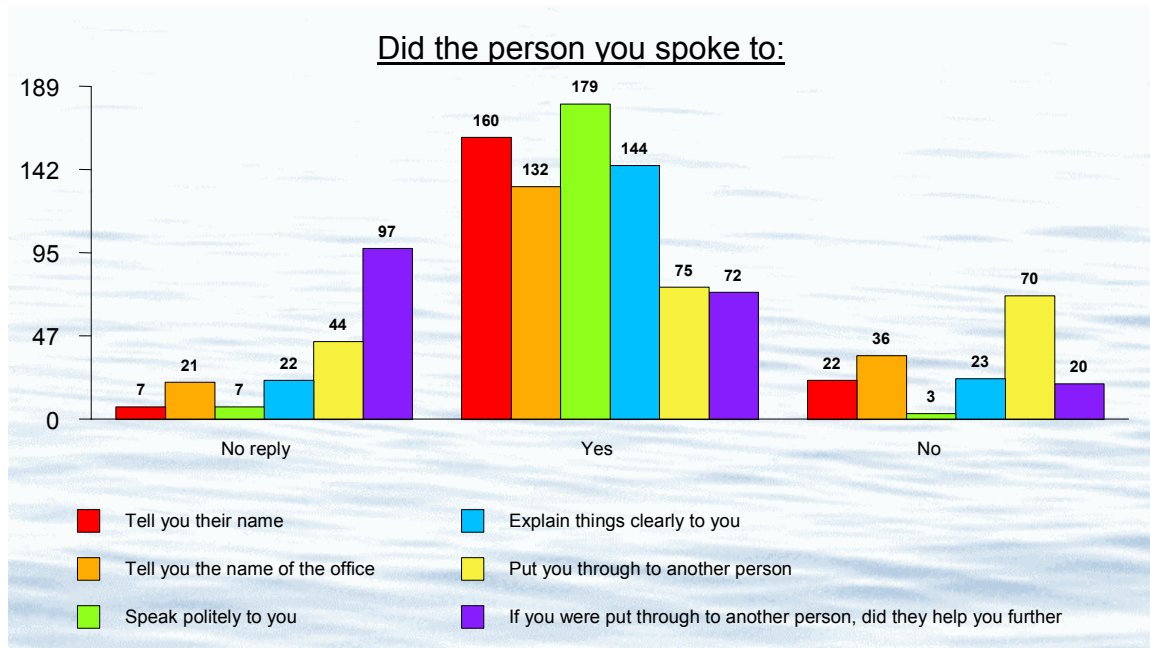
*"Rarely. The cost of sending multiple standard letters is costly and only leads the veteran into thinking they are unimportant"*

*"Generally better to receive information as soon as possible as it shows better responsive action"*

Did you telephone us during the time your appeal was being dealt with?



During the time their appeal was being dealt with, 73% of customers said they had telephoned us – 10% more than in 2004.



98% of those responding to the questions stated that they were spoken to politely, 88% said the person they spoke to told them their name and 86% felt that things were explained clearly to them.

**Further comments included:**

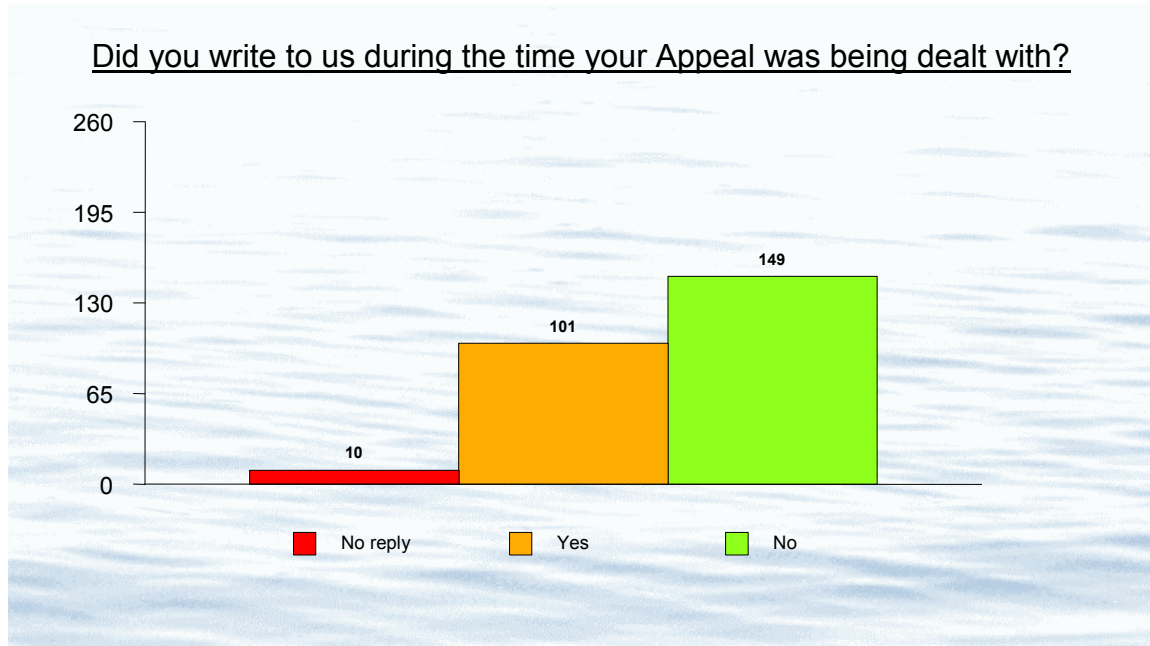
"It would be helpful to speak to the same person each time so that the person is familiar with your case and you hadn't to explain the same old story again"

"In all honesty the helpline is very helpful. If you do have a problem they always get the information you need or get the department to ring you back with the information you require"

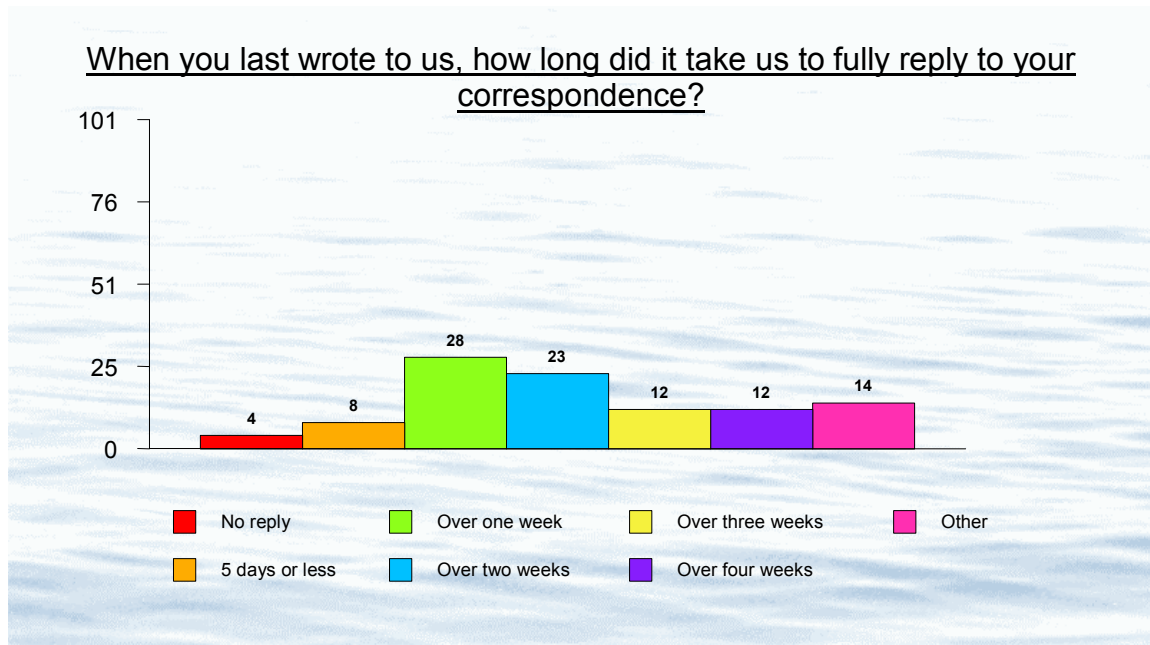
"Very helpful each time I called and accurate information provided"

## PART 2: RESPONSE TIMES

This following question has been introduced to this year's survey to establish a true reflection on correspondence timings during the Appeal process.

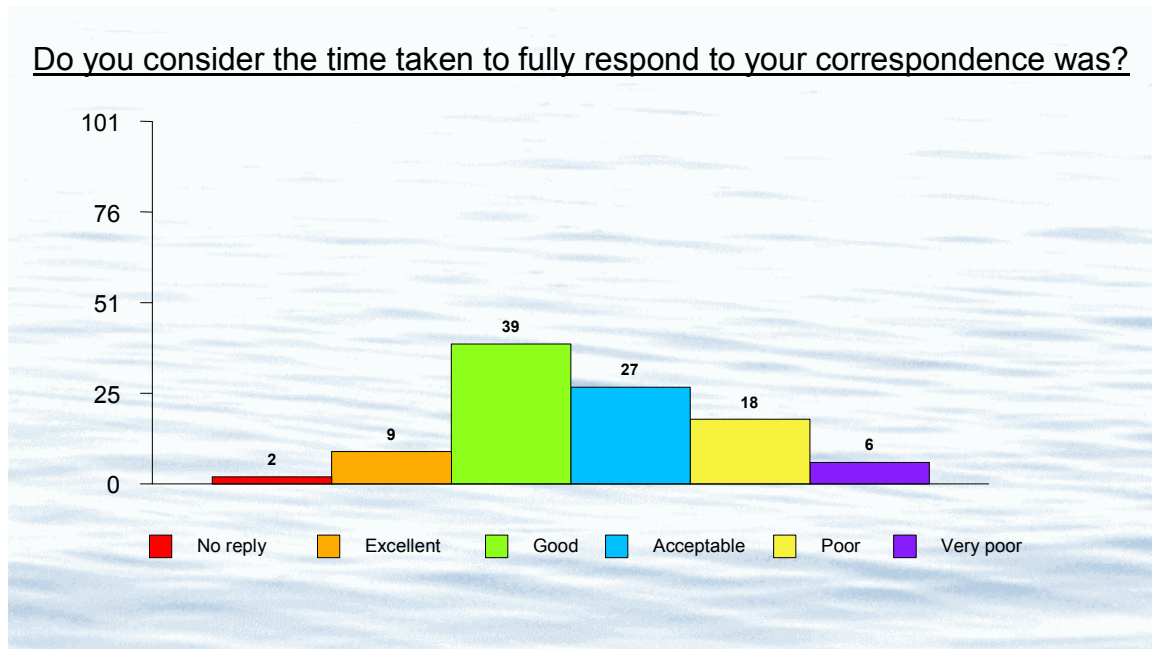


60% of those who responded stated that they did not write to VA during their Appeal.



Of the customers who wrote to VA during their Appeal, 58% advised that they received a reply to their correspondence within three weeks.

Do you consider the time taken to fully respond to your correspondence was?



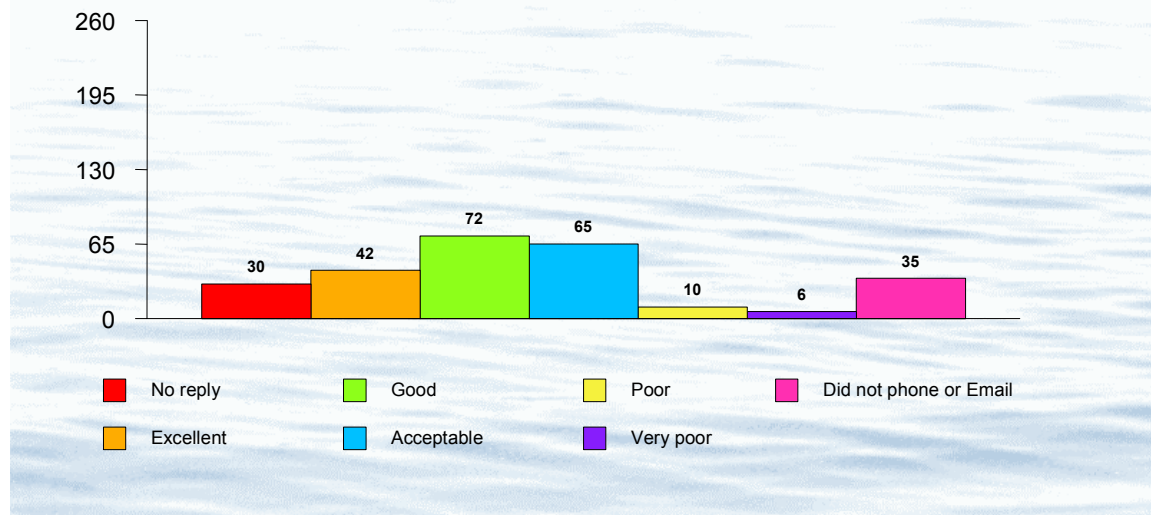
76% advised that they considered the time taken to reply to their correspondence was “Excellent”, “Good” or “Acceptable”.

**Further comments received from “Poor” and “Very poor” responses included:**

*“Some issues in previous correspondence not answered at all”*

*“With eighteen people replying to my letters they were not fully responded to, questions unanswered, misquoted twice”*

If you have telephoned or emailed us about your appeal, do you consider the time taken to respond to your telephone call or email was?



85% of customers who contacted the Agency by telephone or email stated that the time taken to respond to their telephone call or email was either “Excellent”, “Good” or “Acceptable”.

**Further comments received from “Poor” and “Very poor” responses included:**

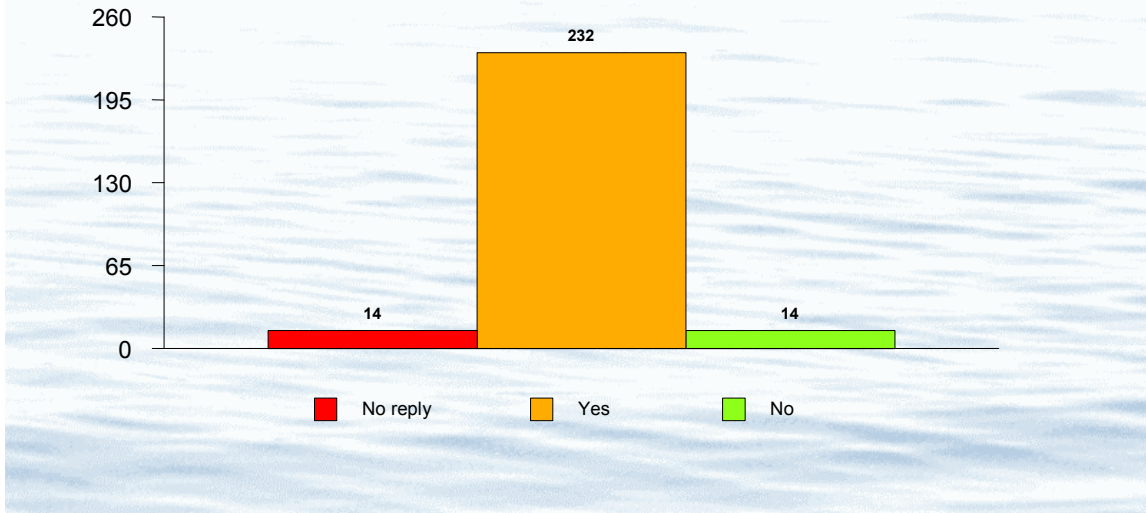
*“Never had a response to an email”*

*“No acknowledgement of receipt before a reply is drafted”*

*“My calls were not returned and I had to continually phone back”*

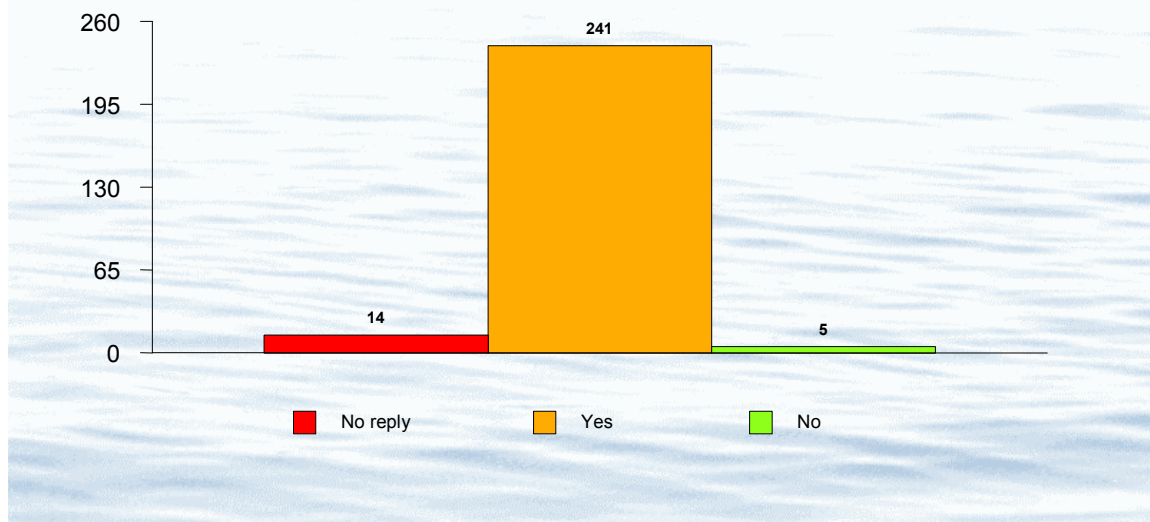
### **PART 3: SERVICE QUALITY**

Prior to you making your appeal, when we notified you of the decision on your claim, did the original letter clearly explain your appeal rights?



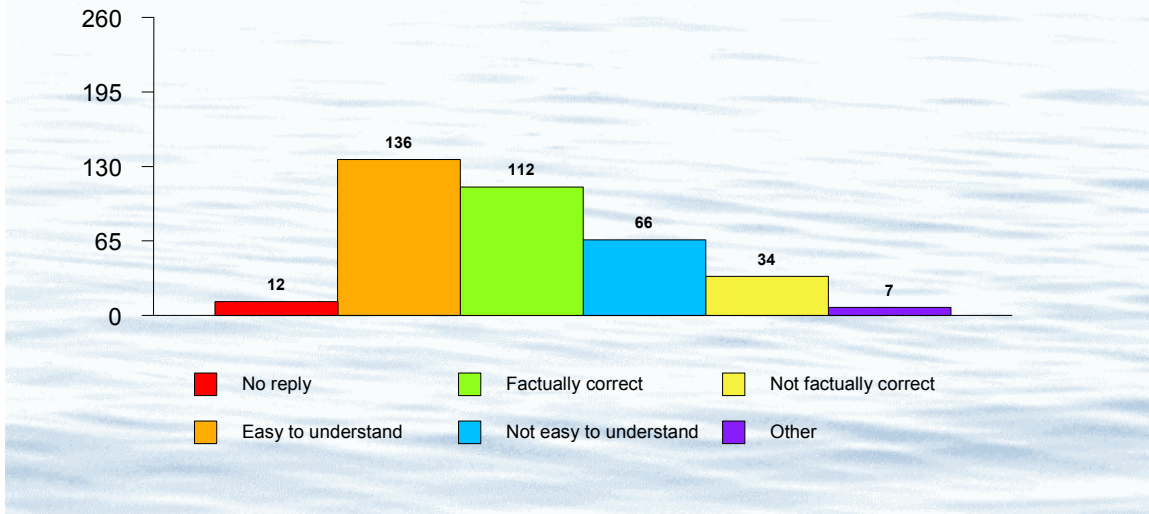
94% of those responding to this question stated that the original letter clearly explained their appeal rights.

When you received your appeal forms did you also receive the Notes for Guidance Booklet explaining the appeals process?



98% of customers responding stated that they received the Notes for Guidance Booklet along with the appeal form.

Which of the following best describes the clarity of information we gave in writing during the appeals process?



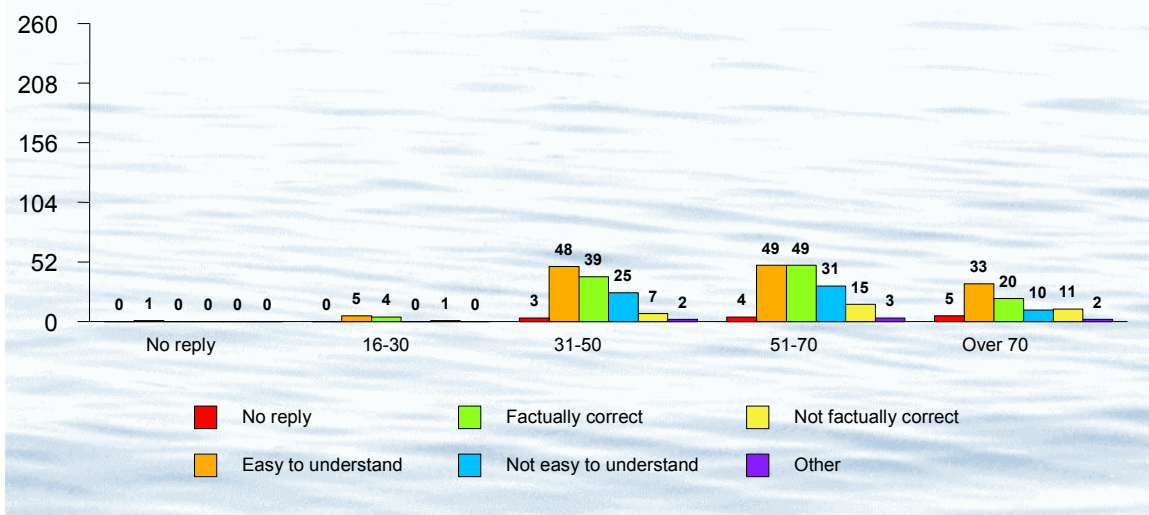
95% stated that the written information we gave them explaining the appeals process was “Easy to understand” and “Factually correct” which shows an increase of 11% compared to last years’ survey.

**Further comments included:**

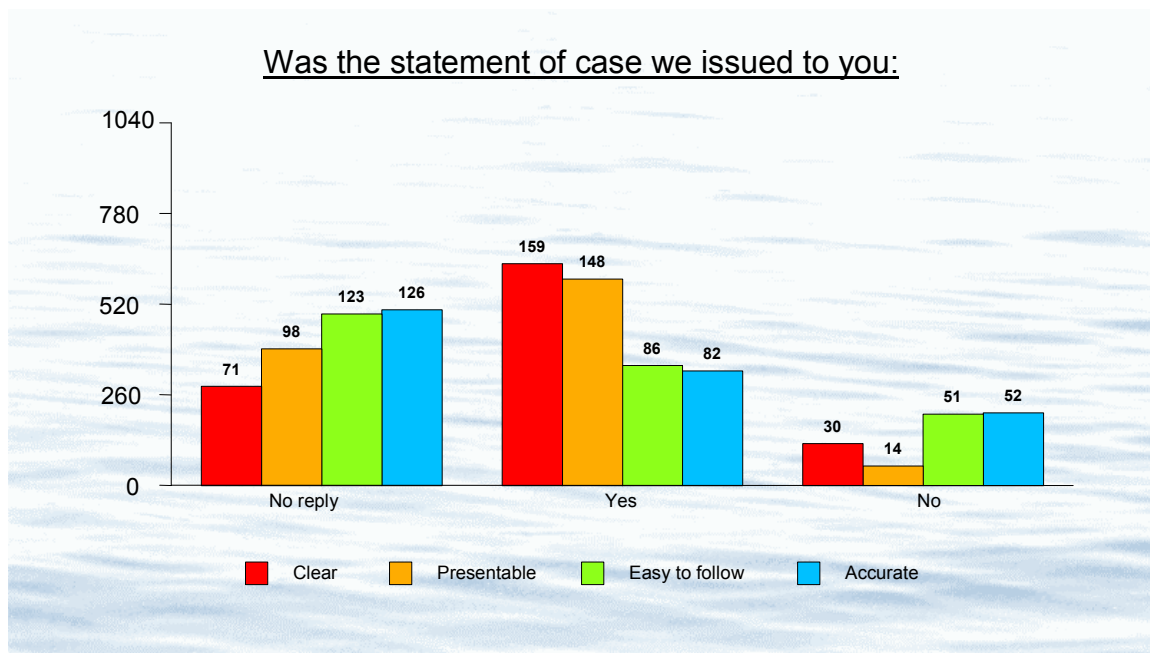
*“More information required on legal help at tribunal”*

*“No clarification of my condition and separation of the two elements”*

Which of the following best describes the clarity of information we gave in writing during the appeals process? by age group.



Within each age group the majority of customers found the clarity of information we gave in writing during the appeals process was easy to understand and factually correct. However, 21% of customers from the 51-70 age group did not find the information easy to understand.



Of the customers who responded, 84% indicated that the statement of case issued to them was “Clear” and 91% stated it was “Presentable”. 63% found it “Easy to follow” and 61% stated it was “Accurate”.

**Further comments included:**

*"At least I actually understood what had been sent to me"*

*"My statement of case was mainly wrong for example dates and family members etc by the time I managed to put it right it was too late to present it to the appeal. I found this very frustrating."*

*"I feel that the points I put forward were not properly dealt with"*

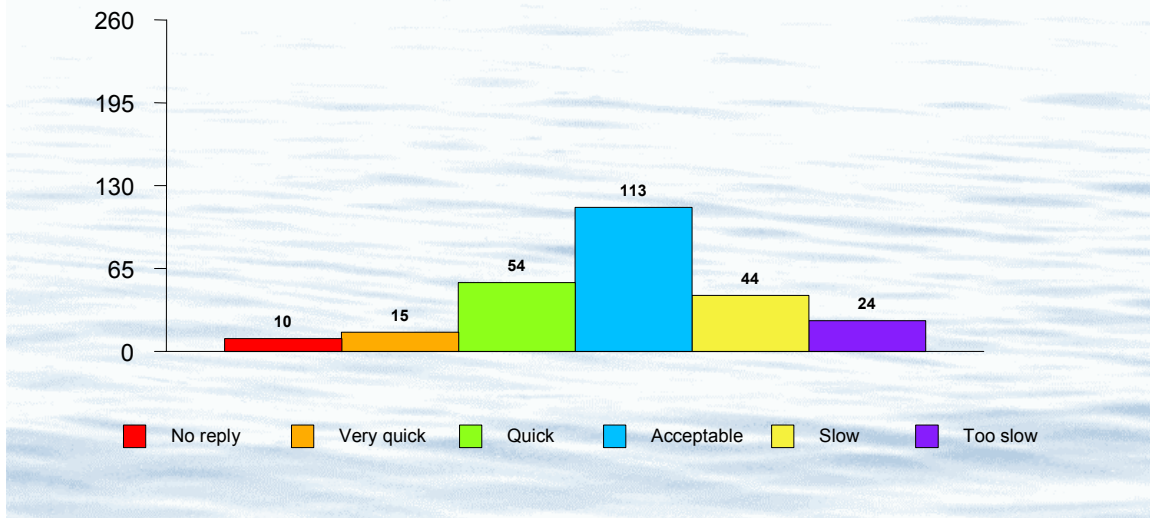
*"Things were made difficult as my rep did not turn up and I had to represent myself"*

*"Forms or documents that were photocopied did not always come out clear and the page numbering was not always easy to follow"*

*"Some entries were incorrect but when this was pointed out the errors were corrected forthwith"*

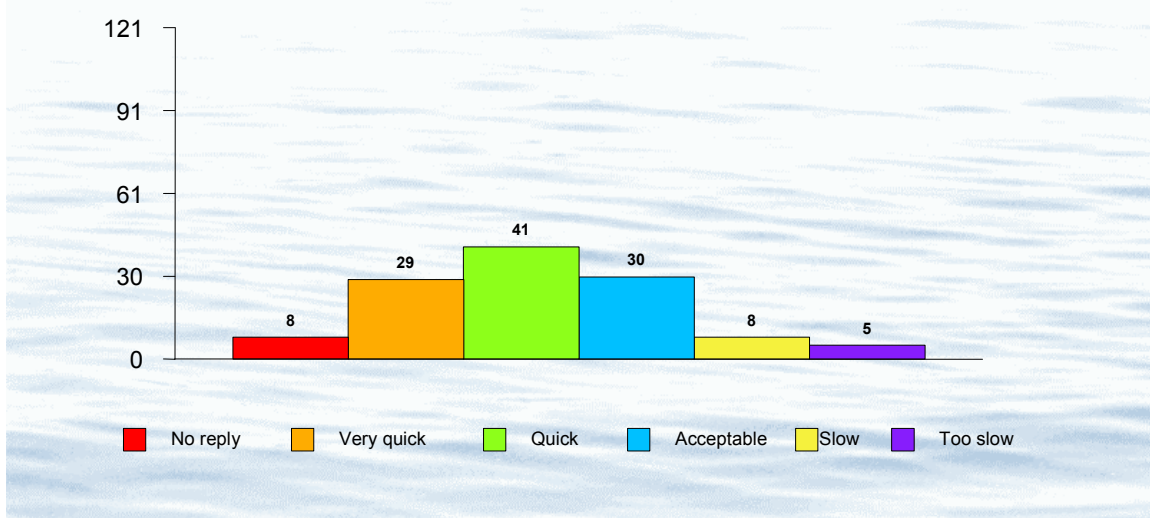
*"The RBL were very helpful"*

Which of the following best describes how you feel about the time taken to issue you with your statement of case?



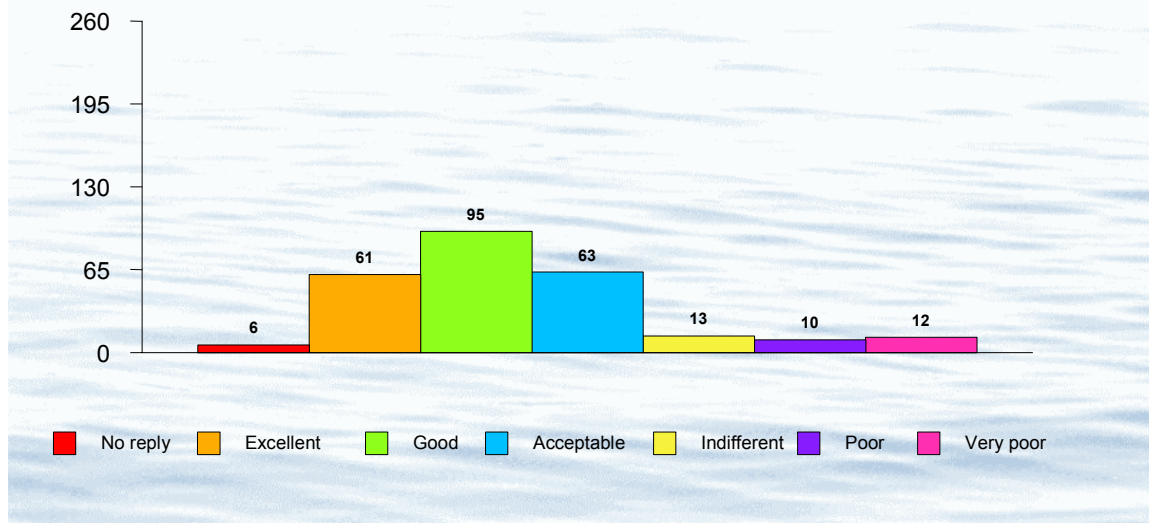
73% of those responding stated that the time taken to finalise their appeal was “Very Quick”, “Quick” or “Acceptable”.

If your appeal was successful, how do you feel about the time taken for us to notify you of the new award?



Of the customers who responded 88% thought that the time taken to notify them of the new award was “Very Quick”, “Quick” or “Acceptable”.

Which of these words best describes the overall service you received from the Veterans Agency during your appeal?



86% of customers responding felt the overall service they received from the Veterans Agency was “Excellent”, “Good” or “Acceptable”.

Finally we asked customers for their thoughts on how we can further improve our services.

**Further comments included:**

*"More information could be given to personnel before leaving the service on appeals procedures "*

*"I did find the appeals system to be very complex and legalised. I do appreciate that with the issue of the taxpayer's money involved, great care needs to be exercised. However, I do believe that an independent advisor with previous tribunal should be available to the claimant well before the tribunal to give clear advice and help in presenting the case replying to the statement of case presented by the VA"*

*"Keep the appellant more informed of what's going on more often"*

*"The only thing I thought was wrong was it took my appeal over 2 years and seven months. Apart from that your service was very very good"*

*"Although my appeal was not successful I found the process very accurate and acceptable. I would have used the website if I had known of its existence"*

*"The statement of case needs to be more accurate, easy to follow. Found it very confusing. All the staff have been helpful and your website is very good"*

*"Provide Frequently asked questions (FAQ). Be more approachable. Roadshows, Local visits for explanations".*