

**VeteransAgency**

An Executive Agency of the Ministry of Defence



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

# Helpline Customer Survey 2004



# **HELPLINE CUSTOMER SURVEY**

## **1. Introduction**

Veterans Agency (VA) has a mission to deliver modern, high quality, customer-focused services to war disablement pensioners, war widow (er) s, their dependants and carers and other veterans; and to deliver them consistently, efficiently and effectively.

Introducing a robust and structured approach to measure customers' perceptions of the VA services ensures that improvements feed into the Customer Results criteria of the European Foundation for Quality Management Excellence Model.

## **2. Research Objectives**

The objectives of this customer research survey is to assist the VA in establishing the needs of current and future customers with particular emphasis on ensuring the Agency identifies:

- The level of customer satisfaction with information provided by the VA Helpline service
- Customer preferences
- Customer choices
- Customer ideas
- Broader business objectives derived from the results

## **3. Approach**

The VA uses up to date research based information to identify the needs and views on all aspects of customer service. The aspect of service delivery, on which information is obtained, is used to help us understand the customer's views and preferences. It will also help us to plan and implement service improvements.

## **4. Customer Samples**

Names of customers calling the Agency Helpline between January 2004 and June 2004 were randomly selected and questionnaires issued to 1684 callers.

## **5. Structure of this and future Reports**

For ease of reference the results follow the flow of the questionnaire.

A management summary follows.

## 6. Management Summary

Of the 1684 questionnaires issued 984 (58%) customers responded to the survey. Those who did not return the questionnaire are considered as unit non-responses. An assumption has been made that there is no bias in this non-response i.e. those who did not respond do not have systematically different views to those who did.

Of the 985 respondents the majority 491 (50%) customers are over the age of 70 with the minority 32 (3%) being aged between 16-30.

Positive results showed that 708 (72%) customers managed to get through to the Helpline on their first attempt, with 235 (24%) customers having to try on more than one occasion.

Of the 235 customers who did not get through to Helpline on their first attempt, the majority 151 (64%) were able to get through on their second or third attempt, with 21 (9%) customers having to ring on more than 6 occasions.

An encouraging 839 (85%) customers stated that their call was answered within the target set of 20 seconds.

When customers were asked about the person they spoke to when they telephoned the Helpline, positive results were received showing that over 88% of all customers stated that the operator gave their name, appeared to be interested, spoke politely to them and told them all they needed to know.

An excellent result showed that 926 (94%) customers would recommend Veterans Agency telephone service to others.

Results show that the majority of customers would prefer when we cannot answer their call immediately, to either be in a queuing system or to listen to a message explaining the reason for the delay. Out of the 23 comments received the majority 20 (87%) stated that they would like to be in a queuing system detailing their queue position and approximate wait time. Some of the comments received were ***“Technology exists to give information as to the exact position in queue, or waiting time”*** and ***“Could a position in queue be identified and an estimated time be given before call is handled”***

Of the 910 customers who responded to this question 27 (3%) customers had ever complained to the Agency.

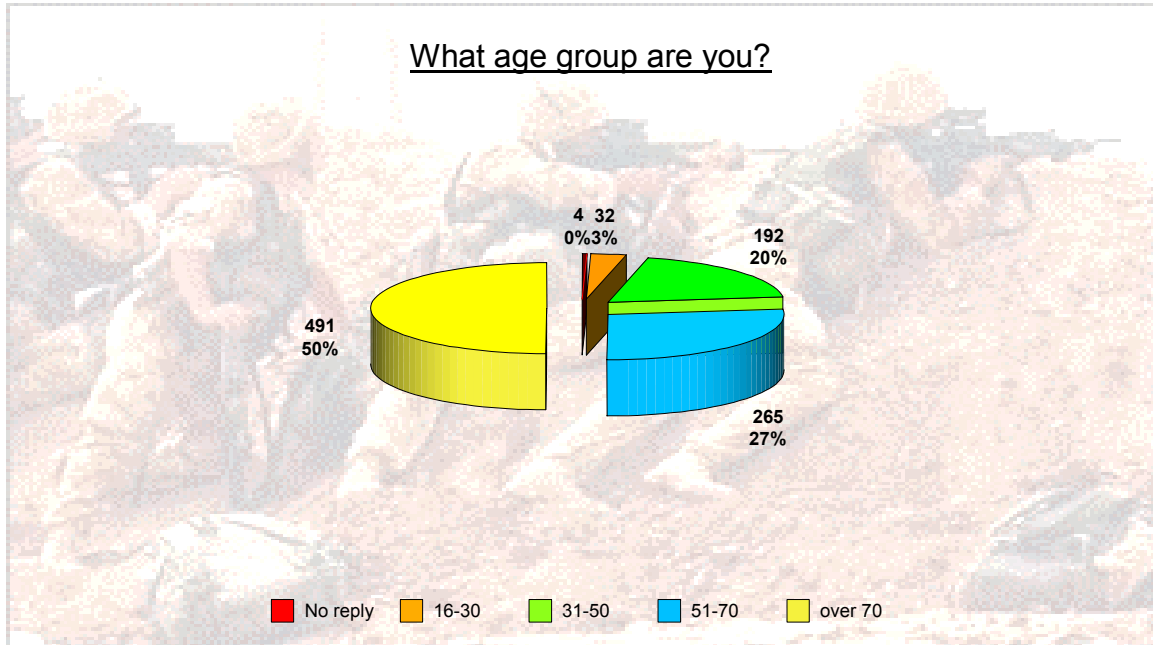
### Recommendations

1. **To consider upgrading current Helpline system, with the facility to record messages and provide queue position.**
2. **Helpline staff to be reminded that they should provide their name to the customer at all times.**

## 7. Survey Results

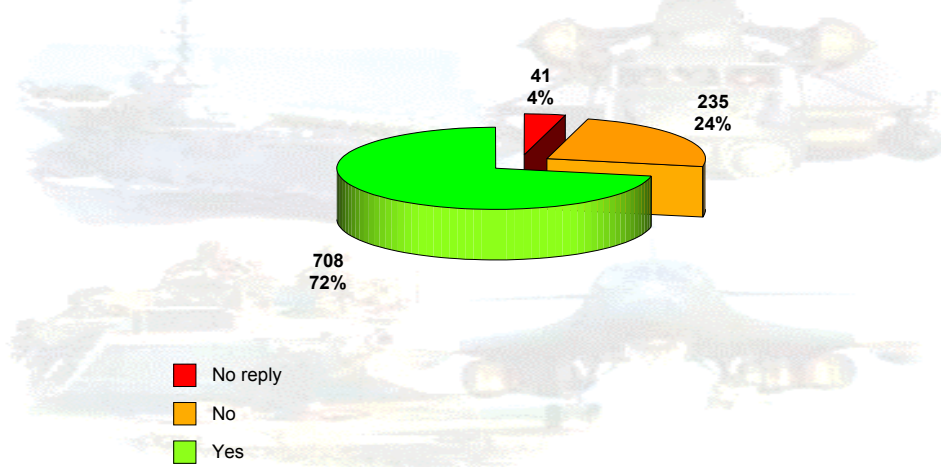
### Findings

The overall findings are represented in graphic format. Also included is a selection of customer comments, good, indifferent or otherwise.



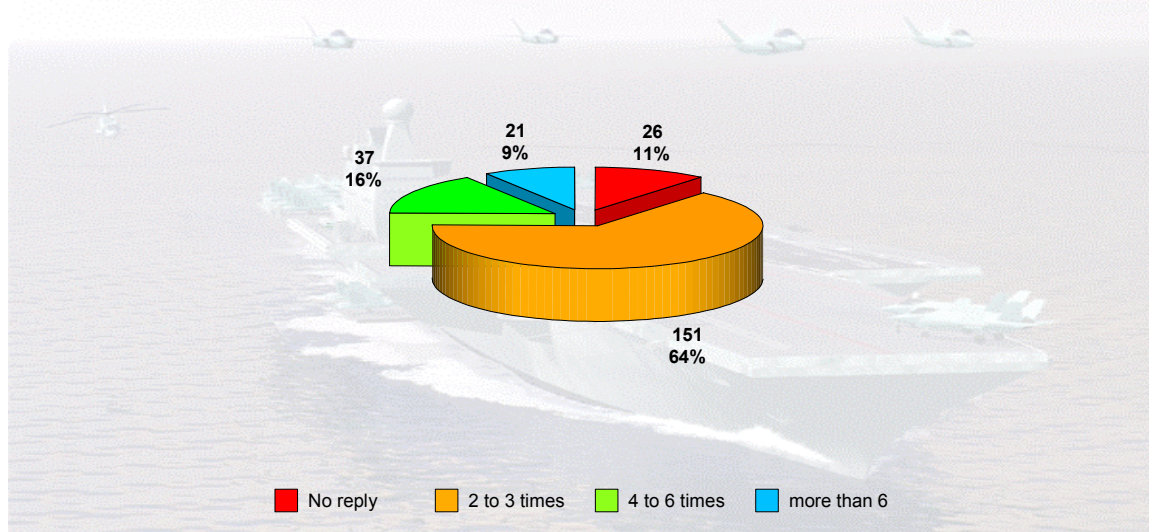
The majority 491 (50%) of customers are over 70 with the minority 32 (3%) being aged between 16-30.

Did you get through to the Helpline at the 1st attempt?



Of the 943 customers who replied to this question, the majority 708 (72%) got through to Helpline on their first attempt.

How many times did you have to telephone before you were able to get through to a Helpline operator?



Of the 235 customers who did not get through to Helpline on the first attempt, the majority 151 (64%) were able to get through on their second or third attempt. 58 (25%) of customers had to ring on more than four occasions.

**Additional comments received were:**

***"Helpline is a very good service"***

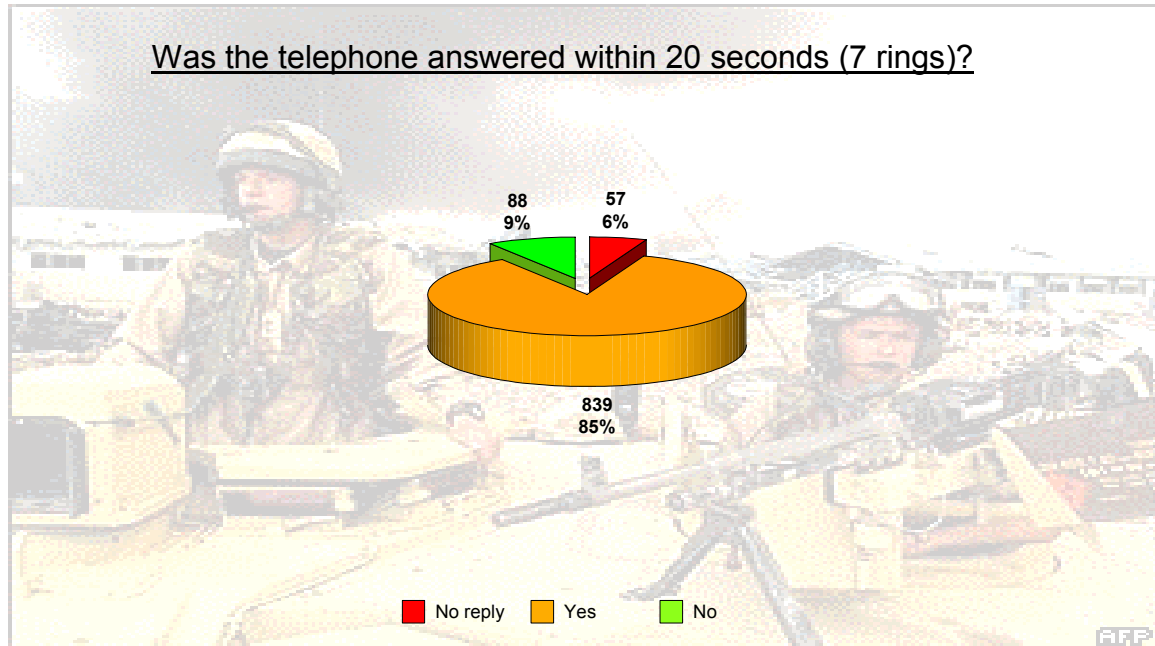
***"It took a long time to get through"***

***"I received a recorded message informing me that a large number of calls were being dealt with and I should call back later."***

***"I got through straight away at 8.15am. That seems to be the slackest time"***

***"No ones fault lines were busy"***

***"Lady was most helpful, she explained that it was very busy."***



When asked if their call was answered within twenty seconds 839 (85%) of customers stated this was the case.

**Additional Comments received:**

***"This person was most helpful. I wish all people I have spoken to were the same"***

***"The person (female) who answered the phone was very helpful in dealing with my case. I can only thank her for her professionalism"***

***"Helpline has always been prompt and friendly, which really cannot be improved."***

***"About 10- 15 rings"***

***"A little longer"***

***"I phoned at lunch time, so that may have been the reason."***

***"Most of the time yes, but there has been a couple of times when it has taken twice the stated time."***

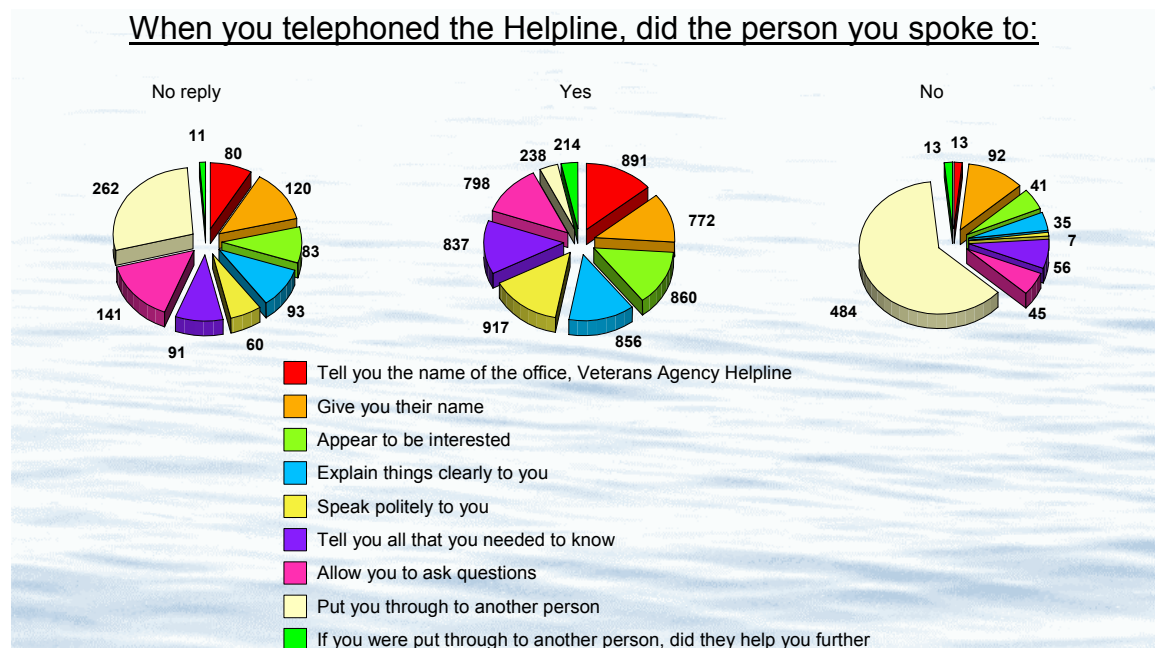
***"A lady named (name provided) was extremely pleasant."***

***"More telephone operators required."***

***"Member of staff put phone down on me on one occasion because it's a very complicated case. She wouldn't allow me to explain fully."***

***"One woman I could not understand her because of her accent"***

***"I never seem to have any problems getting through to your friendly staff"***



Response to this question was very positive with all 984 customers replying to at least part of the question. Of these 891 (91%) stated that when calling, the operator gave the name of the office. This question displays positive results as over 88% of customers stated that the operator gave them their name, appeared to be interested, spoke politely to them and told them all they needed to know.

**Additional Comments:**

***"The lady I spoke to first answered my questions as required"***

***"First class"***

***"Mine was an unusual request but the operator was as helpful and cheerful as she could be. She was also friendly and understanding"***

***"Some have given names, some not."***

***"The first person I spoke to was very polite, extremely helpful and as it was my first time of requesting help very re-assuring"***

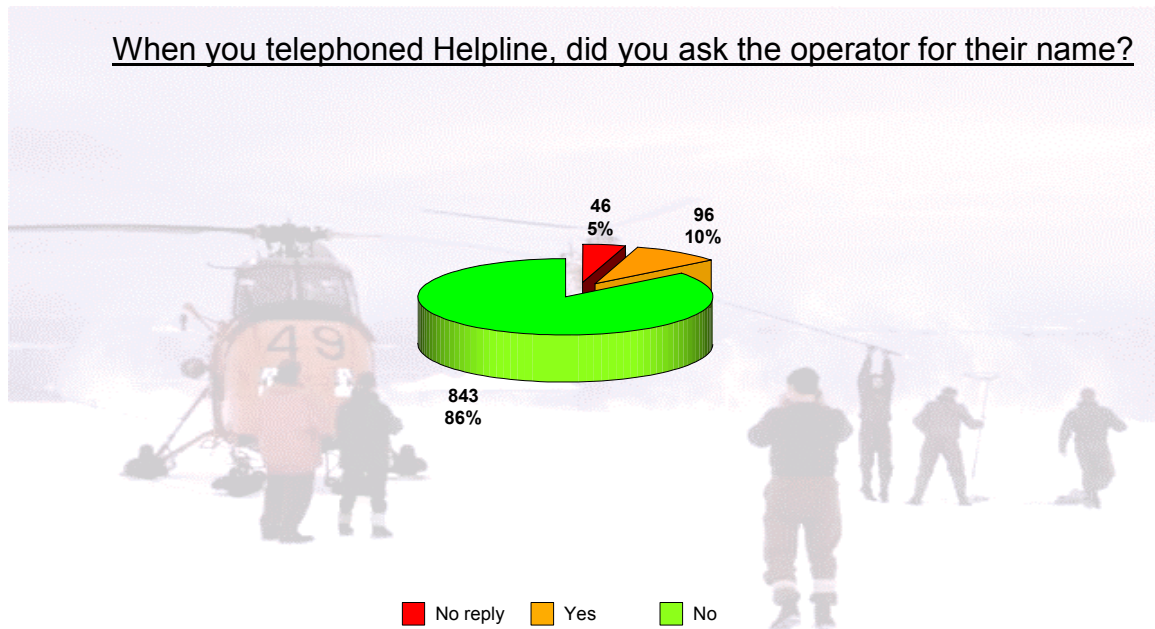
***"The helpline is not what it should be. There are training issues with staff on how to deal with Veterans suffering with PTSD"***

***"Only on the last time I phoned did the person seem to be in a hurry and not very helpful. On other phone calls they seemed a bit better but did not offer any advice"***

***"I was very happy by the way everything was explained to me."***

***"The expressed sorrow of hearing of my wife's death which was very kind."***

***"Very polite and efficiently dealt with."***



Although the minority, 96 (10%) of customers stated that they asked the operator for their name, the additional comments highlight that the operator in accordance with Agency standards offered this initially. Of the 170 comments received 133 (78%) were to advise that the operator had provided their name at the beginning of the call.

**Comments made included:**

***"They have always identified themselves"***

***"They gave me their name straight away without asking"***

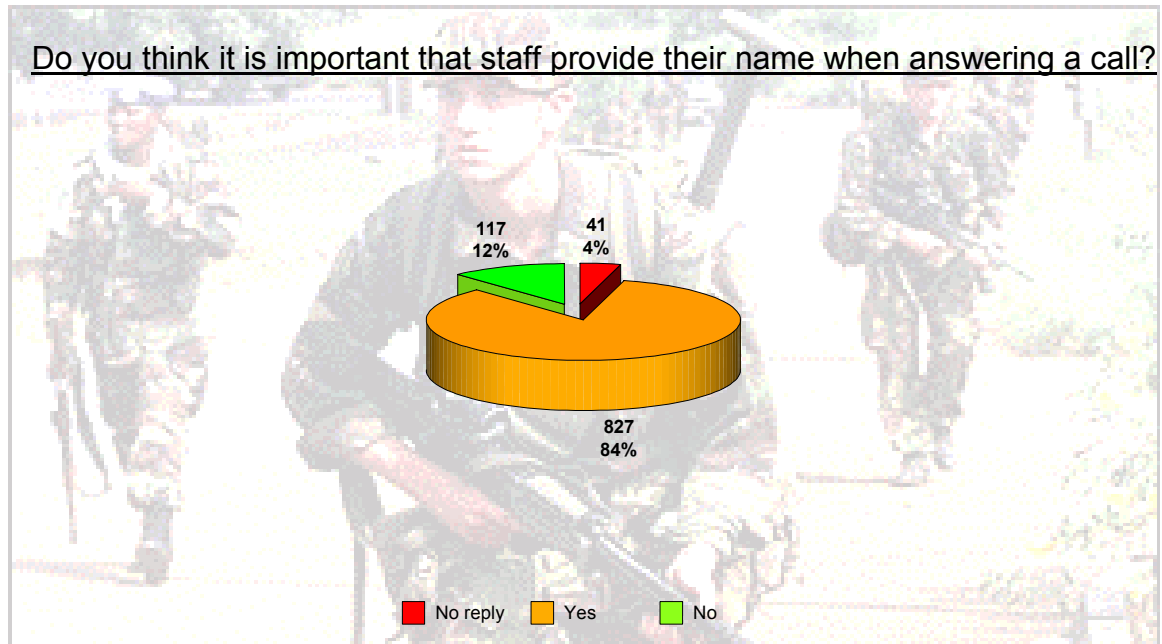
***"They always told me their name"***

***"She has already provided her name-very polite lady"***

***"He added his name"***

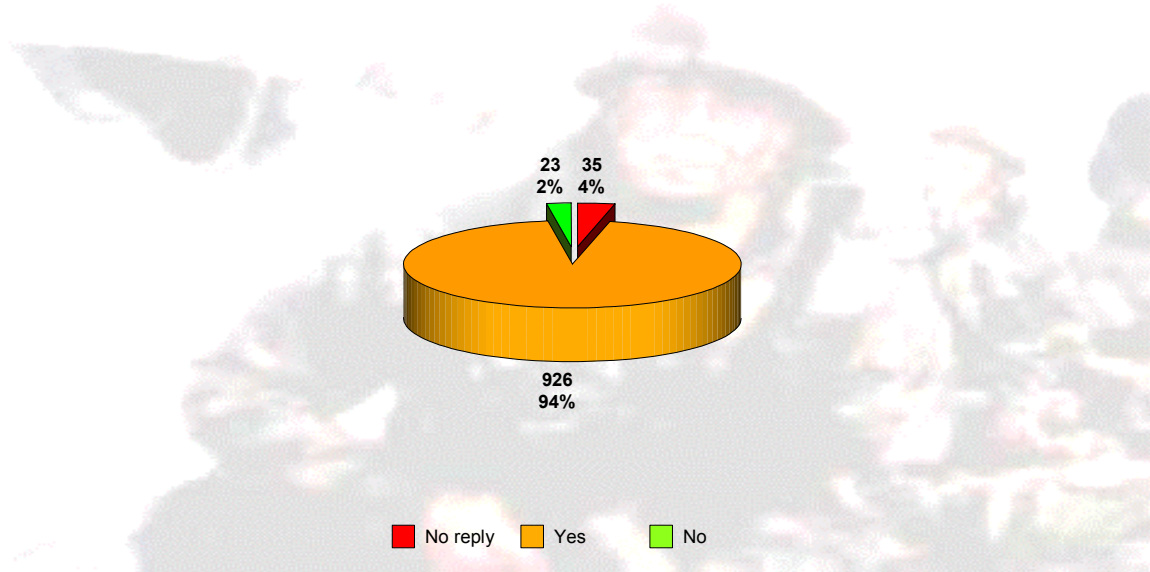
***"The person I spoke to said this is the VA"***

***"It's unusual to speak to a real person."***



This question asks if the customer feels it is important for staff to provide their name when answering a call and results show that a large majority 827 (84%) of customers who replied felt it was important, with only 117 (12%) stating that it was not important.

Would you recommend the Veterans Agency telephone service to others?



This question displays excellent feedback for the Helpline with 926 (94%) of customers stating that they would recommend the Veterans Agency telephone service to others.

**Additional comments:**

***"I got more help from ""name supplied"" at Leeds"***

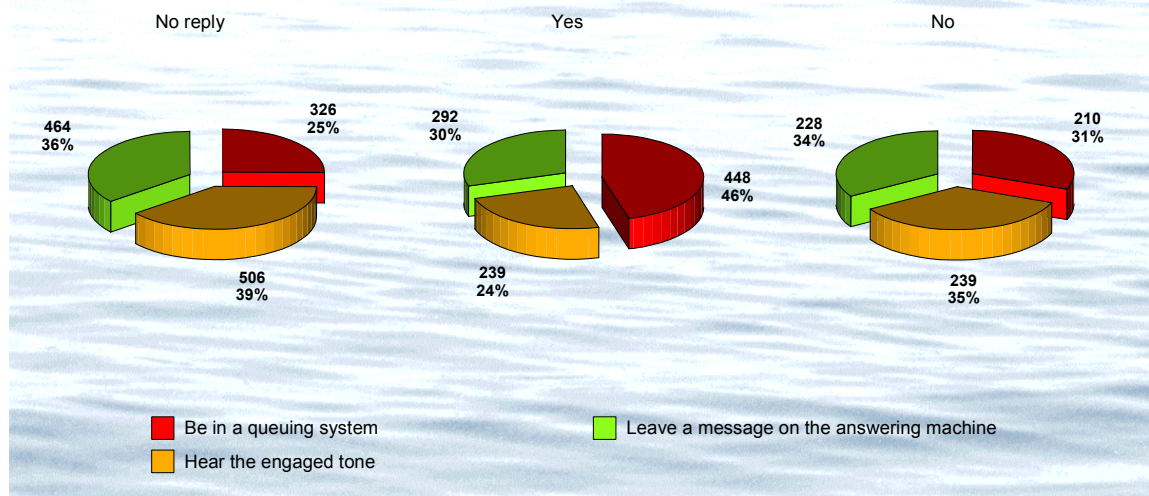
***"So far my dealings have been stressful"***

***"Recorded voice normally states all lines busy call back and cut off"***

***"Need more staff"***

***"Difficulty in being able to get through and obtain info quickly."***

If we cannot answer your call immediately, would you prefer to:



The results show that the majority of the overall responses, 448 (46%), would prefer to be in a queuing system.

Customers were asked for their preference with regards to the type of queuing system they would like to experience. Of the 448 customers who wished to remain in a queue, 356 (35%) advised that they would prefer to listen to a message explaining the reason for delay.

**Further suggestions included:**

***"A facility for leaving a message during busy periods would be helpful"***

***"Technology exists to give information as to the exact position in queue or waiting time"***

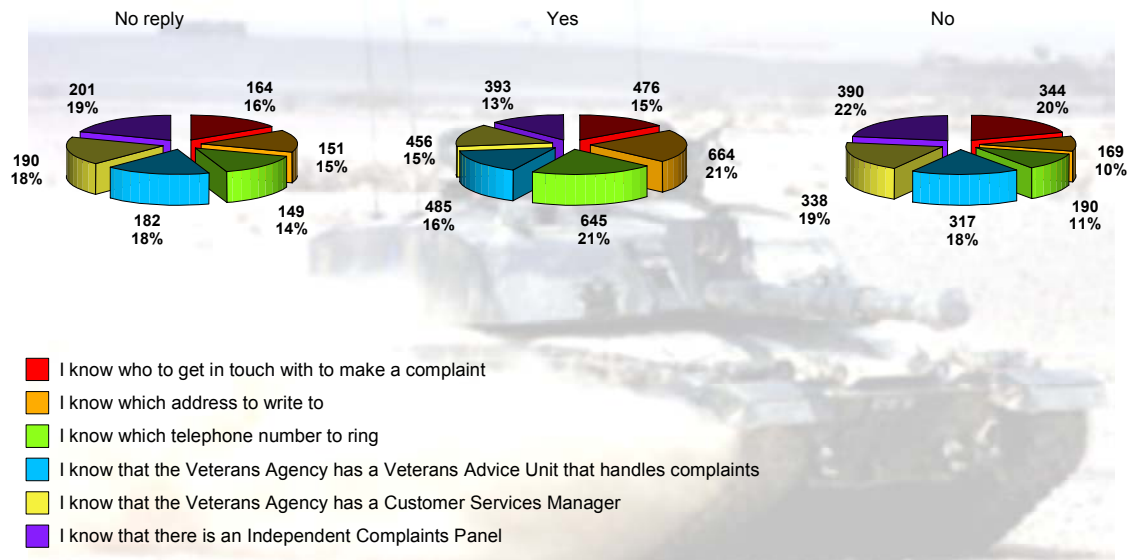
***"I would like a ""Your call is moving up the queue, please hold "" or words to that effect"***

***"State position in queue e.g. 5th, 3rd and to be updated"***

***"Could a position in queue be identified and an estimated time be given before call is handled."***

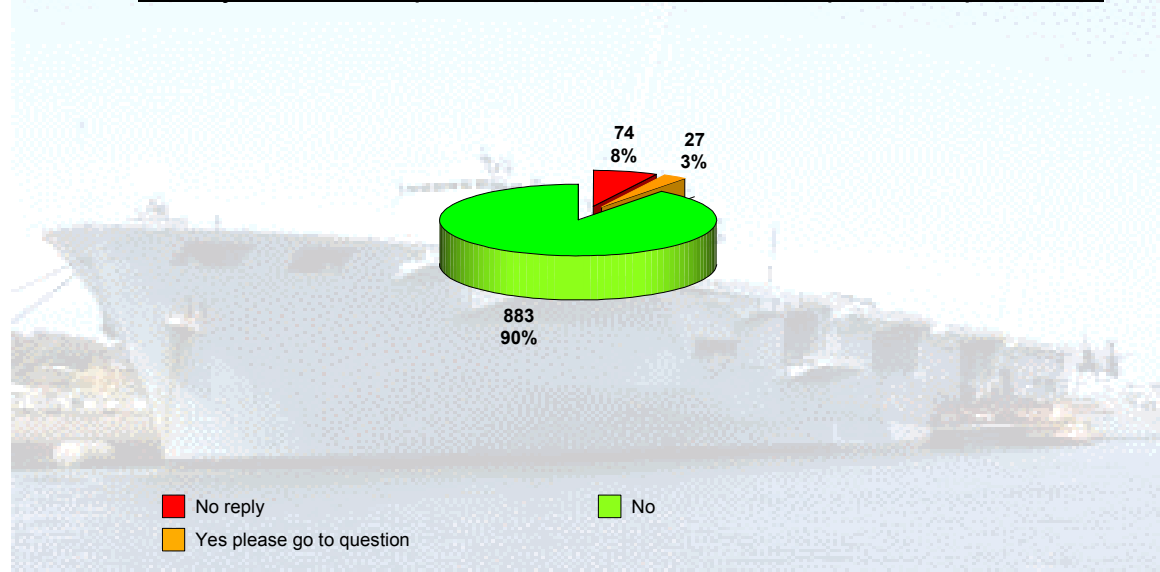
***"A system where a message alternates with music, each time the message informing you of your place in the queue. So you know how many people are waiting in front of you. Thus giving you an idea of how close you are to being answered"***

Do you know about the different ways you can complain to the Veterans Agency?



When asked about the various ways of contacting the Agency to lodge a complaint 664 (67%) customers knew which address to write to. with 645 (66%) customers knowing which telephone number to ring.

Have you ever complained about the service Helpline has provided?



Of the 910 customers who responded to this question 27 (3%) customers had made a complaint to the Agency. However, when asked what the complaint was about 7 customers answered which only included 1 complaint against the service Helpline provided.

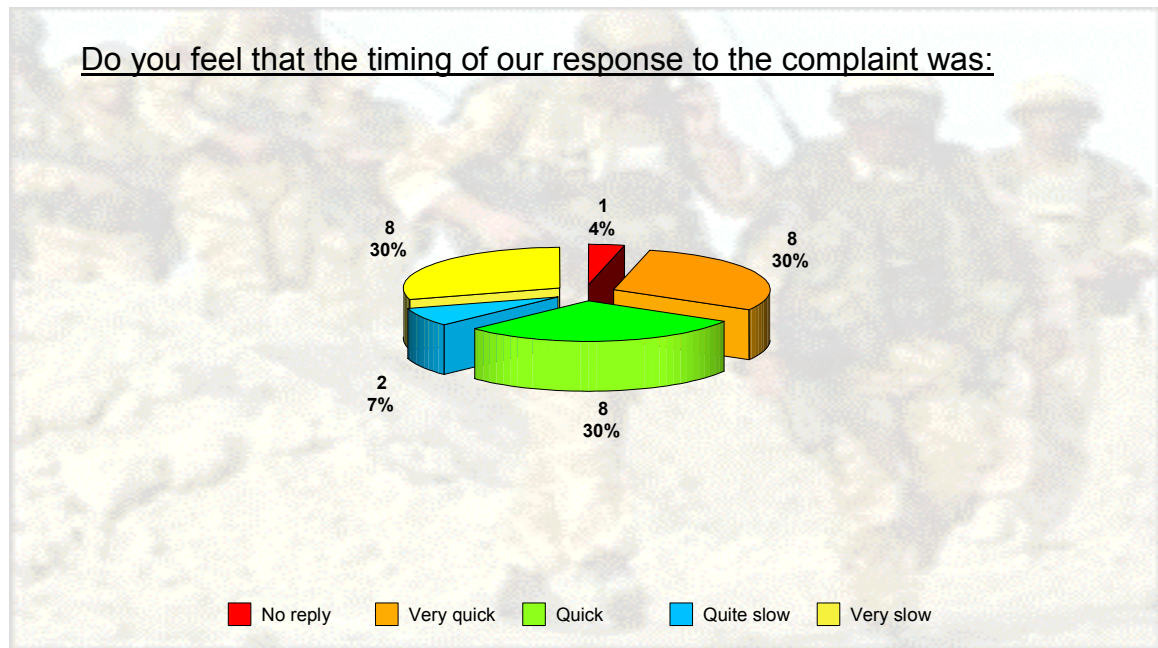
**Comments received:**

***"Wrong name and initial"***

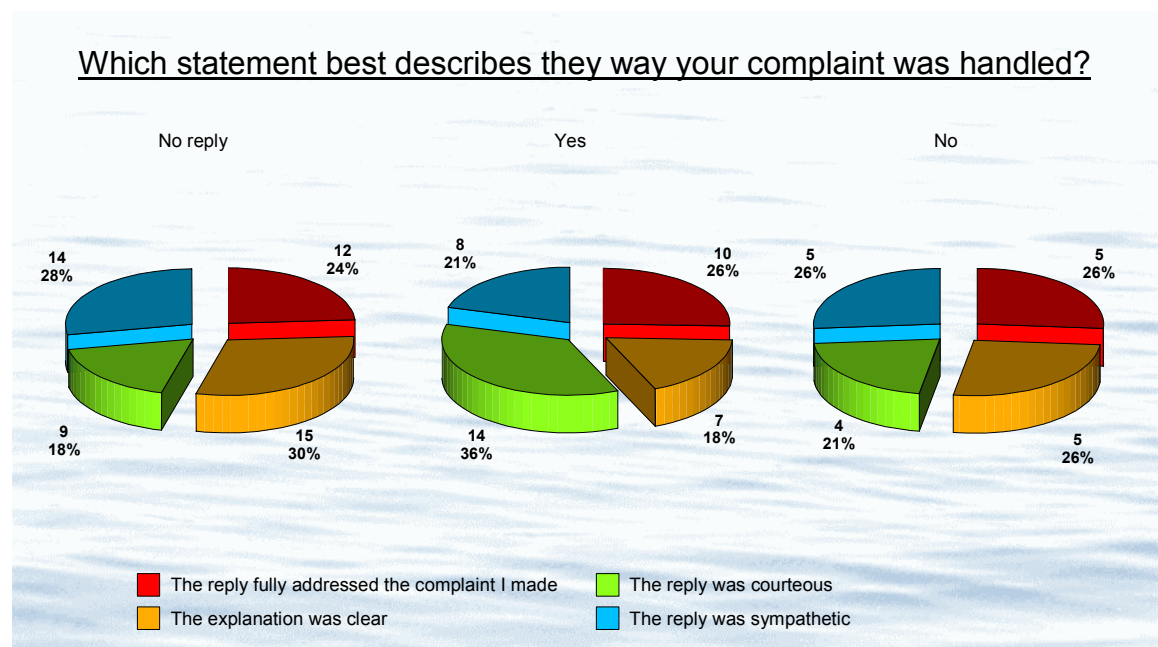
***"Aggressive nature of person on the line."***

**"Not receiving my claim form at first due to it being sent to my old address."**

**"The way a batch of papers arrived split open allowing anyone to see personal details."**

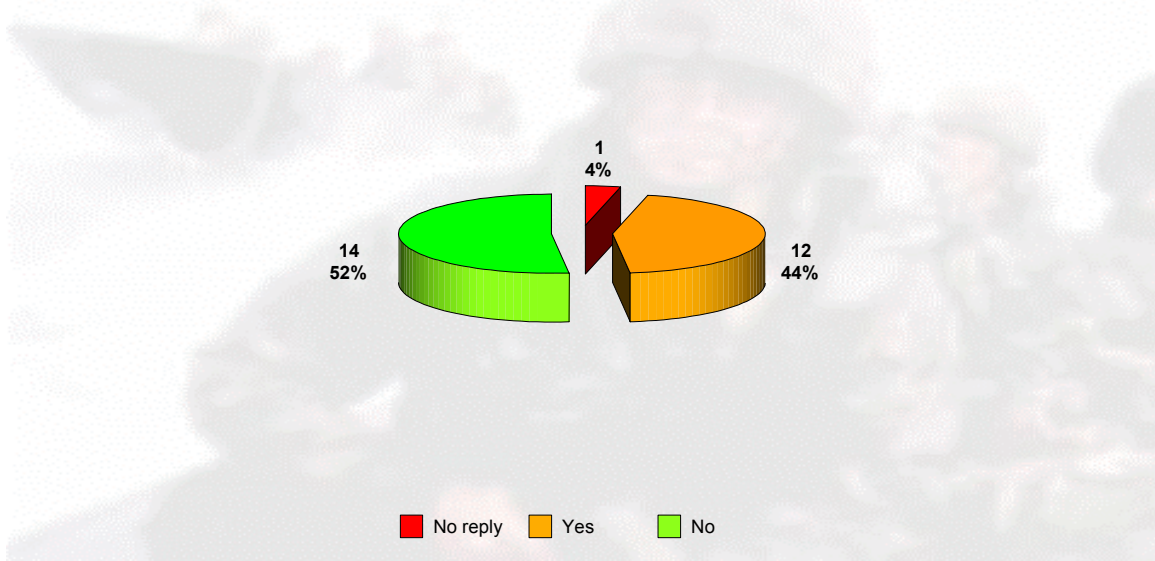


Of the 27 customers who complained to the Agency 26 replied to this question. The results show that the majority 16 (60%) of customers stated that their response was either "Very quick" or "Quick", with 10 (37%) of customers stating their response was either "Quite slow" or "Very slow".



Of those customers who complained, 10 (37%) agreed that the reply fully addressed the complaint they had made and 14 (52%) agreed that the reply to their complaint was dealt with in a courteous manner.

Following your complaint, did we "put things right"?



When asked if we had “put things right” 12 (44%) stated that they felt this was the case. Below are some of the comments received from customers who stated that following their complaint we did not “put things right”.

***"Not yet only contacted last week"***

***"Still waiting for reply to complaint"***

***"Still waiting"***

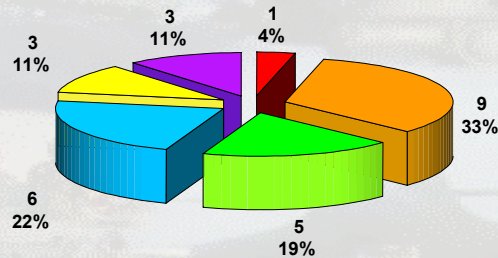
***"Still awaiting documents after 8 weeks."***

***"I have received a questionnaire but they said I would receive a claims form I don't know why I have been sent this form."***

***"My complaint is the fact of always being told all our operators are busy please call back."***

***"You disagreed with me and would not listen"***

How would you rate the overall way we dealt with your complaint?



■ No reply   ■ Very good   ■ Good   ■ Indifferent   ■ Poor   ■ Very Poor

The results show that 14 (52%) customers felt that the way we dealt with their complaint was either "Very good" or "Good", with 6 (22%) customers stating that the way we dealt with their complaint was either "Poor" or "Very Poor".

When customers were asked "What if anything do you like about the Veterans Agency Helpline service", some of the replies were as follows: -

***"I would like to commend the staff for their excellent customer service skills"***

***"Response was quick and kept informed"***

***"I like the fact that I feel someone is there to help me in an emergency and I am not alone"***

***"I like the speed in which forms are sent out to customers after making the initial phone call"***

***"Generally the courtesy I usually receive, although the last time I called the response was brusque and rude"***

***"The fact that someone is trying to help people like myself who during the 2nd World War defended our country"***

***"Your service is second to none. Any help I have requested have been dealt with very professionally"***

***"The staff have always been helpful. The free phone number is also an excellent idea"***

***"You don't understand people, we are only a number or digit to you we are not stupid"***

***"Excellent, my dealings with your office are always first class"***

***"The helpfulness and friendliness of the staff"***

***"Staff are generally polite, explain what is happening but in a very brief way which can be off putting"***

***"They are helpful informative cheerful and give valuable advice"***

Below are comments received from customers who felt that the way we dealt with their complaint was either "Poor" or "Very Poor"

***"I think you should employ Armed Forces personnel who understand what it all means"***

***"I do not accept that there is a clear policy on how to deal with the most traumatised veterans"***

***"Too many different people have had an input over many years allowing bad errors to occur"***

When customers were asked how they would rate the Agency's telephone service on a scale of 1 to 10, the replies were as follows: -

<b>Rating (1=Poor) (10=Excellent)</b>	<b>Customers responding</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>172</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>138</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>471</b>
<b>Total respondents</b>	<b>892</b>

Results to this question are very positive showing that 840 (94%) customers rated the Agency's telephone service at either 6 or more, with only 52 (6%) of customers rating the Agency's telephone service at 5 or less.