

VeteransAgency
An Executive Agency of the Ministry of Defence



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

MAIN CLAIM
SURVEY REPORT 2005

MAIN CLAIM SURVEY REPORT 2005

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MAIN CLAIM CUSTOMER SURVEY

1. Introduction

The 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, 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 April 2005 VA issued a questionnaire to measure the perception of customer satisfaction from those customers who had a decision on a claim in the preceding six months. The results of this exercise are detailed in this report and provide the Agency with the opportunity to compare results with previous surveys, establish if trends have developed and identify areas where VA can make improvements.

2. Research Objectives

The objective of this customer research is to assist VA in establishing the needs of current and future War Disablement Pensioners with particular emphasis on ensuring that the Agency identifies:

- The level of satisfaction with the services VA provides
- 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 includes:

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

4. Customer Samples

A questionnaire was issued in April 2005 to 1,998 customers who had received a notification between the period September 2004 and February 2005. A total of 1040 were completed and returned of which 573 had received a favourable decision and 467 had received a non-favourable decision. This highlights a response rate of 52%, which continues to compare favourably when benchmarked against both public and private sector organisations whose average expected response rate is 30-35%.

5. Structure of the report

The report is structured following the main headings of the survey results with sub-headings, which follow the same layout as the approach headings:

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

The category of "Fairly easy" has been omitted from this year's survey to enable a more accurate reflection of customer perception of the service provided by the Agency.

6. Management Summary

The Customer Research Team issued 1998 questionnaires, which elicited a response of 1040 (52%). Of the responses received, 573 (55%) were from customers who had received a favourable decision and 467 (45%) a non-favourable decision. To enable accurate analysis the decision box this year was completed prior to issue. As with previous years, the majority representation came from those who served in the Army.

The majority, 759 (73%) customers found it easy to get information on how to claim, 190 (18%) people reported difficulties in obtaining information. This is a 9% increase within the difficulty categories. However, 75 (7%) customers knew how to claim as opposed to last year's survey when only 22 (2%) knew how to claim for a War Pension.

When asked where the customers got their information from the majority, 584 (56%), replied that it was from alternative sources other than the Veterans Agency at Norcross or from our Welfare Offices. However people already receiving a War Pension informed some of our customers.

This year 973 (94%) customers gave a positive response to the availability of the claim form, a similar result to the Main Claim Survey 2004 where 989 (95%) customers gave a positive response.

A total of 829 (80%) customers found the claim form easy to complete showing a comparable figure to the results of the Main Claim Survey 2004. The percentage of customers who had difficulty completing the form has increased from 14% to 17%.

The preferred methods of contact remain almost the same, with 603 (58%) stating this year that they preferred to contact the Agency by telephone compared to 57% last year. As with previous years, customers still prefer the Agency to contact them in writing.

When compared to last year's survey, customers advising that they are aware the Agency has a website on the Internet has risen from 411 (39%) to 449 (43%).

When asked how often they wish to be updated on their claim the majority of customers advised that they required updates every three months or less, with 564 (54%) stating this.

Within the questionnaire, this year we added the option for the customer to advise us if they had written to the agency during the time their claim was being dealt with or not. 233 (22%) customers confirmed that they did write to us with 98 (42%) stating that a reply had been given within two weeks and 90 (39%) stating that it had taken over two weeks to receive a reply. The majority of customers found that time taken to respond to their correspondence was "Excellent", "Good" or "Acceptable".

With the omission of the option to select "mostly clear" and "mostly accurate", this year's percentage reflects a more accurate result. The majority of customers advised that the clarity of information provided by the Agency was "Clear" and "Accurate" with 135 (13%) customers advising the information was neither "Clear" nor "Accurate".

In relation to the Agency's standards of service the results have changed slightly since the Main Claim Survey 2004. The most important standard to customers is "To regularly inform customers of the progress of their case" followed closely by "Friendly and helpful staff". The least important once again was "Attending to visitors within 10 minutes of arrival/appointment".

Customers were asked for any thoughts on how we could improve our service. Many comments were received with the outstanding majority referring to the excellent service provided. Numerous customers are still concerned by the length of time it takes to deal with their claim and in particular the lack of a full medical explanation for decisions made.

7. Progress

Following customer comments from previous surveys the Agency has continued to revisit and improve on many areas. The Document Design & Development Unit continues to look critically at all forms and letters issued by the Agency.

The Veterans Services Team continue to promote the Veterans Agency and all aspects of public awareness, accessibility and knowledge surrounding the processes and services provided. A new publication has also been developed this year, Veterans WORLD is a regular newsletter for all those who serve the ex-service community, the initiative is to ensure that as many veterans as possible are aware of the range of help and advice which is available to them.

The Veterans Agency website has been reviewed and re-designed enabling easier access and navigation, more information and more links to many other websites providing specialist advice and services. Search engines identify the agency website from a growing number of 'keywords' and usage is increasing. All press releases and promotional literature now carry agency e-mail and web addresses.

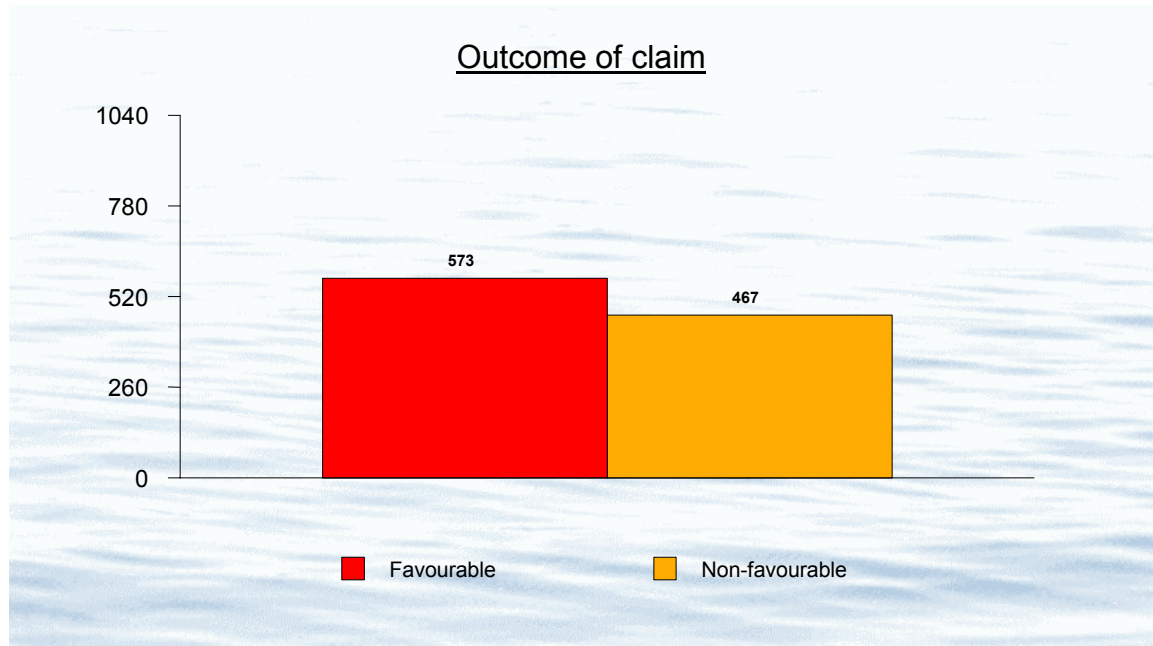
8. Recommendations

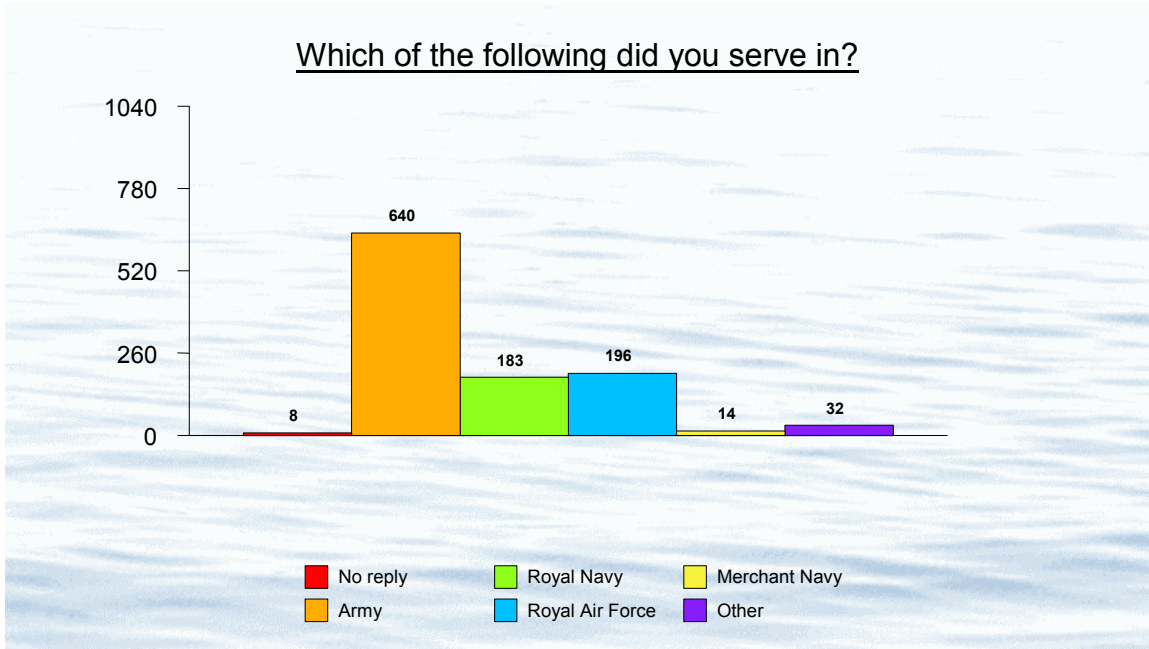
This years survey does not highlight any additional areas for improvement. However, all previous recommendations remain appropriate, and all ongoing improvements within these areas continue to be reviewed.

9. Survey Results

Findings

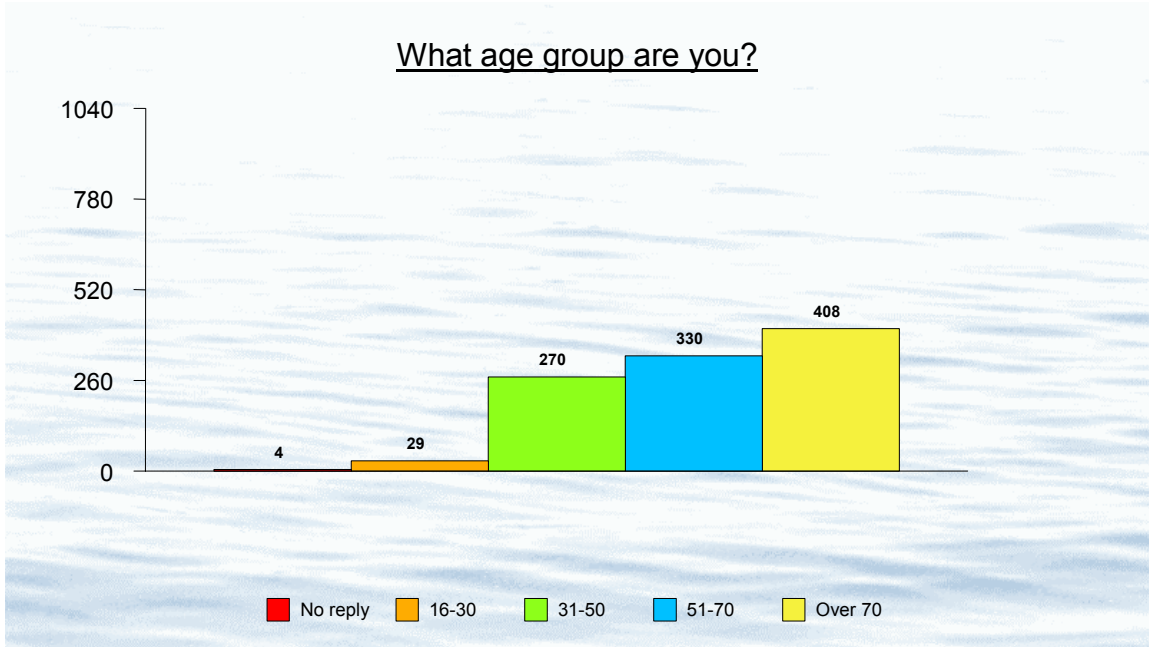
The presentation of the analysis follows the same order as the questionnaire issued. Although the questionnaires were issued to a totally random sample we are able to separate responses in respect of favourable and non-favourable decisions, and cross analyse using age segmentation where appropriate. While each question is analysed using age segmentation, for ease of reference this will not be included in the report where the customer age range does not affect the results.





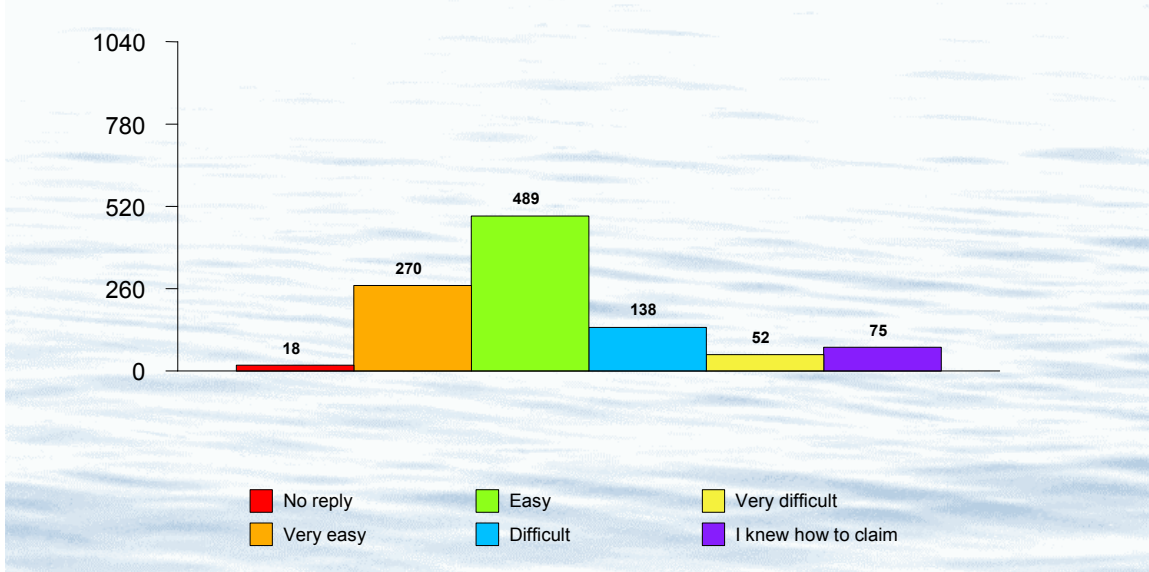
This represents the respondents split by single service. The majority of respondents had served in the Army: 640 (62%). 33 customers advised that they had served in more than one branch of the armed forces.

The next graph shows the age distribution of the respondents, with the largest single group 408 (39%) being the over 70- age group.



PART 1: ACCESS AND CONTACT

How did you find getting information on how to make a claim for a War Pension?



When asked how easy it was to obtain information on how to claim, 759 (73%) respondents advised that it was “Very easy” or “Easy”, with 190 (18%) stating they had difficulty in obtaining information. This is a 9% increase within the difficulty categories since last year’s report. However, 75 (7%) customers knew how to claim as opposed to last years survey when only 22 (2%) knew how to claim for a War Pension. Two people ticked more than one option.

Additional comments from customers who found it difficult to obtain information on claiming a War Pension:

“I was unaware of the Veterans Agency until I was told by my GP”

“I had no idea I was eligible to claim until I was informed by a work colleague”

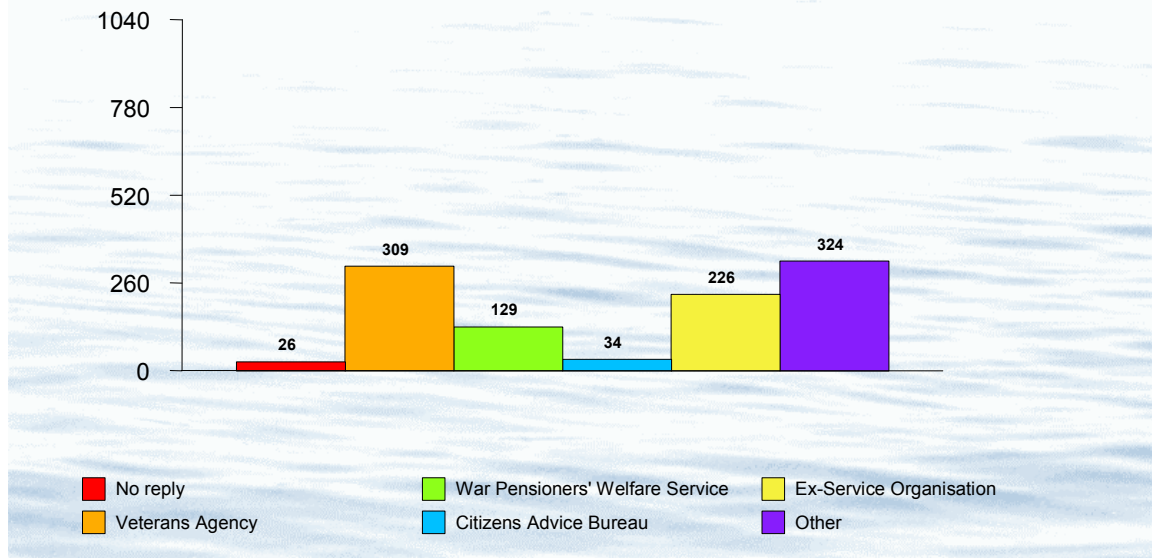
“I had not heard about the VA prior to my initial claim”

“I was not given any information on leaving the service, I got your details from my brother an ex-serving member”

“I was told about how to claim by a friend, many years later. I could have claimed earlier if I had known I could. The information is passed only by word of mouth”

“Never saw anything relating to War Pension or veterans until we at a memorial reunion last year. There was a stand displaying literature plus a couple of people at this stand”

Where did you get the information on how to apply for a War Pension?



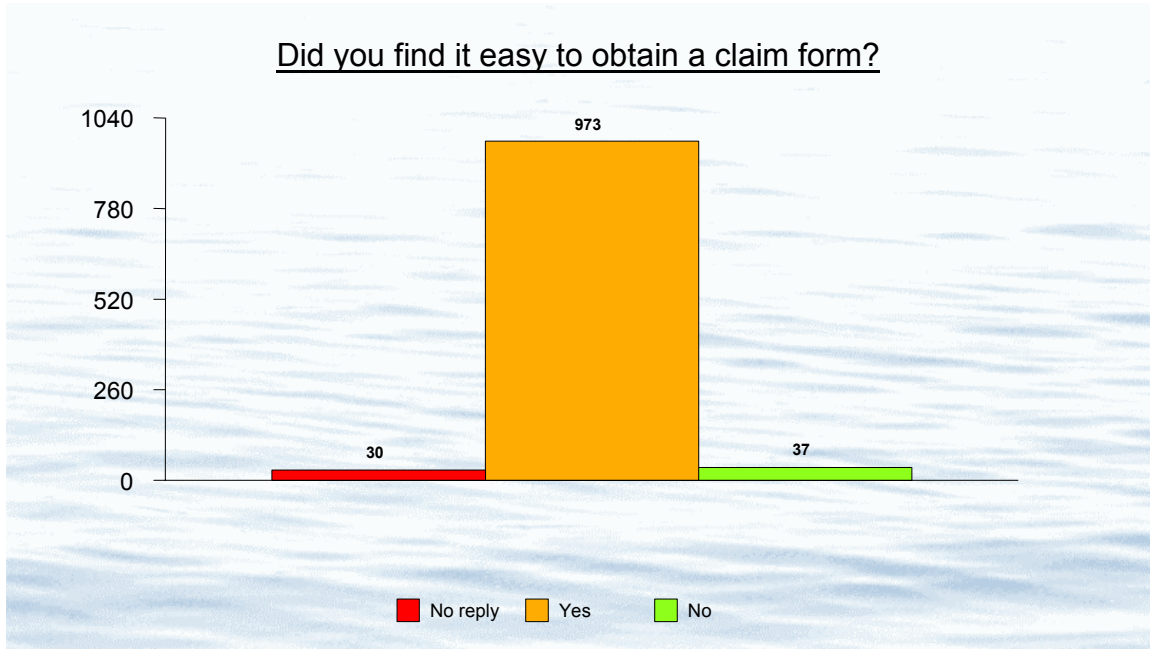
438 (42%) customers advised they obtained the information about how to claim a pension from either the Veterans Agency at Norcross or regionally from our War Pensioners Welfare Service. This indicates a slight decrease of 2% on last year's results. The majority of customers, 584 (56%) continue to obtain information on how to claim from alternative sources such as Ex-Service Organisations, Citizens Advice Bureau, and other organisations. Eight people selected more than one option.

Customers were asked to provide details if they had indicated "Other" as their answer. These included:

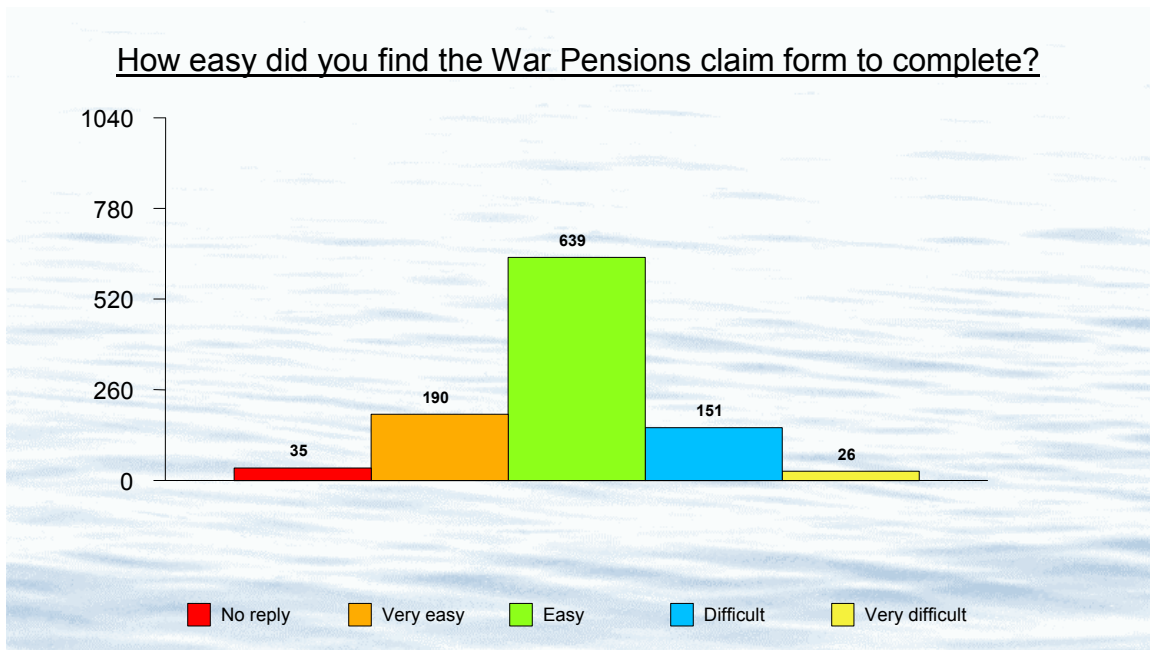
"My doctor"

"A friend"

"Daily paper"

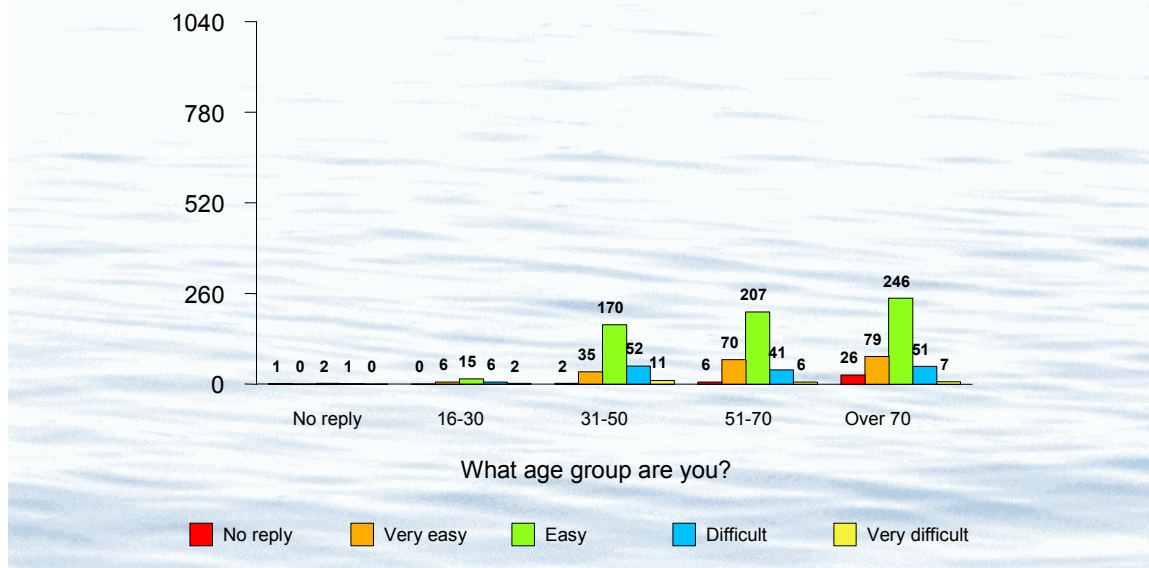


A total of 973 (94%) customers advised that the claim form was “Easy” to obtain.



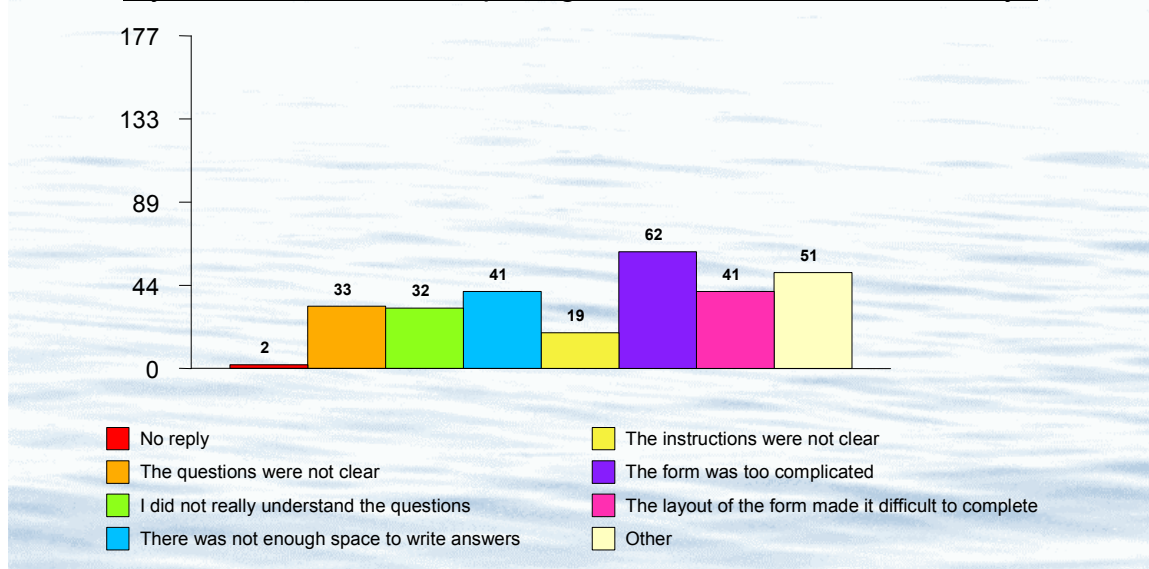
A total of 829 (80%) customers stated that the claim form was either “Very easy” or “Easy” to complete, providing a similar figure to last year’s percentage. Results show that one person selected more than one option.

How easy did you find the War Pensions claim form to complete by age group?



When analysed by age group the outstanding majority found the claim form easy to complete. Within the 31-50 age group 63 (23%) customers found the form “Difficult” or “Very difficult” to complete. Those who did not reply to the question “What age group are you?” did answer this question about completing the claim form and is therefore shown in the “No reply” category.

If you had difficulties completing the claim form, what were they?



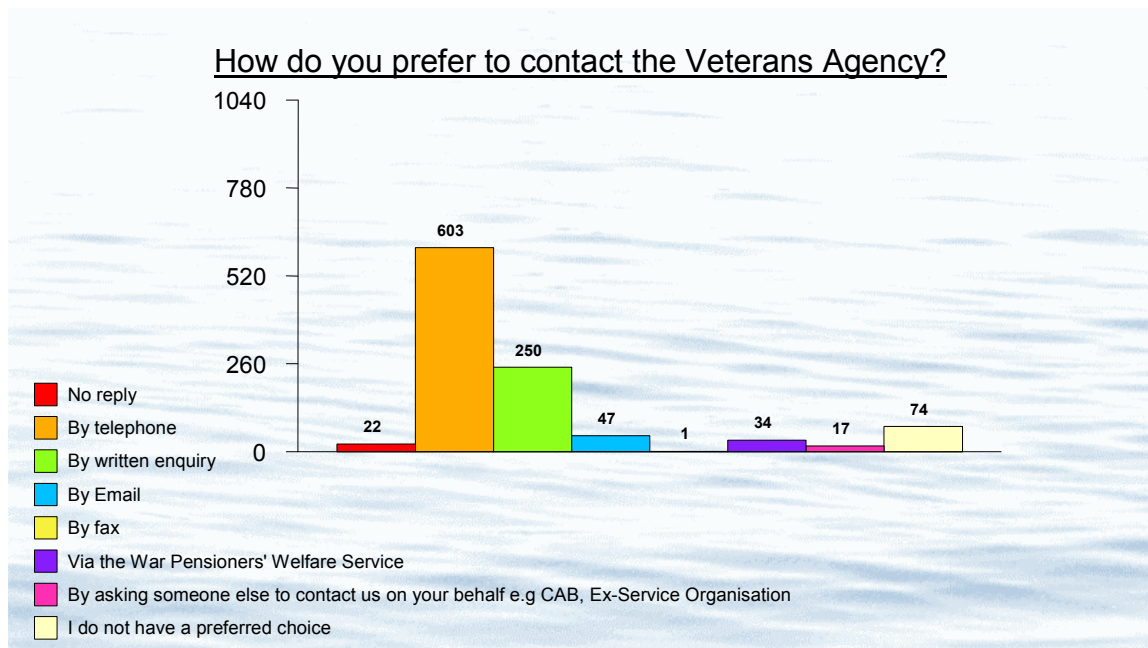
Although 177 customers advised that they had difficulties completing the form, when asked what these difficulties were 279 replies were received. This indicates that customers again found several areas of difficulty with the form. The majority of customers 144 (52%) found that the form was too complicated with not enough space to write full answers and the layout of the form making it difficult to complete.

The “Others” category attracted many comments such as:

“Some of the questions asked for exact dates. As my injuries happened over twenty years ago I found these questions difficult to answer”

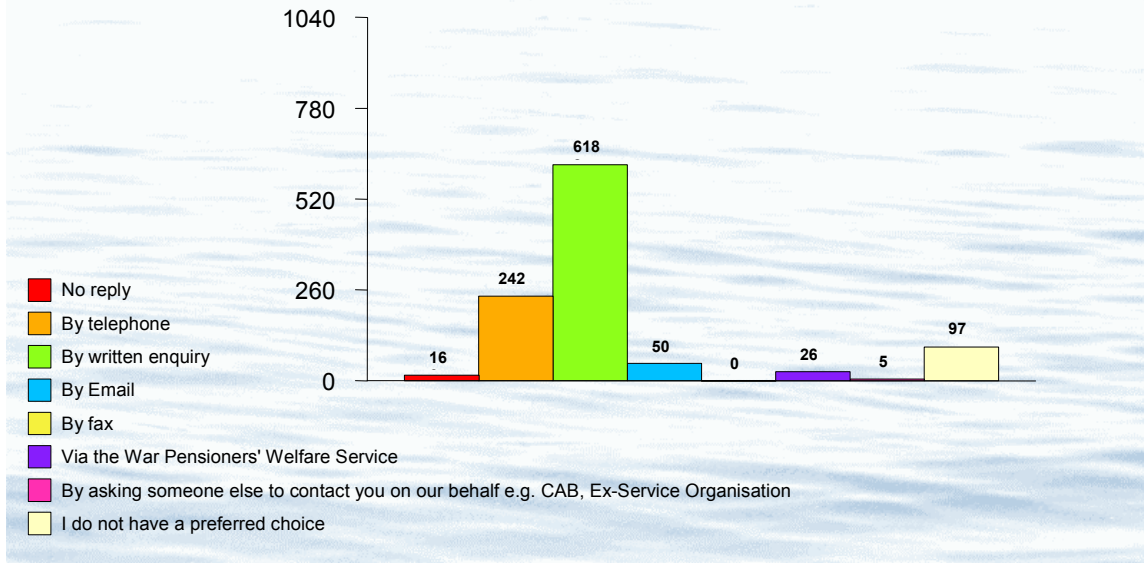
“The wording made it difficult to answer questions clearly because of my dual service in the R.N and R.M. I found the further condition claim form the most difficult to complete”

“The layout of the questions had me going to and fro and in the end I am sure I answered the wrong questions”



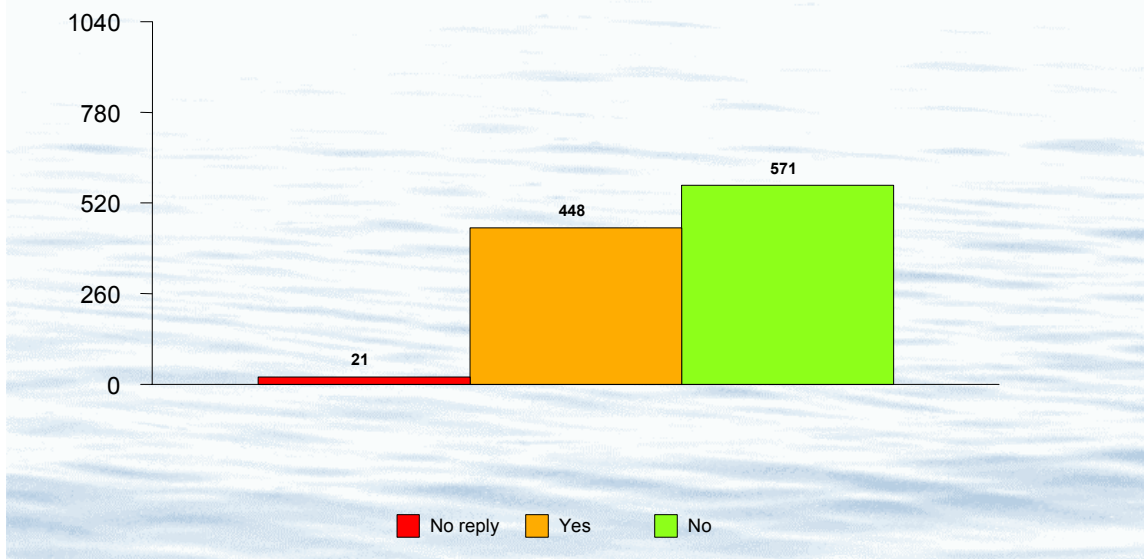
When asked how they preferred to contact the Agency, 603 (58%) customers advised that their preference was by telephone. The trend for customers to contact the agency by telephone remains consistent with the Main Claim Survey 2004. The second choice of contact is by letter, with 250 (24%) customers choosing this option as their preferred method. Eight customers selected two options when replying to this question.

How do you prefer the Veterans Agency to contact you?



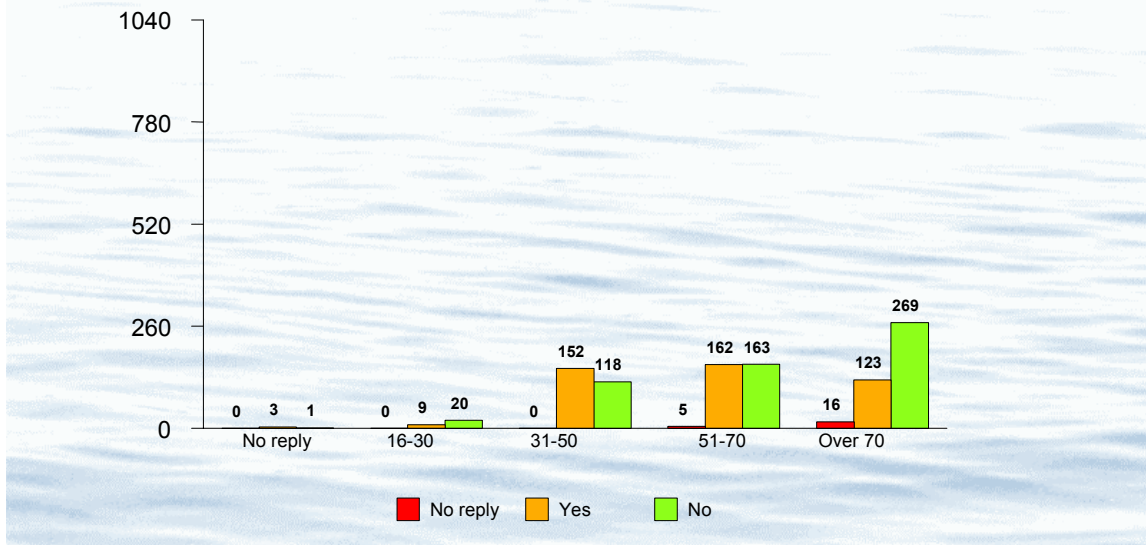
Although as indicated, the customers first choice to contact the Agency is by telephone, when asked how they prefer the Agency to contact them the majority 618 (59%) advised “By written enquiry”. The preferred choice mirrors the Main Claim Survey 2004 with clear indications for the more traditional methods of contact, written contact taking precedence over telephone contact with no interest shown in Fax. Fourteen people selected two options when replying to this question.

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



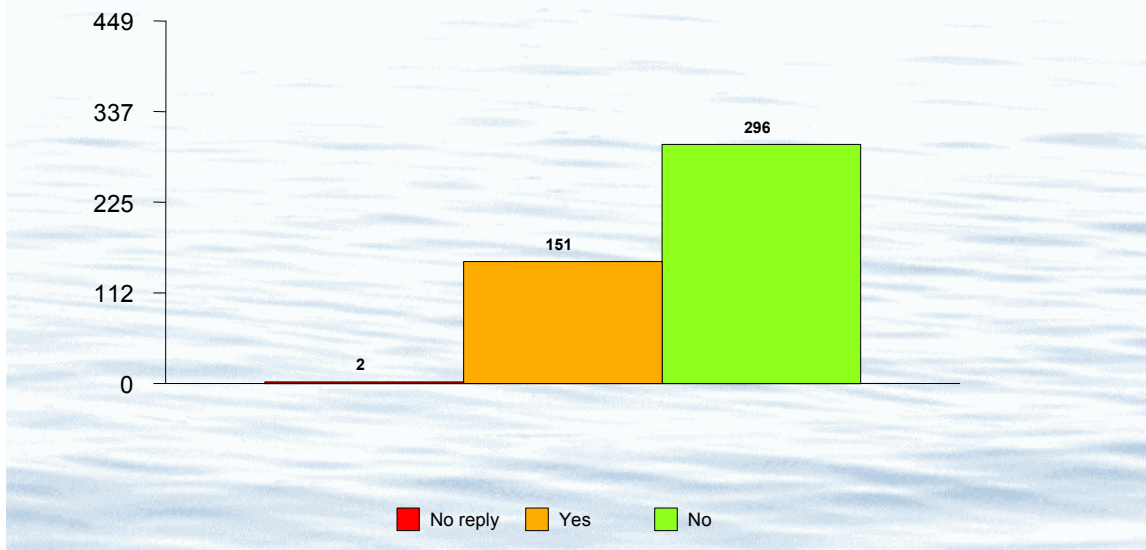
Results this year indicate a steady increase of awareness amongst customers with regards to the Agency Website on the Internet. The chart shows that 448 (43%) customers are aware, which highlights an increase of 4% compared to the Main Claim Survey Report 2004.

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



When analysed by age group, 162 (49%) customers aged between 51 and 70 advised that they were aware of the Agency Website. Of the customers aged between 31 and 50, 152 (56%) advised they were aware which shows an overall increase of 9% compared to last year.

Have you ever used our Website?



Although 449 customers indicated that they are aware of the Website, only 151 (34%) advised that they have used it. This shows a slight increase on last year's figure of 30%. Indications following the yearly reports are highlighting a steady growth of awareness and use of the Website amongst Agency customers.

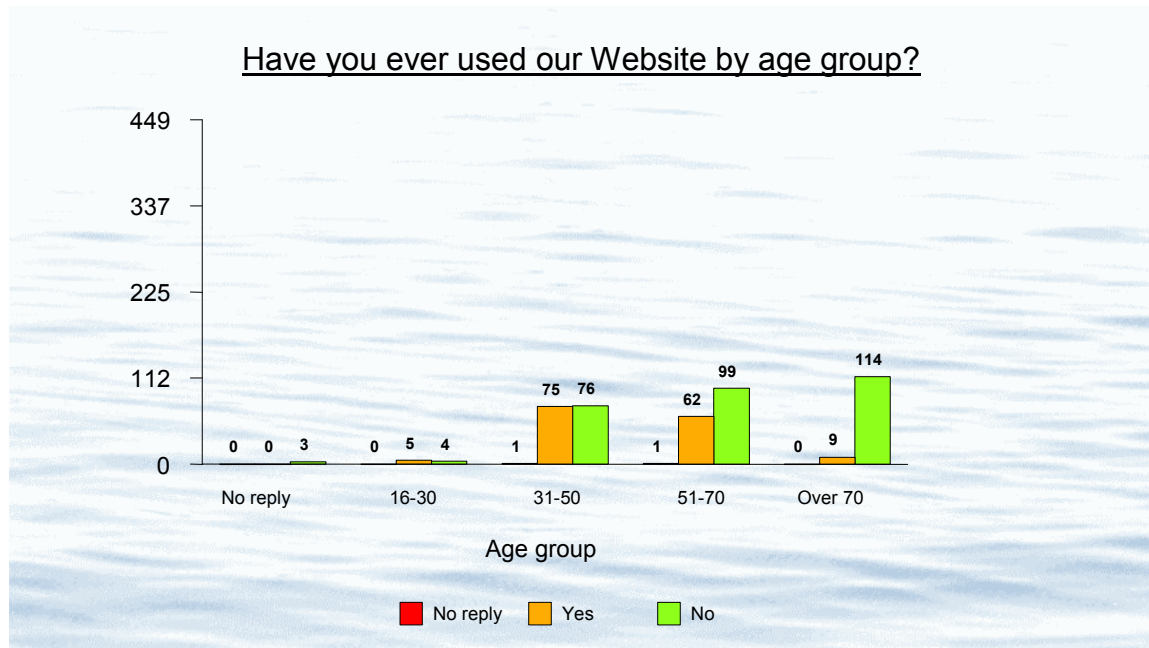
Customers were asked to provide any comments as to why they had not used the Website. The majority advised that they did not own a computer or have Internet access.

Additional comments made included:

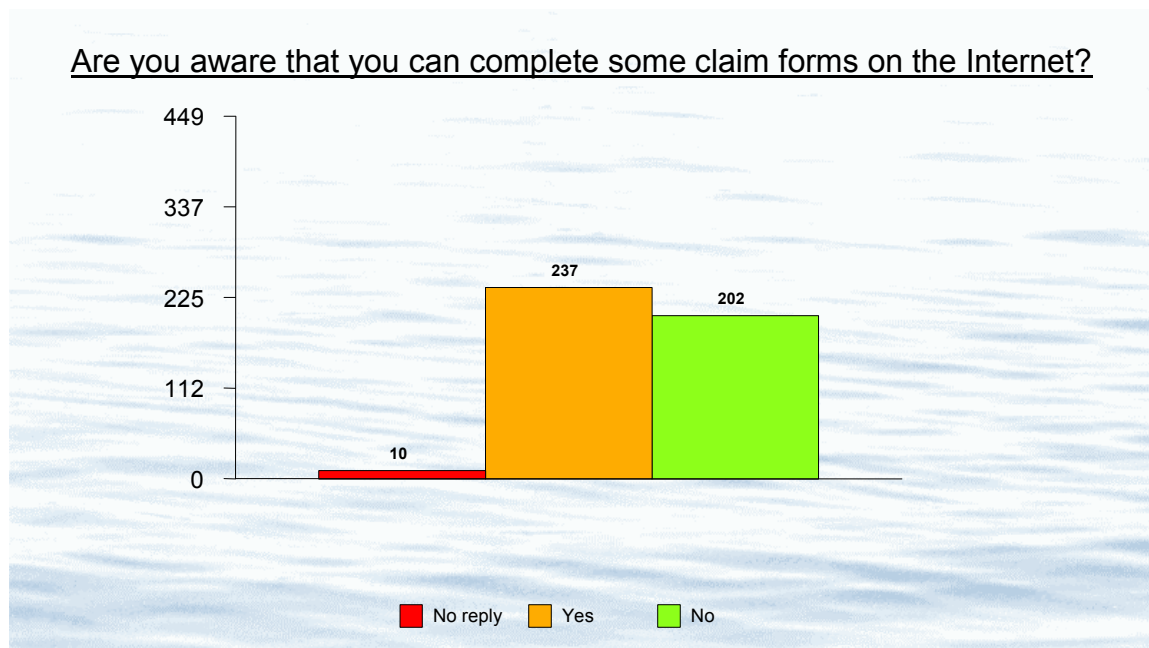
"No need, information provided by VA either by phone or letter has always sufficed"

"Have not yet set up Internet on computer"

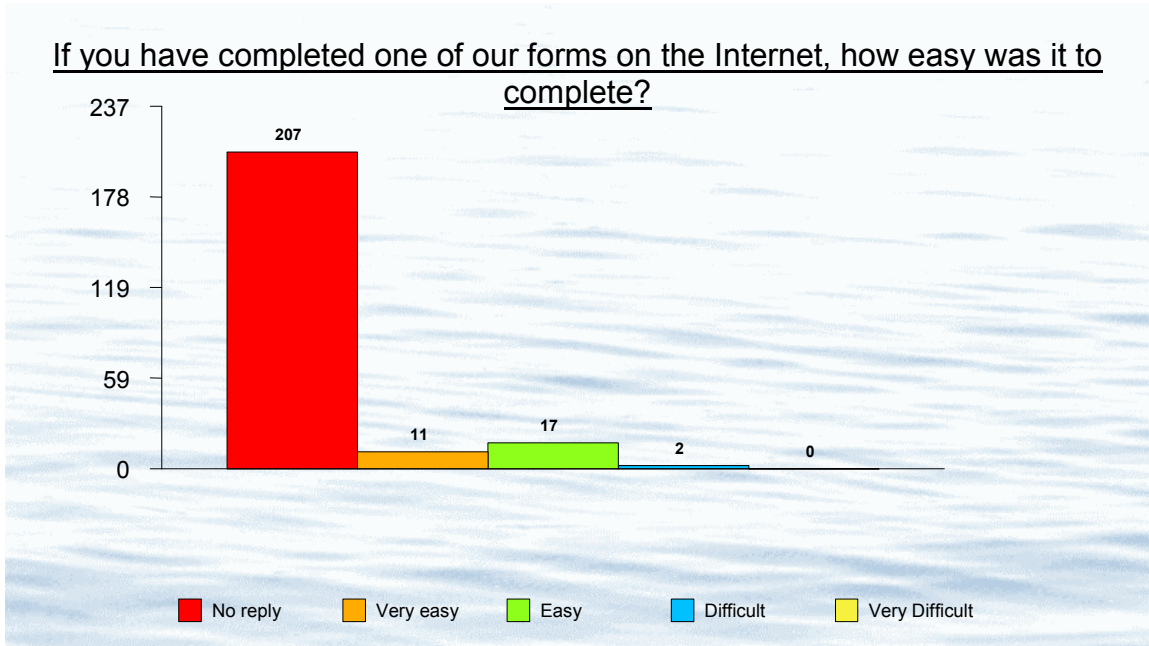
"I will do in the future"



When analysed using age segmentation the results indicate that 75 (49%) customers in the 31-50 age group have used the Agency website on the Internet.



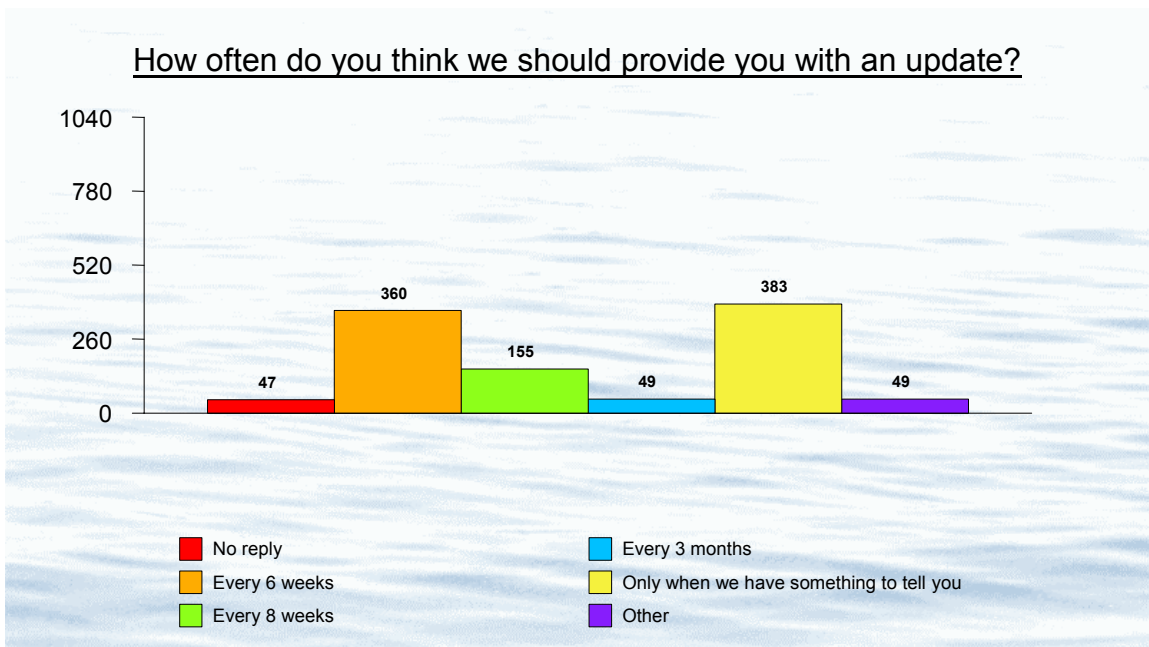
This year has shown a slight increase in awareness of Internet claim form availability on the Agency website. The majority of customers, 237 (53%), who are aware of the website advised that they were aware of this facility.



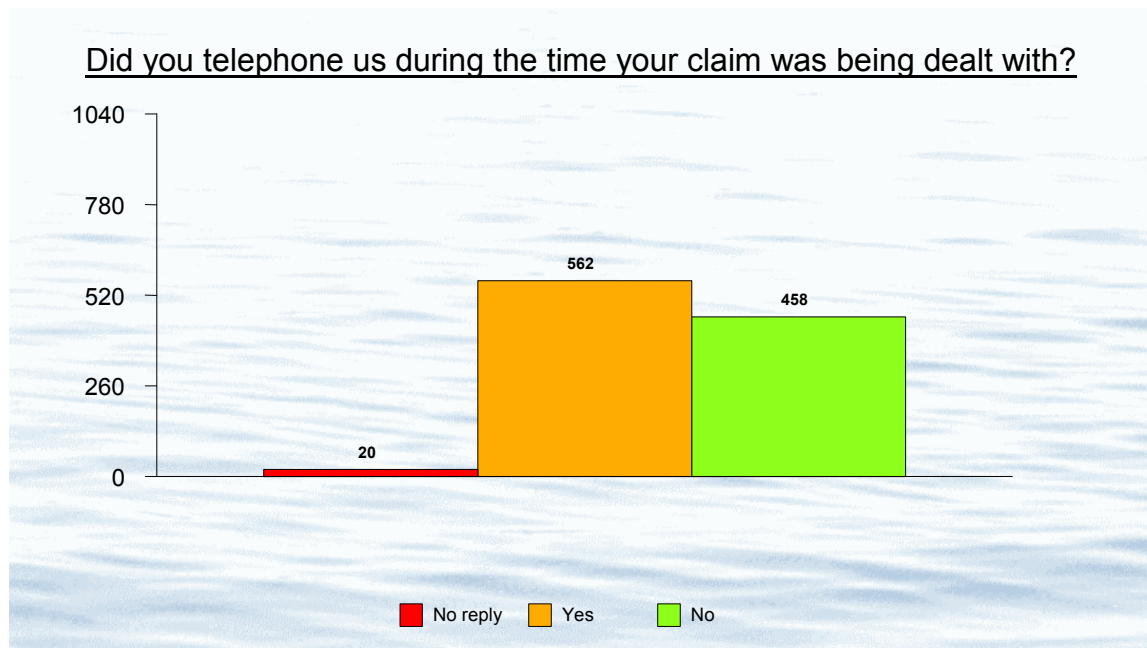
Of the 237 customers who advised they were aware of Internet claim forms, only 30 (13%) customers have used the facility, a slight increase of (1%) compared to last year. Of those, 28 (93%) found the form “Very easy” or “Easy” to complete.

One customer commented:

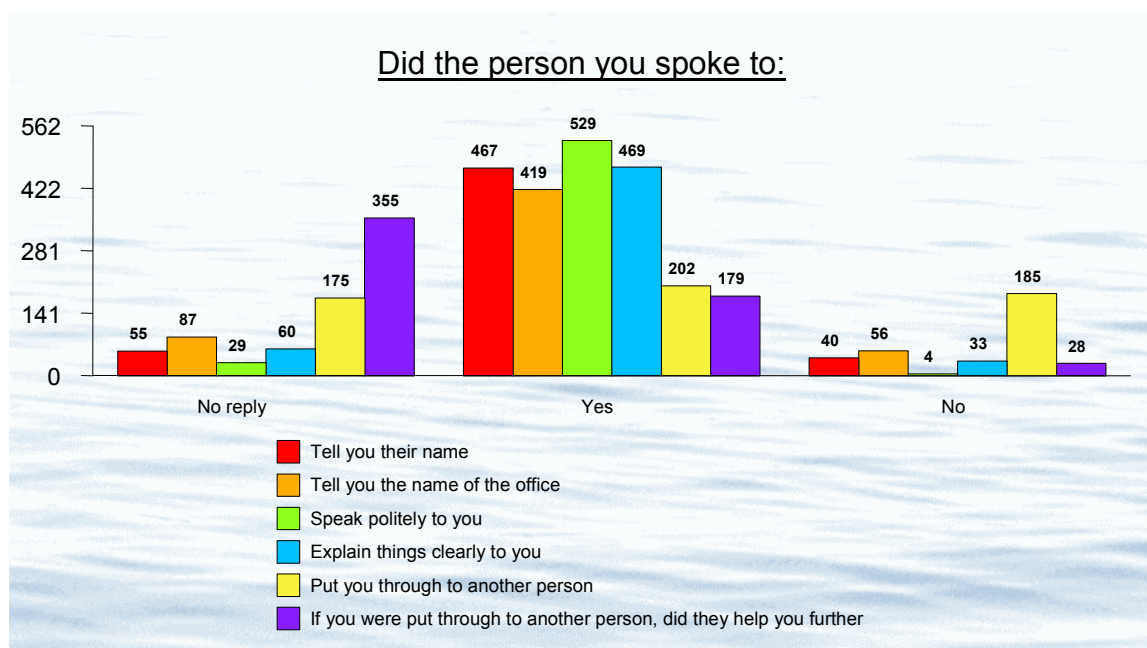
“Not enough information on the web page and hard to navigate.”



As with the Main Claim Survey 2004 the majority of customers, 564 (54%), indicate they require an update every three months or less. As with previous Main Claim Survey’s the single highest preferred option continues to be “Only when we have something to tell you”, with 383 (37%) customers stating this. Three customers selected more than one option.



The number of customers who contacted the Agency by telephone during their claims process has decreased slightly this year from 586 (56%) to 562 (54%).



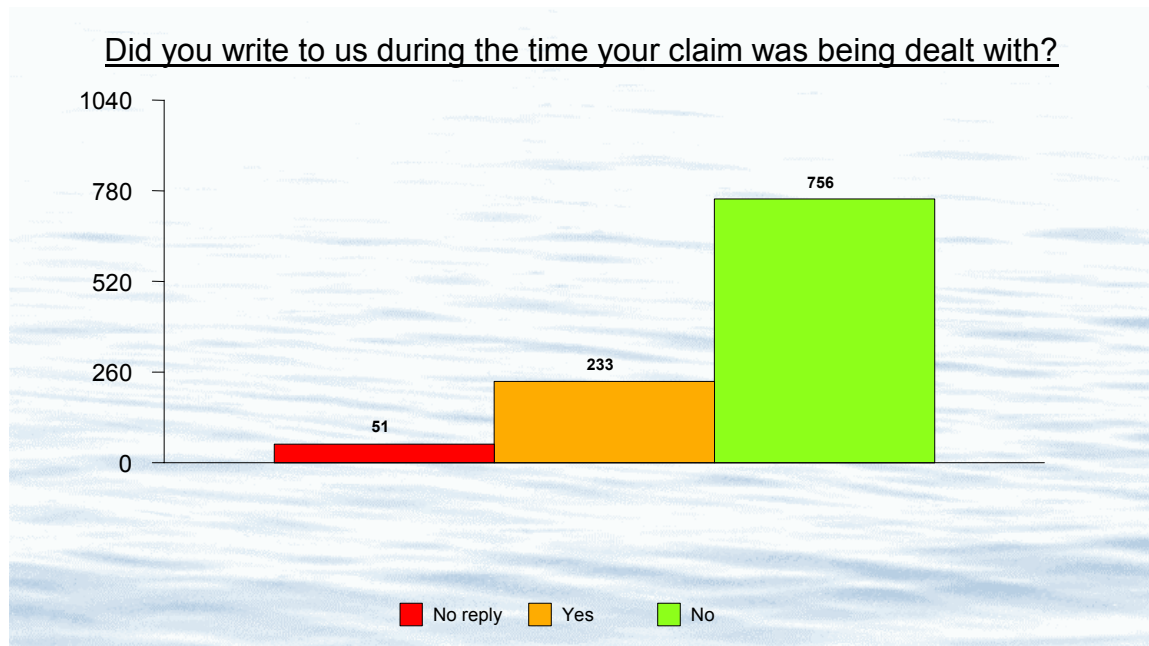
Of the 562 customers who contacted the Agency by telephone, 529 (94%) felt that they had been spoken to politely, with 469 (83%) advising they had information explained clearly to them. These results show continued positive feedback with regards to not only the Helpline team, but also the operational areas who also take telephone calls from our customers.

Many comments were received from customers with the majority praising the staff for the help and advice given.

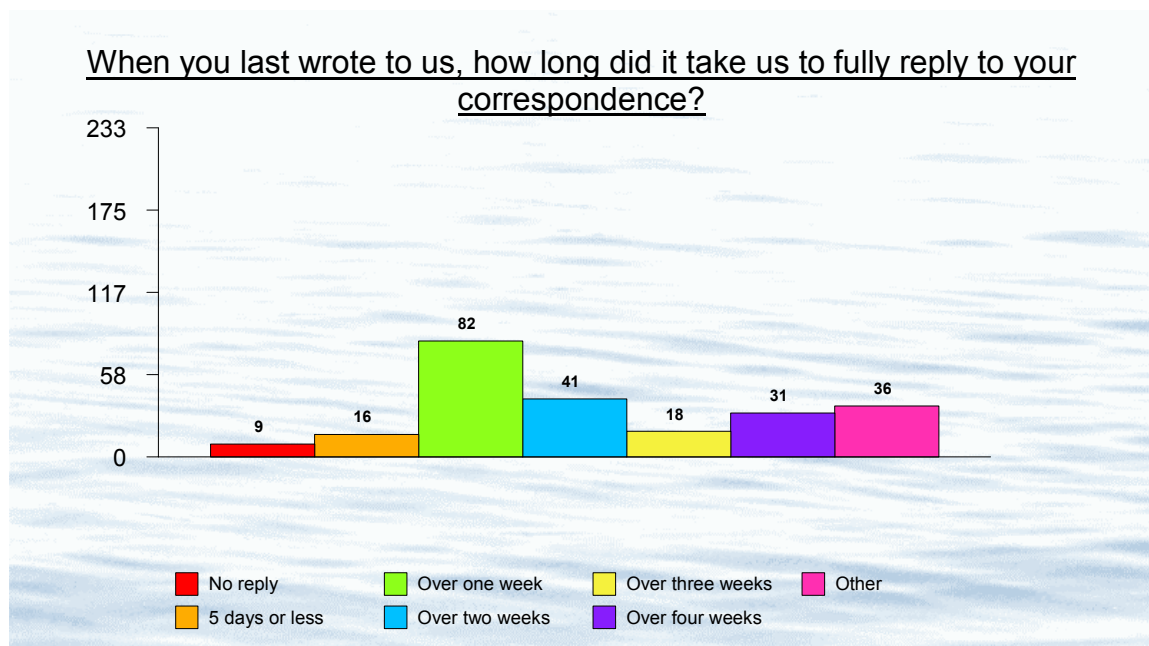
“I was treated with respect and the person I spoke to was very helpful.”

PART 2: RESPONSE TIMES

Part two of the survey sought to establish the Agency's response rate to correspondence, telephone calls and customers perception of how quickly their enquiry was dealt with.

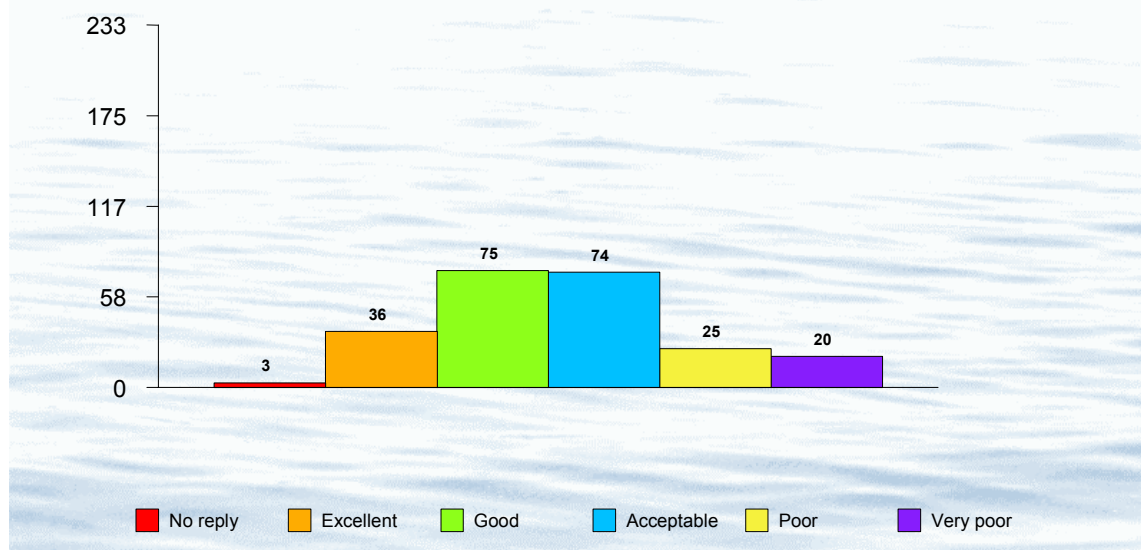


The majority of customers 756 (73%) stated that they did not write during their claim. 233 (22%) customers advised that they did contact the Agency in writing during the time their claim was being dealt with. This question was introduced to this year's survey to allow for a true reflection on correspondence timings during a claim.



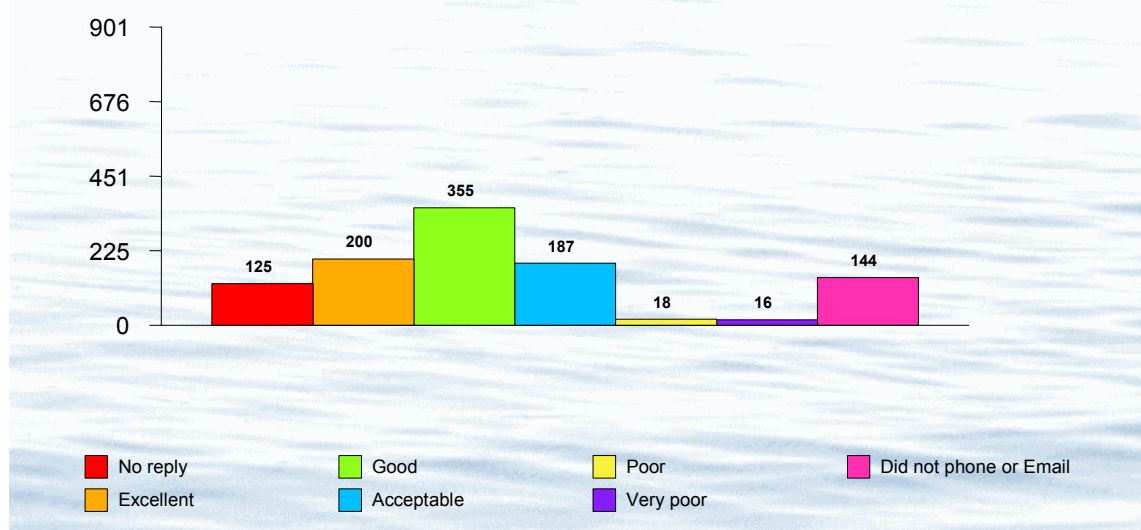
Of the 233 customers who wrote to us during their claim 139 (60%) customers advised that they received a reply to their correspondence within three weeks.

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



Although 49 (21%) customers said it took over three weeks to receive a reply, 185 (79%) considered the time taken to respond to their correspondence was “Excellent”, “Good” or “Acceptable”. 45 (19%) customers thought it took too long to reply.

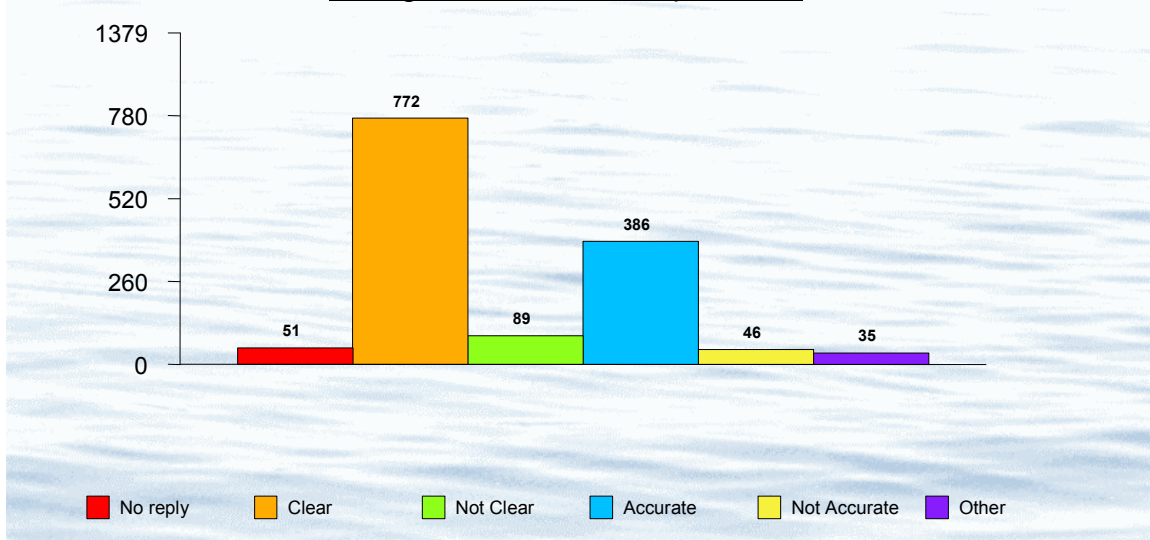
If you have telephoned or Emailed us, do you consider the time taken to respond to your telephone call or Email was?



Of the 901 customers who have telephoned or emailed the Agency, 742 (82%) were satisfied with the time taken to respond. This shows an increase of 2% when compared to the Main Claim Survey 2004.

PART 3: SERVICE QUALITY

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



Customers were asked to tick two options which best described the clarity of information given to them in writing during the whole claims process. From the replies received 1158 (84%) of the selected options were that the information given to them was “Clear” and “Accurate”. However, 135 (10%) advised that the information was neither “Clear” nor “Accurate”.

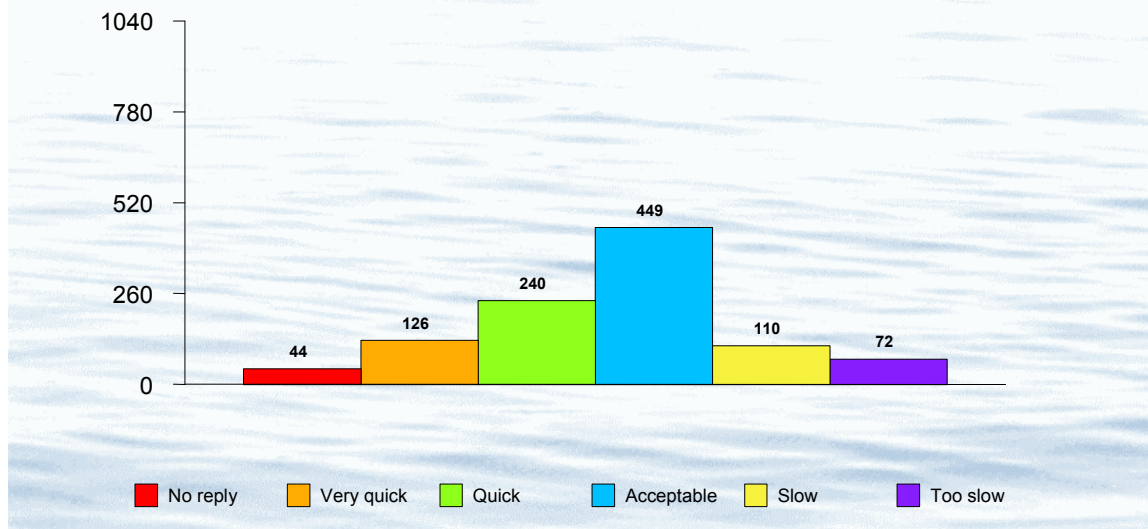
Additional comments received included:

“Clear but not enough information given”

“No proper explanation given as to results of claim”

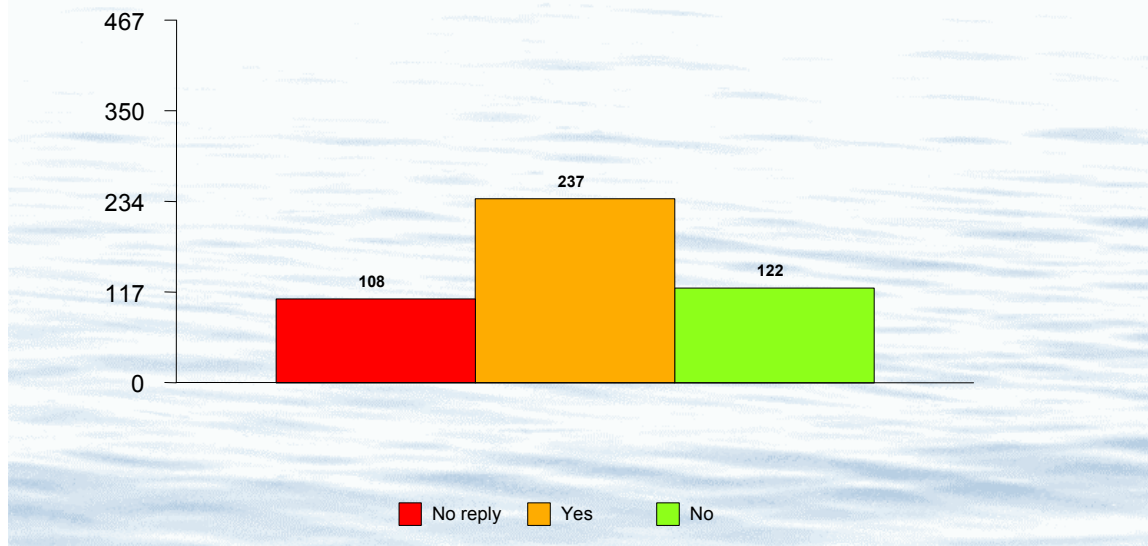
“Most correspondence seemed to have been compiled by inserting pre-programmed text, rather than a letter written specifically for me”

Which of the following best describes how you feel about the time taken to finalise your claim?



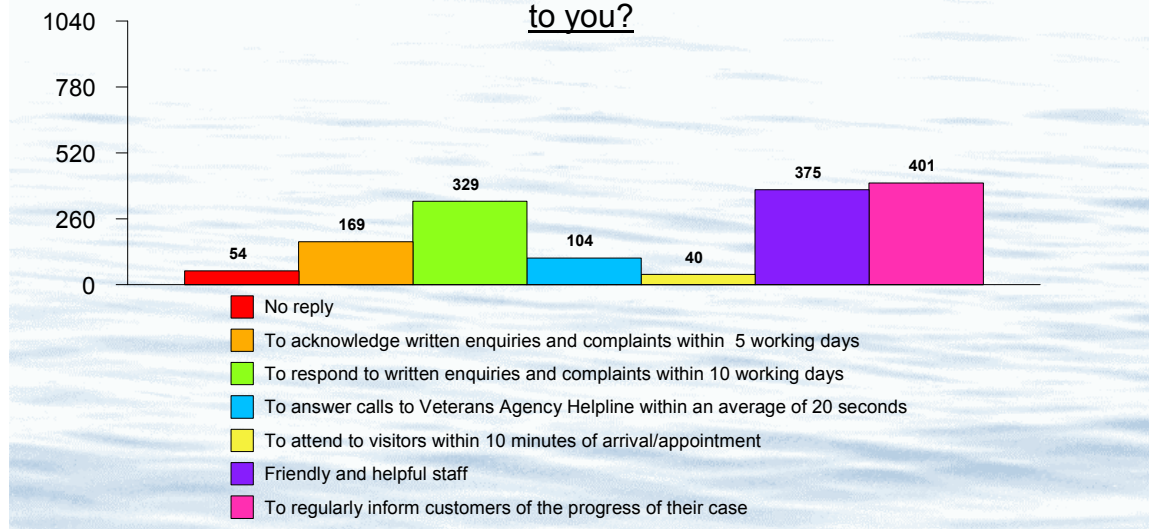
Although the majority, 815 (78%) customers felt that the time taken to finalise the claim was “Very quick”, “Quick” or “Acceptable”, 182 (18%) stated it was either “Slow” or “Too slow”. This does however; highlight a 3% decrease on the negative response when compared to the Main Claim Survey 2004 when 218 (21%) stated the same. One person selected more than one option.

If your claim was unsuccessful, did we make it clear why not?



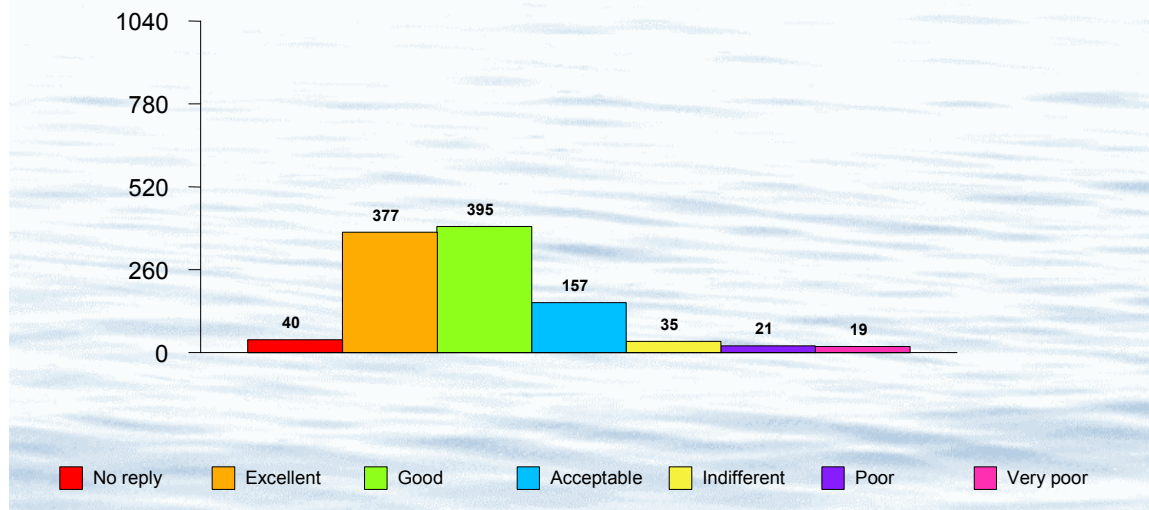
Of the 467 customers who received a non-favourable award, 122 (26%) stated that they did not understand the reason for decision given to them. This percentage has vastly improved when compared to the Main Claim Survey 2004 in which the result was 206 (44%).

Veterans Agency has targets and service standards that it recognises as important to customers. Please tick the statement you feel is most important to you?



The most important standard of service to our customers following this year's survey is "To regularly inform customers of the progress of their case" with the majority, 401 (39%), selecting this option. For the Main Claim Survey 2003 and 2004, the most important standard was "Friendly and helpful staff" which this year is the second choice for our customers.

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



The majority of customers, 929 (89%), stated that they felt the overall service they received from the Agency was "Excellent", "Good" or "Acceptable". This highlights a slight increase of 1% when compared to the Main Claim Survey 2004. The ratings of "Indifferent", "Poor" and "Very Poor" have remained unchanged with 75 (7%) customers indicating this option. Four customers selected more than one option, which is reflected in the above graph.

The final question asked for thoughts or ideas on how the Agency can further improve the service provided. This attracted numerous comments, many of which were praising the Agency. Other comments included:

“You could inform veterans about claiming for a War Pension, I am over 80 and did not know I could claim until last year, I could have had a pension all my life”

“The forms need to be redrafted as I had to enter the same information several times to different questions”

“Include the website address on all literature”

“I was awarded free prescriptions for my condition, this award is on a piece of paper which is not going to fair well for long. A plastic credit style card with my details on would be much better”

“A yearly newsletter – re achievements made during the year and proposals for the following year”

“Although my claim was unsuccessful you did explain why and I was satisfied with your explanation”

“As my claim was due to my poor and deteriorating eyesight, it would have been extremely beneficial to me if your claim form had been in large print therefore showing that the VA were both sensitive and responsive to its customers needs.”

“I have always been happy with the way you have dealt with my claims over the years”