



WIDOWS GROUP CUSTOMER PERCEPTION SURVEY 2005

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WIDOWS GROUP CUSTOMER PERCEPTION SURVEY 2005

1. Introduction

The Veterans Agency (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 contacted our Widows Group. The results of this exercise are detailed in the 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. Objectives

The objective of this customer research is to assist the VA in establishing 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 includes:

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

4. Customer Samples

This survey concentrates on customers who had specifically contacted our Widows Group. The Business Requirement Team provided an extract from the War Pension Computer System of a random sample of 1000 decisions, both favourable and unfavourable. One thousand questionnaires were issued during April 2005. There was a response rate of 514 (51%), which is high when benchmarked against public and private sector organisations who have an average expected response rate of 30-35%.

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 reduce ambiguity. This provides a more accurate reflection of customer perception of the service provided by the Agency.

6. Management Summary – Overall Key Findings

One thousand questionnaires issued elicited a response rate of 514 (51%). This is a slight decrease of 20 (2%) returned questionnaires from last year’s response rate. Of the 1000 questionnaires issued 478 were issued to widows who had been given a favourable decision and 522 issued to widows who had been given an unfavourable decision. To enable accurate analysis the decision box this year was completed prior to issue. Of those returned 338 (66%) were from customers who had received a favourable decision and 176 (34%) were from customers who had received an unfavourable decision.

Number of returned questionnaires by age group –

16-30	-	2
31-50	-	26
51-70	-	121
Over 70	-	340

When asked how they found obtaining information on applying for a War Widows/Widowers pension 49 (10%) customers stated “Difficult” or “Very difficult”. When comparing this to last year’s survey this highlights an increase of 14 (3%). When analysed by age the results show that 33 (10%) of our aged over 70 customers have stated they found it “Difficult” or “Very difficult” to get information on how to make a claim. 267 (52%) customers obtained information from the Veterans Agency and 98 (19%) from the War Pensioners’ Welfare Service.

Of the 437 customers who completed a claim form 327 (75%) thought it "Very easy" or "Easy" to complete. 91 (21%) found it either "Difficult" or "Very difficult" to complete.

Comments received included:

"The questions sometimes contradicted themselves also, often mentioned the hard of hearing but not the blind"

"Wording medical information"

As with previous surveys the majority of customers, 320 (62%), prefer to contact the Agency by telephone. However, when asked how they prefer the Agency to contact them, the majority, 338 (66%), advised "In writing". As with previous Widow Group surveys the least popular mode of communication continues to be by email or fax.

When asked if they were aware the Agency had a website on the Internet, 145 (28%) customers stated that they were aware, with 13 (9%) advising they had used it. As the inclusion of this question is new to this customer group there is no previous years data to compare against. The analysis shows that the 51-70 age group have the highest percent of awareness of the website with 41 (34%) advising of this.

Customers were asked how often they wish to be updated on their claim, the majority advised they would like to receive details every four weeks or less, with 283 (55%) stating this.

When asked their thoughts on the time taken to respond to their correspondence, 88 (85%) of the 104 customers who wrote to the Agency advised that this was "Excellent", "Good" or "Acceptable". When compared to last year's figures this shows a percentage increase of 15%.

Customers were asked to advise on the clarity of information given in writing during the whole claims process, 421 (82%) stated that the clarity of information given was "Clear". The minority, 32 (6%) stated that this information was "Not clear".

Comments received in the "Other" category included:

"I found it fairly clear but not understandable"

Of the 176 customers who received an unfavourable decision, 95 (54%) understood why this was from the notification provided to them. This shows an increase of 29 (16%) when compared to last year's results within the same category. When analysed by age group the results show that 13 (32%) within the age group 51-70 did not find the notification clear.

As with previous surveys conducted within the Widows Group the results give clear evidence that the group provides a good to excellent service. Of the 514 customers returning the questionnaires, 417 (81%) rated the overall service, as "Excellent" or "Good". This shows an increase of 34 (7%) on last year's

results. When considering the categories “Excellent”, “Good” and “Acceptable” the customer response to the overall service received has increased to 461 (90%) compared to last year’s response figure of 448 (84%).

7. Progress

In the Widows Group Survey 2004 customers commented on the content and style of the letters and forms received from the Agency. One of the comments stated:

“Take into consideration that forms and queries may involve dealing with elderly persons. They should be very clear and easy to understand.”

The Agency continues to take steps to ensure that all correspondence is clear and accurate, including the ongoing review of all forms and letters. Widows group are now able to include, where necessary, any personal or additional information relating to each individual, ensuring clear and relevant details are provided.

Results of this review are highlighted within the report. Customers were asked to advise on the clarity of information given in writing during the whole claims process. The outcome of this years survey highlights an improvement of 7% within this area when compared to the Widows Group Survey 2004.

8. Areas for Improvement

When asked how easy the claim form was to complete the majority of customers, 327 (75%) stated “Very easy” or “Easy”. However, a large number of comments were received advising that this was only the case due to the help and advice given by the VA at Norcross and the regional visiting welfare officers.

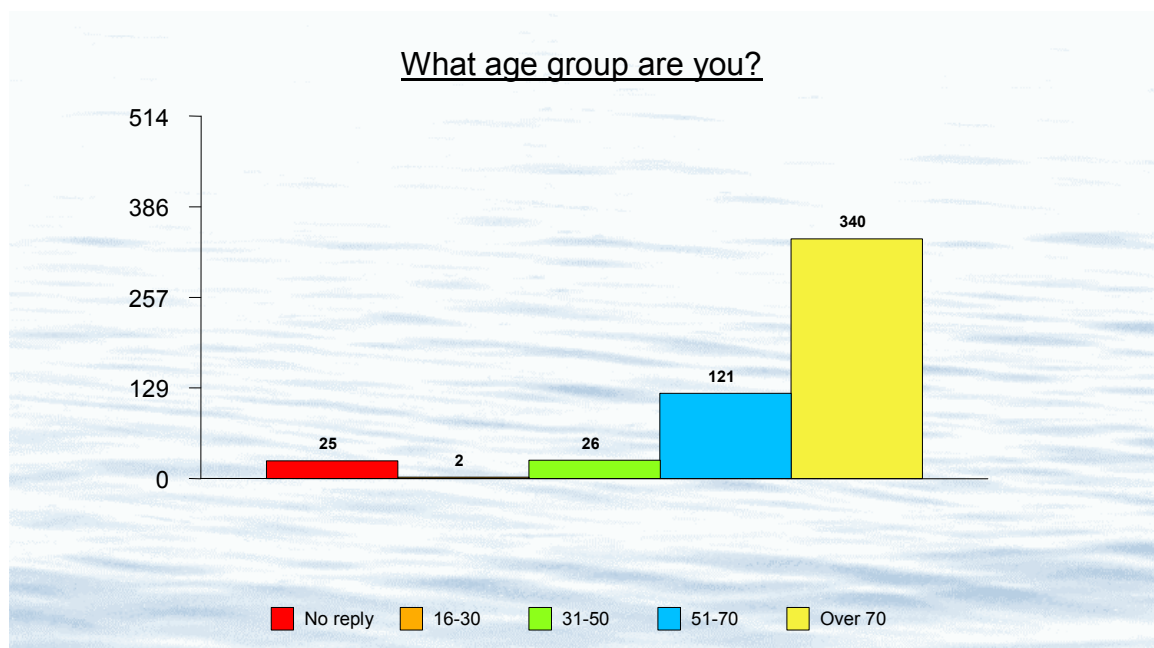
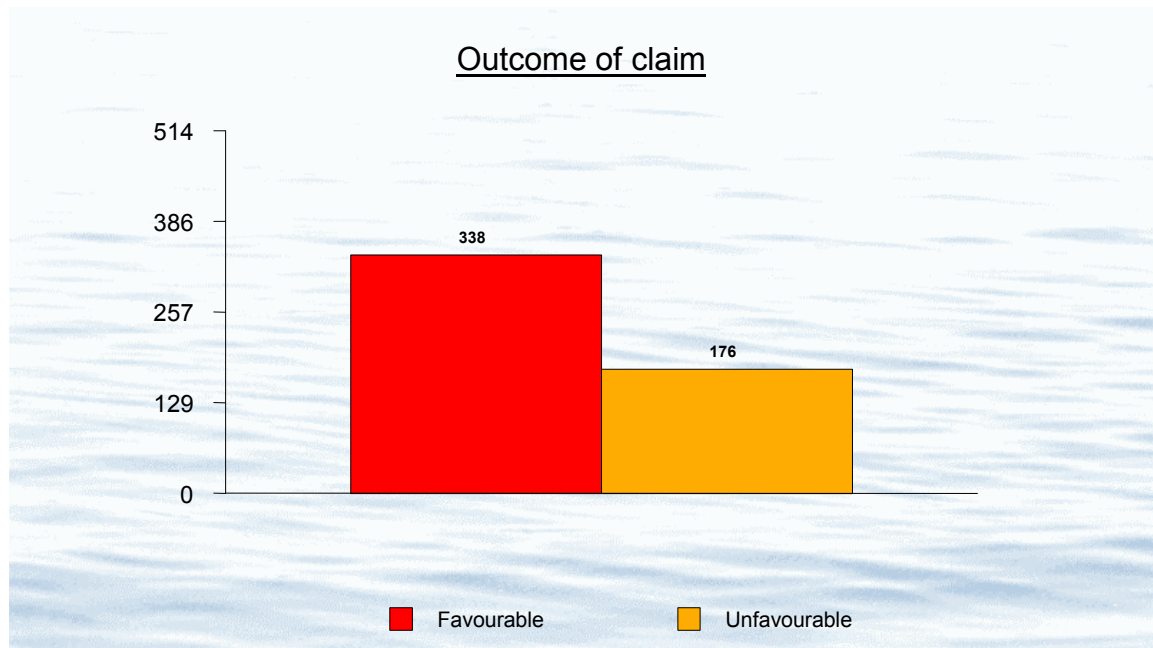
- 1. VA to further publicise the availability of help from VA at Norcross and regional welfare officers with the completion of the widows/widowers claim form. Consider highlighting this on page 2 of the claim form and including it as the first statement in the accompanying leaflet.**

Customers commented on the large amount of information given to them during a time of bereavement. In particular the leaflets provided from various sources, commenting on the Leaflet 1 issued by VA, which includes details for both War Disablement claims and War Widows/Widowers claims.

- 2. VA to consider VA Leaflet 1 and the possibility of dividing into two separate leaflets.**

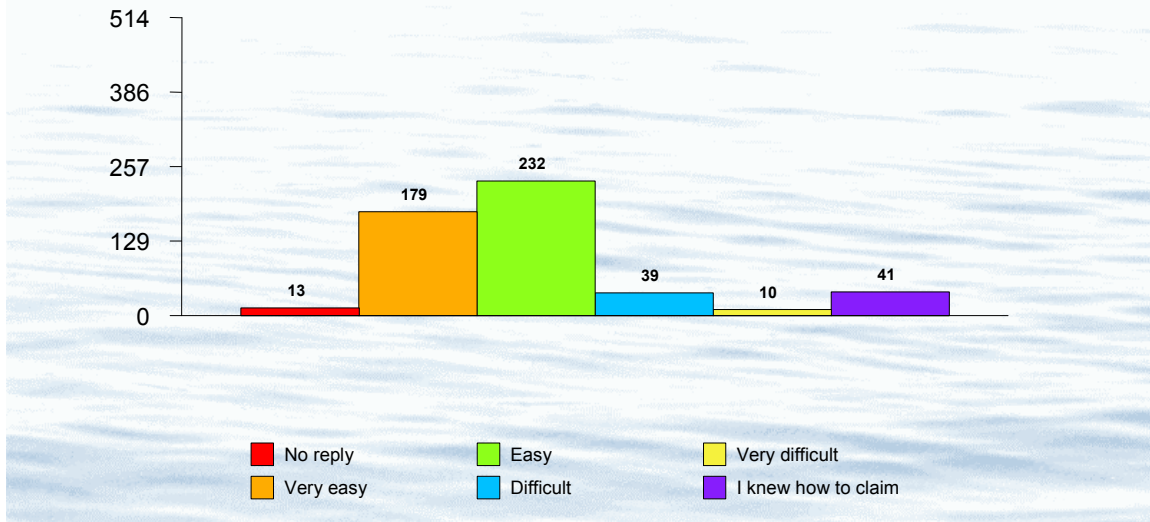
9. Survey Results – Widows Group

The presentation of the analysis follows the same order as the questionnaire issued to customers. Although the questionnaires were issued to a totally random sample, we are able to separate responses in respect of favourable and unfavourable 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.



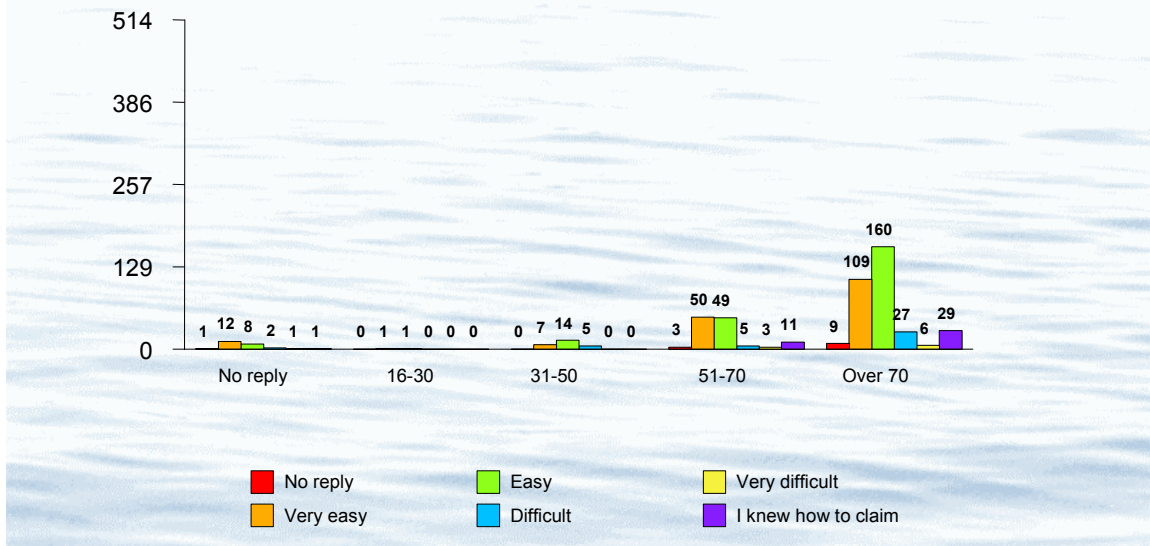
Part 1 - ACCESS AND CONTACT

How did you find getting information on how to make a claim for a War Widows/Widowers pension?



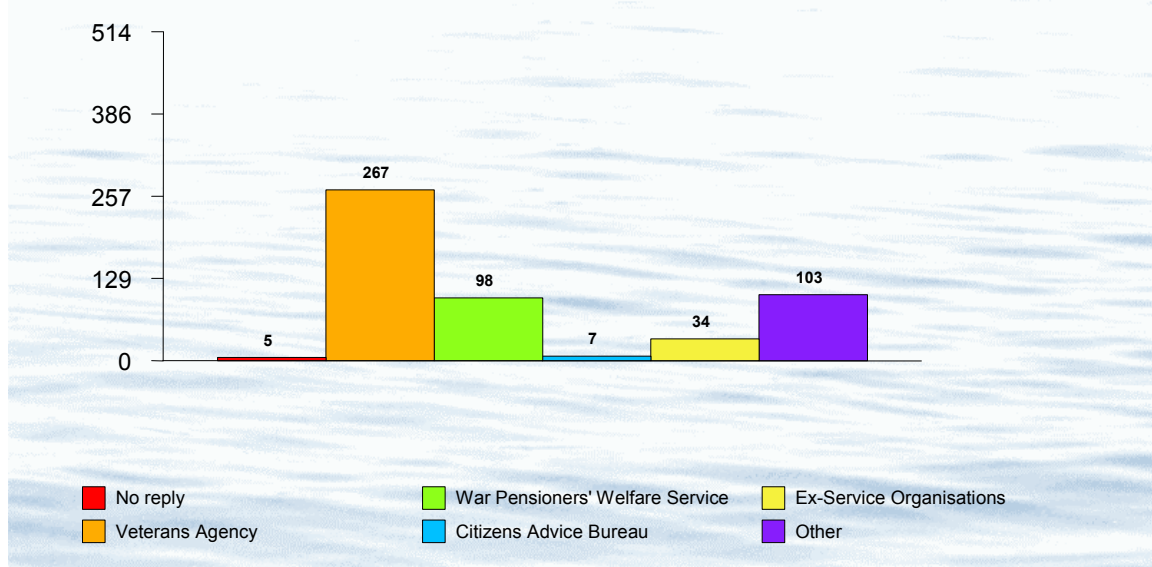
The results show the majority of customers 411 (80%) found the information on how to apply for a War Widows pension to be “Very Easy” or “Easy” to obtain. The answer to the same question in the Widows Survey 2004 was 85% showing a slight decrease this year of 5%. However, the number of customers who were already aware of how to claim has increased this year from 32 (6%) to 41 (8%).

How did you find getting information on how to make a claim? By age group



33 (10%) customers in the over 70-age group found obtaining information on how to make a claim “Difficult” or “Very difficult”.

Where did you get the information on how to apply for a War Widows/Widowers pension?



As with last year's survey, the majority, 365 (71%), respondents obtained information about the War Widows pension from either the Veterans Agency at Norcross or regionally from our War Pensioners Welfare Service.

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

"War Graves commission"

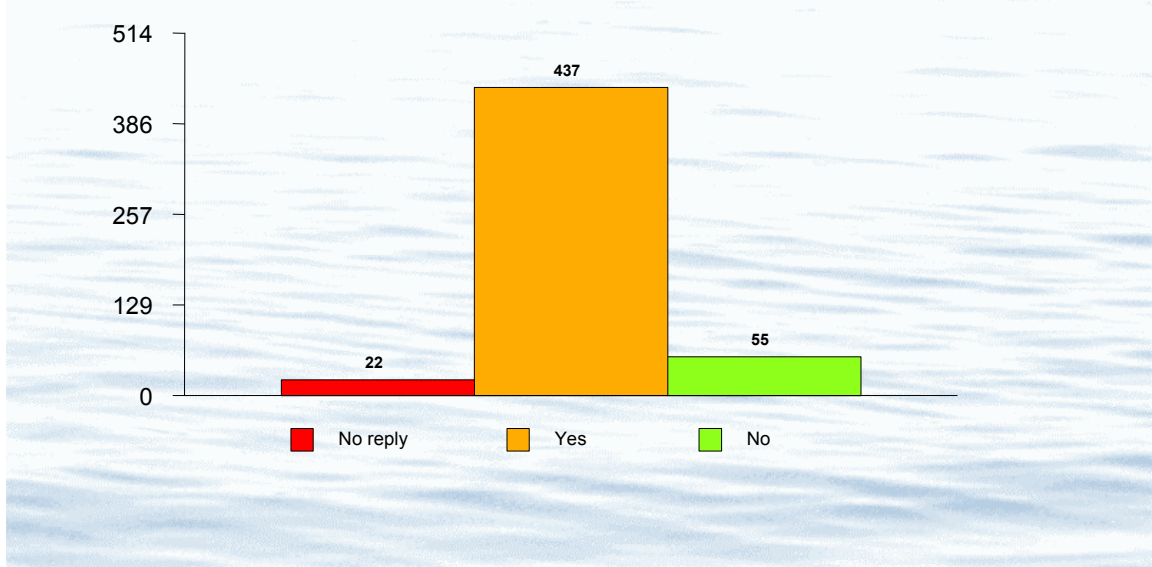
"BLESMA"

"RBL"

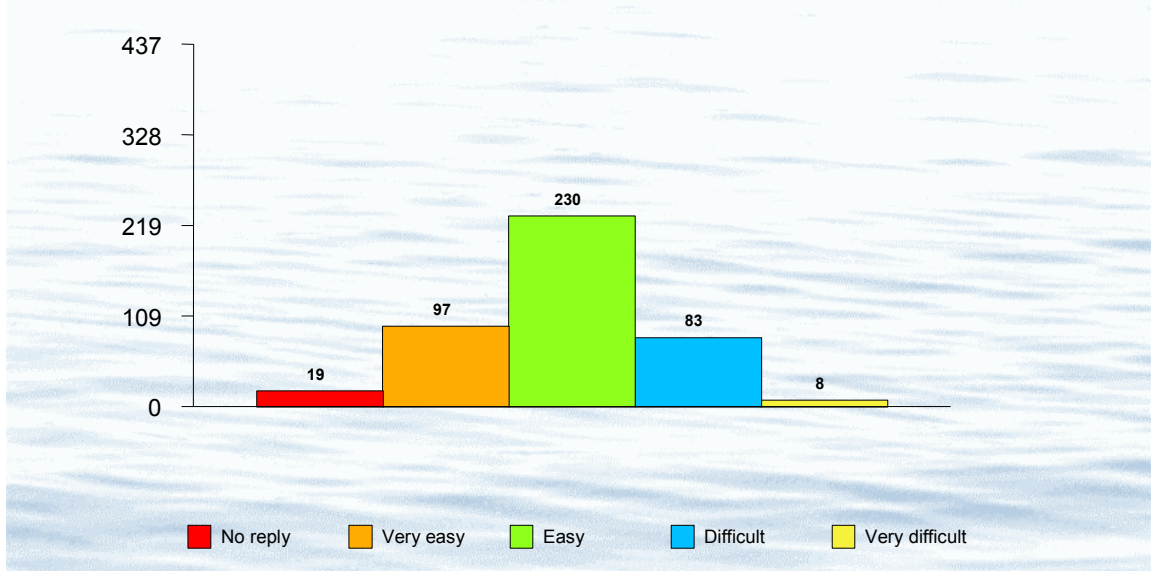
"I read about it in a magazine"

"I heard a radio program"

Did you have to complete a claim form in relation to the War Widows/Widowers pension?

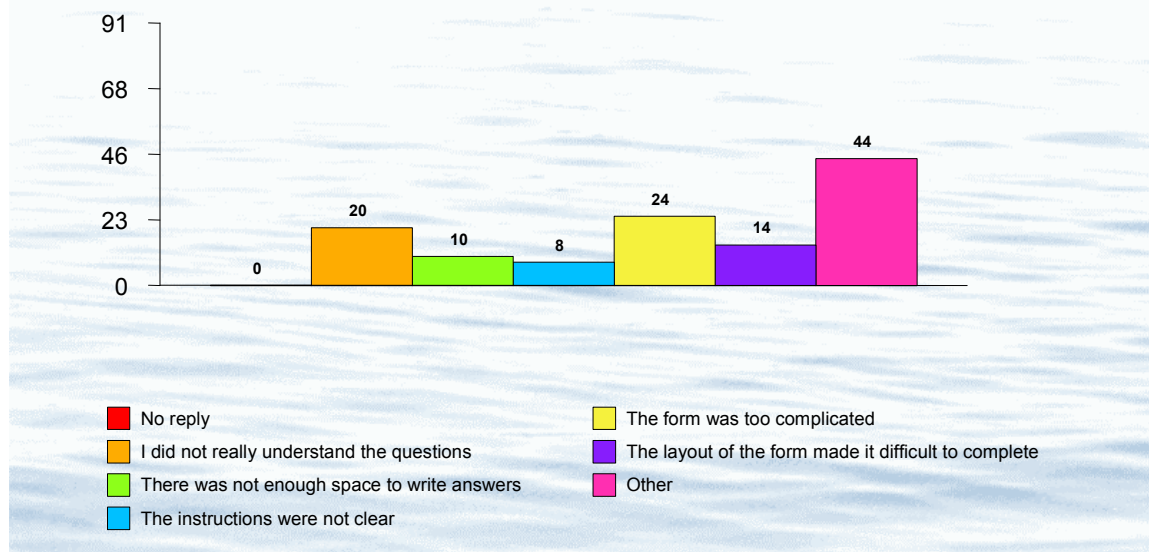


How easy was it to complete?



Of the 437 customers who completed a claim form 91 (21%) rated the claim form “Difficult” or “Very difficult” to complete. This is an increase of 11% on last year’s figures, which also highlighted an increase of 4% on the previous years results. 77 (85%) of the 91 customers who found the claim form difficult to complete were in the over 70-age range.

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

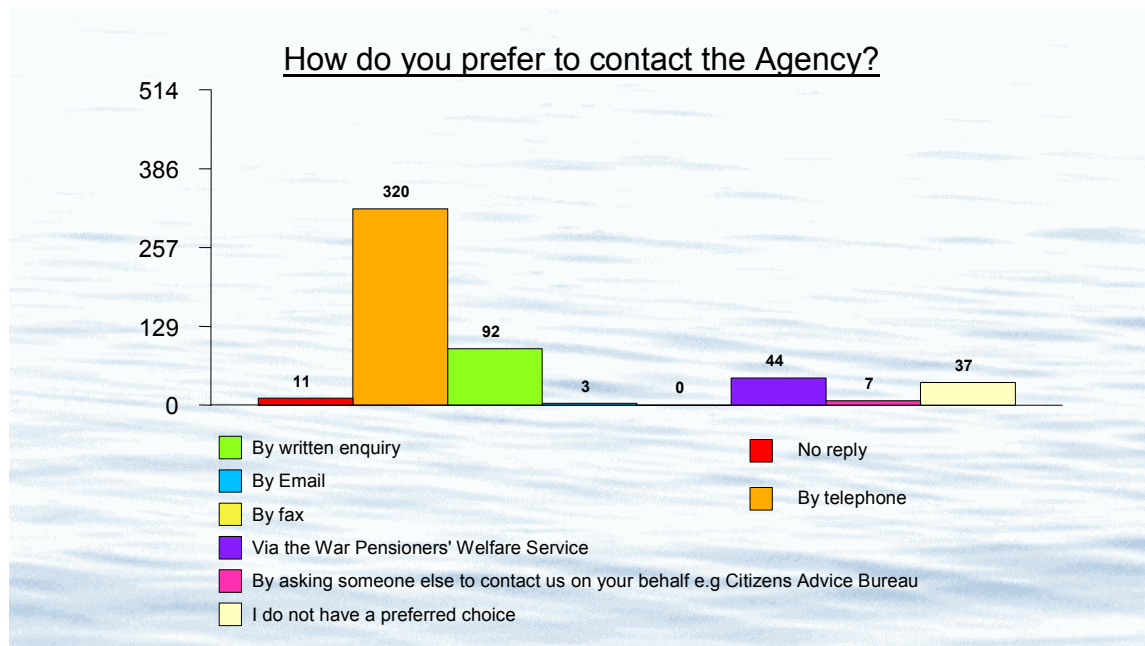


Although 91 customers advised they had difficulties completing the claim form, when asked what these difficulties were 120 replies were received. This indicates that customers found several areas of difficulty with the form. The majority 44 (37%) found the form too complicated and did not understand the questions. The “Others” category attracted many comments, including:

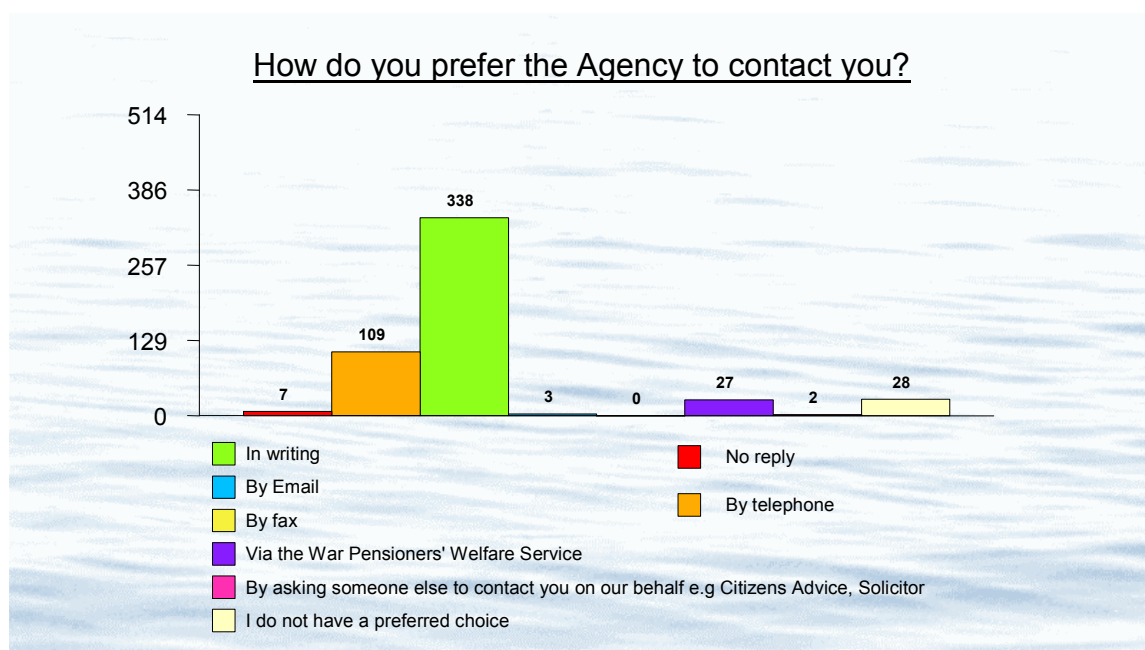
"The questions sometimes contradicted themselves also, often mentioned the hard of hearing but not the blind"

"Rep from VA filled/helped me to fill it in"

Many of the comments received advised that the Veterans Agency at Norcross or one of the regional welfare visitors helped in the completion of the claim form.

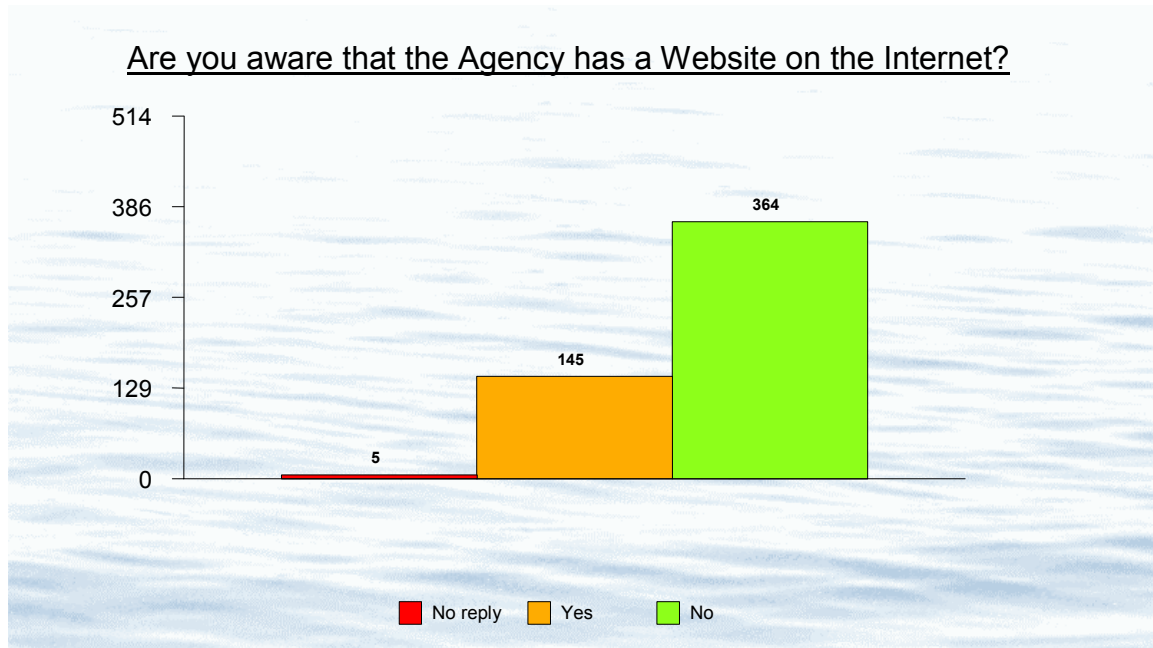


When asked how they preferred to contact the Agency the majority, 320 (62%), advised that their preference was by telephone. This continues to be the customers preferred choice for contacting the Agency, which has been reflected in previous years surveys.



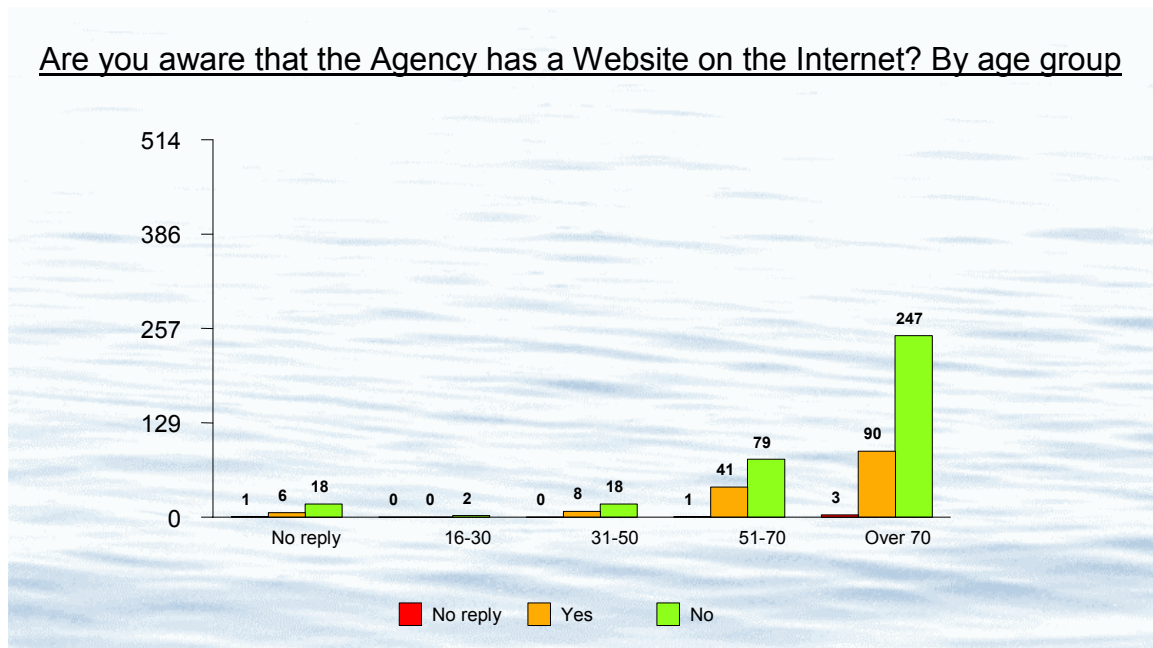
Although as indicated, customers first choice to contact the Agency is by telephone, when asked how they prefer the Agency to contact them, the majority, 338 (66%) advised “In writing”. The preferred choice mirrors the Widows Survey 2004 with clear indications for the more traditional methods of contact, written contact taking precedence over telephone contact with little interest shown in Email or Fax.

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

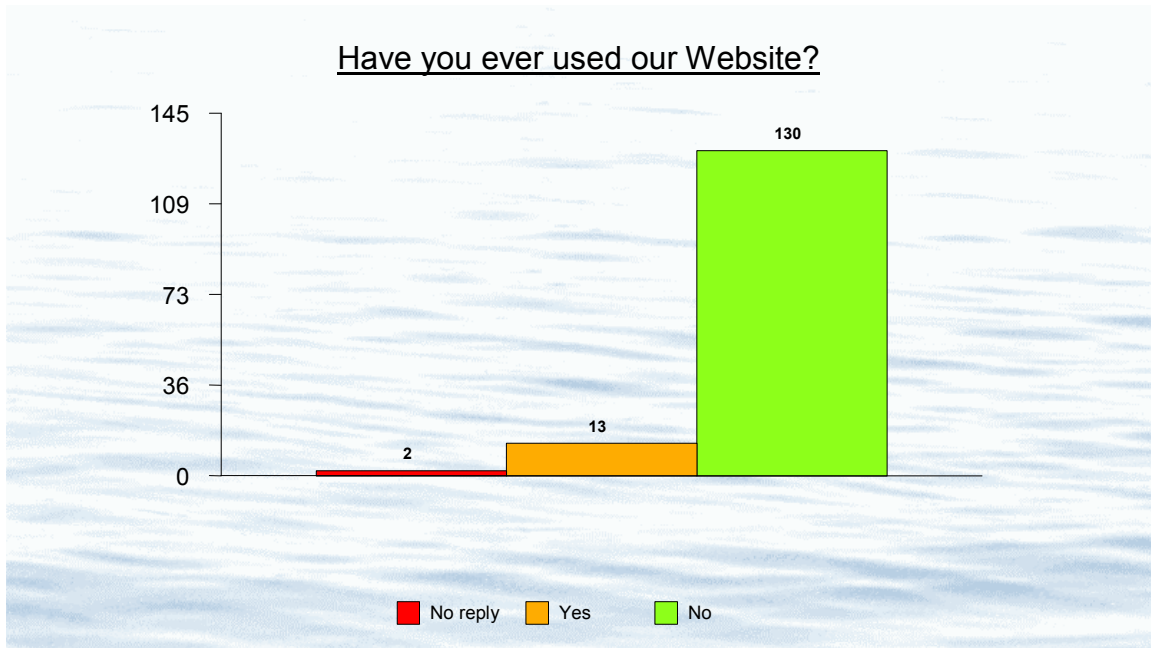


This question was introduced for the first time in this year's survey. 145 (28%) customers advised that they were aware the Agency has a website on the Internet.

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

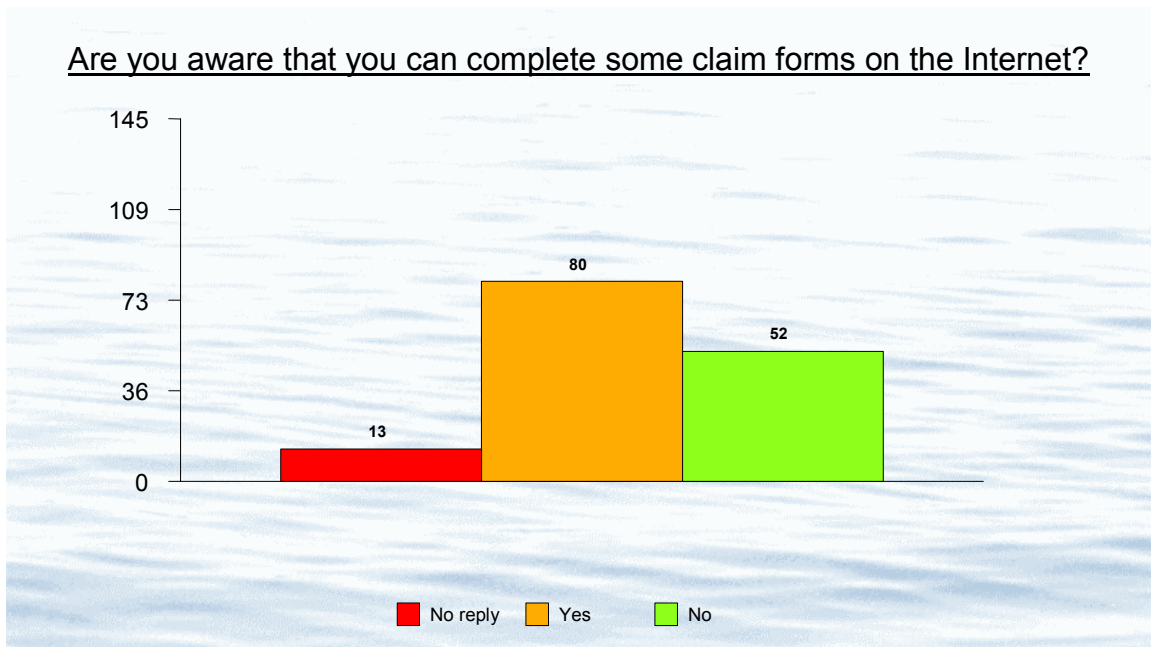


When analysed using age segmentation the results indicate that 41 (34%) customers in the 51-70 age group are aware of the Agency website on the Internet.



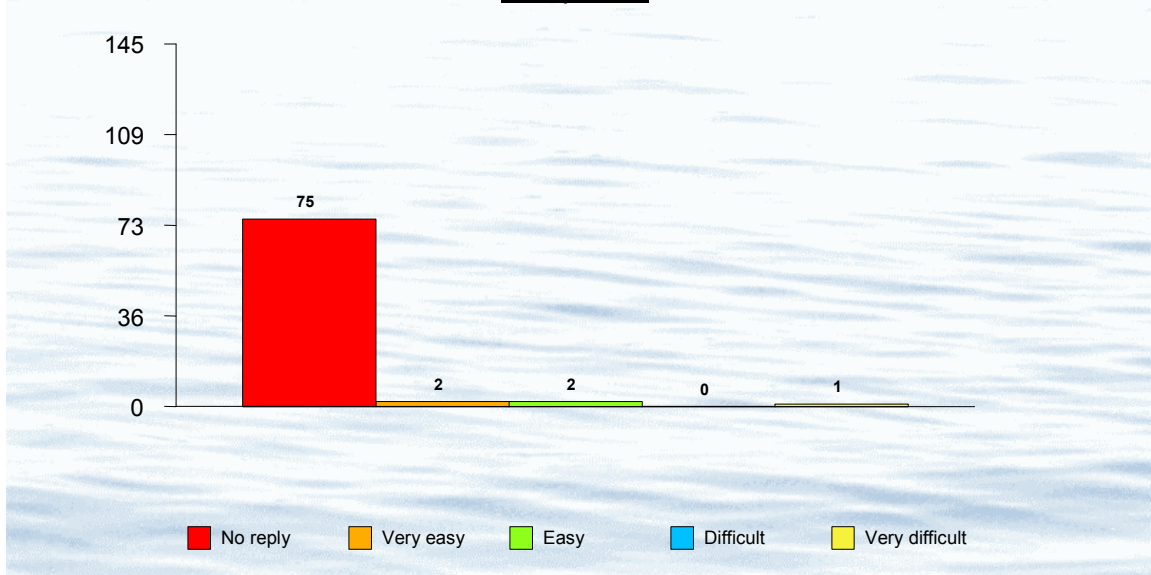
Although 145 customers indicated they were aware of the website, only 13 (9%) advised that they have used it.

As with the Main Claims Survey 2004 the majority of reasons given for not using the website were due to customers not understanding or possessing a computer.



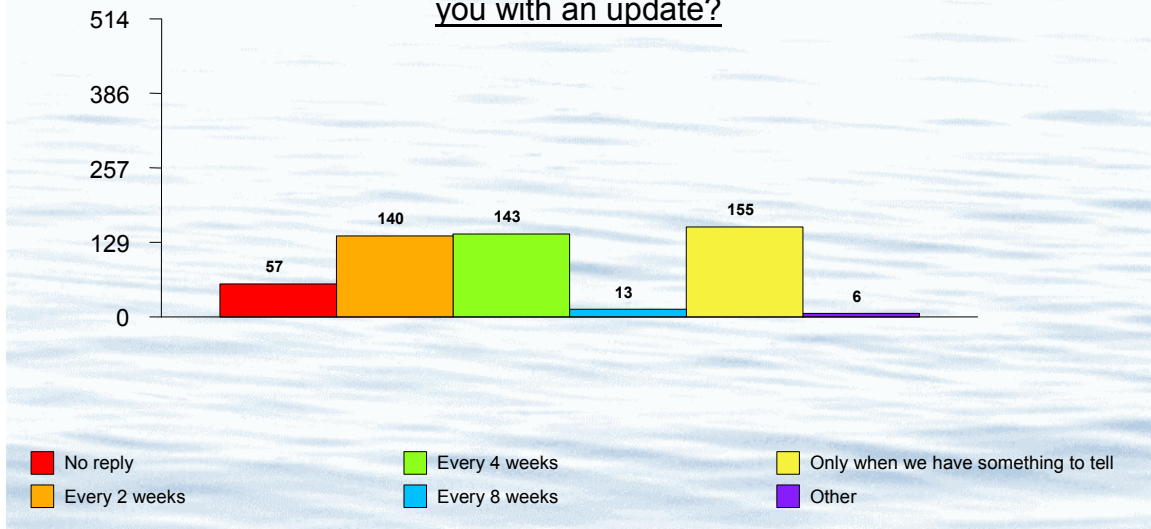
Of the 145 customers aware of the website, 80 (55%) indicated that they were aware that some claims forms were available to complete on the Internet.

If you have completed one of our forms on the Internet, how did you find it to complete?



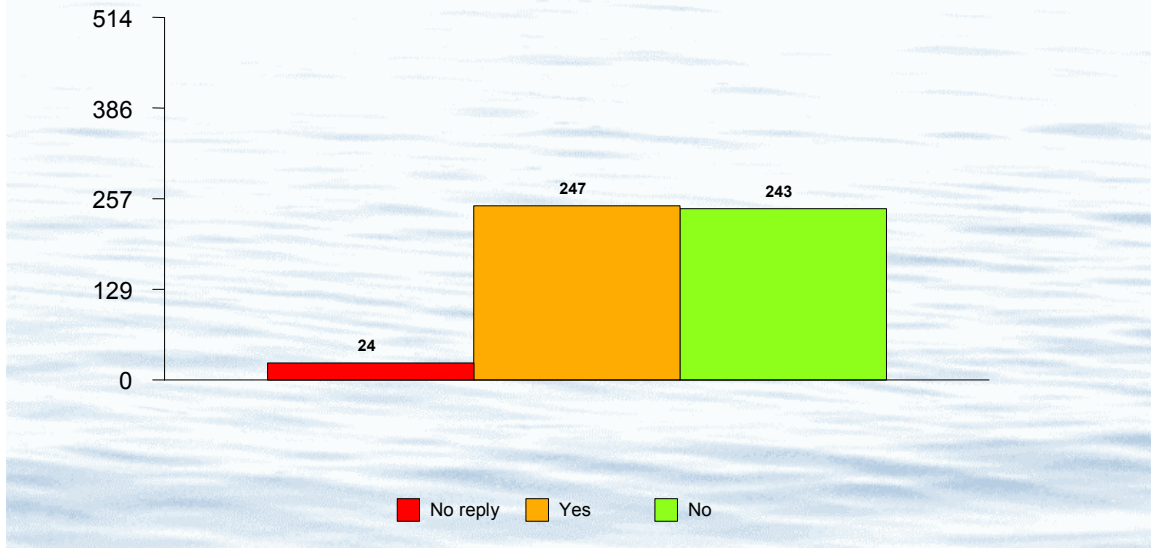
5 customers advised that they had completed claim forms on the Internet. 4 (80%) found the form “Very easy” or “Easy” to complete, with 1 (20%) advising that the form was “Very difficult”.

Our War Widows/Widowers section aims to give you a decision on your claim within a 25 working day period. How often do you think we should provide you with an update?



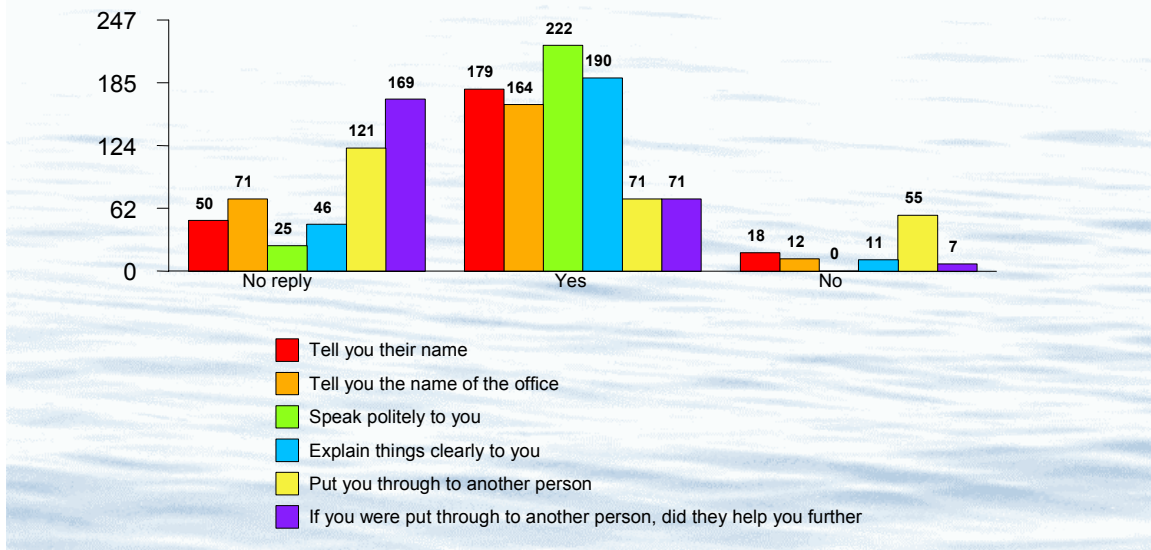
The majority of customers, 283 (55%), stated that they require an update every 4 weeks or less. As with the Widows Group Survey 2004 the single highest preferred option continues to be “Only when we have something to tell”, with 155 (30%) customers stating this.

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



The number of customers who contacted the Agency during their claims process has risen slightly this year from 169 (32%) to 247 (48%).

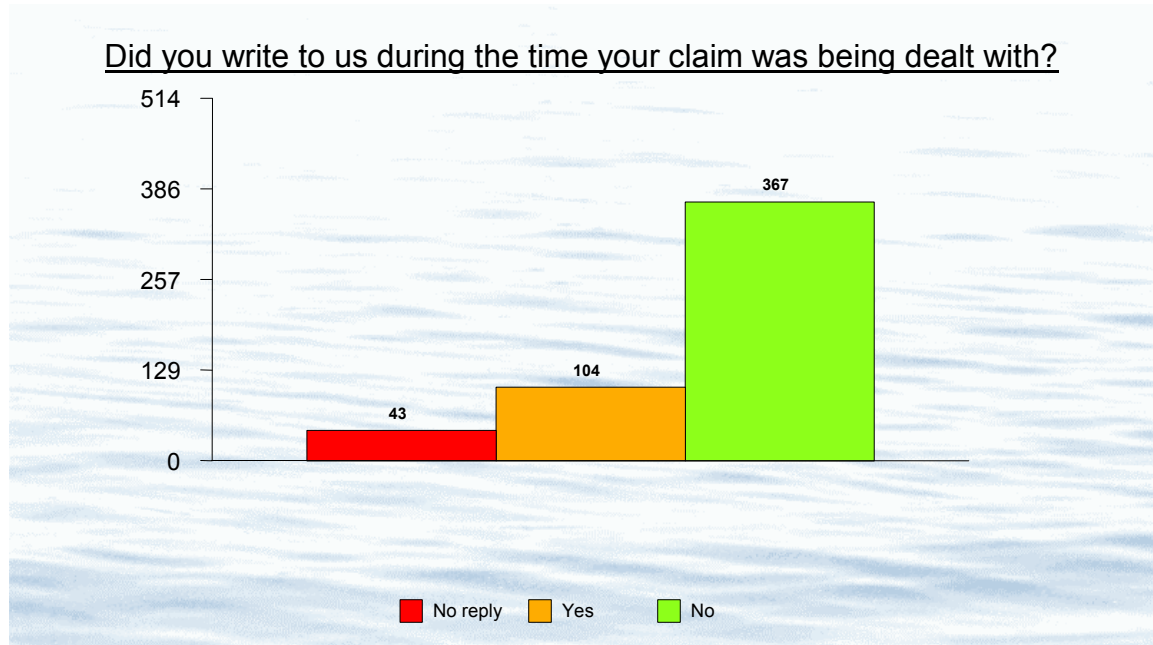
Did the person you spoke to:



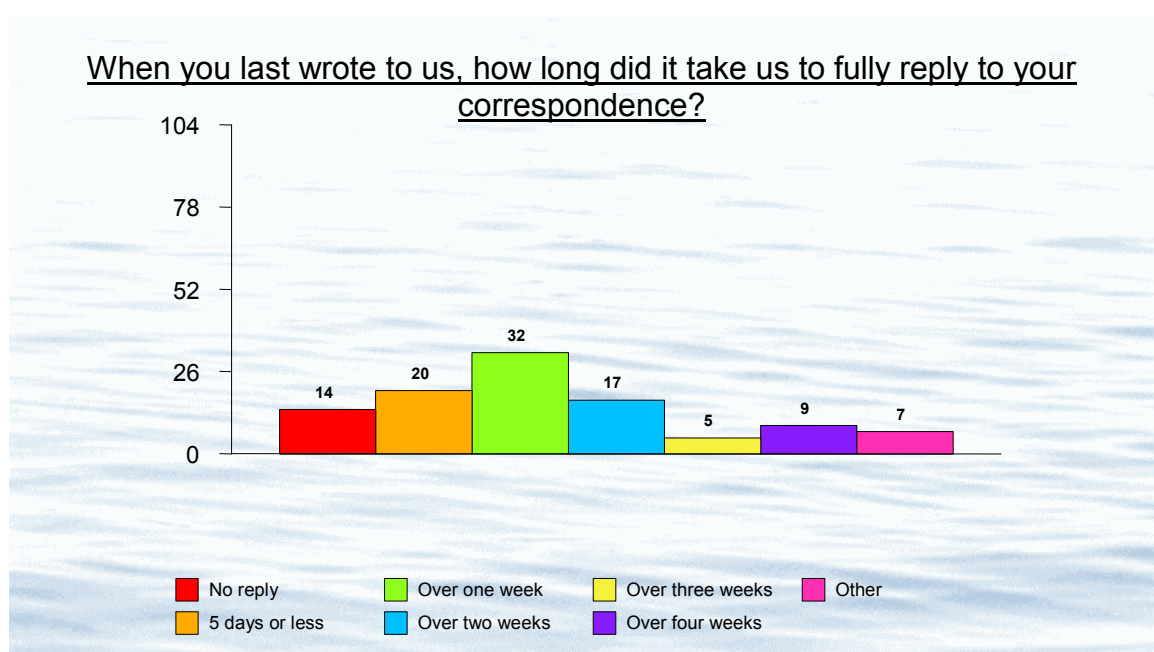
Of the 247 customers who contacted the Agency by telephone, 222 (90%) felt that they had been spoken to politely, with 190 (77%) advising they had information explained clearly to them. All of the 71 customers who were “Put through to another person” stated that they had been helped further. As with previous surveys these results show positive feedback with regards to not only the Helpline team, but the Widows Group who also take telephone calls from our customers. Many comments were received from customers with the majority praising the Agency at Norcross and our regional Welfare Officers for the help and advice given.

Part 2 – RESPONSE TIMES

Part two of the survey sought to establish the Agency's response rates to correspondence, telephone calls and customer's perception of our response.

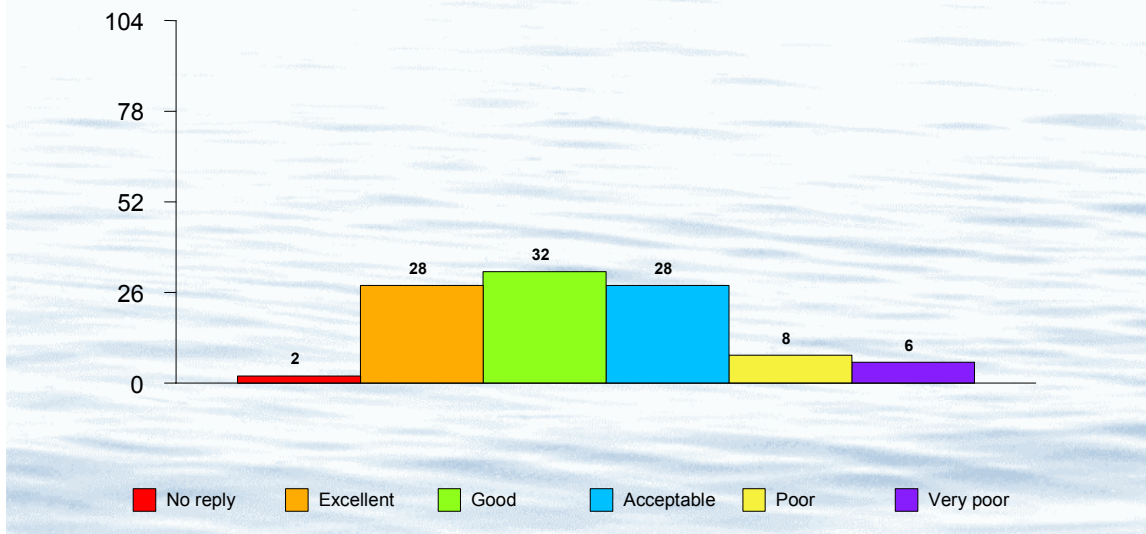


104 (20%) customers advised that they had contacted the Agency during the time their claim was being dealt with.



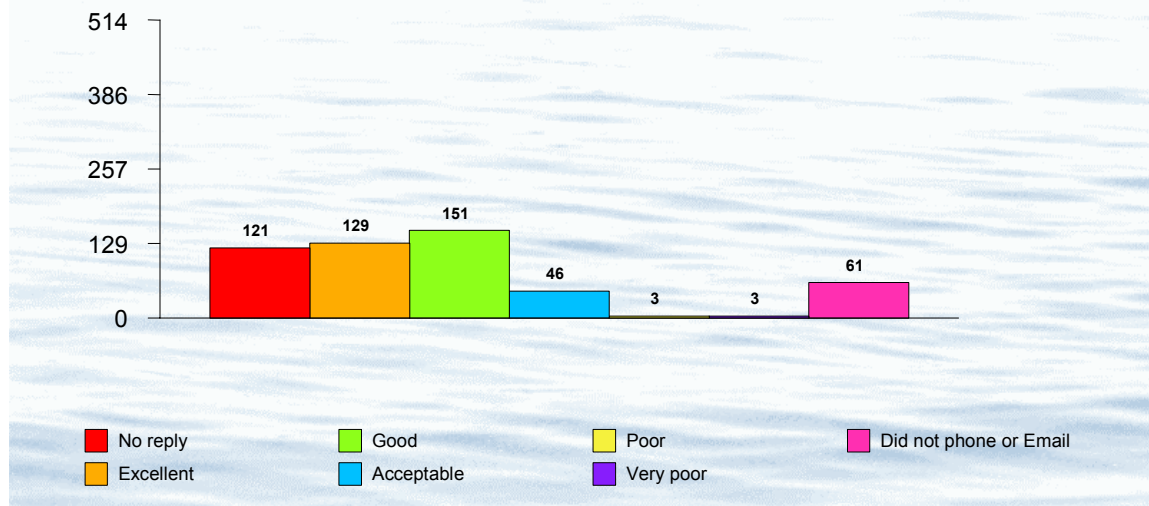
Of the 104 customers who wrote to the Agency 69 (66%) stated that they received a reply to their correspondence within less than three weeks.

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



Although 31 (30%) customers said it took over two weeks or more to reply, 88 (85%) customers considered this to be either “Acceptable”, “Good” or “Excellent”. 14 (13%) found the response time to be either “Poor” or “Very poor”.

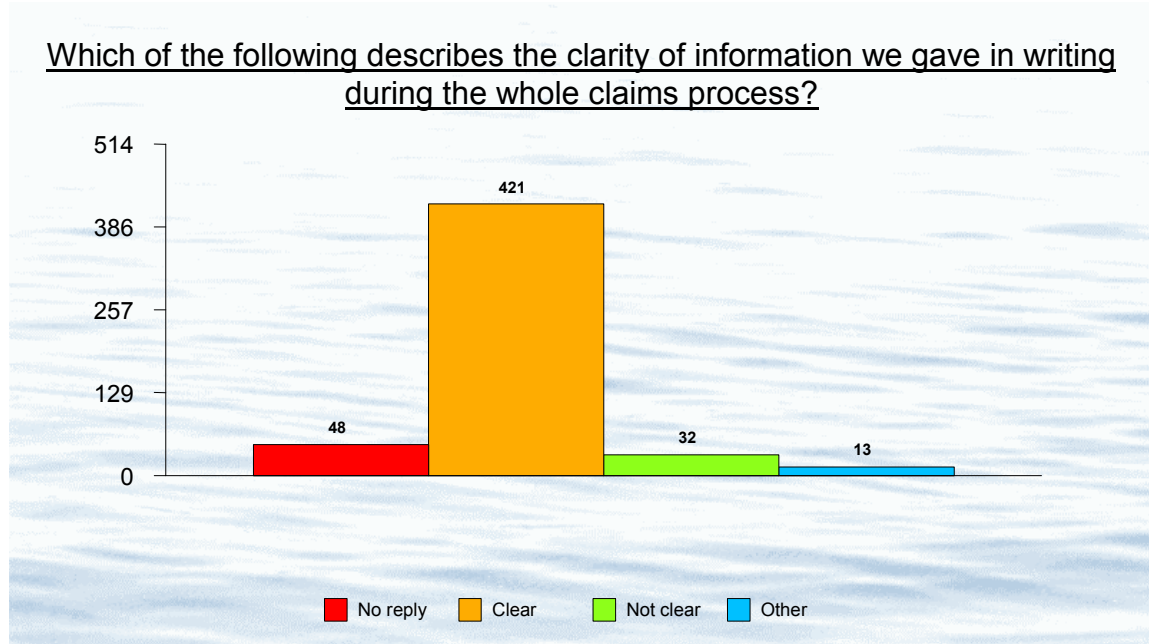
If you have telephoned or Emailed us, do you consider the time taken to respond to your telephone call or Email was:



Of the 453 customers who contacted the Agency by telephone or email, 280 (62%) considered the time taken to respond to their enquiry was “Excellent” or “Good”.

Part 3 – SERVICE QUALITY

Part 3 of the questionnaire was centred on the customer's perception of the quality of service.



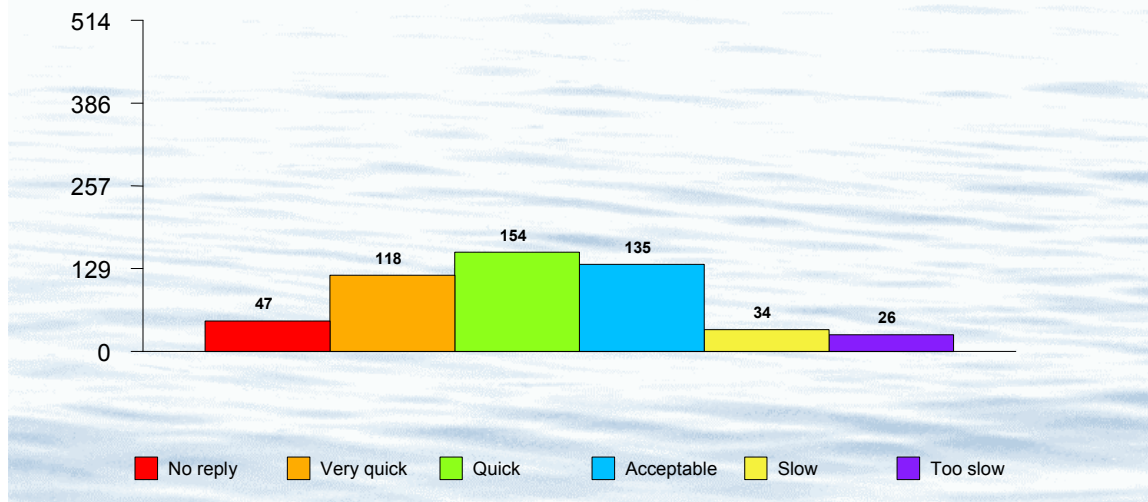
This question asked customers about the clarity of information received from the Agency. As the "Mostly clear" category has been omitted from this year's questionnaire, by adding the "Clear" and "Mostly clear" results from the 2004 report we can ascertain a comparison. 421 (82%) customers said the information given was "Clear", with 32 (6%) stating, "Not clear". This shows that the clarity of information has increased this year by 7% when compared with last year's surveys.

Comments received from the "Other" category included:

"I found it fairly clear but not understandable"

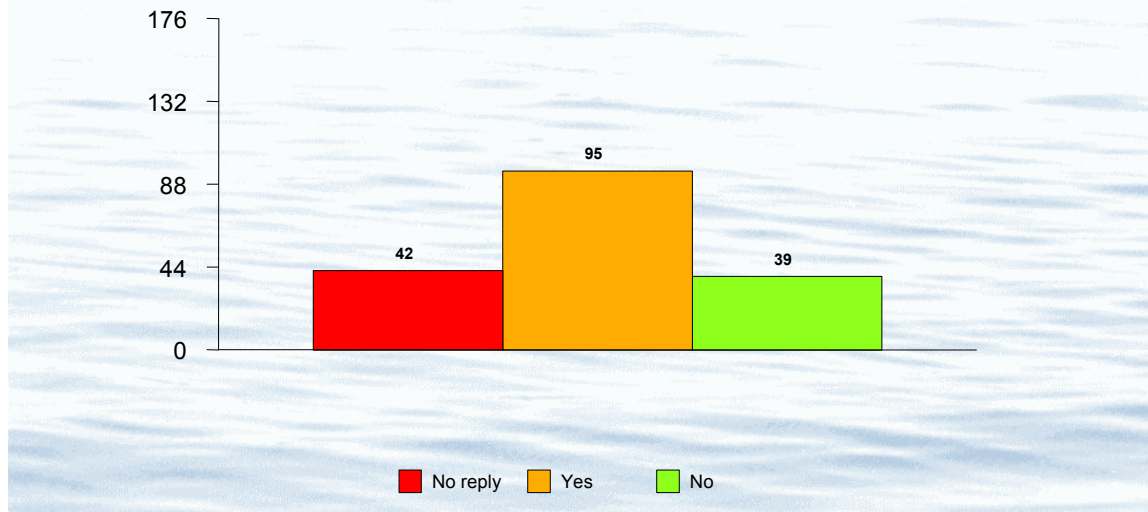
"Could be in a more plain English format"

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



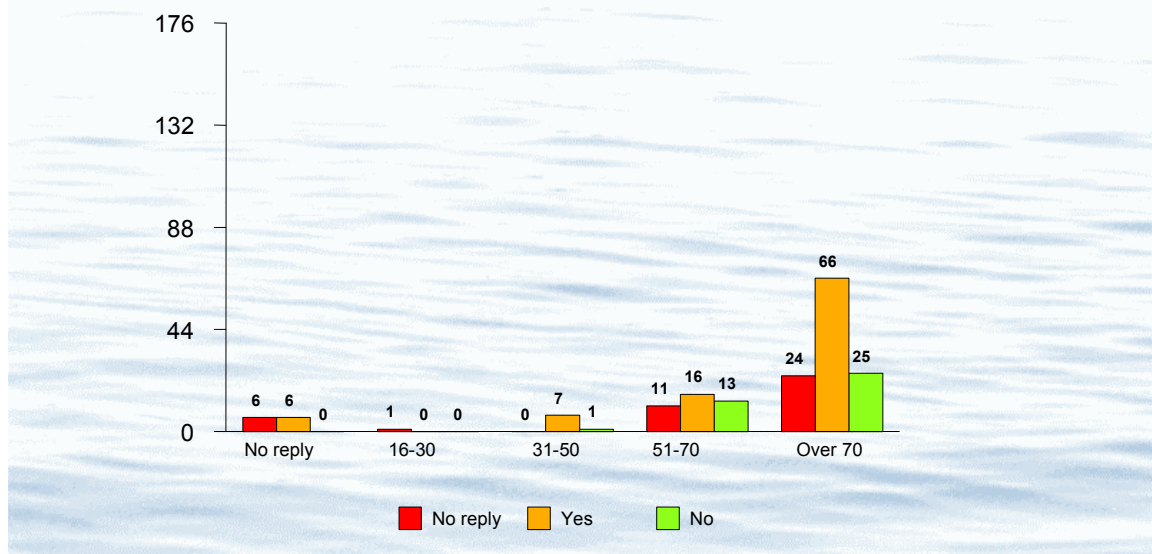
Although the majority, 407 (79%) of customers felt that the time taken to finalise the claim was “Very quick”, “Quick” or “Acceptable”, 60 (12%) stated that this was either “Slow” or “Too slow”.

If your claim was unsuccessful, did we make it clear why not in the notification we sent you?



Of the 176 customers who received an unfavourable decision to their claim, 95 (54%) understood the reason for rejection. This shows a 14% increase when compared to the results of the Widows Group 2004 survey.

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



Of the 115 customers within the Over 70 age range who replied to the question, 66 (57%) advised that they understood the reasons given for the unfavourable decision.

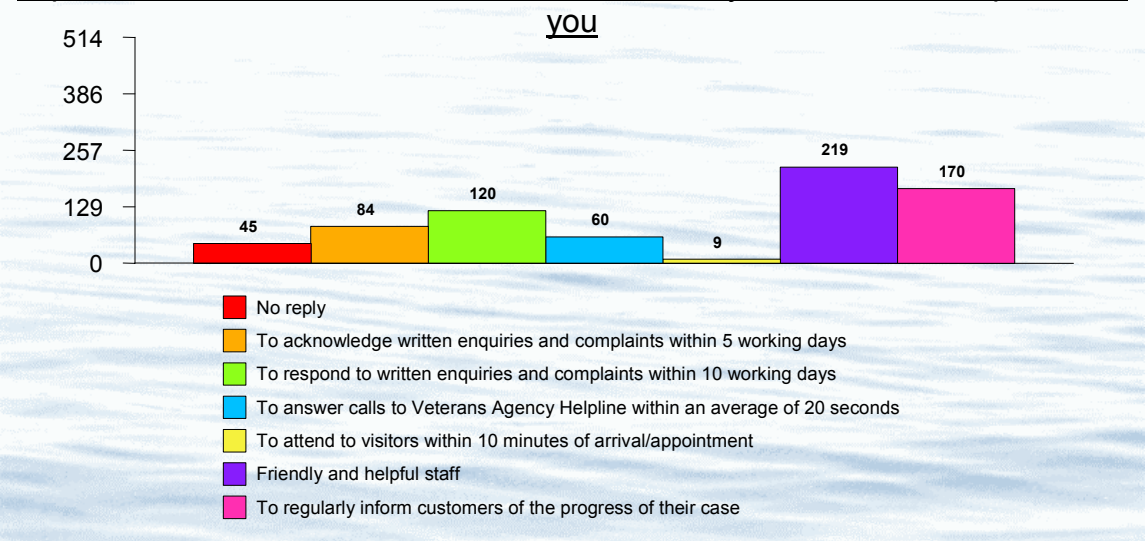
Customers were asked to provide comments if they did not understand the reasons provided to them. These included:

"It just said I was not entitled to a War Widows pension"

"It did not clarify why I did not fall into the correct category"

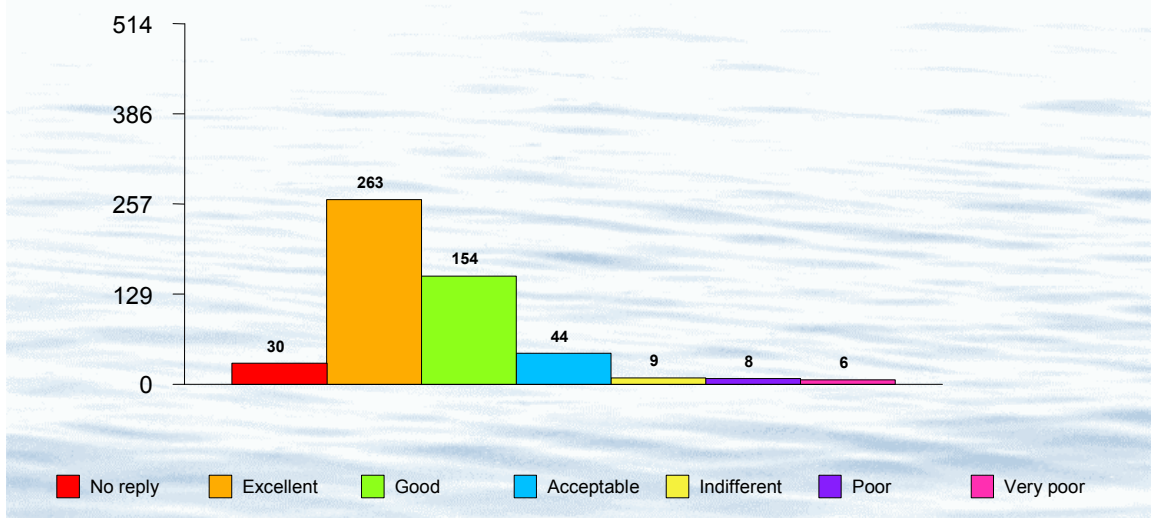
"It did not match the information we had been told"

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



As with all previous surveys conducted by the Agency the most important standard of service as advised by our customers is “Friendly and helpful staff”. The survey indicates that customers feel the least important standard of service is “To attend to visitors within 10 minutes of arrival/appointment”.

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



This question asked customers to rate the overall service received from the Agency. The majority, 461 (90%) indicated that the overall service was either “Excellent” “Good” or “Acceptable” with 14 (3%) considering the service was “Poor” or “Very poor”. This shows a positive increase of 6% when compared to the Widows Group Survey 2004.

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

"I was much impressed by the friendly competent manner the claim was dealt with but it would have been helpful if there was more publicity as it seems I could have claimed 6 years ago when my second husband died but it was only by chance I found out of the possibility of getting WWP reinstated. When once the claim was made I was really impressed with the friendly helpful way everything was dealt with and the only delay was over the period whilst other agencies were contacted which one understands has to happen"

"Just to word any letters very clear so as not to confuse"

"To keep claimants fully informed and with explanation of what is happening rather than just a formal acknowledgement"

"Service is very good but perhaps a little less paperwork could be better"

"By explaining more about what the pension is for and a breakdown of the benefits of a widow. I received a leaflet but don't understand it I read through them but I wasn't in the services my husband was and think it would be better for a leaflet on widows/ers only"