

Holding Public Services to Account in Scotland

Open Government Partnership:
Report on work by Citizens
Advice Scotland



August 2020

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Who we are

Scotland's Citizens Advice Network empowers people in every corner of Scotland through our local bureaux and national services by providing free, confidential, and independent advice. We use people's real-life experiences to influence policy and drive positive change. We are on the side of people in Scotland who need help, and we change lives for the better.

Executive summary

Overview of Open Government Partnership

In 2016 Scotland was selected to join the Open Government Partnership ('OGP'), an international collaboration of 90 governments across the world committed to three key principles: openness, transparency and public involvement. In practice, this means members of the OGP must work with communities to:

- Make governments and decision makers more accessible;
- Make the decision-making process more apparent and open to scrutiny; and
- Make the activities of government more inclusive to involve the people they serve.

In order to direct this work, a National Action Plan was developed by the Scottish Government and civic society partners using input from the public through avenues such as consultations, workshops and idea 'crowdsourcing'. Also involved were organisations such as public service regulators and scrutiny bodies, as well as academics and Scottish Government staff. This action plan lays out five commitments, the fourth of which is "to improve the accountability of public services".

Accountability of public services

One aspect of the fourth commitment is to understand how services – from energy companies to local authorities and the NHS – hold themselves accountable for their actions, and how Scottish residents view and interact with what is being referred to as "the accountability landscape". That is, how services are held to account and scrutinised by the public.

As a Signatory to Commitment 4 of Scotland's second National Open Government Action Plan 2018-20 – focused on improving peoples' access to accountability of public services – Citizens Advice Scotland undertook research to inform the evidence base for this work. This research comprised:

- Inclusion of relevant questions in a YouGov Scotland Omnibus; and
- Interviews with select respondents to the Omnibus.

Exploratory work was also conducted with Citizens Advice Bureaux including analysis of 12 case studies and an Adviser focus group.

Executive summary

YouGov Scotland Omnibus findings

A sample of 1,003 Scottish residents, representative of the Scottish population across demographics such as age, gender, and geographical location was achieved. Fieldwork took place on 21st and 22nd January 2020.

- The majority of respondents (73%) felt confident they could access information on public services, while 36% felt confident they could become involved in a decision-making process.
- Those least confident overall were aged under 25, or unemployed.
- Half of respondents (51%) were confident that they knew their rights in relation to raising concerns, while a little under one-third (31%) felt the same regarding appealing a decision.
- When asked what ‘accountability’ meant to them, two-thirds of respondents (65%) provided a response with the most common factors being ‘responsibility’, ‘transparency’, and being ‘answerable’.
- Similar findings were evident when respondents were asked to select the factors they felt were most important in relation to accountability; the most common were ‘being answerable’ (78%), ‘transparency’ (76%) and being ‘open/trustworthy’ in responses (72%).
- Knowledge of regulatory bodies was poor, with 26% of respondents having not heard of any. Audit Scotland was the most recognised (53%) and the Scottish Information Commissioner the least (24%).
- Few respondents knew what the regulatory bodies did, with the highest proportion being 20% who stated that they knew what Audit Scotland did. However, some of those providing explanations of what they believed the regulatory bodies did were incorrect, so figures are likely to be lower in this regard.
- Of those who had made contact with public services (n=142) the most common reason (60%) was to make a complaint, followed by 42% expressing concerns.
- Of those who had a reason for concern, but had not made contact (n=31), the most common reason (50%) was that they felt they would not be taken seriously; a further 46% did not know who to contact.



Executive summary

Interviews with Omnibus respondents

Interviews were conducted with 20 respondents who felt they had reason to complain to a public service; of these, 16 had made contact and 4 had not. Common themes emerging from these interviews were:

- Barriers to complaining included fear of repercussions, lack of confidence in communicating and lack of knowledge of who to complain to.
- Few interviewees had a clear understanding of what to expect when making a complaint.
- Interviewees suggested that there should be a number of different avenues through which contact could be made, both online and offline, and that clear timetables for responses should be laid out.
- Few interviewees felt they would know what to do if they were not satisfied with a response to a complaint and it was suggested the role of regulatory bodies needed to be clearer.



1. Background

- 1.1** In 2016 Scotland was selected to join the Open Government Partnership ('OGP'), an international collaboration of 90 governments across the world committed to three key principles: openness; transparency; and public involvement. In practice, this means members of the OGP must work with communities to:
- > Make governments and decision makers more accessible;
 - > Make the decision-making process more apparent and open to scrutiny; and
 - > Make the activities of government more inclusive to involve the people they serve.
- 1.2** In order to direct this work, a National Action Plan was developed by the Scottish Government and civic society partners, using input from the public through avenues such as consultations, workshops and idea 'crowdsourcing'. Also involved were organisations such as public service regulators and scrutiny bodies, as well as academics and Scottish Government staff. This action plan lays out five commitments, the fourth of which is "to improve the accountability of public services".

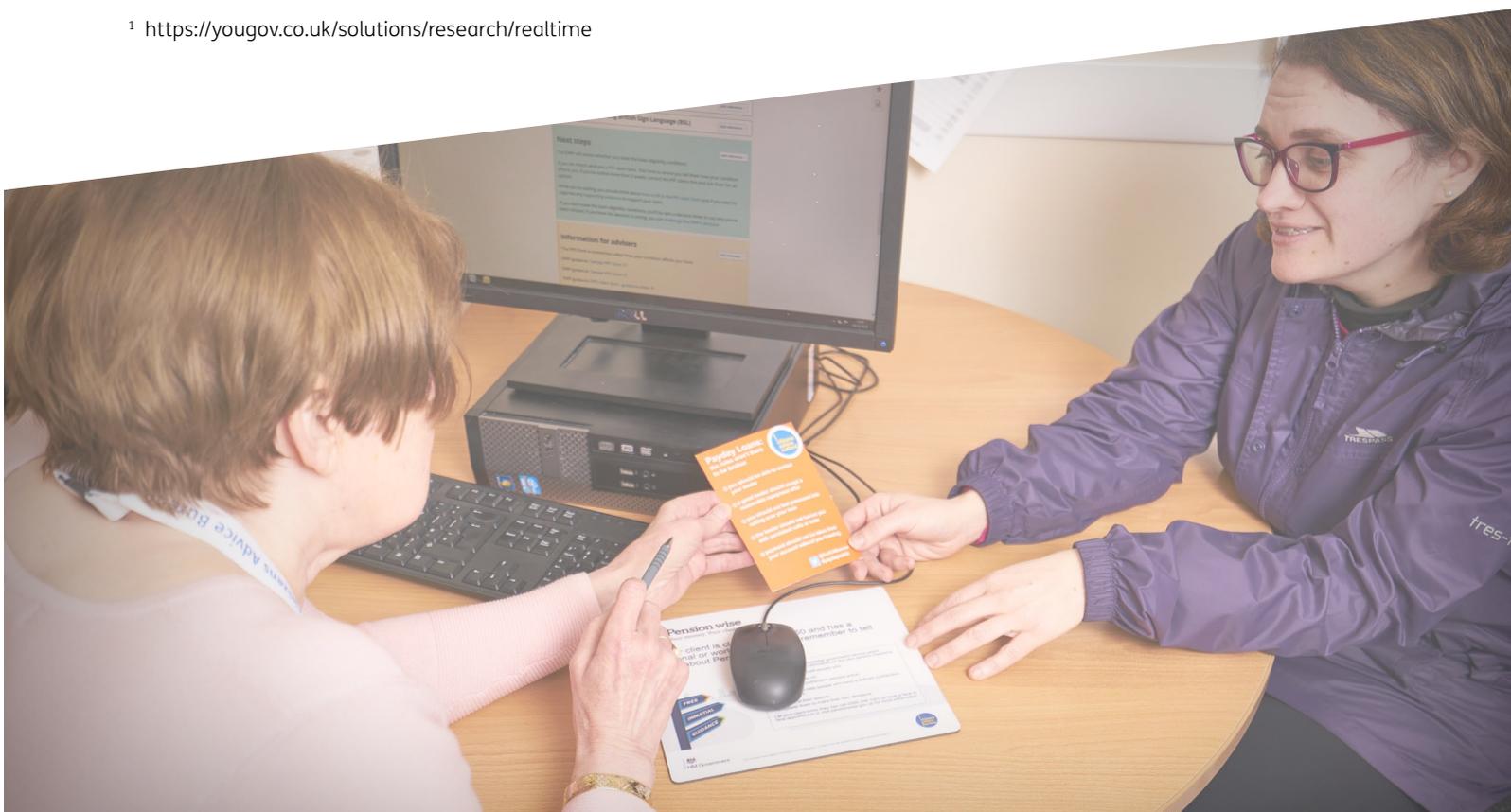
Accountability of public services

- 1.3** One aspect of the fourth commitment is to understand how public services – from government to local authorities to private and third sector contracted providers – hold themselves accountable for their actions and how Scottish residents view and interact with what is being referred to as "the accountability landscape". That is, how services are held to account and scrutinised by the public.
- 1.4** As part of this an agreement was made between the Scottish Government and Citizens Advice Scotland that a piece of work would be conducted with the bureaux network to contribute to the understanding of accountability. In its' original form it was proposed that this work would primarily involve:
- > Analysis of client case histories and any associated communications with public services;
 - > Interviews with clients who had experience of holding public services to account; and
 - > A series of focus groups with bureaux Advisers to gain an overall perspective of how clients found the accountability process.
- 1.5** However, due to exceptional demand on bureaux time (e.g. the introduction of new national projects) the goals for this work could not be met; further details on what was achieved will be discussed under methodology below. As a consequence, it was agreed that what was initially only a small facet of the work, namely the inclusion of questions in a YouGov Scotland Omnibus, would be extended to compensate.
- 1.6** This report will first briefly cover methodology before moving on to discuss findings from the YouGov omnibus and interviews. Conclusions and recommendations will also be presented. Findings from work in connection with CAB clients and Advisers will be summarised at Appendix 1.

2. Methodology

- 2.1** As mentioned above, it was originally intended to focus the work around bureaux and their clients but operational pressures meant this had to be greatly reduced. Although all of these activities provided valuable information and will be reported on at Appendix 1, the low numbers mean that inference from any findings is limited.
- 2.2** As a consequence, planned work involving the YouGov Scotland Omnibus was extended. Using their extensive user panel, YouGov conduct a range of daily surveys where a representative sample of the national and other populations are asked a series of questions on an ever-changing range of topics. Organisations can buy ‘space’ in these surveys in order to include questions relevant to their own needs as well as being able to customise respondent demographics.
- 2.3** As part of this ‘Real Time’ research service¹, YouGov operate a twice-weekly Scotland survey and it was this that ultimately incorporated questions relating to the Open Government work; the questions included can be found at Appendix 2. Fieldwork for the Open Government questions was live during 21st to 22nd January 2020 and provided a sample of 1,003 responses. Along with providing top line findings in the form of Excel tables, raw data in SPSS format was also provided.
- 2.4** As a complement to the Omnibus work, YouGov also offer qualitative research in the form of online focus groups and one-to-one interviews. The samples for this work are drawn from Omnibus respondents who have answered particular questions in a certain way. For this work, 20 one-to-one interviews were commissioned, with the sampling criteria being that the respondent had had a reason to hold a public service to account. While it was originally planned to have an equal split of interviewees across those who had/had not made contact as a result of their concerns, this was ultimately not achievable. Therefore interviews included 16 individuals who had made contact, and four who had not.

¹ <https://yougov.co.uk/solutions/research/realtime>



3. Scotland Omnibus Survey Findings

3.1 Questions were included in the YouGov Scotland Omnibus to assess peoples understanding and experiences of holding public services to account. The findings discussed below are based on a sample of 1,003 respondents, representative of the Scottish population across major demographics such as age, gender and geographical location.

Confidence with regard to engaging with public services

3.2 Respondents were first asked how confident they were in relation to different forms of engagement with public services. While almost three-quarters (73%) were confident they could access general information about a public service, fewer than two in five (36%) felt confident enough to get involved with a services’ decision making process.

Table 1: Levels of confidence in engaging with public services

<i>(Base: 1,003 respondents)</i>	Very/Fairly confident	Not very/Not at all confident
Access general information about a public service	73%	23%
Request answers to specific questions	49%	45%
Raise concerns	55%	40%
Question a decision that has been made	43%	52%
Get involved with the decision making process	36%	57%

3. Scotland Omnibus Survey Findings

3.3 In terms of the difference between demographic groups it would appear that male respondents are marginally more confident in this regard than female respondents across all types of engagement. Respondents in the 35 to 44 years age group expressed most confidence, with those under 25 years expressing the least. Confidence levels were also lower amongst unemployed respondents, who reported feeling much less confident (53%) than those in employment (75%).

3.4 From the comments provided at this question (n=271), some clear themes emerge. One of these is the importance of knowing “the system” when it comes to making contact with public services, with respondents noting that relevant knowledge tends to be gained through experience:

“[Communicating with public services is] normally learnt through trial and error and sharing experiences, rather than being user friendly and easy to access from the beginning”

3.5 Some respondents also felt that even where seemingly clear guidance was provided in regard to making contact with public services, in practice this did not always work:

“Our local council has, ostensibly, clear systems for raising issues, however, it rarely works well, if at all”

3.6 In spite of this, a notable minority of respondents expressed satisfaction with the way public services operate and are accountable:

“Public services in Scotland and local and devolved government functions are in general well run, transparent and have adequate websites for information, questioning and input”

3.7 Some respondents with positive perceptions of public services nevertheless noted that resourcing could be an issue:

“Public services are generally reliable and work well on the limited resources they have. I believe that many public services have an unfairly bad reputation based on the high and unrealistic expectations of a minority”

3.8 Other respondents felt that processes were too remote from the public in the sense that issues raised were not treated with much respect, no matter how confident an individual was in their approach:

“My view is that even if I do understand how to challenge decisions by public bodies etc. they don’t always respond in a meaningful way, if at all.... In other words I know how to ask the questions but have zero confidence in getting a reply”

3. Scotland Omnibus Survey Findings

Confidence with regard to knowing one's rights

3.9 Similar variations could be seen with regard to respondent's confidence in knowing their rights in respect to public services, though confidence levels were much lower. For example, only half (51%) felt confident regarding their rights around making a complaint.

Table 2: Levels of confidence regarding knowing rights

<i>(Base: 1,003 respondents)</i>	Very/Fairly confident	Not very/Not at all confident
Making a complaint against a public service	51%	43%
Making an assessment (i.e. a critique) of performance/actions	39%	53%
Appealing a decision made by a public service	32%	61%

3.10 A small proportion of respondents (17%) provided comments in relation to knowing their rights and these echoed the general lack of confidence expressed in the main question. The type of language used was highlighted as a particular problem:

“..you think [you have rights] until you try to exercise them and find yourself tied up in gobbledegook and management speak.”

3.11 Many respondents felt they did not know their rights, although one highlighted that this lack of knowledge may not be restricted to the general public:

“..the ground level employees and even many principal employees do not know what the civilian rights are and as such run roughshod over them in the early stages of events that may end up within the complaints procedures. Improving their knowledge will surely reduce complaint levels and be financially beneficial”

3.12 The rural nature of much of Scotland was suggested to be an exacerbating factor by one respondent:

“Rights are quite hard to find and generally unclear to many. Similar applies to mechanisms to exercise those rights. The generally rural nature of Scotland makes face to face representation exceptionally difficult.”

3. Scotland Omnibus Survey Findings

3.17 Accepting scrutiny, from both the public and government, was also considered important by respondents:

“Accountability involves accepting scrutiny, taking responsibility for decisions and performance of the service”

“The relevant public service managers have to accept that they will be held accountable for the decisions that they make individually and collectively when setting policy and strategy within their area of responsibility. They are in charge of public money and must seek to use it as effectively as they can to provide the services that matter. They must minimise waste and be in a position to justify how they are spending the funds when asked / challenged.”

3.18 Not everyone, however, was confident that public services are currently accountable:

“They always try to avoid accountability. So basically [accountability] means nothing”

“Accountability is explicitly tied to responsibility - so those responsible for service delivery are accountable for both failure and success. They should be rewarded and censured accordingly. Sadly, acceptance of accountability and censure - or resignation - for failure appears to be a thing of the past in the Scottish public sector. Excuses, or shifting blame elsewhere, appears to be the default position, which is disgraceful.”

3.19 As with comments provided in relation to individual confidence in approaching public services, the issue of resourcing was raised on a number of occasions. While lengthy, the following quote is a good example of this position:

“Accountability at its simplest means ‘taking full responsibility’. But service providers can only work within the budgets they are given. They can only appoint the staff they can afford to pay on the agreed pay-scale. Individual employees are responsible for the quality of the services they provide. We, the electorate, elect the councillors, MSPs and MPs to decide priorities for funding, and funds can only be allocated on the basis of national and local taxation raised. We receive the level of service - and therefore level of accountability - that we are prepared to pay for. Tax raised is woefully inadequate for the level of service we expect and need, so it is often unjust that service providers are held accountable for shortfalls in service, when in fact they would probably provide a better service if it was properly funded.”

3.20 Following on from the open question, respondents were then asked what factors were important for a public service to display in relation to accountability. Being answerable to the public was considered the most important factor, with more than three-quarters of respondents (78%) selecting this. This was followed by transparency (76%) and providing an open/trustworthy response to contacts (72%).

3. Scotland Omnibus Survey Findings

Table 3: Factors important in demonstrating accountability

<i>(Base: 1,003 respondents)</i>	
Being answerable to the public	78%
Transparency	76%
Providing an open/trustworthy response	72%
Responsibility	70%
Demonstrating continuous improvement/the ability to learn from mistakes	66%
Being liable for mistakes (e.g. legally)	64%
Being answerable to an external regulator that can enforce change	62%
Regularly updating those involved on progress	61%
Representing its consumers' interests	54%

3.21 Female respondents were more likely to believe that public services should be liable for mistakes (69%) than male respondents (59%), and that they should make continuous improvements/learn from their mistakes (71% vs. 61%). Respondents in the 55 and over age group appear to expect the most from public services (rating all of the categories in Table 3 highly), with those under 25 expecting the least.

Knowledge of regulatory bodies

3.22 Respondents were asked if they had heard of certain regulatory bodies in Scotland, and knowledge was found to be limited. While a little over half of respondents (53%) had heard of Audit Scotland, fewer than one quarter (24%) had heard of the Scottish Information Commissioner. More than one in four respondents (26%) had not heard of any of the four regulators listed in the survey, with those aged under 25 years by far the least likely to have any knowledge of these bodies (48%).

3. Scotland Omnibus Survey Findings

Table 4: Experience and knowledge of regulatory bodies in Scotland

<i>(Base: 1,003 respondents)</i>	% heard of body	% of those who had heard of body, knowing what the body does
Audit Scotland	53%	20%
Care Inspectorate	47%	6%
Scottish Public Services Ombudsman	39%	14%
Scottish Information Commissioner	24%	18%
<i>Not heard of any of these regulatory bodies</i>	26%	

3.23 Although Audit Scotland had been heard of by the highest proportion of respondents, only one in five of these (20%) stated they knew what the purpose of the body was. In contrast, the majority (94%) of those who had heard of the Care Inspectorate knew what the body did, though this may be because the purpose of it, including its sector of operations, is relatively clear in its name.

3.24 It was clear from statements regarding what the regulatory bodies did that some respondents did not actually know, but these were not included in the ‘don’t know’ figures. For example, with regard to Audit Scotland responses ranged from the very specific to the extremely vague, as the following quotes demonstrates:

“Perform both financial audits to help ensure that public sector bodies adhere to the highest standards of financial management and governance, and perform audits to help ensure that these bodies achieve the best possible value for money”

“To check things”

3.25 Responses regarding the role of the Scottish Information Commissioner were equally diverse, and sometimes entirely incorrect:

“The Scottish Information Commissioner has responsibility for the promotion and when needed, enforcement of freedom of information laws”

“The body who collates and shares all information on Scottish matters”

3. Scotland Omnibus Survey Findings

Personal experiences of holding public services to account

- 3.26** Respondents were asked if they had ever had a reason to hold a public service to account, whether they took action or not, and fewer than one in five (17%) stated they had. Of the 173 respondents that formed this sub-group, the highest proportion (30%) had issues with non-emergency health care services while the second highest proportion (10%) had issues with social services.
- 3.27** Four in five of these 173 respondents (83%) further stated they had contacted the service in question, the majority of whom had done so in order to make a complaint. Of those who made contact, almost two in three (62%) reported that the process was not a positive one.

Table 5: Reason for contacting service

<i>(Base: 1,003 respondents)</i>	
To make a complaint	60%
To express concern about a service/practice	42%
To question a decision they had made	39%
To express concern about something that had happened	29%
To obtain information in relation to something they had already done	23%
To obtain information in relation to something they were planning to do	18%
To obtain information in relation to myself/my family	17%

- 3.28** Only a small number of respondents (n=31) reported they had cause to contact a public service but chose not to. Findings in this context, therefore, should not be considered as definitive in any sense. Half of the respondents in this group (50%) reported that one of the reasons for not making contact was that they felt the matter would not be taken seriously. A little fewer than half (46%) also stated that they did not know who to contact regarding their concern.

4. YouGov Omnibus: Interview findings

- 4.1** Twenty respondents to the Omnibus survey were recruited for one-to-one interviews on their experiences of holding services to account, the key findings from which are summarised here³. Barriers to action and suggestions for improvement will be the main focus in this section.
- 4.2** Several barriers to action were identified, including fear of repercussions, lack of confidence in articulating an issue, and lack of knowledge of how to complain. Very few of the interviewees had a clear understanding of what they could expect to happen if they took a complaint forward. Other barriers included overuse of ‘jargon’ and little opportunity to ask an individual for help.
- 4.3** Communication challenges were felt most by those with lower levels of education, who could lack confidence in speaking with professionals, and those with mental health difficulties who could experience anxiety in such situations.
- 4.4** Knowledge of how to make approaches to public services was quite poor and it was suggested that avenues for contact, both online and off, should be better promoted. It was further suggested that there should be one point of contact for those approaching public services with a concern, as frustration could be an issue when having to re-explain circumstances multiple times.
- 4.5** Allied to this was the need for a range of contact methods to be available, so individuals could make contact in a way that best suited their needs and/or circumstances. Even those who were comfortable using technology could find online approaches problematic, and others cited extensive waiting times when making calls to public services.
- 4.6** It was suggested that, on raising any kind of concern/complaint, it was important for the public service to provide clear timeframes within which this would be addressed and to provide regular updates on progress. Ideally, the service should also share with the wider public lessons learnt and changes made, so that trust could be built and care demonstrated.
- 4.7** Many of the interviewees stated that they would not know what to do if they were not satisfied with a response to a concern/complaint, although a few stated that they might contact their MSP or a Citizens Advice Bureau for assistance. It was therefore suggested that the role and remit of regulating bodies should be promoted more widely.

³ The full report can be requested from Linda.Hutton@cas.org.uk

5. Concluding remarks

- 5.1** The public services landscape is a complex one. As has been evident throughout this research, some services are stretched “to breaking point” or are, at the least, under a great deal of pressure. It would seem fair to suggest, therefore, that this may potentially have a detrimental impact on their ability to respond to concerns and complaints, no matter how understanding the general public is of these circumstances.
- 5.2** The findings indicate that one of the key themes from this work is a need for public services to provide clear, definitive information on how the public can engage with them, particularly when there is a need to raise a concern or question decisions made. Making better information available across a range of on and off-line platforms would also appear to be important. Allied to this is a need for regulatory bodies to raise their profile and inform the general public as to their roles.
- 5.3** As with all communications, the use of plain English and keeping technical terms to a minimum would seem to be a straightforward suggestion for improvement. It appears that access to clear information in general can also be problematic in some cases, so it may be of value for public services to examine both how they present key facts and how widely accessible these are.
- 5.4** Key factors in accountability for public services would appear to be taking responsibility for actions; behaving in a transparent manner; and providing open/trustworthy responses to concerns. A number of research avenues in this study suggested that responses to complaints tended to reiterate processes and events rather than directly answering questions. As one Bureau Adviser expressed it, they felt that public services often responded to queries “like a politician”.
- 5.5** Although it is not possible to draw robust conclusions from the work conducted with Citizens Advice Bureaux, one point of note is that there can be a disconnect between what medical staff see as ‘everyday’ events and the understanding of patients. It may therefore be useful for those responding to concerns to be aware that their world is often quite alien to the general public, and it should not be assumed that patients understand that their experiences are ‘normal’. In addition, an increased appreciation of the difficulty a person under stress can have in understanding and absorbing new information might be useful.



Appendix 1: Research with Citizens Advice Bureaux

As mentioned above, it was originally intended to focus the work around bureaux and their clients but operational pressures meant this had to be greatly reduced. As a result, only the following was achieved:

- > One Adviser focus group (6 participants)
- > Two client interviews
- > Twelve case histories/associated paperwork were obtained

CAB Clients: Case Histories

As part of this exercise a combination of case notes and complaint responses from 12 Patient Advice and Support Service ('PASS') cases were examined.

The cases considered here provide examples of concerns dealt with by GPs; health boards; and the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman ('SPSO'). In some of these it would seem fair to hypothesise that certain issues have been at the very least exacerbated by the pressures that many NHS staff are under, and it is important to acknowledge this. However, this does not lessen any impact felt by those affected by their experience with health services.

In all of the responses there is acknowledgement of facts but little account of feelings; in the majority of responses there is no apparent understanding of the distress experienced by the complainant. In many cases, the processes being brought into question are 'normal' for the medical personnel involved and there is an impression that these personnel expect patients and their families to also view what is happening as normal. Some medical personnel, therefore, seem to find it difficult to understand why someone may be upset by what, to them, is an everyday process.

There were, however, clear examples of those staff responding to complaints being sympathetic with the complainant:

“..Notwithstanding the above [statement of complaint not being upheld], I wish to recognise that this has been an upsetting and distressing time for [the complainant], and I hope this response and the investigation that has taken place have gone some way to assure [the complainant] that [their] concerns have been taken seriously.”

Another commonality across the responses is that these are often set out as an explanation (or sometimes simple reiteration) of events and, as such, can give the impression that the complaint is not actually being responded to. While it is understandable that the passage of events should be clarified, the medical response to a situation is often only part of the issue; in the majority of cases, it is the approach and/or attitude of staff that has been a key driver in the complaint. Even in cases where the complaint is upheld, there is often no mention of any action that will be taken as a result, or any apology given.

There is often what appears to be a lack of understanding of the difficulty all individuals can have in absorbing/retaining information when under stress. It is therefore unsurprising to note how many of

Appendix 1: Research with Citizens Advice Bureaux

the cases contain reference to there being ‘a note’ of a patient or family member being provided with information that the patient/family member later either cannot remember or remembers out of context. It may perhaps be helpful to health personnel to ensure that more responsibility is taken for both making sure information is understood and that adequate records are kept. An example of where such action could have been taken is as follows:

The complaint response mentions an “informal” meeting between the complainant and two consultants, at which it was “made very clear” that there was “no complaint to answer at that time”. However, no notes of the meeting were taken and no report made because the complainant “did not ask them” for one.

With regard to cases dealt with by SPSO, delays in allocating a reviewer were present in half of the cases examined. These delays appeared to contribute at times to variations in the length of time cases took to bring to a final conclusion, with this ranging from four to ten months in the current sample.

Adviser Focus Group Findings

Advisers reported a number of challenges in supporting clients to hold public services to account, with the first issue raised being that of difficulty in making contact with these services. They noted, however, that many services were “at breaking point” due to a combination of demand and austerity measures, with this often having an impact on anything outside of ‘business as usual’.

Phone lines were cited as being particularly problematic, with calls ‘cutting off’ and exceptionally long hold times being common. In addition, it was noted that many dedicated helplines that used to be open to services such as CABs had ceased to operate, with Advisers feeling that this resulted in them spending more time on bureaucratic process and so “less time representing clients”. For example, one Adviser noted being on hold for more than two hours when trying to change an assessment appointment in relation to a particular social security benefit.

Advisers also felt that it could be difficult for CAB clients to identify accurate information on public services as this could be contradictory, sometimes even on a single website, and felt this should be simplified. The same could be true across different Health Boards and Local Authorities.

Areas of good practice were also identified, however, such as within the Scottish Power ‘Social Responsibility Team’; the DWP Dundee help centre; and the Gov.uk dedicated line for advice providers. It was emphasised that these situations often came about as a result of relationships built over time, rather than any set policies, and so were easily impacted by staff changes.

Appendix 1: Research with Citizens Advice Bureaux

Interviews with clients

Two interviews were conducted; one relating to an NHS complaint and the other regarding an ongoing issue with an energy supplier. With regard to the NHS complaint (where physical harm was alleged as the result of an operation), notable findings included:

- Although the complainant had worked for the NHS for some years, they had difficulty progressing their complaint and could find no information on what they should do if they were not satisfied with the response to the complaint.
- Actions promised to the complainant were not taken forward; for example, at the time of interview the complainant had been waiting six months for a ‘meeting to discuss her concerns’ to be arranged.
- The complainant reported feeling “emotionally drained” by her experience (which, at time of interview, had been on-going for 18 months); “hurt” and “cheated” by the way she had been treated by her own profession; and “useless” as her formerly active life (both professional and personal) had been altered so drastically.
- At time of interview, the complainant had no interest in any financial compensation but simply would like the mistakes to be acknowledged so their experience does not happen to anyone else.

The second interview was held with a bureau client experiencing difficulties with a utility company in relation to billing, with notable findings including:

- Repeated demands for payment although their account was in credit.
- Increases made in the complainant’s direct debit amount, without consent and while the account was in credit.
- Customer services appearing to have difficulty dealing with issues that were not “on their script” and struggling to provide meaningful responses to queries.
- No response from Ofgem when the complaint was escalated
- At time of interviewing the complainant had been dealing with these issues for over two years. Although the complainant was confident enough to complain, they nevertheless feared “getting cut off” and felt that there was no way of “taking [utility companies] to task” in these situations.

Appendix 2: YouGov Omnibus questions

1. Thinking generally about public services (i.e. the Scottish government or any government funded service e.g. local authorities, the healthcare system etc.), how confident, if at all, are you that you know how to do each of the following things?
 - > Access general information about a public service
 - > Request answers to my own specific questions about a public service
 - > Raise concerns about a public service
 - > Ask questions about a specific decision a public service has made
 - > Get involved with a public services decision making process (i.e. provide my own input into their decision making processes)
2. Still thinking about accessing information, asking questions or raising concerns about public services (i.e. the Scottish government or any government funded service e.g. local authorities, the healthcare system etc.), do you have anything else you would like to add about public services? (open text box).
3. Still thinking about public services (i.e. the Scottish government or any government funded service e.g. local authorities, the healthcare system etc.), what do you think “accountability” means for public services? (open text box).
4. Now thinking about public services (i.e. the Scottish government or any government funded service e.g. local authorities, the healthcare system etc.) in relation to your rights, how confident, if at all, are you that you know your rights in relation to doing each the following? (Please select one option on each row)
 - > Making a complaint against a public service
 - > Appealing a decision a public service have made (e.g. a funding decision etc.)
 - > Making an assessment (i.e. a critique) of a public services performance/ actions
5. Still thinking about public services (i.e. the Scottish government or any government funded service e.g. local authorities, the healthcare system etc.) in relation to your rights, do you have anything else you would like to add about your rights in relation to public services? (open text box).

Appendix 2: YouGov Omnibus questions

6. For the following question, by “accountability process”, we mean any process with the power to determine whether or not a public service is at fault for a decision or action (e.g. spending etc.). Which, if any, of the following things do you think it’s important for a public service to demonstrate during an accountability process? (Please select all that apply)
- > Transparency
 - > Responsibility
 - > Being answerable to the public
 - > Being liable for mistakes (i.e. legally)
 - > Being answerable to an external regulator that can enforce change
 - > Providing an open /trustworthy response (i.e. one that’s true)
 - > Regularly updating those involved on progress
 - > Demonstrating continuous improvement/the ability to learn from mistakes
 - > Representing its consumers interests
 - > None of these
7. Before taking this survey, which, if any, of the following regulators of public services (i.e. the Scottish government or any government funded service e.g. local authorities, the healthcare system etc.) had you heard of? (Please select all that apply)
- > Scottish Public Services Ombudsman
 - > Scottish Information Commissioner
 - > Care Inspectorate
 - > Audit Scotland
 - > None of these
8. You previously mentioned that you had heard of [one of the bodies mentioned at Q7 – question repeated for each body]. What do you think the role of [that body] is? (Open text box)
9. Now thinking about your personal experience of public services (i.e. the Scottish government or any government funded service e.g. local authorities, the healthcare system etc.), have you ever had a reason to hold a public service to account (i.e. hold them responsible for their actions) that left you wanting to take action yourself (e.g. seek information about them, contact them, make a complaint about them etc.)?
- > Yes, I have
 - > No, I haven’t
 - > Don’t know/can’t recall

Appendix 2: YouGov Omnibus questions

- 10.** You previously mentioned that you have had a reason to take action against a public service (i.e. the Scottish government or any government funded service e.g. local authorities, the healthcare system etc.). If you have had a reason to take action against a public service more than once, please think about the most recent time. Which ONE, if any, of the following public services was this about?
- > Legal system
 - > Education
 - > Emergency services (i.e. police, fire or ambulance)
 - > Health care, excluding emergency service
 - > Public transportation
 - > Social services
 - > Transportation services
 - > None of these
 - > Don't know/can't recall
- 11.** Still thinking about the most recent time you have had a reason to take action against a public service (i.e. the Scottish government or any government funded service e.g. local authorities, the healthcare system etc.), did you get in contact with the public service that you had a reason to complain to?
- > Yes, I did
 - > No, I didn't
 - > Don't know/can't recall
- 12.** You previously mentioned that you contacted the public service regarding your reason to take action against them. Which, if any, of the following were your reasons for contacting them? (Please select all that apply)
- > To make a complaint
 - > To question a decision they had made
 - > To obtain information in relation to myself/my family
 - > To obtain information in relation to something they were planning to do
 - > To obtain information in relation to something they had already done
 - > To express concern about a particular service/practice
 - > I was worried about something that had happened
 - > Other, please specify [open]
 - > Don't know/can't recall

Appendix 2: YouGov Omnibus questions

- 13.** Still thinking about the most recent time you have had a reason to take action against a public service (i.e. the Scottish government or any government funded service e.g. local authorities, the healthcare system etc.), how good, if at all, would you say your experience of the interaction was?
- > Very good
 - > Fairly good
 - > Not very good
 - > Not good at all
 - > Don't know
- 14.** Still think about your contact with the public service regarding your reason to take action against them, do you have any other comments about your experience? (open text box).
- 15.** You previously mentioned that you did not contact the public service regarding your reason to take action against them. Which, if any, of the following were reasons you did not contact them? (Please select all that apply)
- > I felt the matter wouldn't be taken seriously
 - > I couldn't be bothered
 - > I don't have the time/too many other things to do
 - > I didn't know how to make contact/who to approach
 - > I'm not good/confident enough at talking to public services
 - > It wasn't a big enough deal/was too trivial
 - > I was worried there might be negative consequences for me/my family
 - > I've complained or taken action before and it wasn't worth it/didn't help
 - > I handled the matter myself/was resolved before action was needed
 - > Other, please specify [open]



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