



**Northern Ireland
Review of Public Administration**

**RESEARCH BULLETIN 3
RESULTS FROM APRIL NORTHERN IRELAND OMNIBUS SURVEY**

Tony O'Brien

GENERAL

This bulletin is based on information obtained from the Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey, which was carried out over a 5-week period in April and May 2003 by the Central Survey Unit of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). In all, a total of 1,240 people were surveyed.

The Review of Public Administration team commissioned a series of questions to be included in this Survey, on the public's views and experience of public services in Northern Ireland (see Notes).

KEY POINTS

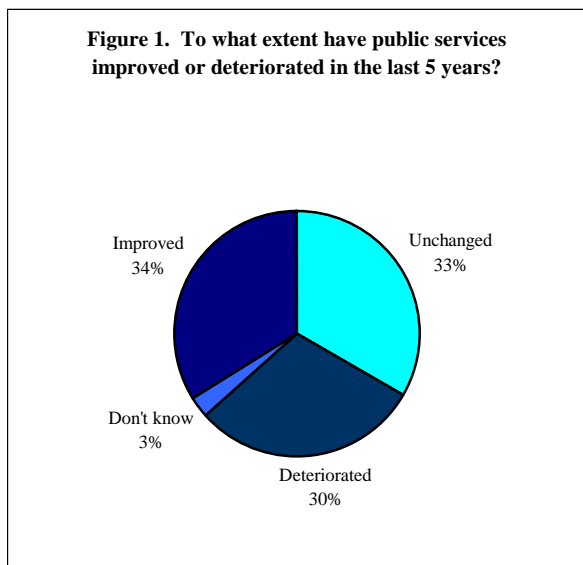
- Approximately the same proportions of respondents stated that they felt public services had improved, remained unchanged or deteriorated over the last five years. 33% of respondents felt that quality of public services had remained unchanged, while 34% felt that public services had improved.
- Respondents identified health and social services and education as the public services which were most in need of further improvement.
- Quality of service and knowing who to complain to if something went wrong were the aspects of public services which most respondents identified as needing improvement.
- The majority of respondents (52%) were aware of the public bodies known as quangos, although a substantial minority (48%) were not aware of these bodies. 43% of respondents felt that election by the public was the most appropriate way for people to become members of the Boards of quangos. 33% of respondents thought that relevant professionals, and 25% thought that the general public, should be members of such Boards.
- 32% of respondents felt that the community and voluntary sectors should have a role in providing public services, and 39% felt that the private sector should have a role in providing public services.
- Half of all respondents felt that public services did not keep them well informed about what they were doing.
- The majority of respondents (66%) felt that their views on public services were listened to to a limited extent or not at all.
- 31% of respondents thought that older people were treated less well than other groups in the provision of public services.



1. Improvement in public services

Respondents were asked a number of questions relating to improvement to public services.

Respondents were asked to what extent they felt that public services had improved over the last five years (Figure 1).



Approximately the same proportions of respondents stated that they felt public services had improved, remained unchanged or deteriorated over the last five years. Just over one-third of respondents stated that they felt that public services had remained unchanged, while 34% felt that public services had either improved or greatly improved.

There were significant ⁽¹⁾ differences in responses to this question across different age groups and across different areas of residence. People aged 35 and over, and people from the East of Northern Ireland, were more likely than others to state that quality of public services had remained unchanged over the last five years, compared with people aged under 35 and those from Belfast or the West of Northern Ireland.

Respondents were also asked to rank a list of public services in terms of which services they felt were most in need of improvement (Table 1).

Table 1. Which public services need greatest improvement?

	1st	2nd	3rd
Health and social services	41%	19%	13%
Education	19%	17%	13%
Roads	10%	12%	11%
Housing	9%	12%	12%
Employment services	7%	10%	10%
Waste management	4%	7%	9%
Environmental management	3%	7%	9%
Planning	2%	4%	4%
Leisure services	2%	4%	6%
Water	1%	3%	3%
Tourism	<1%	2%	5%
Don't know	1%	4%	7%

It is clear from this table that the services which the public feels are most in need of improvement are health and social services and education. The services which were felt to be least in need of improvement were planning, leisure services, water and tourism.

There were differences among respondents in their answers to this question in terms of age, area of residence and socio-economic group

A greater proportion of respondents aged 35 and over, and also a greater proportion of respondents from the East of Northern Ireland, stated that health and social services was most in need of improvement, compared with people aged under 35 and those from Belfast or the West of Northern Ireland. More people working in non-manual occupations stated that education was the service most in need of improvement compared with those working in other occupations.

Respondents were asked to identify what aspects of public services they felt most needed to be improved (Table 2).

(1) See Notes point 8

Table 2. What do you think most needs to be improved about public services?

	Number	%
Quality of service	343	28%
Knowing who to complain to if something goes wrong	207	17%
Value for money	140	11%
Easy access to services	124	10%
Speed of response from public bodies	105	8%
Public services coordinating with each other	72	6%
Other	177	14%
Don't know	72	6%
Total	1,240	100%

Most respondents felt that quality of service and knowing who to complain to if something went wrong were the aspects of public services which were most in need of improvement.

There were differences in responses to this question between men and women, across different age groups and across different socio-economic groups.

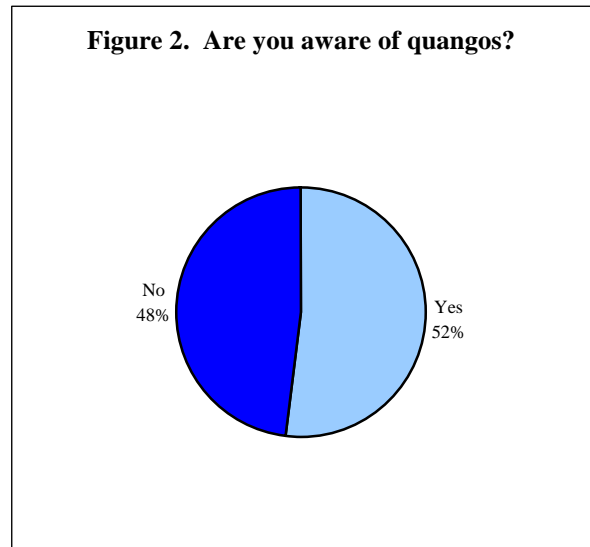
Women were more likely than men to state that knowing who to complain to if something went wrong was the aspect of public services most in need of improvement. People aged 35 and over and also people working in non-manual occupations were more likely to state that quality of service in public services was most in need of improvement.

Among the “Other” responses to this question, respondents stated that more funding for public services, better communication with the public and better management of resources were the main improvements needed in public services.

2. Quangos

Quangos (quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations) are bodies which plan and provide some public services in Northern Ireland. Although they are outside of central government, they are answerable to central government and rely on central government for funding. These bodies include the Health and Social Services Boards, Education and Library Boards, the Housing Executive, Invest Northern Ireland, etc.

Respondents were given an explanation of what quangos are and what they do, and were then asked a number of questions relating to quangos, the first of which asked if they were aware of these bodies (Figure 2).



Although the majority of respondents (52%) were aware of these bodies, a substantial number (48%) were not.

There were differences in responses to this question between men and women, across different age groups and across different socio-economic groups. Men were more likely than women to be aware of quangos, as were people working in non-manual occupations and people aged 35 and over.

Respondents were then asked about who they felt should be members of the Boards of quangos (Table 3).

Table 3. Who should be members of the Boards of quangos?

	Number	%
Professionals (e.g. teachers, doctors, lawyers)	408	33%
General public	307	25%
Politicians	195	16%
Community/voluntary workers	87	7%
Other	83	7%
Private enterprise	15	1%
Don't know	145	12%
Total	1,240	100%

One-third of respondents felt that professional people, such as doctors, lawyers and teachers should be members of the Boards of quangos, while one-quarter felt that members of the general public should be on these Boards.

There were differences in responses to this question between men and women, across different socio-economic groups and across different areas of residence.

Women were more likely than men to feel that members of the public should be on the Boards of quangos, while people working in non-manual occupations were more likely to feel that professional people would be most appropriate. People from the East and West of Northern Ireland more likely than people from Belfast to feel that members of the general public should be on the Boards of quangos.

Of the “Other” responses to this question, most (70%) stated that any interested person or party should be able to be a member of the Board of a quango.

Respondents were asked about what method they felt was most appropriate for a person to become a member of the Board of a quango (Table 4).

Table 4. What is the most appropriate way for people to become members of the Boards of quangos?

	Number	%
Elected by general public	532	43%
Nominated by fellow professionals	153	12%
Appointed by Ministers	145	12%
Nominated by local councils	76	6%
Other	75	6%
Nominated by other relevant bodies	62	5%
Don't know	197	16%
Total	1,240	100%

Most respondents (43%) felt that the most appropriate method for someone to become a member of the Board of a quango was to be elected by the general public. Twenty-four percent of respondents felt that members of the Boards of quangos should either be nominated by fellow professionals or appointed by Ministers.

There were differences in responses to this question between men and women, across different socio-economic groups and across different areas of residence.

Women were more likely than men to feel that the Boards of quangos should be elected by the general public, while people working in non-manual occupations were more likely to feel that nomination by fellow professionals would be the most appropriate method. People from the East and West of Northern Ireland more likely than people from Belfast to feel that members of the Boards of quangos should be nominated by their local council.

Among the “Other” responses to this question, respondents suggested that an open competition or nomination by the community sector would be appropriate ways of becoming a member of the Board of a quango.

3. Equality Issues

Respondents were asked if there were any groups in our society which they felt were treated less well in the provision of public services (Table 5).

Table 5. Are there any groups in our society who are treated less well than others in the provision of public services?

	Number	%
Older people	382	31%
People with disabilities	170	14%
People on low incomes	62	5%
People of different racial groups	54	4%
Children and young people	38	3%
People from rural communities	37	3%
People of particular religious beliefs	30	2%
People of a different sexual orientation	13	1%
People with dependants	7	1%
Married people	4	<1%
People of particular political opinion	3	<1%
Men or women	3	<1%
Other	235	19%
Don't know	202	16%
Total	1,240	100%

Almost one-third of respondents stated that they felt that older people were less well treated in the provision of public services, while a substantial proportion (14%) felt that people with disabilities were treated less well.

These views are reflected across the sample irrespective of gender, religion, socio-economic group or area of residence.

However, people aged 35 and over were more likely to feel that older people were treated less well than other groups in the provision of public services.

Of the “Other” responses to this question, the majority (75%) stated that they felt that everyone is treated equally nowadays. However, eight percent of these “Other” responses stated that they felt that the Travelling community were treated less well in the provision of public services.

4. Role of the community and voluntary sectors

Respondents were asked how the community and voluntary sectors should be involved in public services in Northern Ireland (Table 6).

Table 6. How should the community and voluntary sectors be involved in public services in Northern Ireland?

	Number	%
Providing services	396	32%
Planning services	256	21%
Policy development	185	15%
Lobbying	175	14%
Advocacy	28	2%
Other	10	1%
Don't know	190	15%
Total	1,240	100%

Almost one-third of respondents felt that the community and voluntary sectors should have a role in providing public services, while one-fifth felt that they should have a role in planning services.

A smaller proportion of respondents felt that the community and voluntary sectors should have a role in policy development (15%) and lobbying (14%).

There were differences in responses to this question across different age groups, socio-economic groups and areas of residence.

People aged 35 and over were more likely to state that the community and voluntary sectors should have a role in policy development.

People working in non-manual occupations and people from the East and West of Northern Ireland were more likely to state that the community and voluntary sectors should have a role in providing services, compared with those working in manual occupations and people living in Belfast.

5. Role of the private sector

Respondents were asked how the private sector should be involved in public services in Northern Ireland (Table 7).

Table 7. How should the private sector be involved in public services in Northern Ireland?

	Number	%
Providing services	481	39%
Planning services	186	15%
Policy development	128	10%
Lobbying	117	9%
Advocacy	29	2%
Other	67	5%
Don't know	232	19%
Total	1,240	100%

Almost forty percent of respondents stated that they felt that the private sector should have a role in providing public services in Northern Ireland, while 15% stated that it should have a role in planning services. A smaller proportion of respondents felt that the private sector should have a role in policy development (10%) and lobbying (9%).

There were differences in responses to this question across different age groups, socio-economic groups and areas of residence.

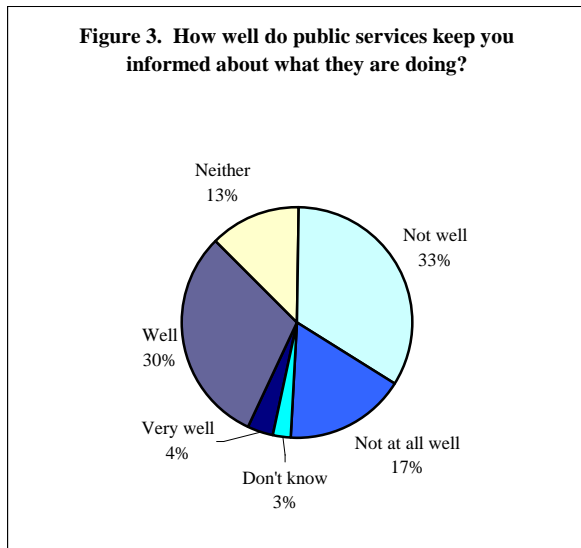
People aged 35 and over, and those working in non-manual occupations, were more likely to state that the private sector should have a role in providing public services compared with respondents aged under 35 or those working in manual occupations.

Respondents from the East of Northern Ireland were more likely to state that the private sector should have a role in providing

public services and in policy development compared with respondents from the Belfast or from the West of Northern Ireland.

6. Informing the public

Respondents were asked how well they felt public services kept them informed about what they were doing (Figure 3).



Over one-third (34%) of all respondents stated that public services kept them well informed or very well informed about what they were doing. However, half of all respondents stated that public services did not keep them well informed about what they were doing.

There were differences in responses to this question between men and women, across different age groups, socio-economic groups and areas of residence.

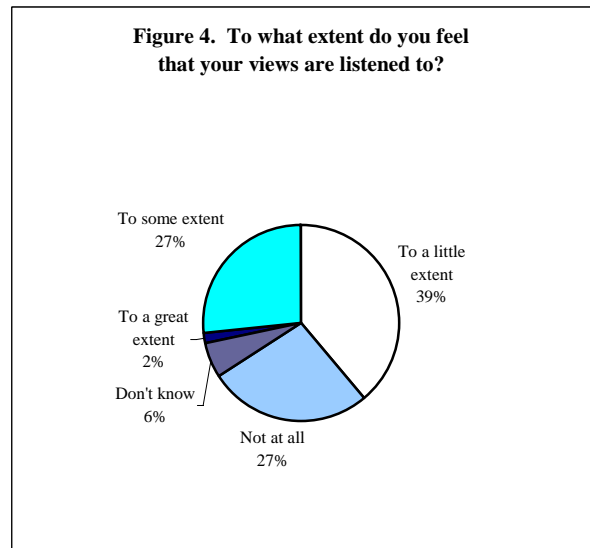
Women and people aged 35 and over were more likely to state that public services did not keep them well informed about what they were doing.

People working in non-manual occupations were more likely to state that public services kept them well informed about what they were doing, compared with people working in manual occupations.

People from the East and West of Northern Ireland were more likely to state that public services did not keep them well informed about what they were doing.

7. Listening to the public's views

Respondents were asked when they expressed a view to public bodies, to what extent they felt that their views were listened to (Figure 4).



The majority of respondents (66%) stated that they felt their views were listened to to a limited extent or not at all, whereas 28% of respondents felt that their views were listened to to some extent or to a great extent.

There were differences in responses to this question between men and women, across different age groups and areas of residence.

Women were more likely than men to feel that their views were not listened to. People aged 35 and over were also more likely to express this view compared with people aged under 35, as were people living in the East and West of Northern Ireland compared with residents of Belfast.

Notes

1. The Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey is conducted several times each year by the Central Survey Unit of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), and is designed to provide a snapshot of the behaviour, lifestyle and views of a representative sample of the people of Northern Ireland.
2. The Survey comprises two distinct parts: core questions about the respondents and their individual circumstances, and a variety of mainly attitudinal questions commissioned by clients. Fifteen questions commissioned by the Review of Public Administration team were included in the April and May 2003 Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey. The questions asked were:
 - A. Which public services do you feel need greatest improvement? (Rank 1st, 2nd and 3rd).
 1. Education
 2. Employment services
 3. Environmental management
 4. Housing
 5. Health & social services
 6. Planning
 7. Water
 8. Roads
 9. Waste management
 10. Leisure services
 11. Tourism
 12. Other (specify)
 - B. In your view, what do you think most needs to be improved about public services?
 1. Knowing who to complain to when something goes wrong.
 2. Easy access to services
 3. Quality of service
 4. Speed of response from public bodies
 5. Value for money
 6. Different public services coordinating with each other
 7. Other (specify)
- C. To what extent do you think that the quality of public services in Northern Ireland has improved or deteriorated over the last five years?
 1. Greatly improved
 2. Improved
 3. Unchanged
 4. Deteriorated
 5. Greatly deteriorated
- D. In Northern Ireland, some public services are planned and provided by organisations that are outside of central government but are answerable to central government, for example the Education and Library Boards, Health Boards, the Planning Service, the Rural Development Council, etc. These organisations are sometimes called quangos. Are you aware of these types of bodies? Yes/No
- E. Currently, Ministers appoint members to the Boards of most quangos. In your view, what is the most appropriate way for people to become members of the Boards of quangos?
 1. Appointed by Ministers
 2. Elected by general public
 3. Nominated by fellow professionals
 4. Nominated by local councils
 5. Nominated by other relevant interested bodies
 6. Other (specify)

- F. In your view, who should be members of the Boards of quangos?
1. Local councillors
 2. MLAs
 3. MPs
 4. Professionals (teachers, doctors, lawyers, etc)
 5. Community/voluntary workers
 6. Members of the general public
 7. Private enterprise
 8. Other (specify)
- G. In your view, are there any groups in our society who are treated less well than others in the provision of public services? *(The following list was provided to interviewers but was not read out. It was used as a guide only).*
1. Older people
 2. Children and young people
 3. People from rural communities
 4. People of different racial groups
 5. People of particular religious beliefs
 6. People of particular political opinions
 7. People with disabilities
 8. People of a different sexual orientation
 9. People on low incomes
 10. Married people
 11. People with dependants
 12. Men or women generally
 13. Other (specify)
- H. In your view, how should the community and voluntary sectors be involved in public services in Northern Ireland?
1. Providing services
 2. Planning services
 3. Lobbying
 4. Advocacy
 5. Policy development
 6. Other (specify)
- I. In your view, how should the private sector be involved in public services in Northern Ireland?
1. Providing services
 2. Planning services
 3. Lobbying
 4. Advocacy
 5. Policy development
 6. Other (specify)
- J. In your view, how well do public services keep you informed about what they are doing?
1. Very well
 2. Well
 3. Neither
 4. Not well
 5. Not at all well
 6. Don't know
- K. In your view, when you express a view to public bodies, to what extent do you feel that your views are listened to?
1. To a great extent
 2. To some extent
 3. To a little extent
 4. Not at all
 5. Don't know
3. The sample of those surveyed in the April 2003 Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey was drawn from the Valuation and Lands Agency list, the most up-to-date listing of private households in Northern Ireland. The complete list of private addresses was stratified into three regions – Belfast, East of Northern Ireland and West of Northern Ireland, and a random sample drawn from each region.
4. At each address, the interviewer lists all members of the household eligible for inclusion in the sample, i.e. all persons aged 16 or over. The interviewer's computer then randomly selects one person from each household to complete

the interview. From an eligible sample of 1,941 individuals, 1,214 interviews were achieved, giving an overall response rate of 63%.

5. Selecting only one individual for interview from each address means that individuals living in large households have a lower chance of being included in the sample than individuals living in smaller households. The data presented in this bulletin have been weighted to prevent a bias towards smaller households.
6. To assess how accurately a survey sample reflects the population of Northern Ireland, the characteristics of the sample are compared with the characteristics of the 2001 Census of Population (Table 9). The Omnibus sample has also been compared to the achieved sample of the Continuous Household Survey (CHS)

Table 9. Representativeness of the sample

	2001 Census	CHS 2001/02	Omnibus	Selected respondents
Age				
16-24	16	15	14	13
25-34	19	19	17	17
35-49	27	27	29	29
50-64	20	21	21	22
65 and over	17	18	19	19
Gender				
Male	48	47	48	49
Female	52	53	52	51
Base=100%	1.29k	5.5k	2.4k	1.2k

7. Statistical significance tests were carried out on a range of group differences observed in the Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey findings. These tests are used to establish the degree of confidence with which we can infer the observed findings as an

accurate reflection of the views of the total Northern Ireland population.

8. For the purposes of this bulletin, the term “significant” is used only in the strict statistical sense. This means that if a comparison is reported as being significant (between the views of older and younger people for example) we are confident that there is a real difference between these groups in the sample and that the result has not occurred by chance. The term “significant” is not used in any other sense such as “important” or “meaningful”.
9. Area analysis was based on District Council boundaries and is detailed in Table 10. Councils listed in this table were used to form each of the three areas (Belfast, East of Northern Ireland, West of Northern Ireland) described in this bulletin.

Table 10. Areas of Northern Ireland by District Council

Area	District councils
Belfast	Belfast
East of Northern Ireland	Antrim Ards Ballymena Banbridge Carrickfergus Castlereagh Craigavon Down Larne Lisburn Newtownabbey North Down
West of Northern Ireland	Armagh Ballymoney Coleraine Cookstown Dungannon Fermanagh Limavady Derry Magherafelt Moyle Newry & Mourne Omagh Strabane

10. Due to rounding, percentages noted in figures and tables may not add to 100%.

11. The Registrar General's classification of occupations used in this bulletin groups occupations into five socio-economic classes with the implication that occupation is a meaningful indicator of social welfare.

I Professional occupations - e.g. doctors and lawyers.

II Managerial and lower professional occupations - e.g. managers and teachers.

III_n Non-manual skilled occupations - e.g. office workers.

III_m Manual skilled occupations e.g. bricklayers, coalminers

IV Semi-skilled occupations - e.g. postal workers.

V Unskilled manual occupations - e.g. porters, dustmen.

For presentational purposes, in this bulletin these classifications have been grouped together as follows: I, II and III_n (non-manual); III_m and IV (skilled manual); V (unskilled).

Further information and additional copies of this bulletin can be obtained by contacting Tony O'Brien on 028 9027 7603, by fax on 028 9027 7610, or by email to tony.o'brien@rpani.gov.uk.