



SPA
Future
Thinking

Satisfaction with Written Advice

ico.

Information Commissioner's Office

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Background

- ICO responds to 36,000 requests for written advice each year by letter or email
- The survey among written enquirers obtains overall satisfaction measures for ICO's written advice which can be benchmarked against other ICO services
- Sample contains personal and business enquirers, writing letters and emailing
- The survey evaluates specific features of ICO's written advice and determines how these impact on overall satisfaction
 - speed of responding to written enquiries
 - quality of the reply
 - extent to which got what wanted
 - effort required



Methodology

- ICO randomly sampled circa 3,000 cases of people sending letters or emails seeking advice in writing from the ICO and whose cases were deemed closed
- Contact details (addresses and email addresses) were supplied in four tranches between May and September 2012 of cases closed May – September 2012 (cases opened March – September 2012)
- SPA Future Thinking sent out self-completion questionnaires with reply paid envelopes to all postal enquirers and emails with a link to an online questionnaire to all email enquirers in four tranches between mid June and mid October 2012
- 354 interviews were completed: 181 postal and 173 email
 - ICO supplied sample of email and postal enquirers in the ratio of 2:1
 - A higher conversion rate among postal enquirers resulted in a final achieved sample which was more evenly balanced between postal and email



Response rates and outcomes

- One in five responded to the postal survey and one in ten, to the email survey
- 11% claimed not to have received a reply from the ICO to their enquiry at the time of interview and were screened out

	Postal	Email	Total
Mailed to	991	1877	2868
Completed survey	181	173	354
Responded but claimed not to have received a reply from the ICO	23	20	43
Response rate	21%	10%	12%
% responding who claimed not to have received a reply	11%	10%	11%

Base: All mailed to



Key Findings

- Six in ten (58%) are satisfied overall with the way ICO dealt with their recent written enquiry (30% dissatisfied)
 - levels of satisfaction are very similar to those given for ICO's complaint handling service
 - there are higher levels of satisfaction for business enquiries (70%) than for personal enquiries (42%)

- Seven in ten would approach the ICO again for advice if they had another enquiry

- Enquirers writing to or emailing the ICO tend to be male, middle-aged (45-64) and from social classes AB

- The top 5 enquiries (grouped from respondents' own descriptions of their enquiry) were:
 - queries about/ challenges to an aspect of the DPA – 14%
 - informing the ICO of a (suspected) breach of the DPA – 12%
 - requests for clarification about the DPA – 12%
 - finding out how to stop or complaining about cold calls/ spam emails/ unwanted mail – 5%
 - queries about data sharing/ sharing of personal details – 5%

- Those making personal enquiries were more likely to be informing the ICO of a (suspected) breach of the DPA or finding out how to stop unwanted calls/ correspondence



Key Findings /2

- Answering the question directly, responding quickly and giving a clear and concise reply were the main reasons given for high satisfaction with the ICO

- Taking too long to reply and not answering the question were the main reasons for dissatisfaction

- An analysis of overall satisfaction levels by those satisfied and dissatisfied with various aspects of the written advice service reveals some key drivers of satisfaction. These are aspects where there is a big difference in overall satisfaction with the written advice service between those rating an aspect well and those rating it poorly. They are also areas where there could be improvements made. They are:-
 - showing that you fully understand what is being asked
 - addressing the main issue
 - showing that you are treating the enquiry as a serious matter
 - replying quickly



Key Findings /3

- A large proportion of correspondence is not being dealt with within the ICO's own target of 30 days according to respondents and is falling outside the response time which enquirers expect
 - 58% of postal enquiries dealt with within 4 weeks (82% expected a reply within 4 weeks)
 - 52% of email enquiries dealt with within 4 weeks (84% expected a reply within 4 weeks)

- Consequently, a large proportion of enquirers are dissatisfied with speed of reply (31% of postal and 46% of email) which is impacting negatively on overall satisfaction

- Good points about written advice are:-
 - replies were polite (88%)
 - about the right length (81%)
 - written in plain English (79%)
 - tailored to enquirer's letter/ email (72%)
 - the writer was knowledgeable and competent (72%)
 - correspondence was treated seriously (72%)



Key Findings /4

- Matters needing addressing are:-
 - only 40% claimed that their enquiry had been fully dealt with by the time of interview (26% of personal enquiries)
 - 10% still waiting for additional information from the ICO/ 18% still need to clarify something (15% and 24% respectively for personal enquiries)
 - only 64% claimed ICO's reply addressed the main issue (49% for personal enquiries)

- In half of cases, the experience of dealing with the ICO was in line with people's expectations. However 32% said it was worse than expected with a lower 16% saying it was better

- While 40% claimed that the exercise was relatively effortless, 22% said they had to expend a great deal of effort getting the information they needed

- 37% would be happy for the ICO to telephone them in response to a written enquiry (44% of business enquirers and 30% of personal enquirers)

- 36% would be happy to receive an email with a link to the relevant information on ICO's website (45% of business enquirers and 26% of personal enquirers)



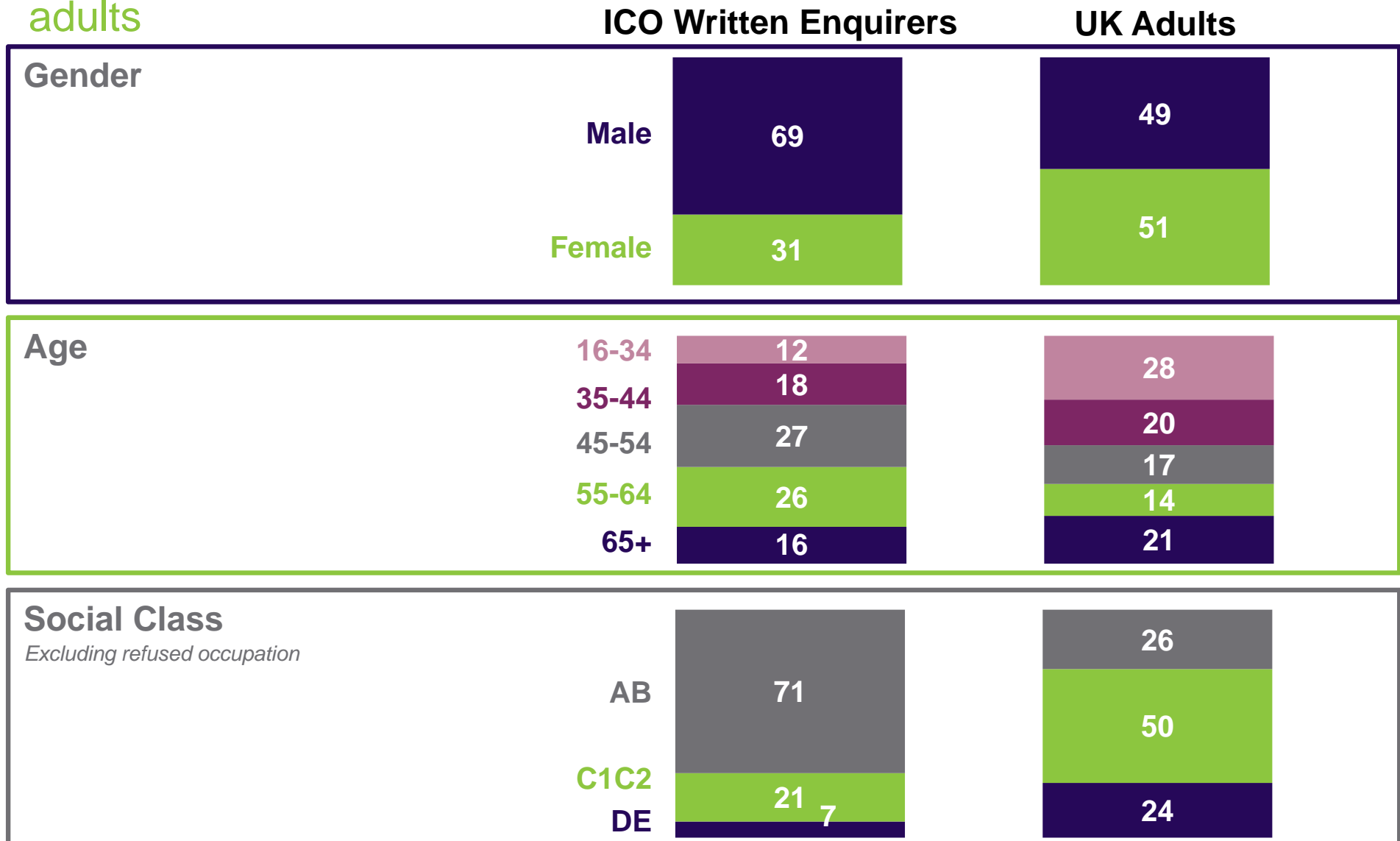
Detailed Findings





Profile of written enquirers to the ICO

Those writing to or emailing the ICO for written advice are skewed towards males, 45-64s and ABs when compared to the profile of UK adults





Nature of enquiry (according to respondent)

Using respondents' own descriptions of the subject matter of their latest written enquiry to the ICO, the most common enquires were about the Data Protection Act (colour coded green in the table)

Key: **DPA** **FOIA** **PECR** **Other**

	All (354) %	Business (172) %	Personal (167) %
Query/ challenge an aspect of the DPA	14	17	10
Inform ICO of a (suspected) breach of the DPA	12	8	19
Obtain clarification about the DPA	12	15	8
Find out how to stop/ complain about/ inform ICO about cold calls/ spam emails/ unwanted mail	5	4	9
Query about data sharing / sharing of personal details	5	6	4
Find out if company/ organisation is acting lawfully when it says it cannot release information to me	5	1	8
Find out how Councils/ Government Departments/ the Police/ the NHS use my personal data	4	5	2
Obtain clarification /info regarding cookie regulations/ website compliance/ informing site visitors about cookie policy	4	7	2
Inform ICO that I have not had a reply to a data request/ FOI request not responded to/ denied	3	1	6
Clarification regarding CCTV/ correct installation/ use of CCTV	3	4	3
Obtain clarification about the FOIA	3	3	3
Ask about notification/ renewal of notification/ changing details on my notification entry	3	2	3
Query/ challenge an aspect of the FOIA	2	2	2
Find out how to check/ correct my credit record/ credit history	2	0	4
Ask advice about/ complain about a reference/ information about me sent to a third party by my employer/ former employer/ a suspected bad reference	2	0	4
Advice regarding how long you can keep personal data/ the disposal of confidential documents/ deleting personal data	2	2	1
Clarification regarding accessing data/ information requests	2	1	2
Other	22	28	14
Don't know/not stated	3	2	4

Q2 Firstly, what was your letter/ email to the ICO about?

Base: All (354)

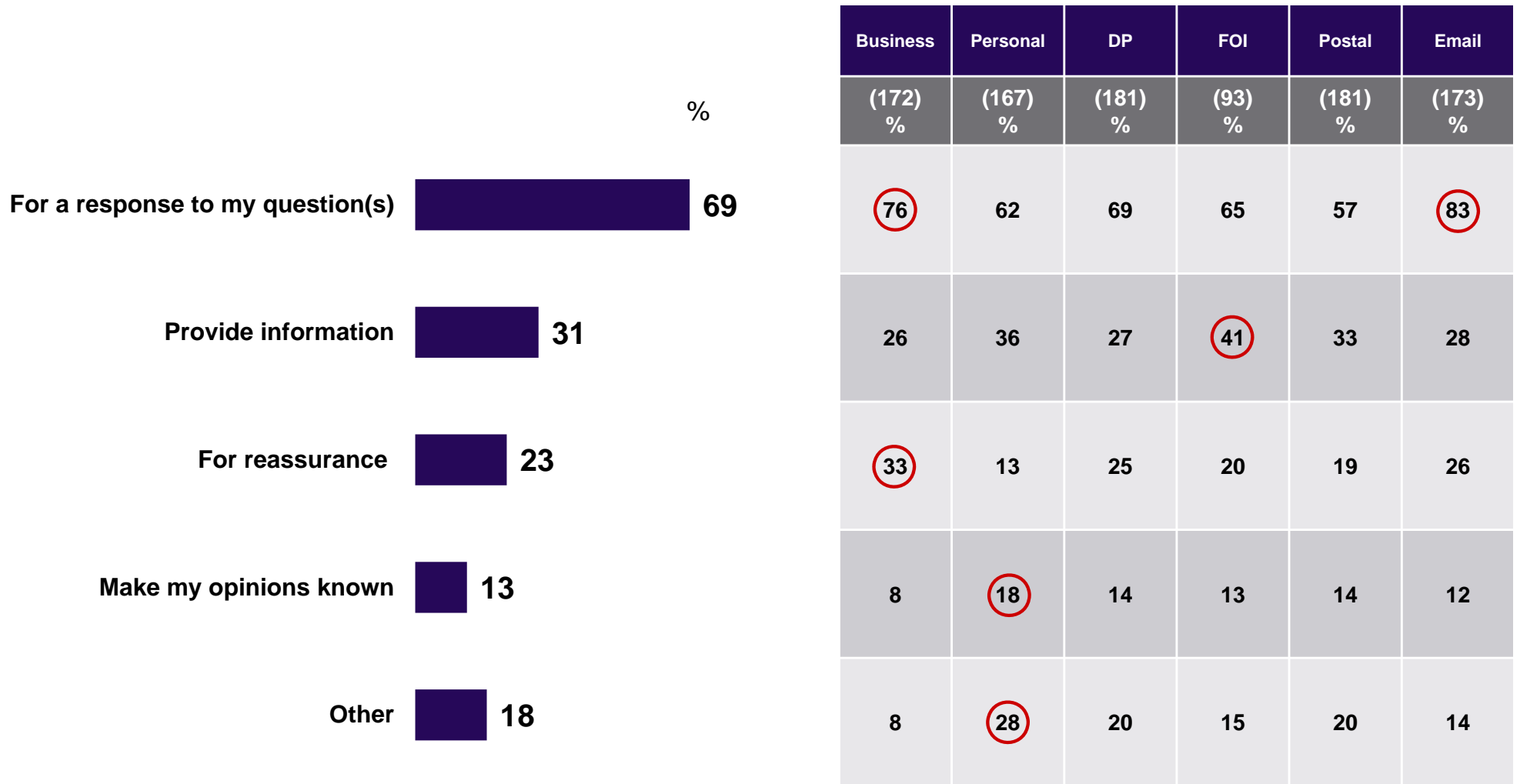
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Outcome hoped for

Naturally, the outcome most wanted is a response to their question.

A third wanted to provide information and a quarter wanted reassurance



Q3 When you wrote your letter/ email, which of the following were you hoping for?
Base: All (354)

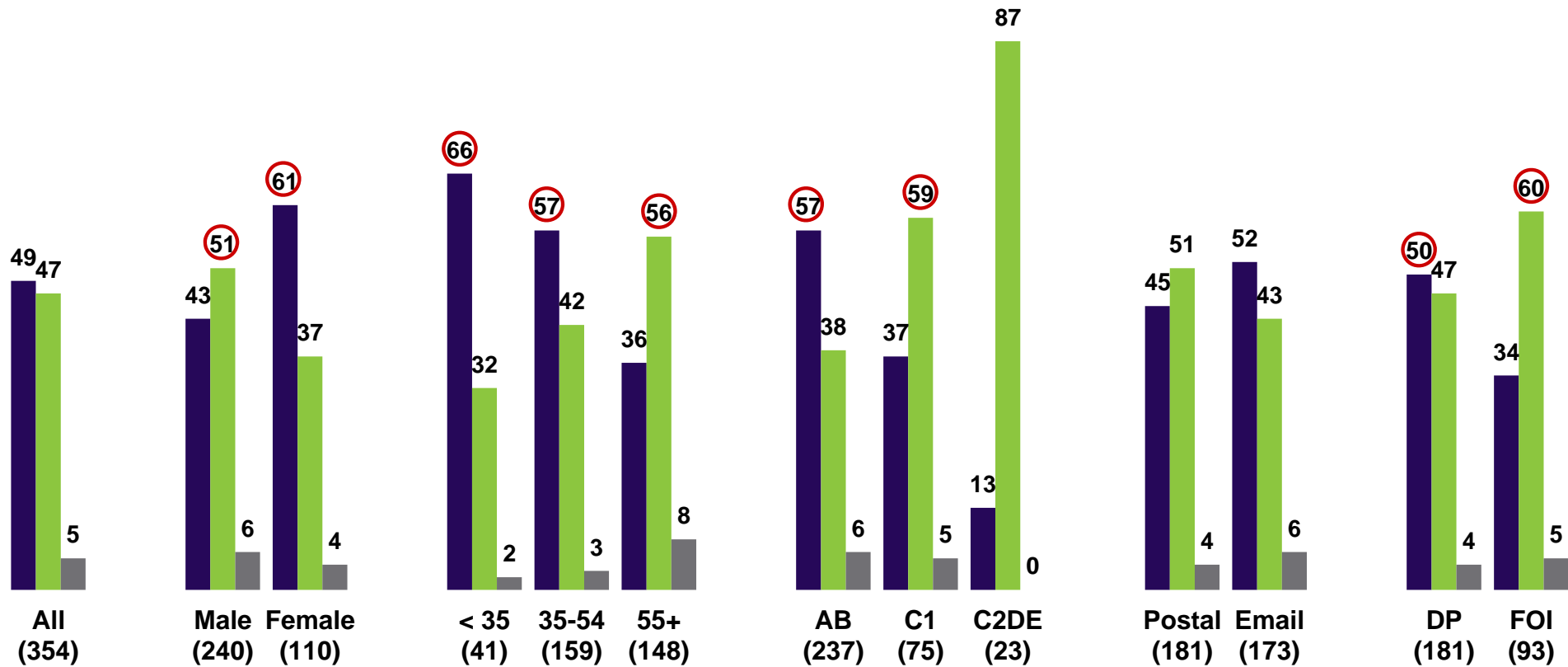
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Business or personal enquiry?

In our survey sample, requests for written advice were split evenly between those made on behalf of a business and personal (private) enquiries

■ Business enquiry ■ Personal enquiry ■ Other



Q4 Was your enquiry made on behalf of a business or was it a personal enquiry?

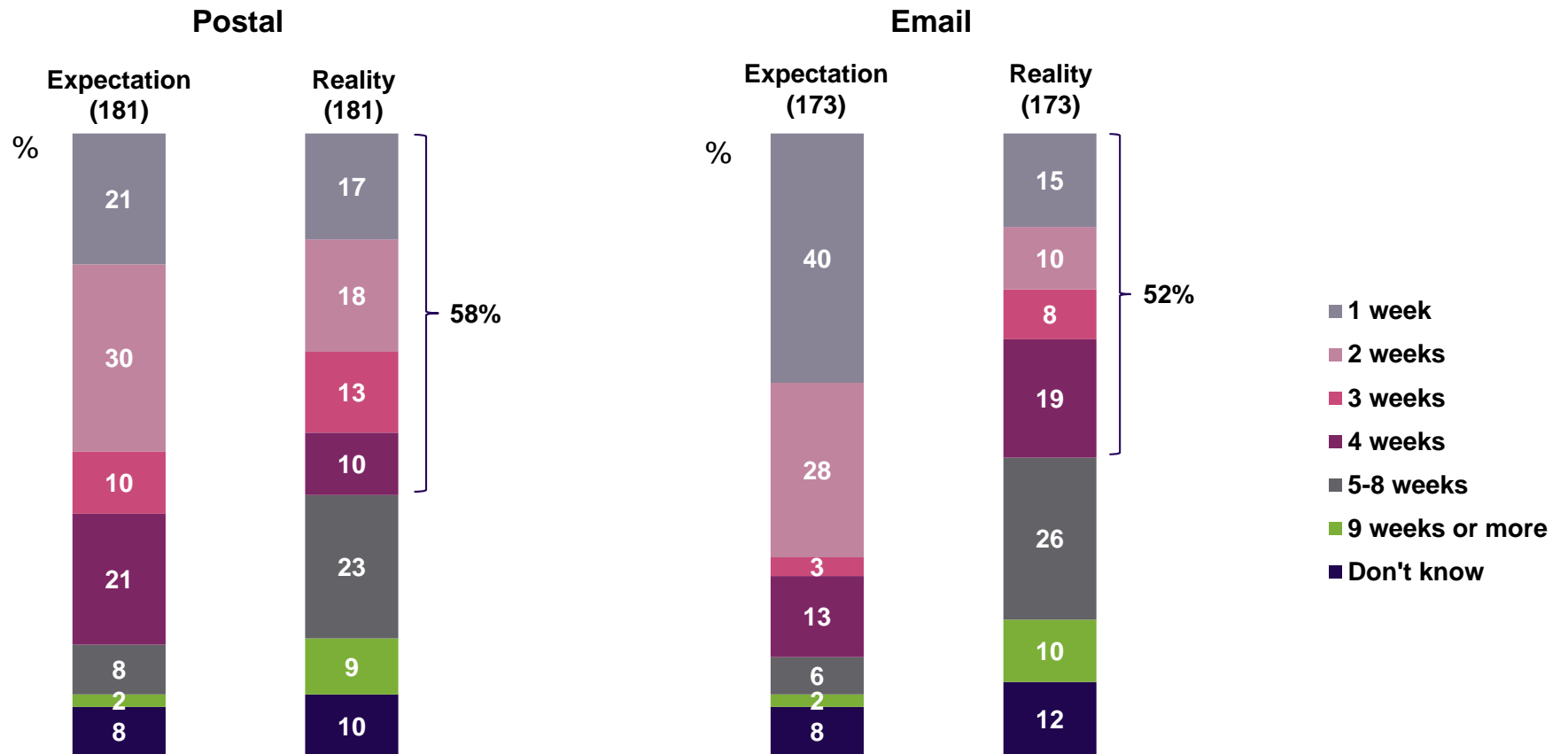
Base: All

○ = Significantly higher



Speed of dealing with enquiry

58% of postal and 52% of email enquirers received a reply from the ICO dealing with their enquiry within 4 weeks of them writing/ emailing. It took longer for the ICO to reply to written enquiries than expected in many cases



Q6 How quickly did you expect to receive a reply?

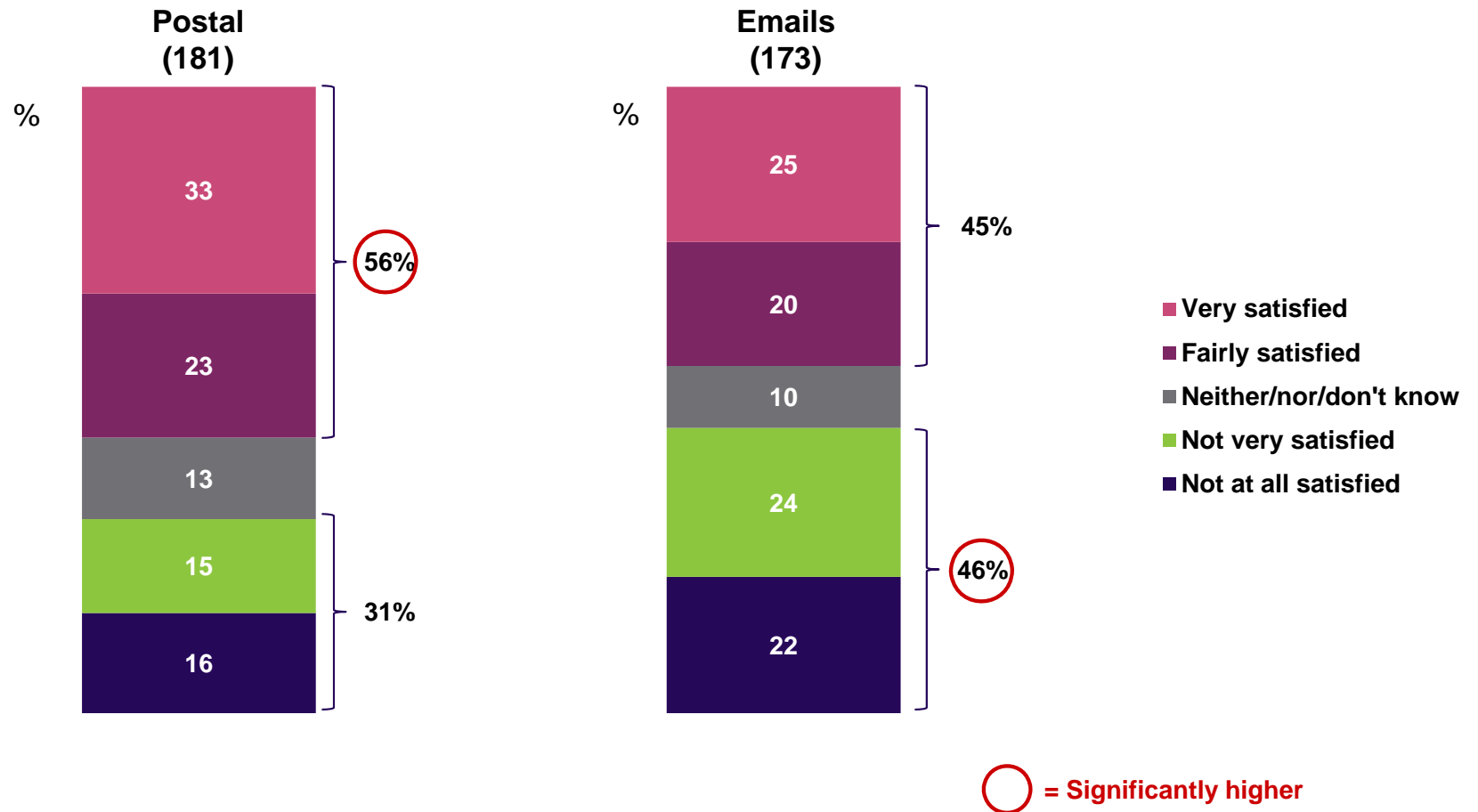
Q7 How soon after you sent your original letter/ email did you receive a reply from them dealing with your enquiry?

Base: All



Satisfaction with speed

As time taken to reply is longer than expected, satisfaction with speed of replying is depressed, especially in the case of emails where almost half are dissatisfied



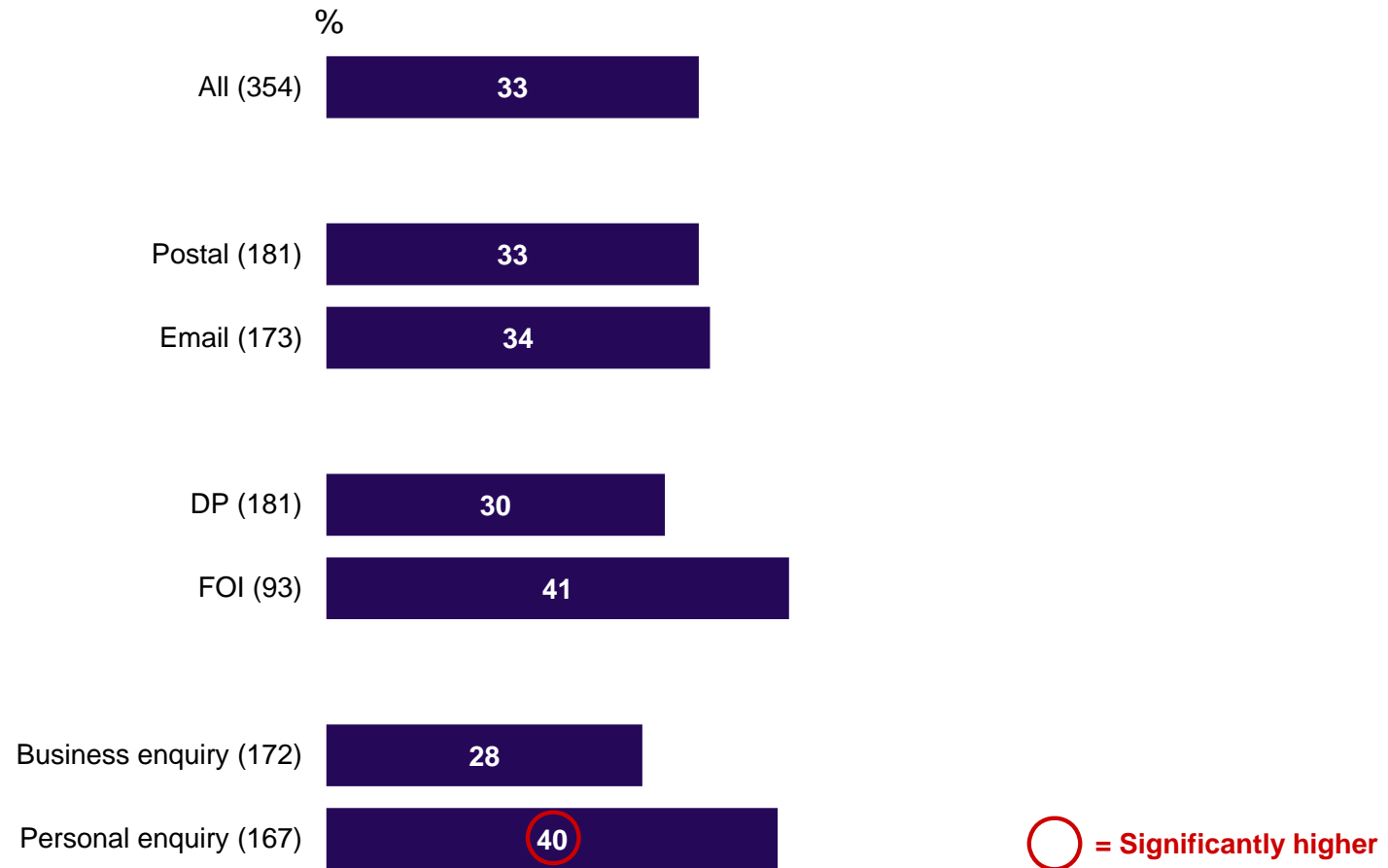
Q8 How satisfied are you with the speed with which the ICO has dealt with your enquiry

Base: All



Multiple Contacts

A third of enquirers are needing more than one exchange of letters/ emails for their enquiry to be dealt with (four in ten of FOI enquiries)



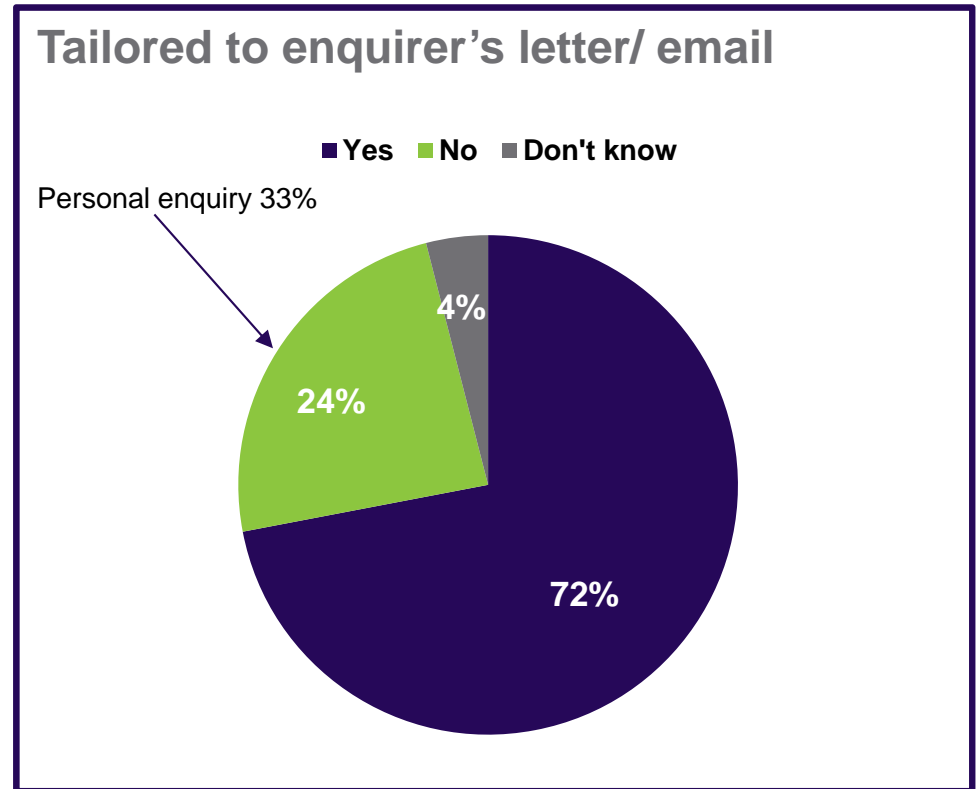
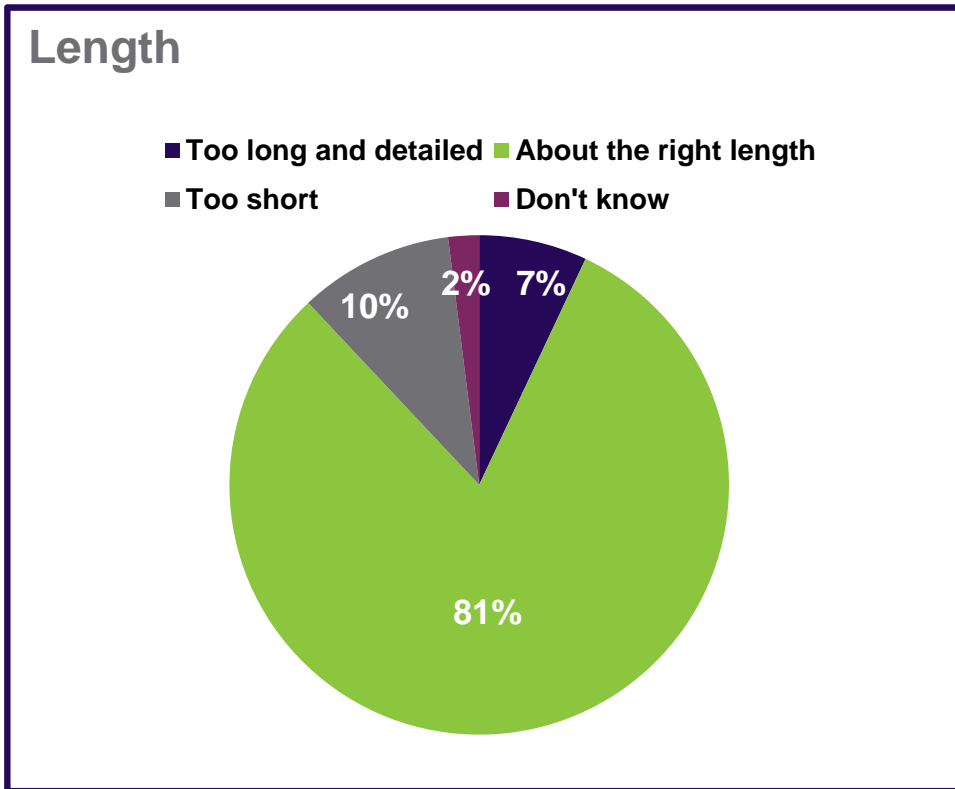
Q9 Has it taken more than one exchange of letters/ emails between you and the ICO to deal with your enquiry?

Base: All



Length of reply/ whether tailored

The majority (81%) are happy that written replies from the ICO are about the right length, however, a quarter did not feel the reply was tailored to their particular enquiry (a third among personal enquirers)



Q11 Did you feel the reply you received from the ICO was too long and detailed, about the right length or too short?

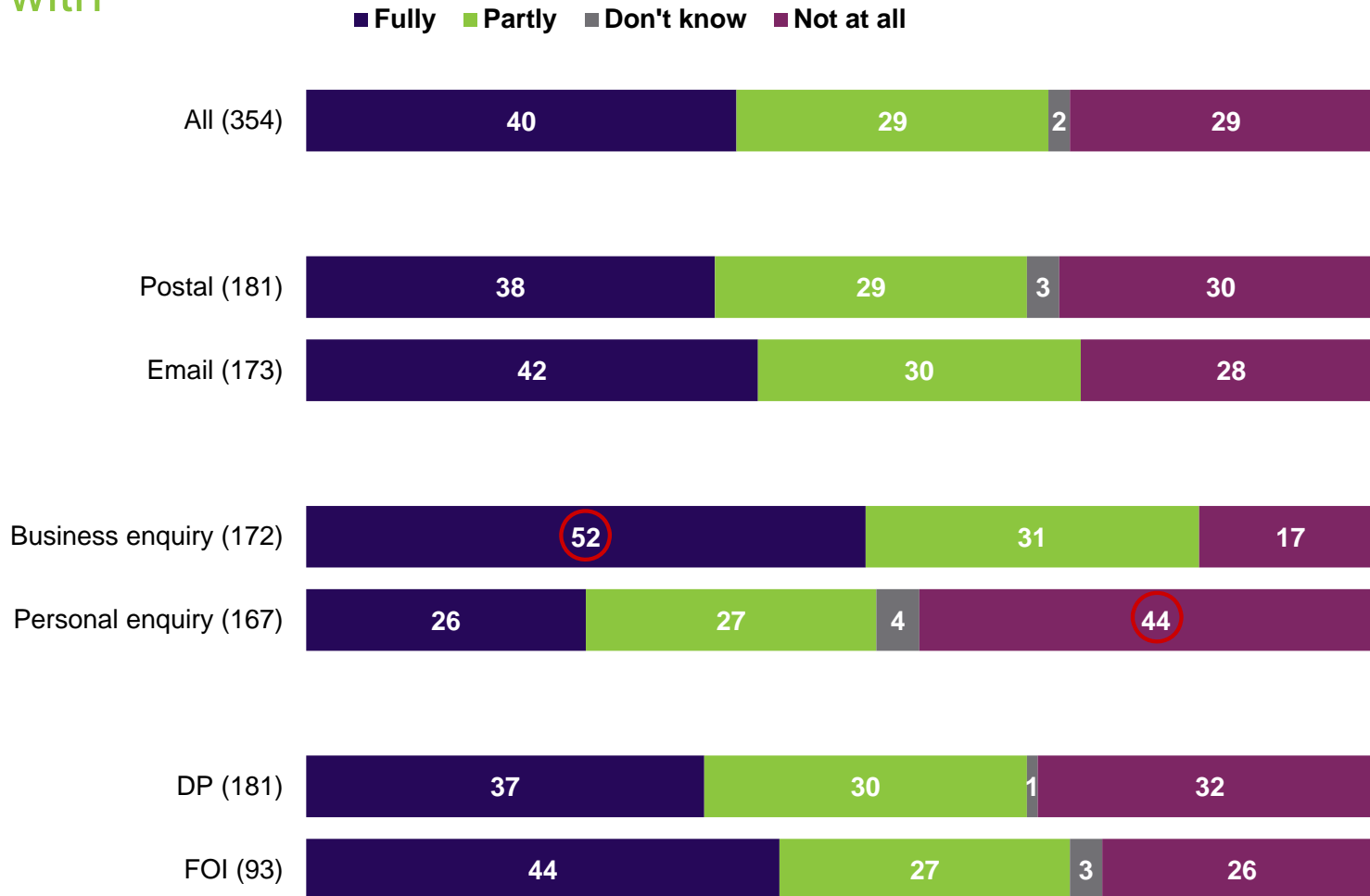
Q12 Did you feel the reply was tailored to your particular letter/ email?

Base: All (354)



Fulfilment

40 percent claimed that their enquiry had been fully dealt with by the time of interview and 29% said that it had been partly dealt with. Business enquirers were more likely to say their enquiry had been fully or partly dealt with



Q13 To what extent did you get what you wanted as a result of writing to/ emailing the ICO?

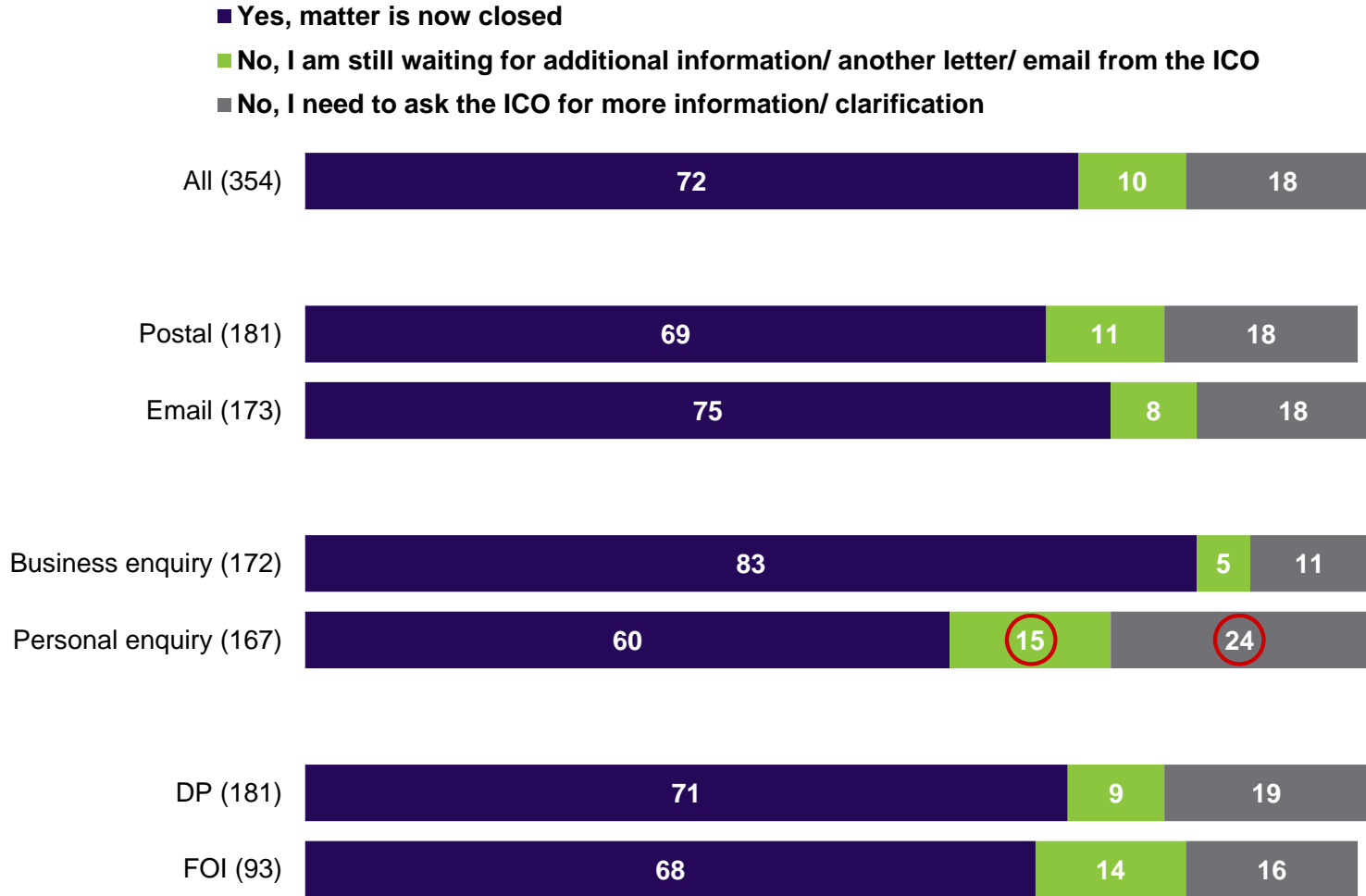
Base: All

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Matter now closed?

Over seven in ten said that the matter is now closed but 10% are waiting for more information from the ICO and 18% need to ask for clarification



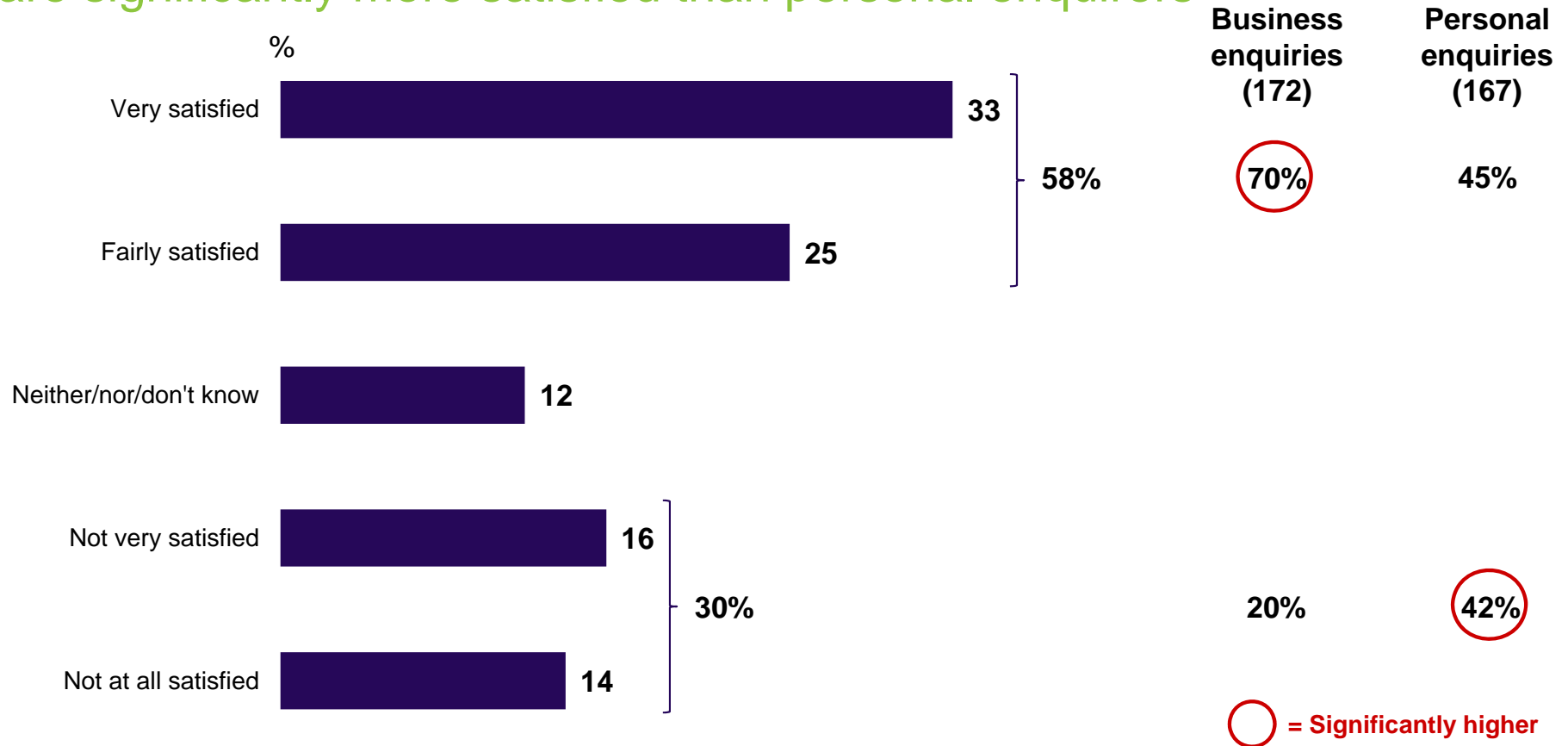
Q14 As far as you are concerned, is the matter now closed?
Base: All

= Significantly higher



Overall satisfaction with written advice

Six in ten (58%) are satisfied overall with the way ICO handled their written enquires. Three in ten (30%) are dissatisfied. Business enquirers are significantly more satisfied than personal enquirers



ICO's written advice service receives a very similar set of results to its complaint handling service. Another central Government Office obtained 48% satisfaction for enquiry handling in 2008, and this year, a utilities consumer watchdog obtained 74% satisfaction for complaint handling (by way of comparison).

Q15 So how satisfied are you overall with the way your letter/ email was handled by the ICO?

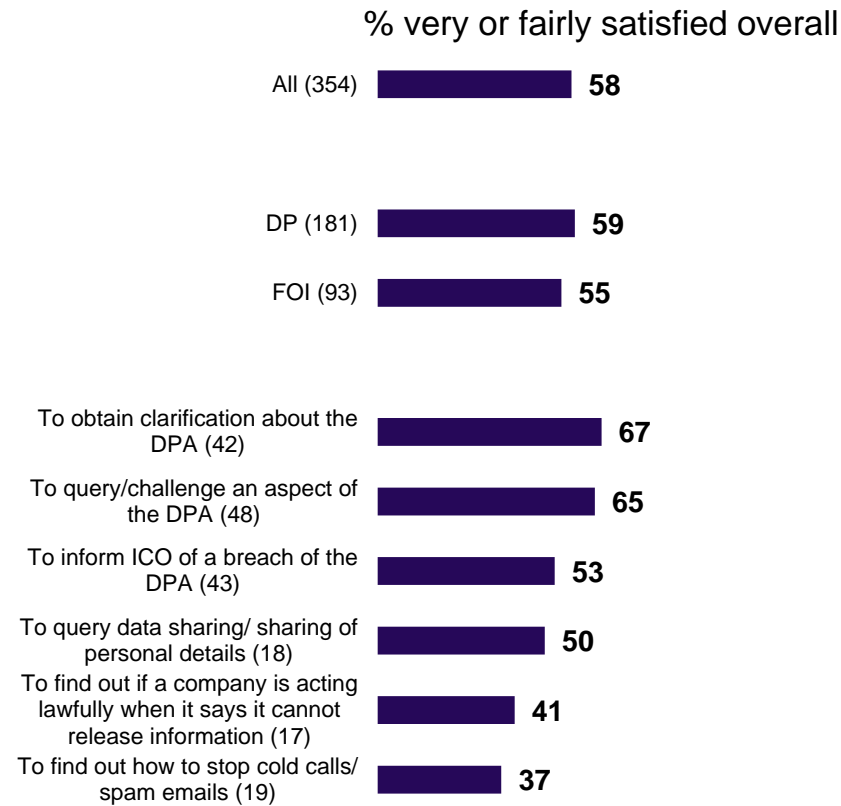
Base: All (354)



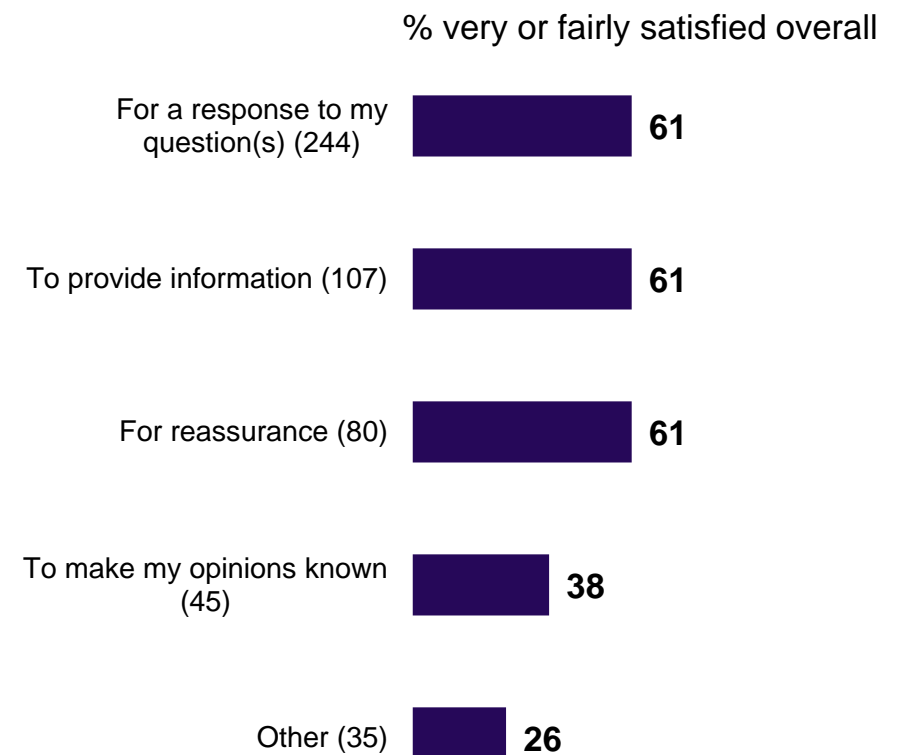
Overall satisfaction with written advice

ICO obtains the lowest overall satisfaction ratings for enquiries about how to stop cold calls/ unwanted mail and about whether companies are acting lawfully when they say they cannot release information

By Enquiry Type



By Desired Outcome



Q15 So how satisfied are you overall with the way your letter/ email was handled by the ICO?

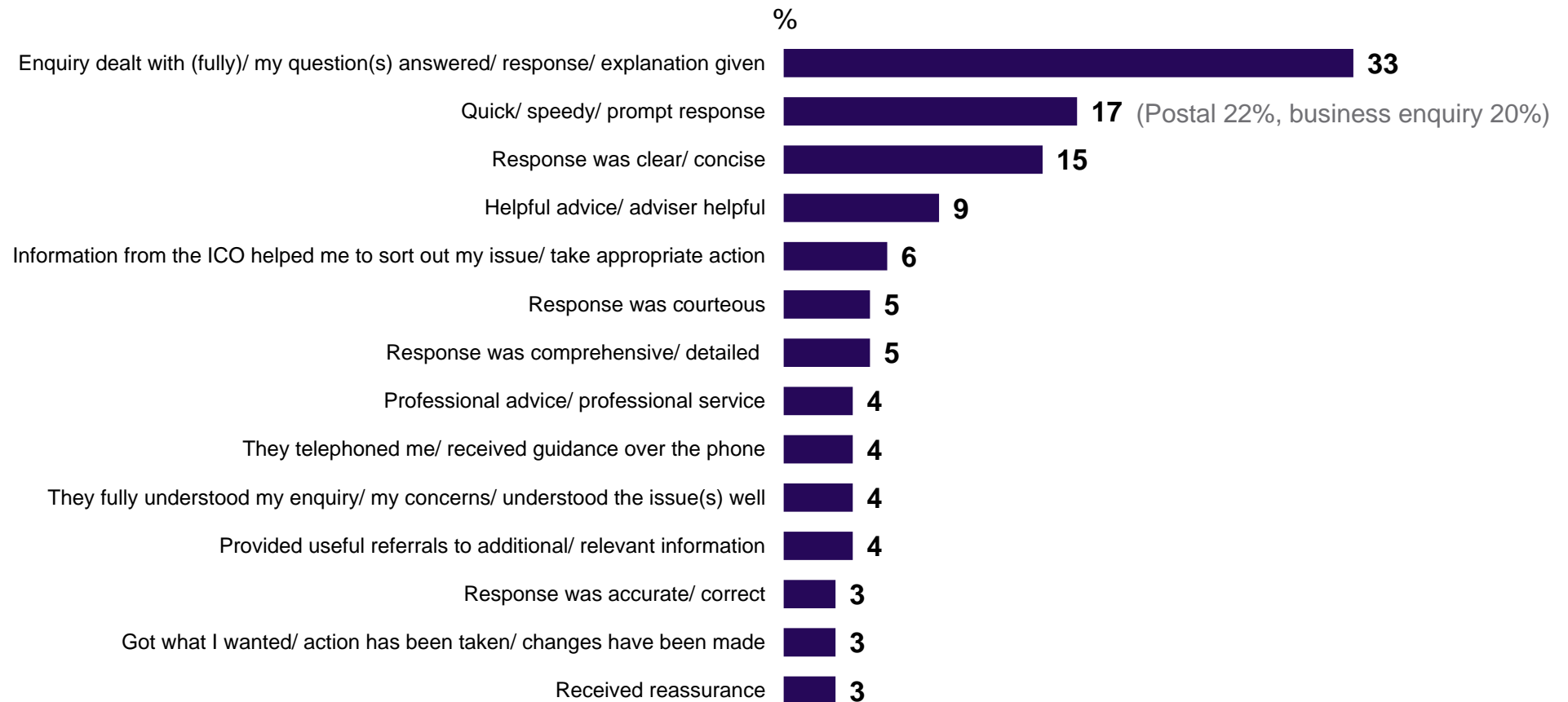
Base: All

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Reasons for satisfaction with written advice

Satisfied enquirers had their enquiry dealt with fully, speedily and in a clear and concise manner

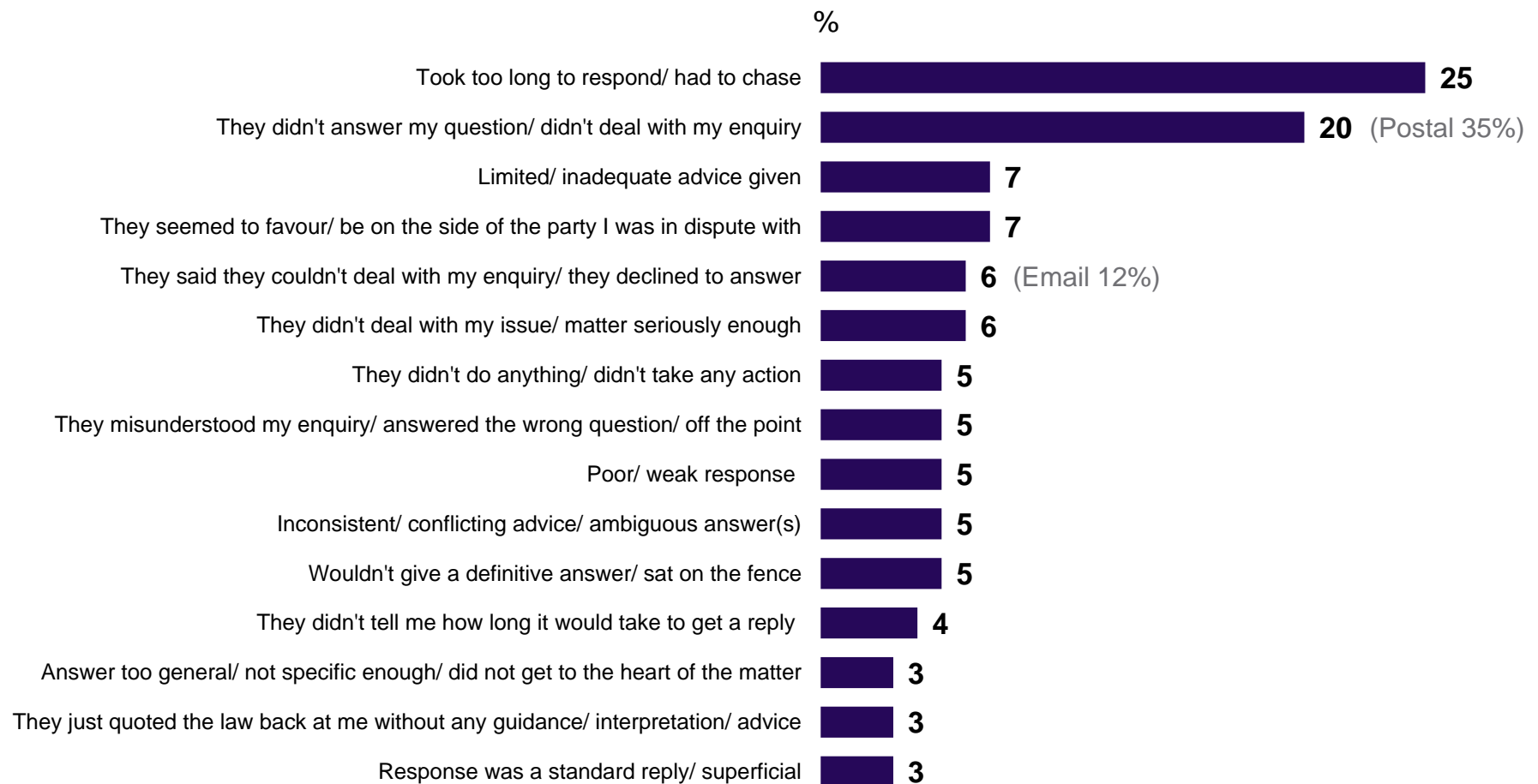


Q16a Why are you satisfied with the way your letter/ email was handled by the ICO?

Base: All very or fairly satisfied overall (206)

→ Reasons for dissatisfaction with written advice

Dissatisfied enquirers mainly complained about the length of time it took to receive a reply and that it didn't answer their question(s)



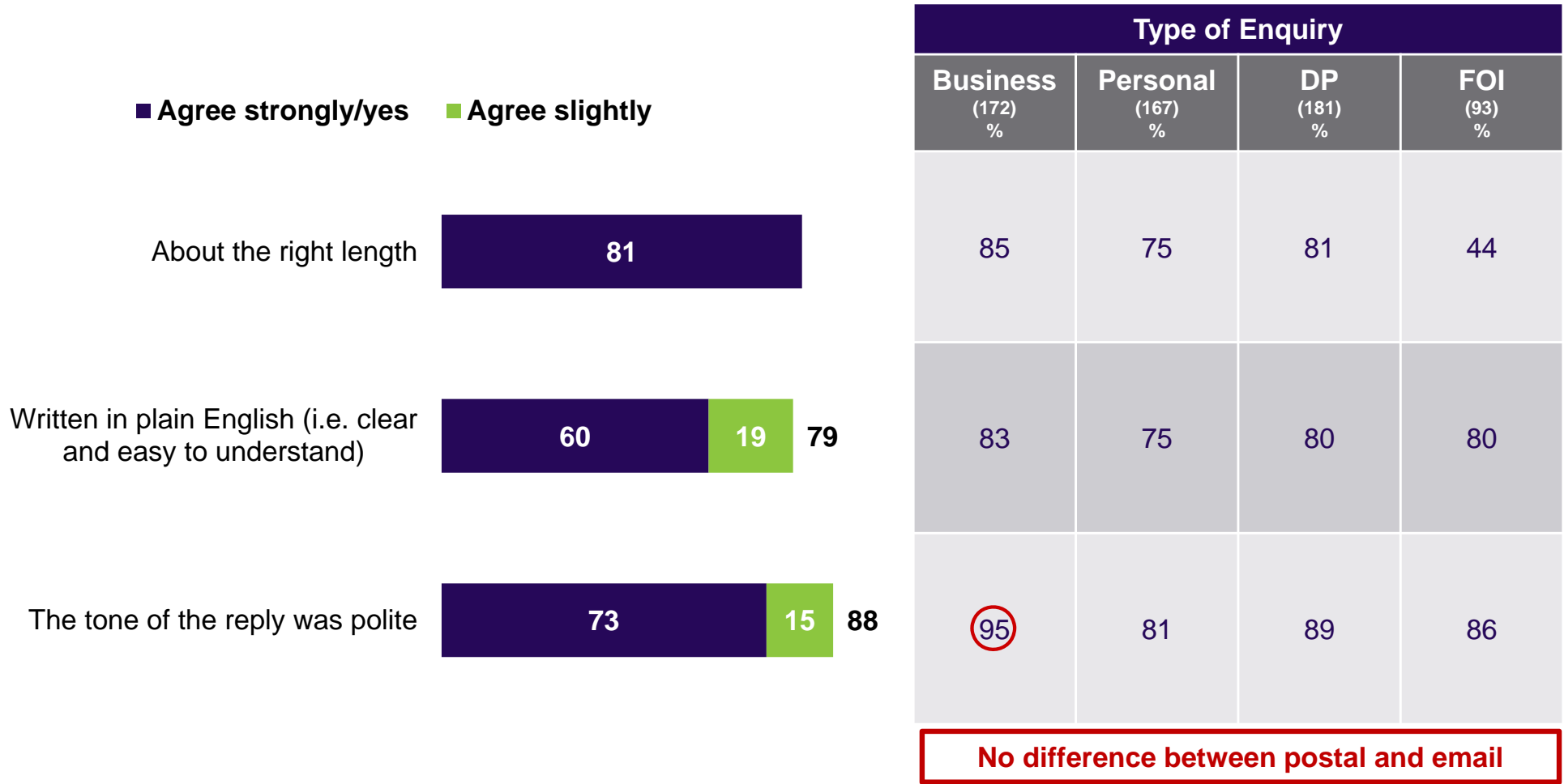
Q16b Why are you not satisfied with the way your letter/ email was handled by the ICO?

Base: All not very or not at all satisfied overall (106)



Rating of the reply – length, clarity, tone

Eight in ten thought written replies were about the right length and written in plain English. Approaching nine in ten thought they were polite



Q11 Did you feel the reply you received from the ICO was too long and detailed, about the right length or too short?

Q10a How much do you agree or disagree that the reply was written in plain English (i.e. it was clear and easy to understand)?

Q10b How much do you agree or disagree that the tone of the reply was polite?

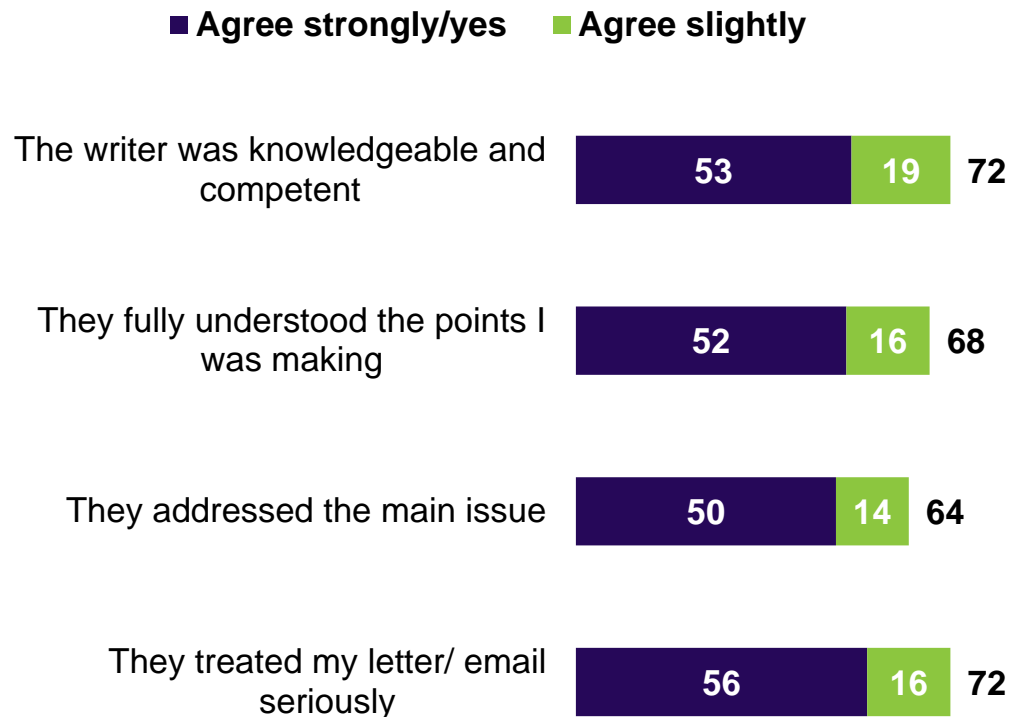
Base: All

○ = Significantly higher



Rating of the reply – competence of person replying

Seven in ten agreed that the reply was written by someone who fully understood the points raised, who treated their correspondence seriously and was knowledgeable and competent. However, only 64% agreed that the reply addressed the main issue



Type of Enquiry			
Business (172) %	Personal (167) %	DP (181) %	FOI (93) %
79	62	73	62
77	57	67	70
74	49	62	66
84	58	71	72
No difference between postal and email			

Q10c How much do you agree or disagree that the writer was knowledgeable and competent?

Q10d How much do you agree or disagree that they fully understood the points you were making?

Q10e How much do you agree or disagree that they addressed the main issue?

Q10f How much do you agree or disagree that they treated your letter/ email seriously?

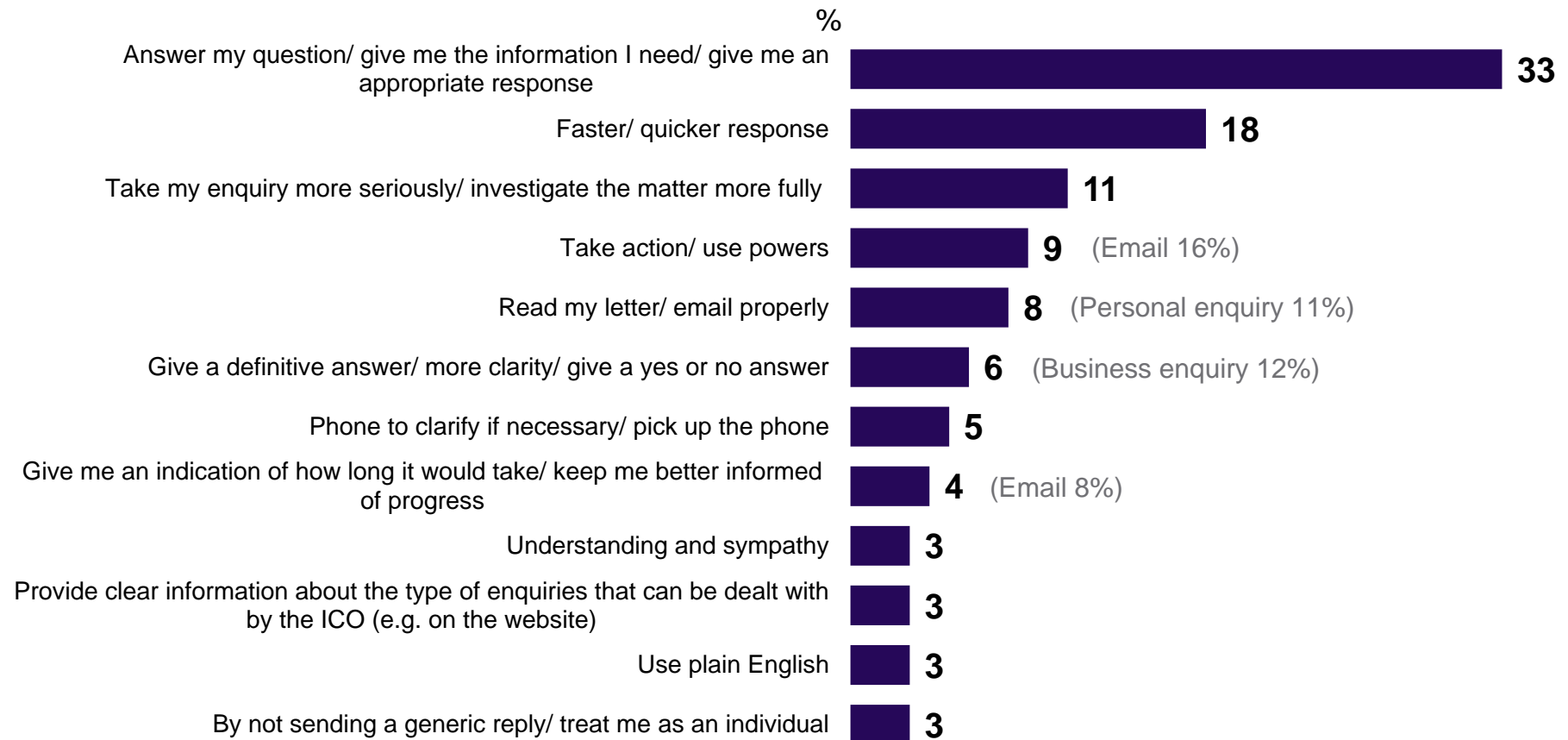
Base: All

○ = Significantly higher



Suggestions for improvement

There were a variety of suggestions for improvement among dissatisfied enquirers including more effort in answering the question(s), faster response time, treating enquiries more seriously and taking action/ using powers



Q17 How could they have handled your letter/ email better?

Base: All not very or not at all satisfied overall (106)

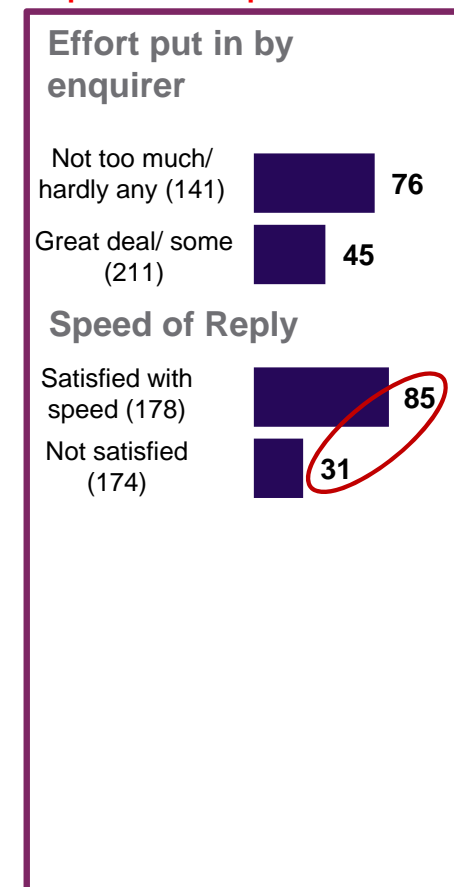
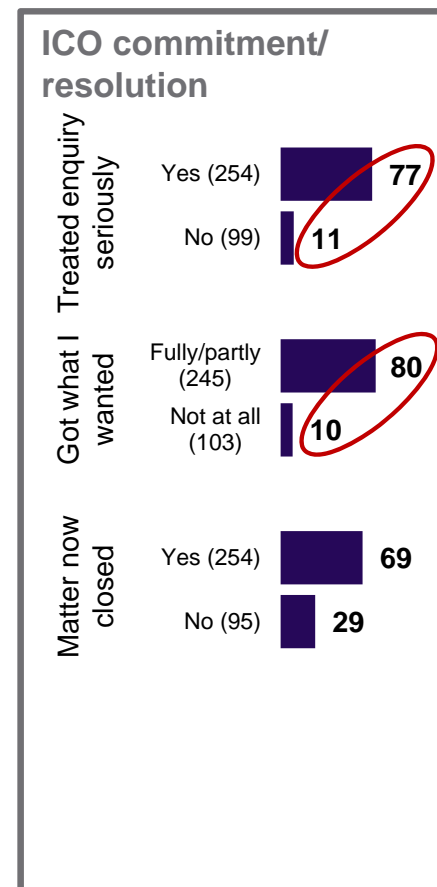
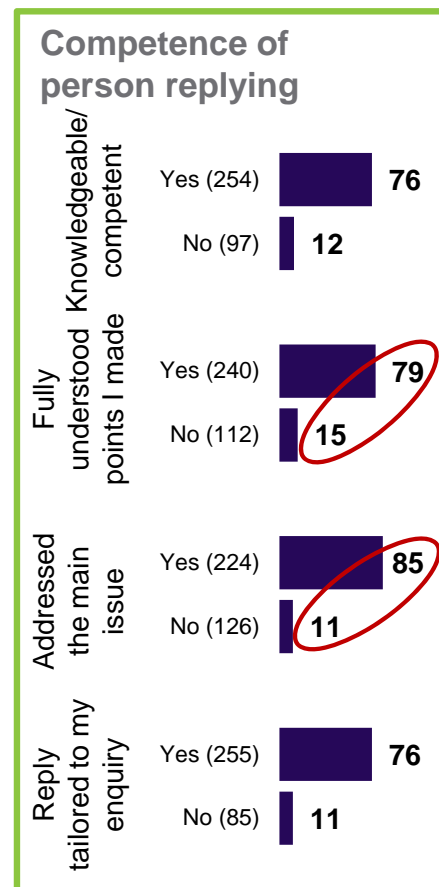
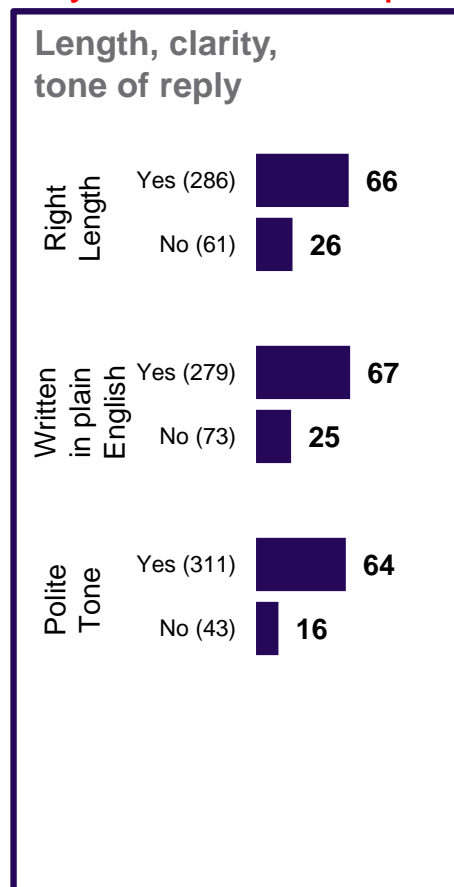


Key drivers of overall satisfaction

Showing that you fully understand what enquirers are asking, addressing the main issue, treating their correspondence seriously, giving them what they want and replying quickly are key to improving overall satisfaction

% satisfied overall with enquiry handling among those satisfied/ not satisfied with key aspects

Key drivers are aspects which drive overall satisfaction and where there is scope for improvement



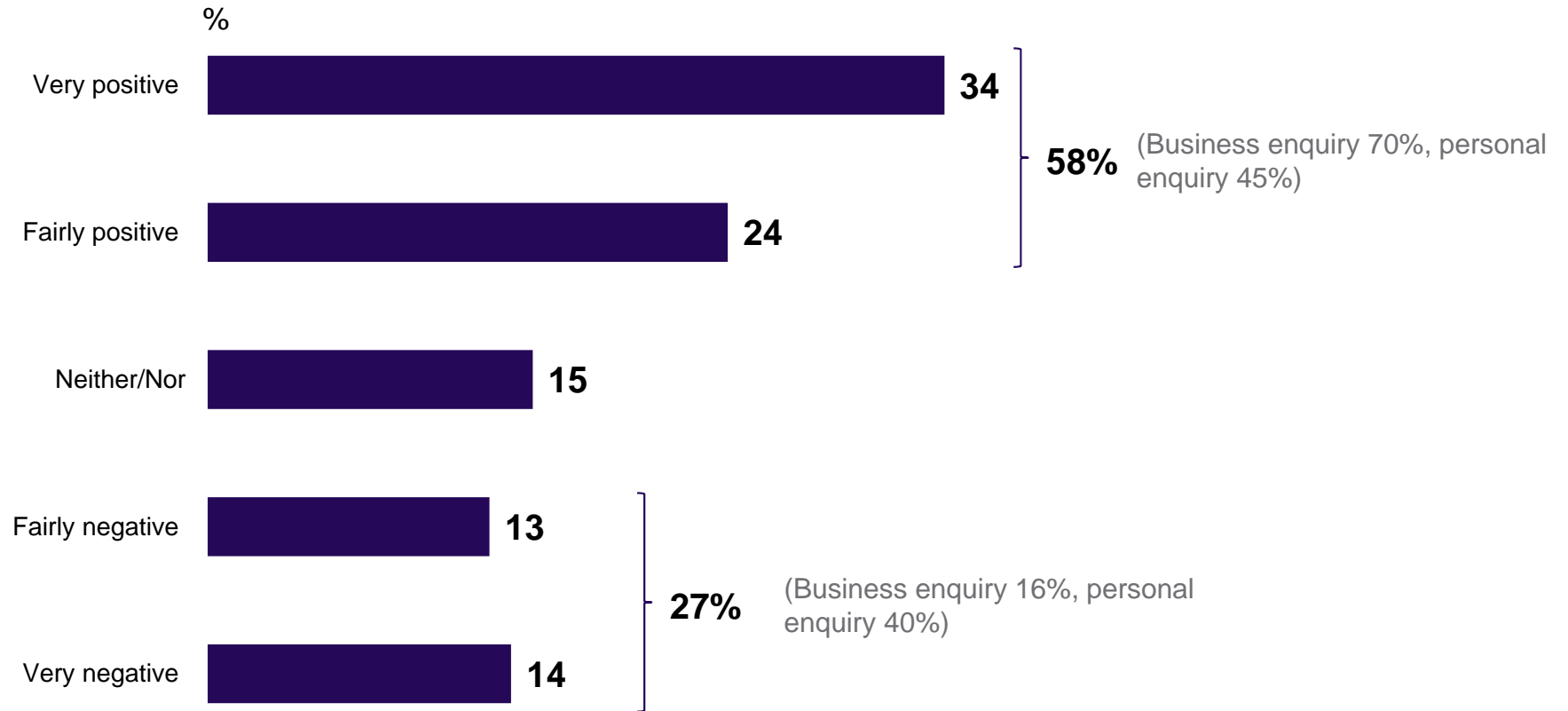
Q15 So how satisfied are you overall with the way your letter/ email was handled by the ICO?

Base: All



Impression of ICO

On balance more written enquirers formed a positive impression of the ICO after contacting (58%) than a negative one (27%)



Very similar results among complainants thinking about their last complaint to ICO

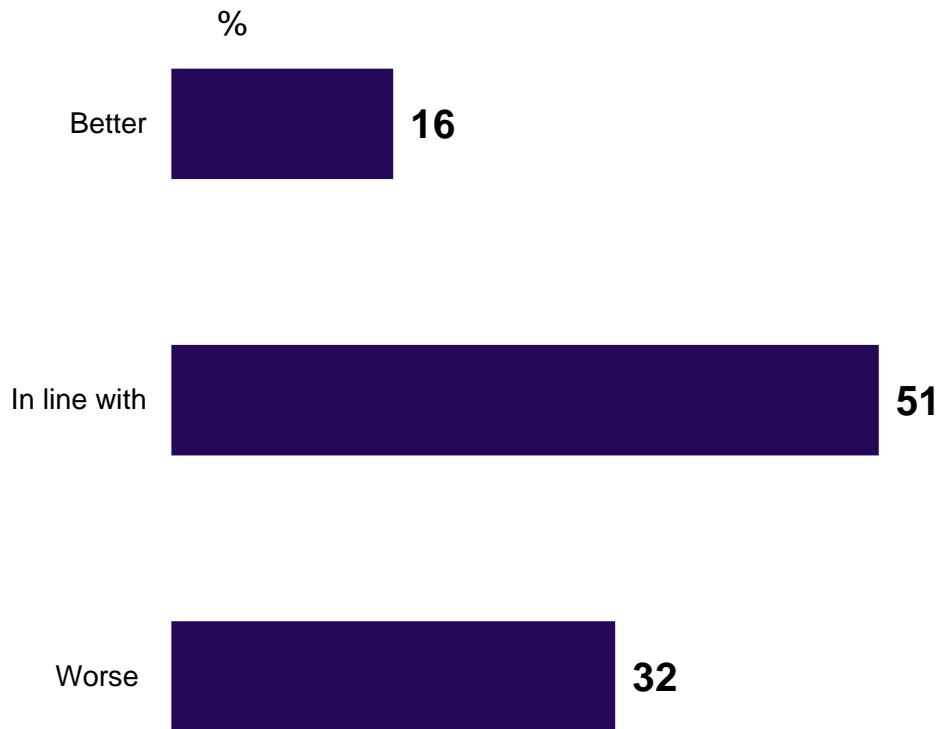
Q18 Thinking of how they dealt with your letter/ email, what sort of impression did this give you of the ICO?

Base: All (354)



Expectation versus reality

The experience of writing to/ emailing the ICO was often worse than expected among those making personal enquiries and emailers



	Business (172) %	Personal (167) %	Postal (181) %	Email (173) %
Better	15	15	14	18
In line with	61	43	57	45
Worse	23	42	27	37

= Significantly higher

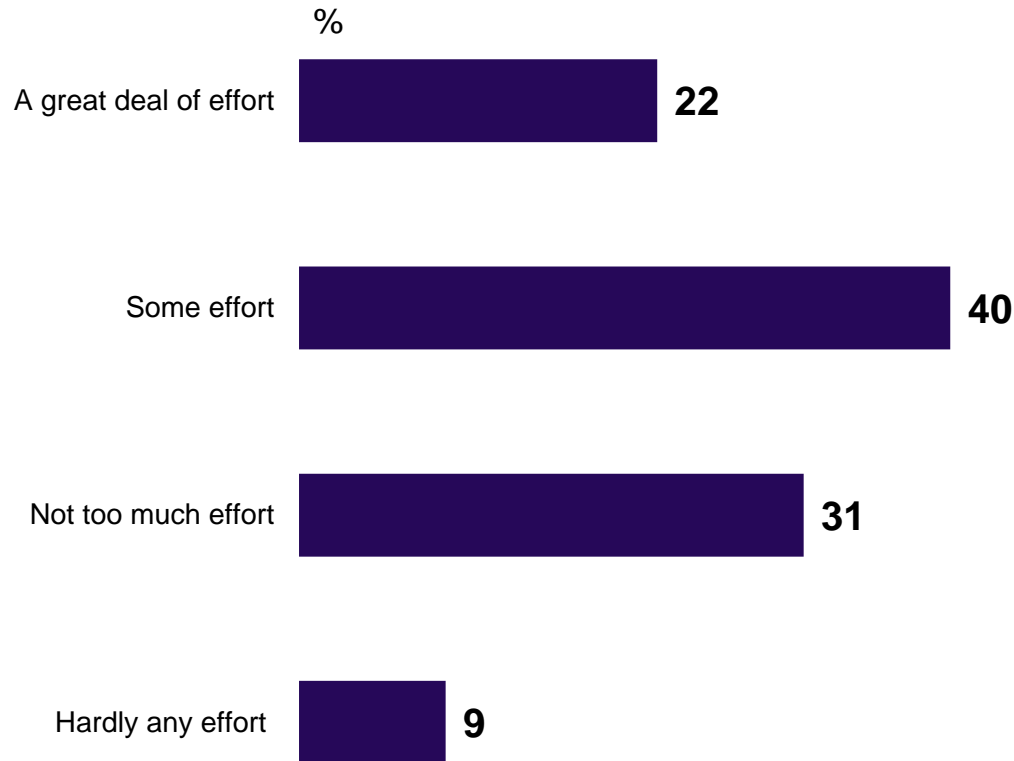
Q19 Thinking back to what you were expecting at the outset when you first sent a letter to/ emailed the ICO, has the experience of dealing with them been better than, in line with or worse than you expected?

Base: All (354)



Effort

A fifth claimed they had to put a great deal of effort into making their enquiry, but four in ten found the exercise relatively effortless



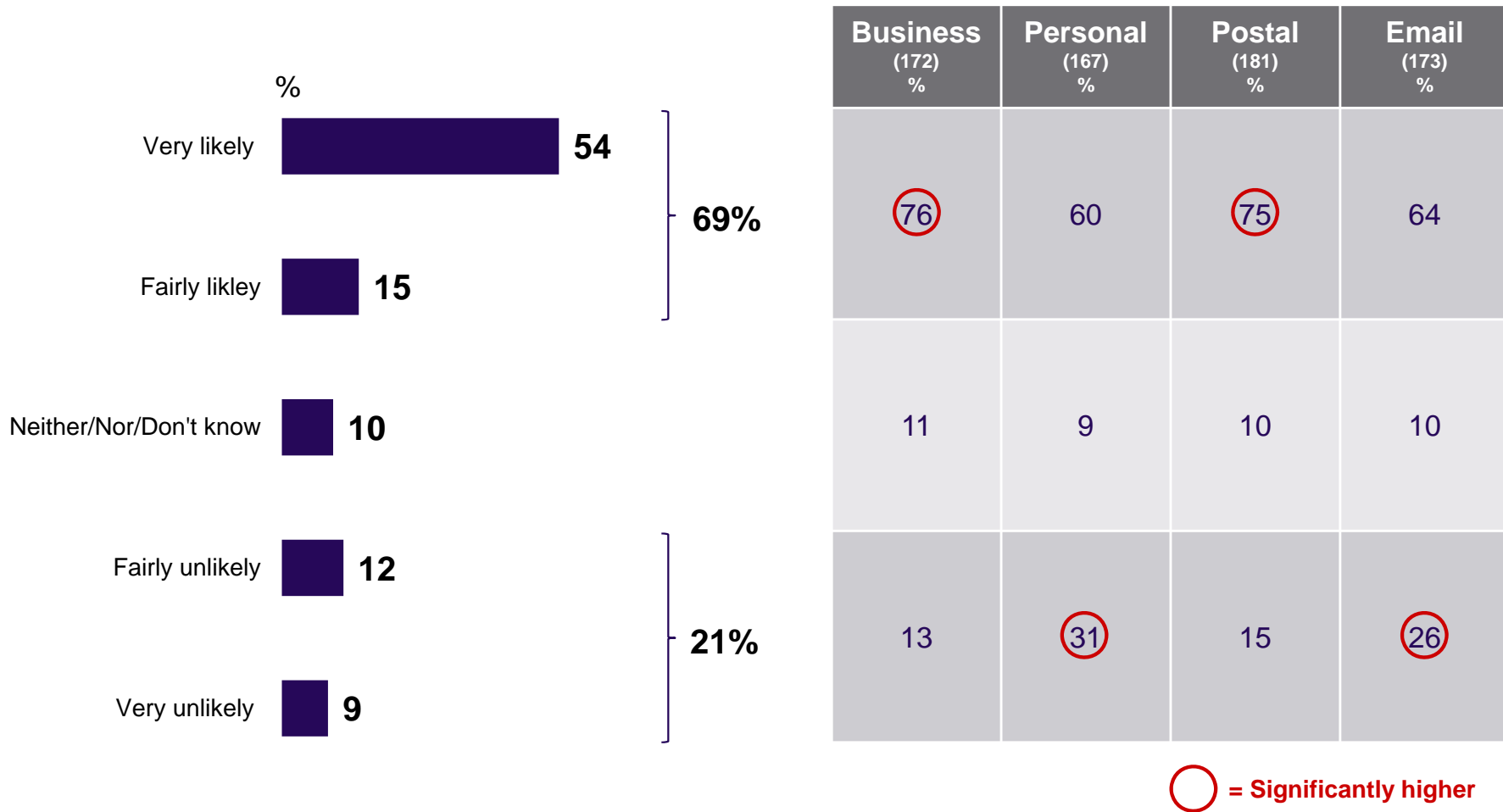
No significant differences by business versus personal, DP versus FOI or postal versus email

Q20 How much effort have you personally had to put into getting the information you needed from the ICO?
Base: All (354)



Likelihood of approaching ICO again

Seven in ten would approach the ICO again if they had another enquiry. 21% are not likely to approach the ICO again (higher among personal enquirers and emailers)



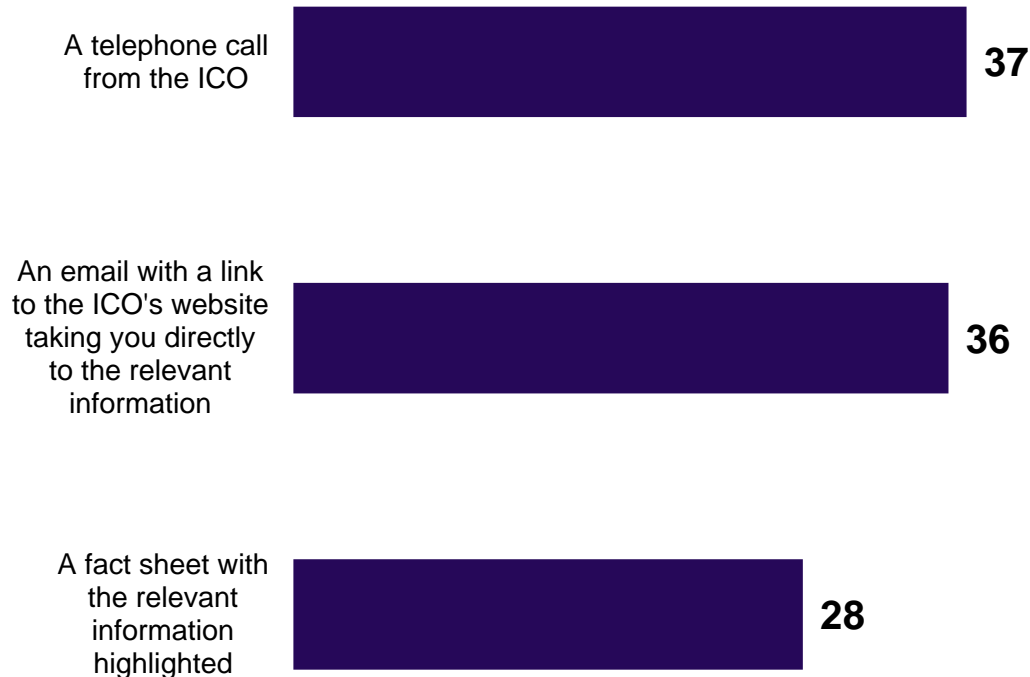
Q21 How likely are you to approach the ICO again if you had another enquiry?
Base: All (354)



Alternative approaches

37% would be happy to have written enquiries answered by a telephone call and 36% by an email with a link to the relevant information on ICO's website. Both of these options were even more acceptable to businesses

% happy to have had enquiry dealt with by alternative approach



	Business (172) %	Personal (167) %	DP (181) %	FOI (93) %	Postal (181) %	Email (173) %
A telephone call from the ICO	44	30	34	37	34	41
An email with a link to the ICO's website taking you directly to the relevant information	45	26	29	47	30	41
A fact sheet with the relevant information highlighted	31	25	25	34	27	29

= Significantly higher

Q22 You received a written response to your enquiry. Would you have been happy to have had your enquiry answered in any of the following ways instead?

Base: All (354)



Recommendations

- ICO needs to deliver speedier replies to written enquiries. Enquirers' perceptions of how long it took to reply are not going to be the same as the time recorded by ICO for sending out replies. With a third claiming that they needed to make more than one contact and three in ten still needing additional information or clarification, enquirers' conception of the time taken will of course be longer. Improving the quality of replies will help as the need for repeat contacts and the incidence of unresolved matters will be reduced
- The focus to improving satisfaction with written advice should be on personal enquiries as satisfaction levels are lower here than with business enquiries. The demographic profile of personal enquirers is a hard group to satisfy (male, 55+, AB). Many personal enquiries can be seen as complaints (e.g. informing the ICO of a (suspected) breach of the DPA or advice on how to stop unwanted calls/ mail). Dissatisfaction arises as a result of frustration that nothing is or can be done. The ICO needs to strike a careful balance between giving too little information and giving too much. Some will be served better if more explanation is given as to why certain actions/ outcomes are not possible e.g. the interests of safeguarding personal privacy are balanced against the needs of businesses to sell/ market (economic argument). With others, the greater depth of explanation is likely to encourage further enquiries. ICO may consider testing both approaches with personal enquirers to see which works best
- The ICO might consider asking enquirers (for more complex or 'emotional' cases) if they would be happy to discuss the matter over the phone. It is often much easier to resolve issues over the phone instead of having a chain of correspondence going back and forth. As one of the main complaints is that questions are not being answered, it would give the ICO a much quicker and more direct way of establishing exactly what it is that the enquirer is asking