



SPA
Future
Thinking

Satisfaction with Complaint Handling

ico.

Information Commissioner's Office

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LONDON OFFICE

Laystall House, 8 Rosebery Avenue
London, EC1R 4TD, United Kingdom
T +44 (0) 20 7843 9777
F +44 (0) 20 7843 9779
E info@spafuturethinking.com
W www.spafuturethinking.com



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Background

- ICO responds to 26,000 Data Protection complaints and 4,500 Freedom of Information complaints a year
- The survey among complainants obtains overall satisfaction measures for complaint handling which can be benchmarked against other ICO services once other satisfaction surveys in the programme have been completed
- The survey evaluates specific features of complaint handling and determines how these impact on overall satisfaction
 - ease of registering complaint
 - speed of acknowledging and replying to the complaint
 - quality of the reply
 - thoroughness of ICO's investigation
 - extent to which got what wanted
- The survey is split across two waves in order to allow a follow up to measure the impact of any changes/improvements introduced in light of these wave 1 findings



Methodology

- ICO randomly sampled 875 complainants whose case was closed in the months of March, April and May 2012
- SPA Future Thinking sent an advance letter to these complainants introducing the survey and giving complainants the opportunity to opt out if they did not want to take part (30 chose to opt out)
- Those not opting out were interviewed by phone between 20th - 25th June 2012
- 175 interviews were completed: 53 DP, 60 FOI and 62 PECR complainants
- A second wave of complainants satisfaction survey is scheduled to take place in February 2013 among a sample of complainants whose case will be closed in the months of November, December and January



Key findings

- Complainants to the ICO are more likely to be middle-aged men from social class groups ABC1 than the population as a whole
 - the majority of complaints (84%) are being made for personal reasons rather than on behalf of a business

- Approaching four in ten complaints to the ICO in the period March-May 2012 were about unsolicited phone calls, text messages and mail and a third were about companies and organisations failing to supply information which was requested of them

- Companies and organisations complained about most are:
 - financial companies (banks, credit card companies, mortgage lenders) – 24%
 - local councils – 19%
 - central Government departments (e.g. HMRC, DWP, Home Office) – 10%
 - the NHS – 6%

- When presented with a list of 10 desirable outcomes, two thirds or more wanted:-
 - the company or organisation they were complaining about to think about its responsibilities more
 - confirmation that action had been taken to make sure it doesn't happen again
 - an investigation to be carried out
 - to find out if the company or organisation acted in accordance with the law



Key findings /2

- In the vast majority of cases (87%), complainants want feedback from the ICO on actions and outcomes. They would not be content with just reporting a breach of the DP or FOI act and hearing no more
 - except in the case of PECR complaints and complaints about unsolicited phone calls/ mail where a third would be content with just reporting the breach

- Three in ten would have been happy to have had their complaint handled by phone without necessarily receiving a written response
 - this rises to over four in ten among PECR complainants and complaints about unsolicited phone calls/ mail

- A third knew of the ICO already when they made their last complaint and another third found you on the internet. One in ten were referred by the Telephone Preference Service

- Half complained by email and four in ten on the ICO website
 - Only 7% claimed that it was difficult to register the complaint



Key findings /3

- Approaching seven in ten received an acknowledgement of their complaint within 7 days, in line with their expectations

- However, when it comes to actually dealing with the complaint, expectations are not being met in a lot of cases
 - two thirds expected a reply within 4 weeks but only 46% claimed they received one within this time frame
 - consequently, only 59% are satisfied with speed of response

- Half reported that it took more than one exchange of phone calls, emails or letters to deal with the complaint and approaching six in ten were asked to supply documents to support their complaint
 - a third claimed they had to put a great deal of effort into raising the complaint
 - on balance the experience of complaining to the ICO was worse than expected apart from among FOI complainants



Key findings /4

- 58% are satisfied overall with the way their complaint was handled by the ICO. 32% are dissatisfied
 - we have found from numerous event driven customer satisfaction surveys that complaint handling receives the lowest satisfaction ratings because of the very nature of the contact
 - in other surveys we have recorded levels of satisfaction with complaint handling as low as 48% and as high as 74%

- Those making FOI complaints are more satisfied overall (72%) than those making DP complaints (42%)

- The main reasons for being satisfied with ICO's complaint handling are:
 - got what wanted – 33%
 - professional, conscientious, business-like service – 25%
 - speed of response – 22%
 - ICO took the complaint up with the company/ organisation concerned – 14%
 - clear and easy to understand communication – 10%

- The main reasons for dissatisfaction were lack of results, a feeling the ICO did not carry out a full investigation, a perception that the ICO has **no teeth** and that they should have taken firmer action



Key findings /5

- ICO obtains good ratings for the length of replies and their clarity and tone and reasonable ratings for:
 - knowledgeability/ competence
 - fully understanding the points raised
 - tailoring the reply to the particular complaint
 - treating the complaint seriously

- However, lower levels of satisfaction were given for:
 - addressing the main issue
 - thoroughness of investigation
 - extent to which got what wanted

- Four in ten acknowledged that they **did obtain clarification** about whether the company or organisation they were complaining about had acted in accordance with the law

- However for two particular outcomes strongly correlated with overall satisfaction, only one in five claimed they obtained these outcomes. They were:
 - confirmation that the problem/ error was accepted by the company/ organisation and understood
 - confirmation that action has been taken to make sure it doesn't happen again



Key findings /6

- The main suggestions for improvement to ICO's complaint handling, given by dissatisfied customers are:
 - get to the bottom of the issue/ address the complaint properly
 - keep the complainant informed/ tell them what's happening/ appraise them of how long it will take
 - take more robust action/ impose fines
 - (wherever possible of course) give the complainant what they want !

- In terms of general impressions of the ICO obtained after the experience of complaining to them, 57% came away with a positive impression while 27% were left with a negative impression (mirroring the overall satisfaction ratings)

- 77% say they would be happy to approach the ICO again if they had a similar complaint



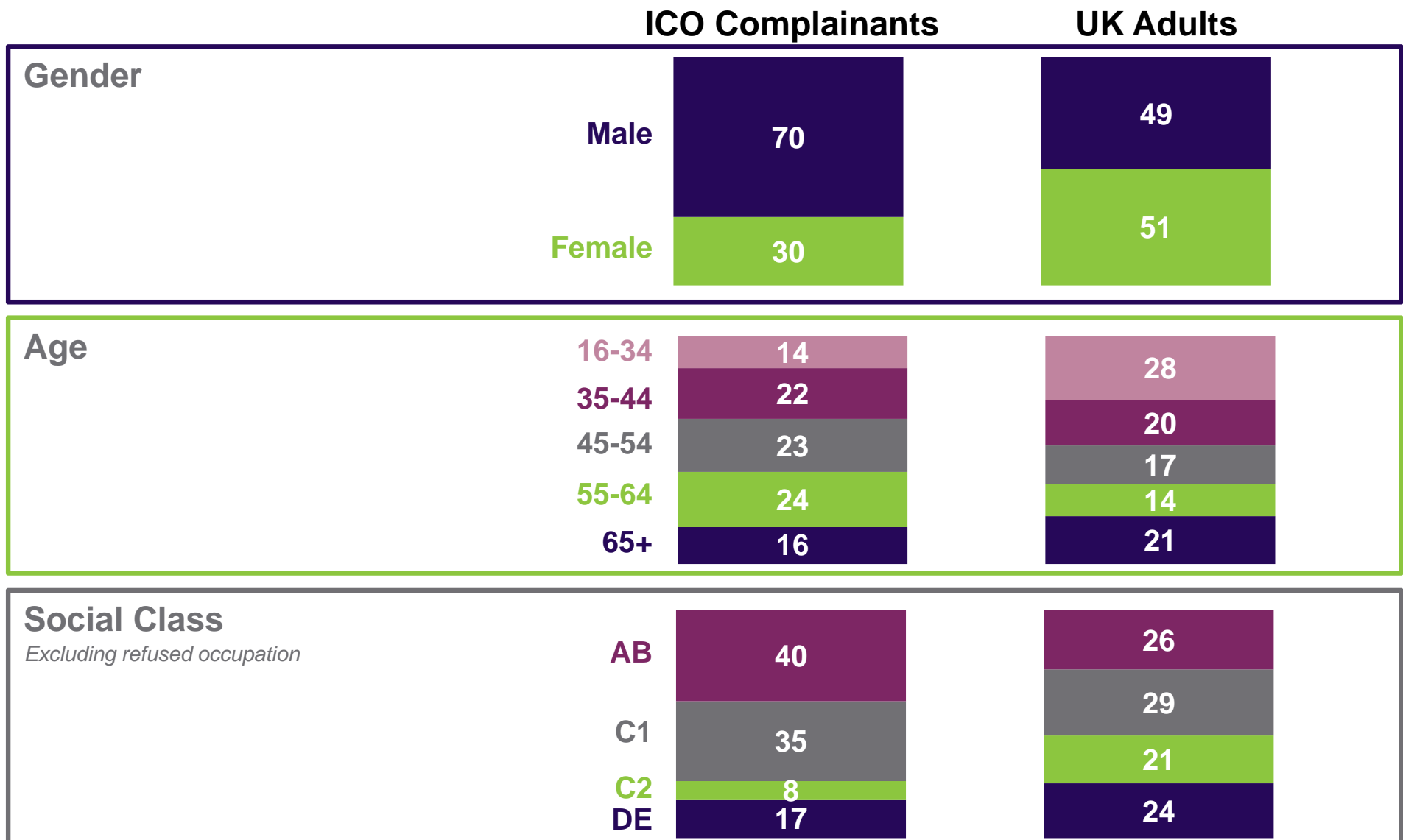
Detailed Findings





Profile of complainants to the ICO

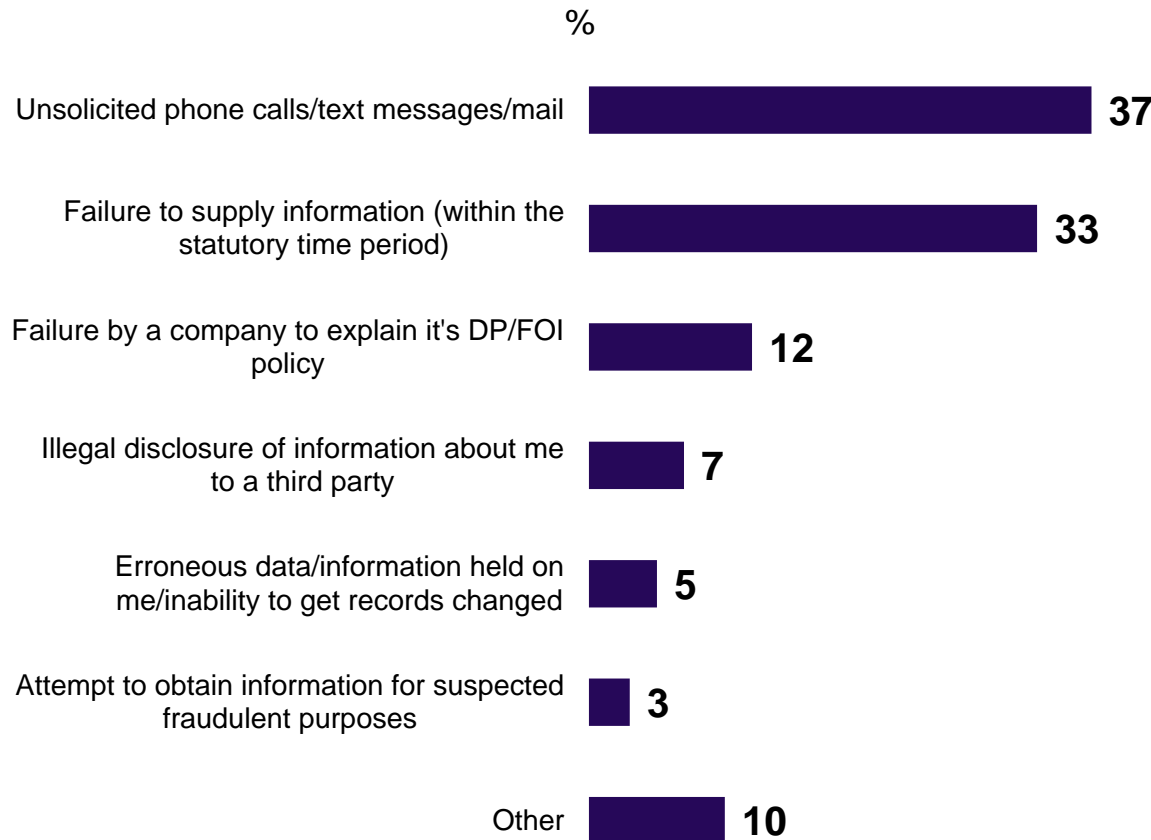
Complainants to the ICO are skewed towards males, 45-64s and ABC1s when compared to the profile of UK adults





Nature of complaint (according to the complainant)

Approaching four in ten complaints to the ICO were about unsolicited phone calls/text messages/mail and a third were about failure to supply information



Type of Complaint (ICO Records)		
DP (53) %	FOI (60) %	PECR (62) %
9	0	95
30	67	2
11	25	0
19	2	2
13	0	2
8	0	2
21	11	0

= Significantly higher

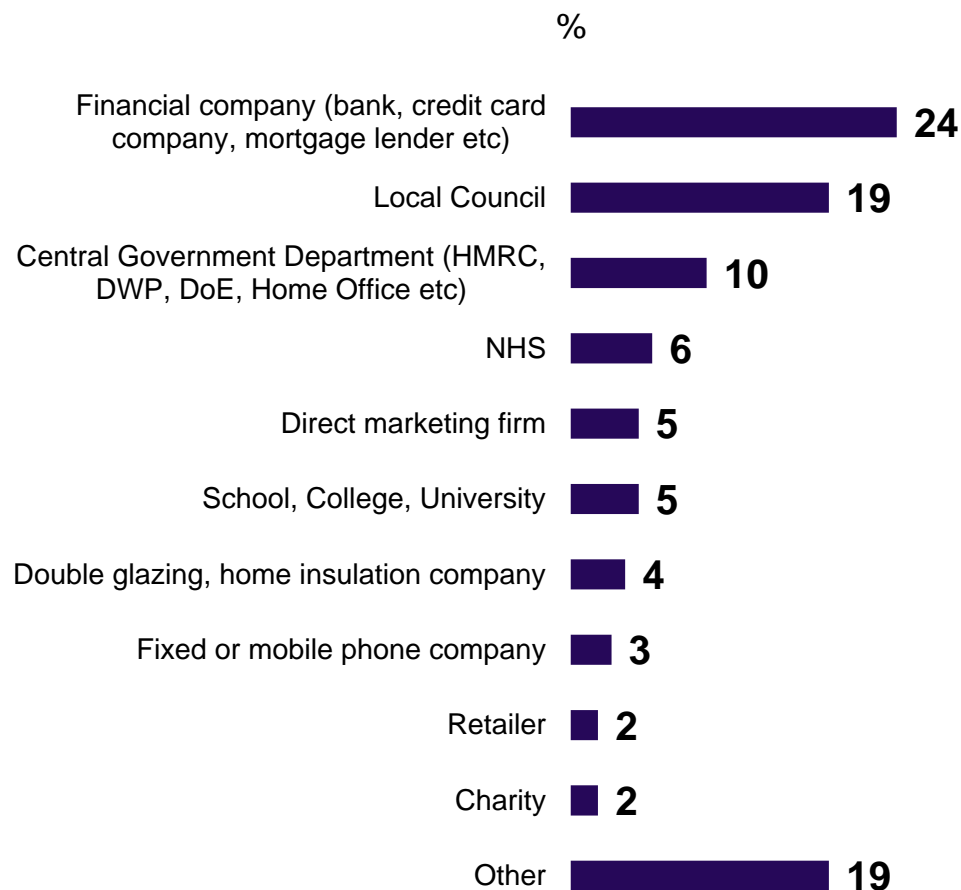
Q2 Firstly, what was your complaint to the ICO about?

Base: All (175)



Type of company/organisation complaining about

A quarter of complaints are about a financial company and one in five about a local council



Type of Complaint (ICO Records)		
DP (53) %	FOI (60) %	PECR (62) %
23	2	47
8	48	2
6	23	0
9	8	0
0	0	15
4	10	0
2	0	10
2	0	6
4	0	2
8	0	0
36	9	17

= Significantly higher

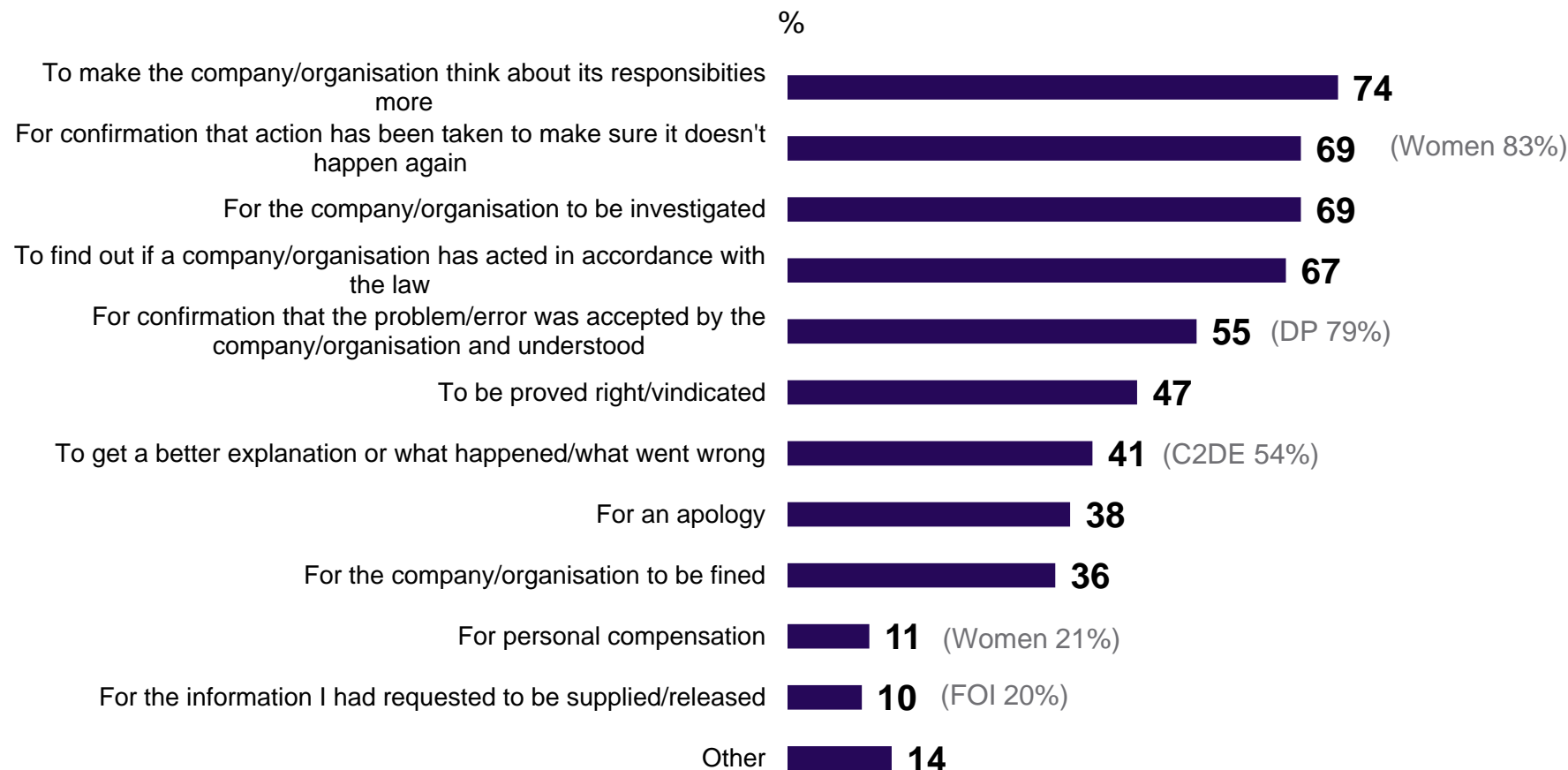
Q3 What type of company or organisation were you complaining about?

Base: All (175)



Outcome hoped for

Large proportions of complainants were hoping for a variety of outcomes as a result of their complaint



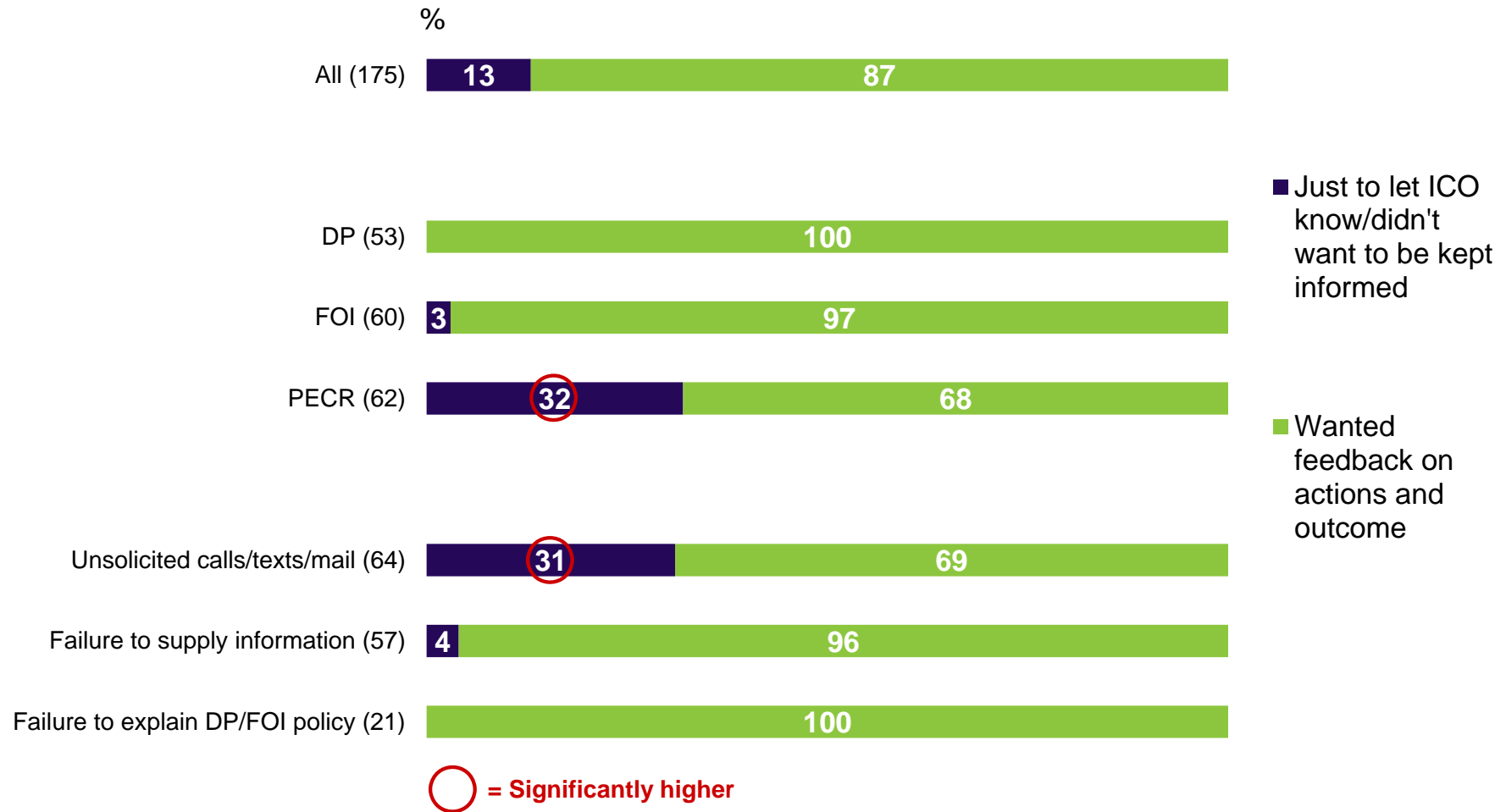
Q4 When you complained to the ICO, which of the following were you hoping for?

Base: All (175)



Feedback required

Most complainants want feedback on actions and outcomes. A third of PECR complainants and those complaining about unsolicited phone calls/texts/mail don't need to be kept informed



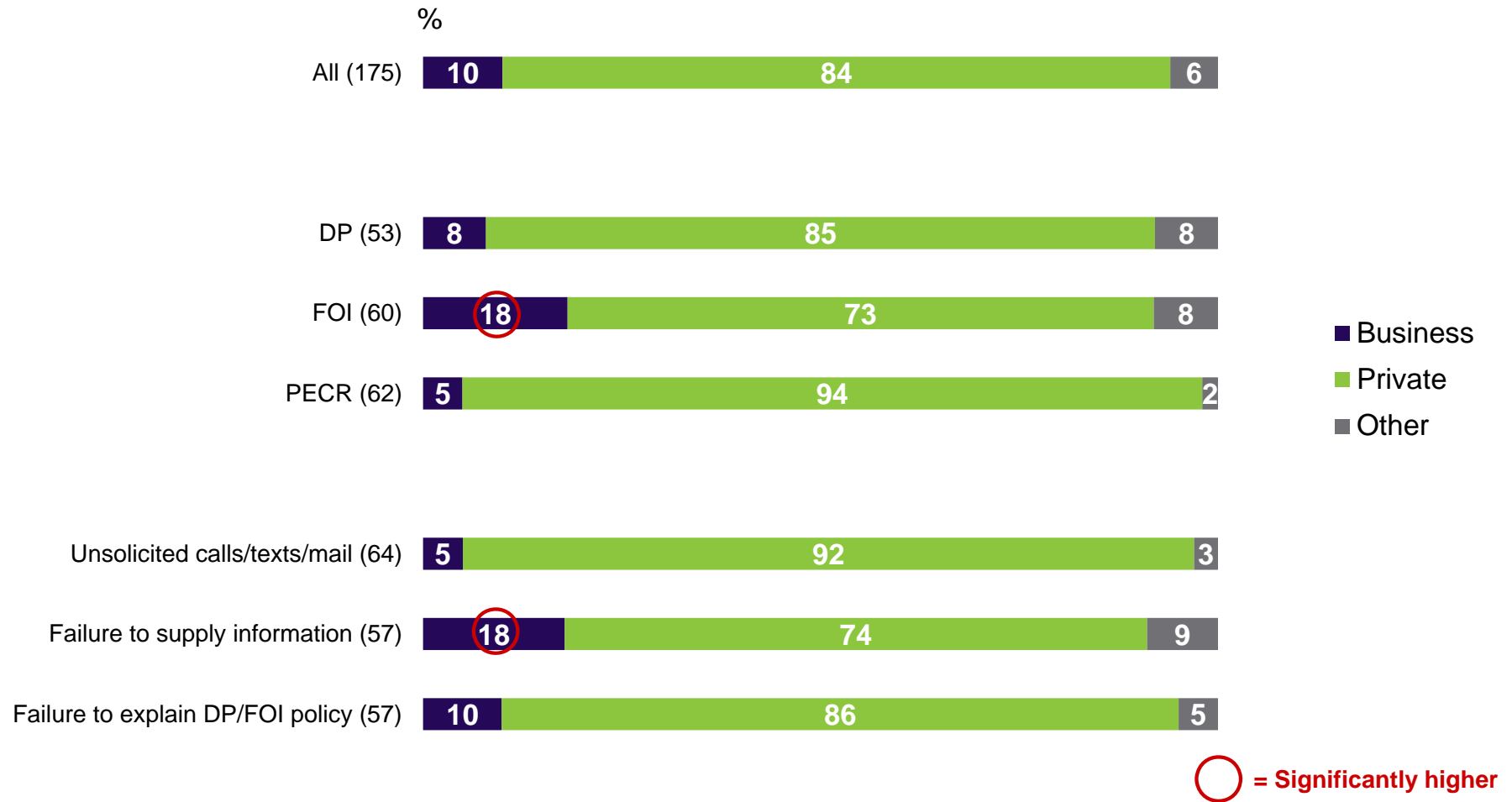
Q5 Did you just want to inform the ICO about something that had happened so that they could look into it without necessarily being kept informed of their actions or the outcome or did you want feedback on actions and outcome?

Base: All



Complaining as a business person or as a private citizen

Most complainants are acting as private citizens. Businesses tend to be making FOI complaints rather than DP complaints



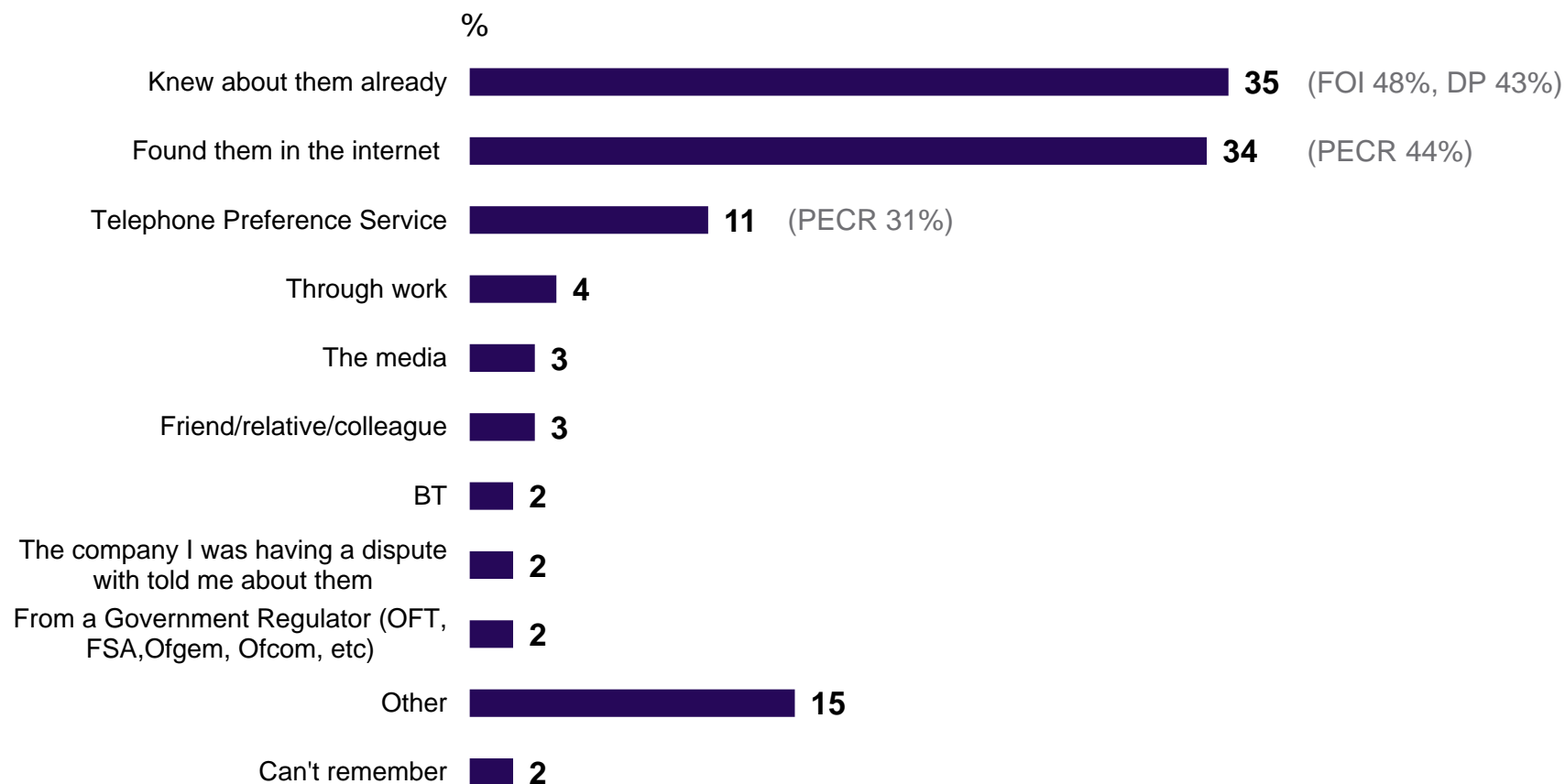
Q6 Were you complaining as a business person or as a private citizen?

Base: All



How found out about the ICO

A third knew about the ICO already when they made their last complaint, a third found ICO on the internet and one in ten, through the Telephone Preference Service

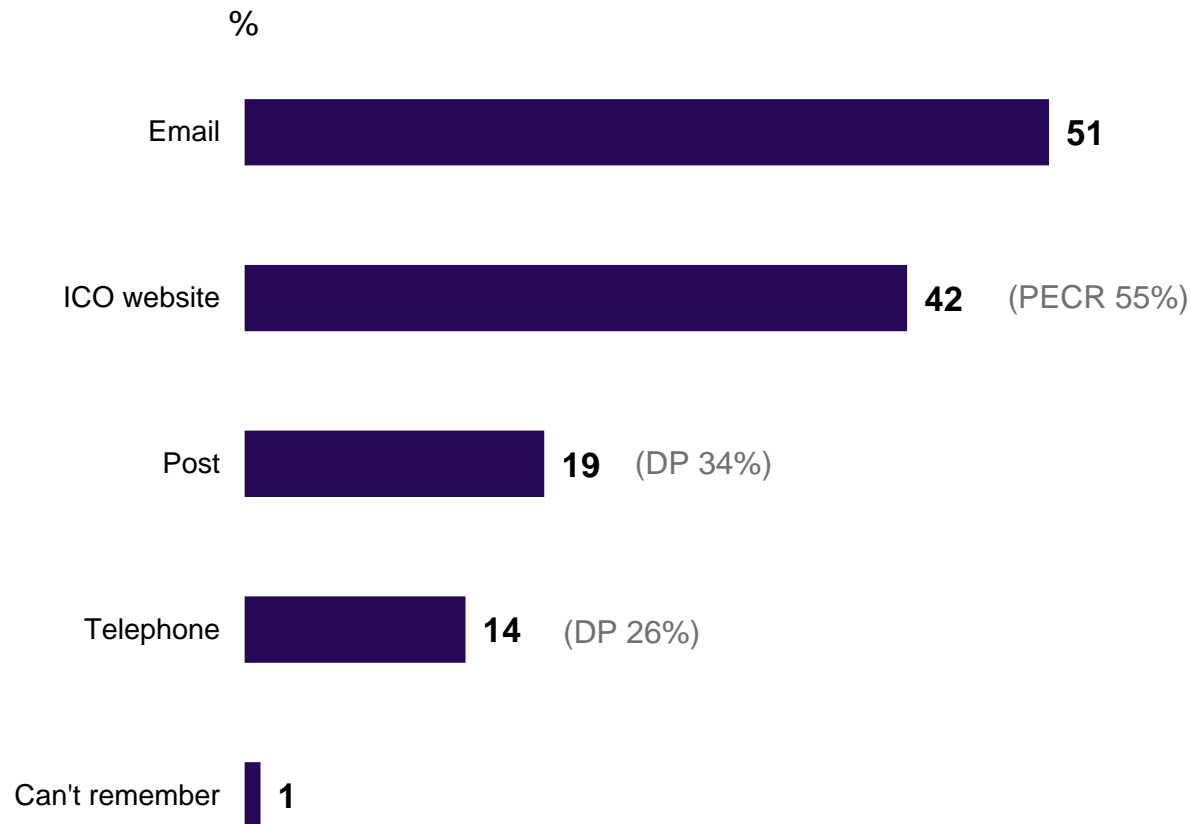


Q7 How did you find out about the ICO as an organisation you could complain to about data protection and freedom of information issues?

Base: All (175)

→ Channel used to complain

Half complain by email and four in ten via the ICO website. PECR complaints are more likely to be made via the ICO website



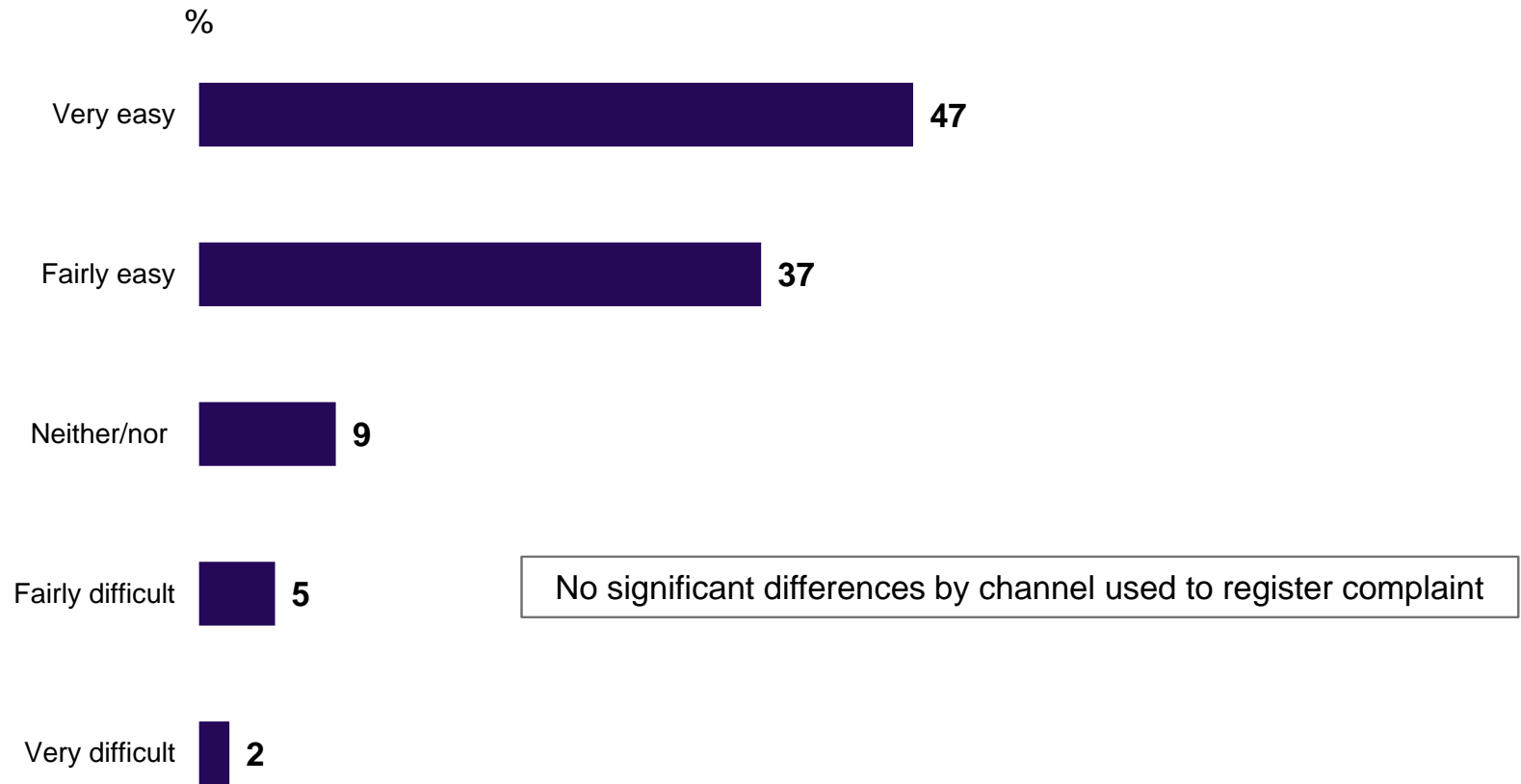
Q8 Which of the following channels did you use to register your complaint with the ICO?

Base: All (175)



Ease of registering complaint

Only 7% found it difficult to register their complaint with the ICO
(11% among PECR complainants)



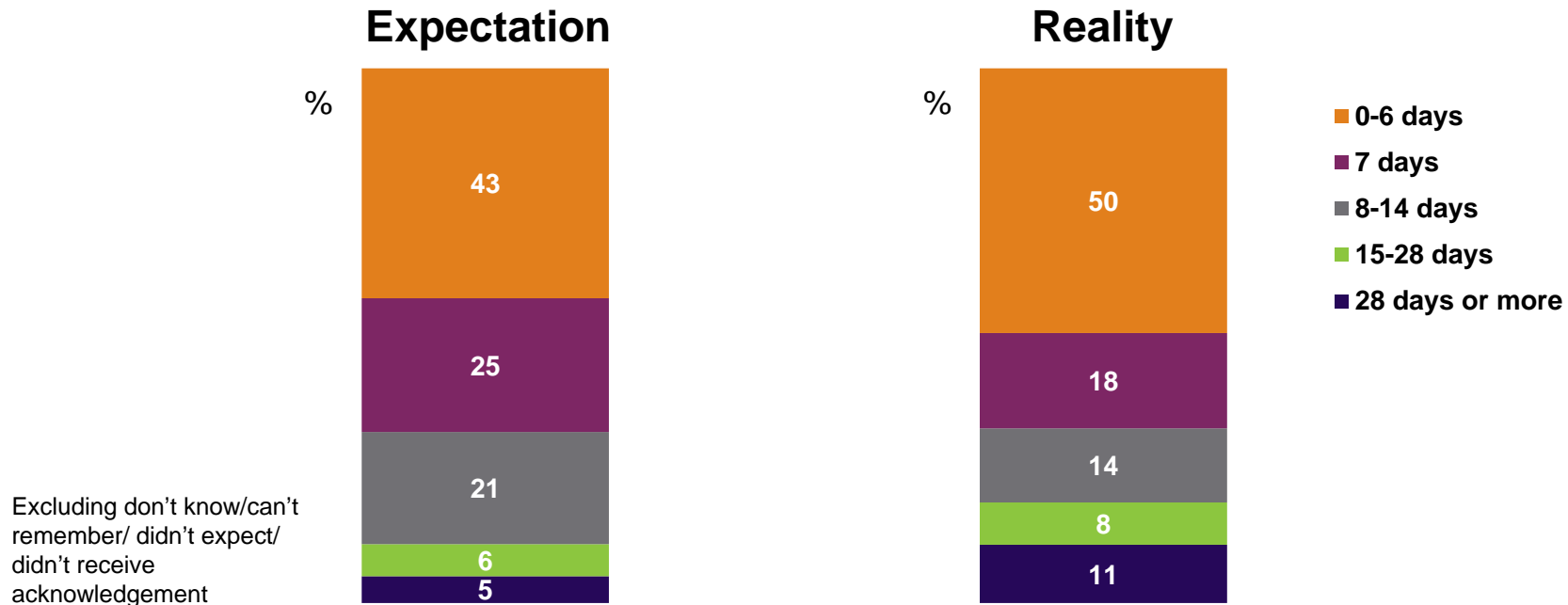
Q9 How easy did you find it to first register your complaint with the ICO?

Base: All (175)



Speed of acknowledgement

Approaching seven in ten received an acknowledgement of their complainant within 7 days. ICO's performance is generally in line with expectations



83% are satisfied with the speed with which ICO acknowledged their complaint

Q12 How quickly did you expect ICO to acknowledge your complaint and let you know they were dealing with it?

Q13 How soon after you lodged your complaint with the ICO did you receive an acknowledgement from them that they received your complaint and were now dealing with it?

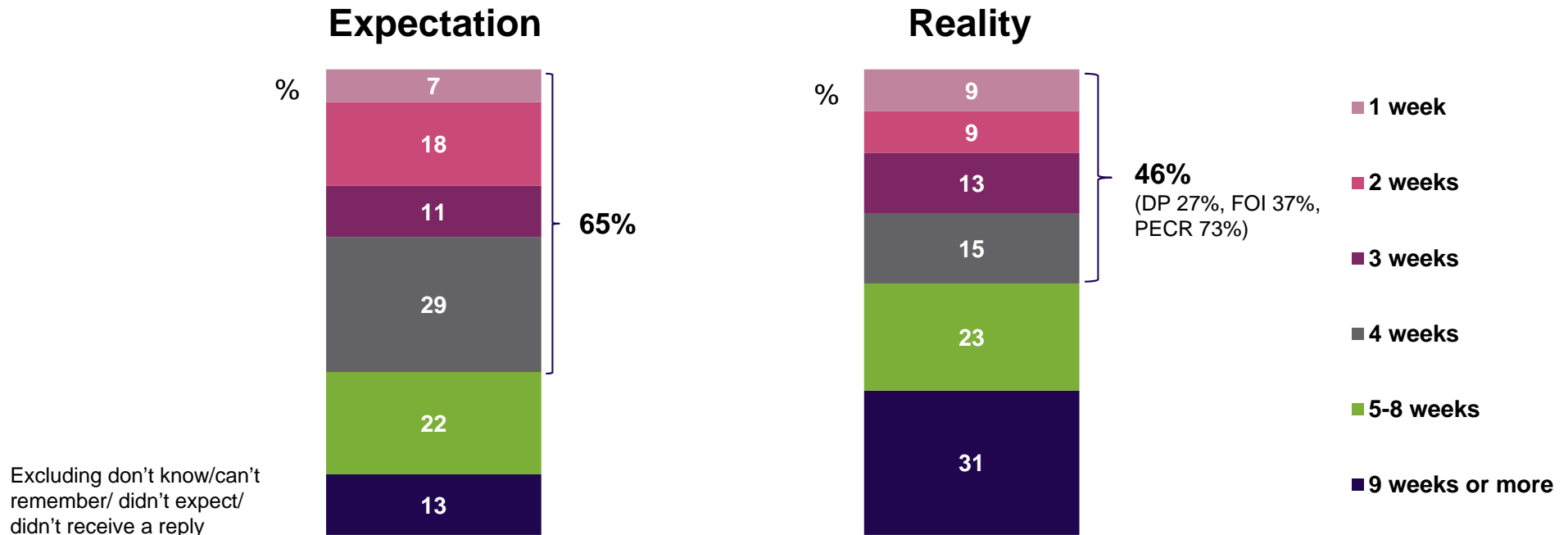
Q14 How satisfied are you with the speed with which the ICO acknowledged your Complaint?

Base: All (175)



Speed of dealing with complaint

46% actually had their complaint dealt with within 4 weeks but in 31% of cases it took more than 8 weeks



59% are satisfied with the speed with which ICO dealt with their complaint (81% if it was dealt with within 4 weeks)

Q17 How quickly did you expect the ICO to deal with your complaint and come back to you with an answer?

Q18 How soon after you lodged your complaint with the ICO did you receive a reply from them dealing with your complaint?

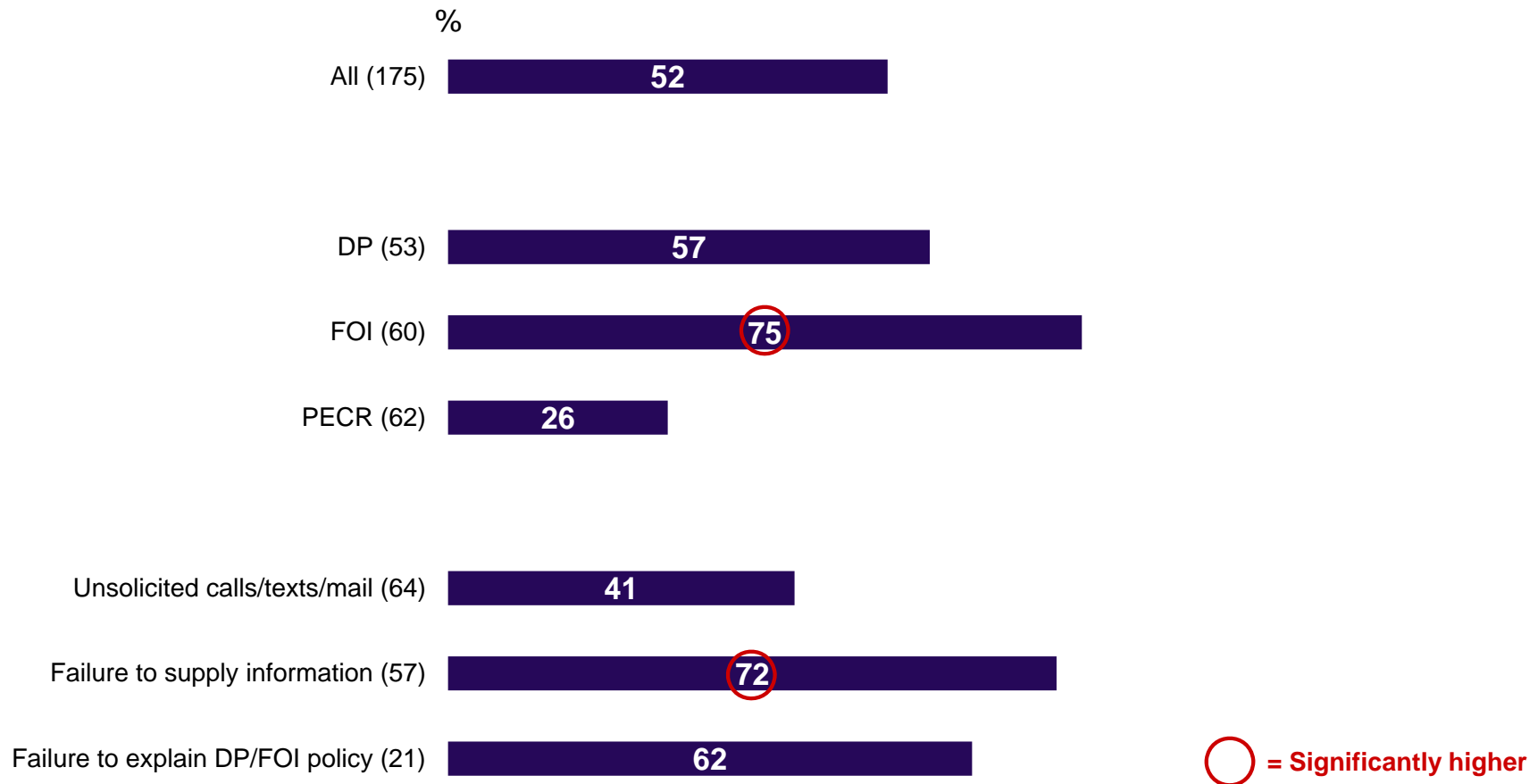
Q19 How satisfied are you with the speed with which the ICO has dealt with your complaint?

Base: All (175)



Multiple contacts

Half of complainants are needing more than one exchange of phone calls, emails or letters for their complaint to be dealt with (three quarters of FOI complainants)



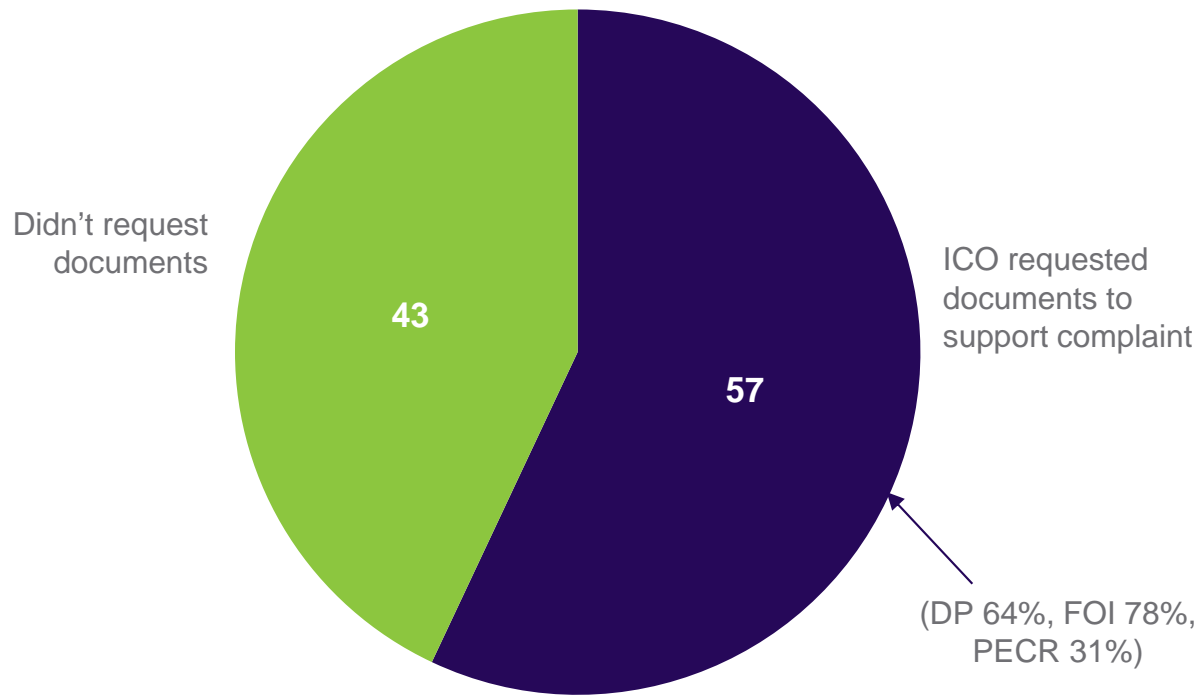
Q20 Has it taken more than one exchange of phone calls, emails or letters between you and the ICO to deal with your complaint?

Base: All



Requests for additional information

57% were asked to supply documents to support their complaint and almost all responded



→ In the vast majority of cases (96%), the complainant responded to the request for supporting documents

→ 91% claimed it was easy to supply the information requested

Q21 Did the ICO ask you to supply any documents to support your complaint and help them with their investigation?

Q22 Did you supply the information ICO requested?

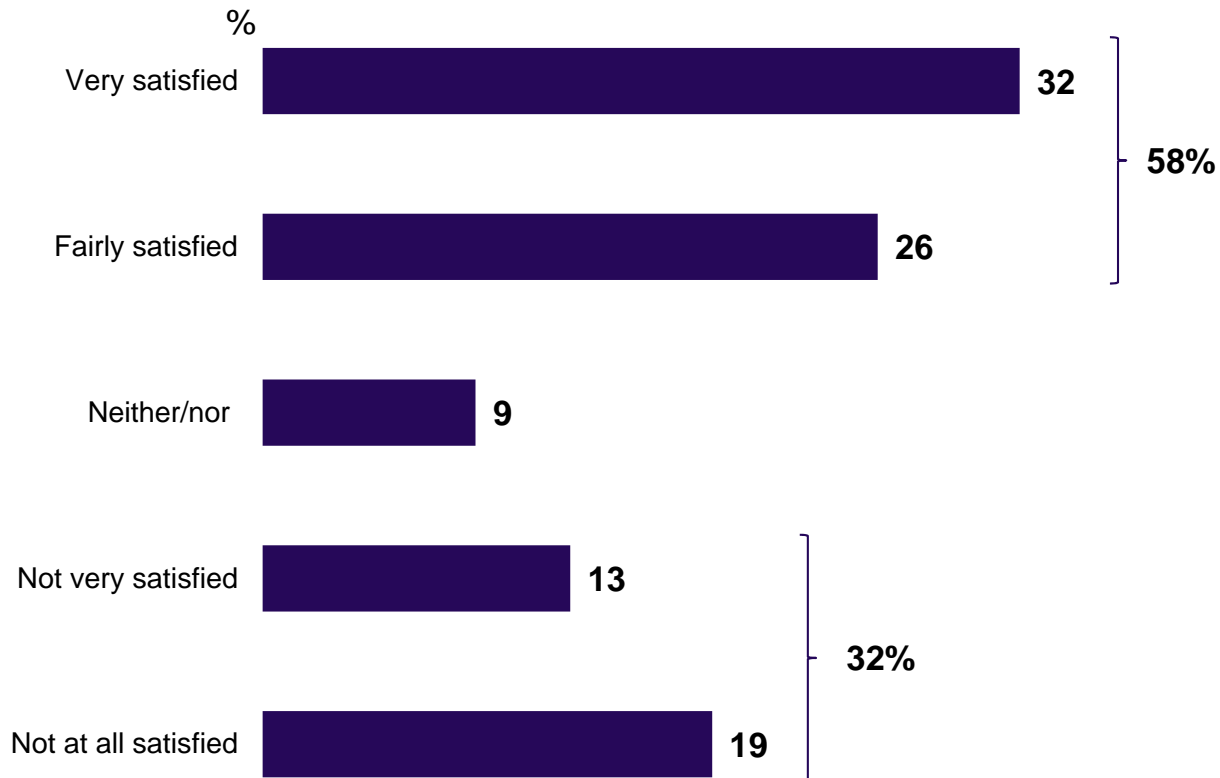
Q23 How easy was it for you to supply the information ICO requested?

Base: All (175)



Overall satisfaction with complaint handling

Six in ten (58%) are satisfied overall with the way ICO handled their complaint. A third (32%) are dissatisfied.



→ A central Government Department obtained 48% satisfaction for enquiry handling in 2008, where the majority of enquiries could be considered as complaints. This year a utilities consumer watchdog obtained 74% satisfaction

Q31 So how satisfied are you overall with the way your complaint was handled by the ICO?

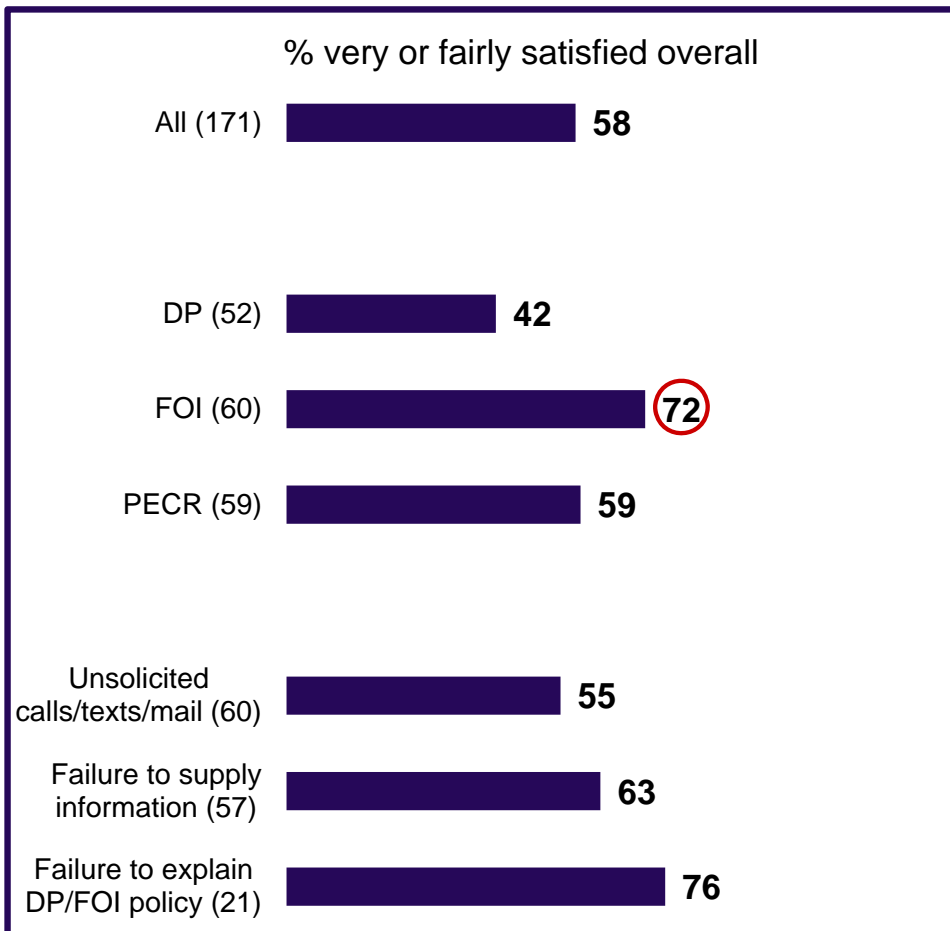
Base: All except those not supplying requested documents (171)



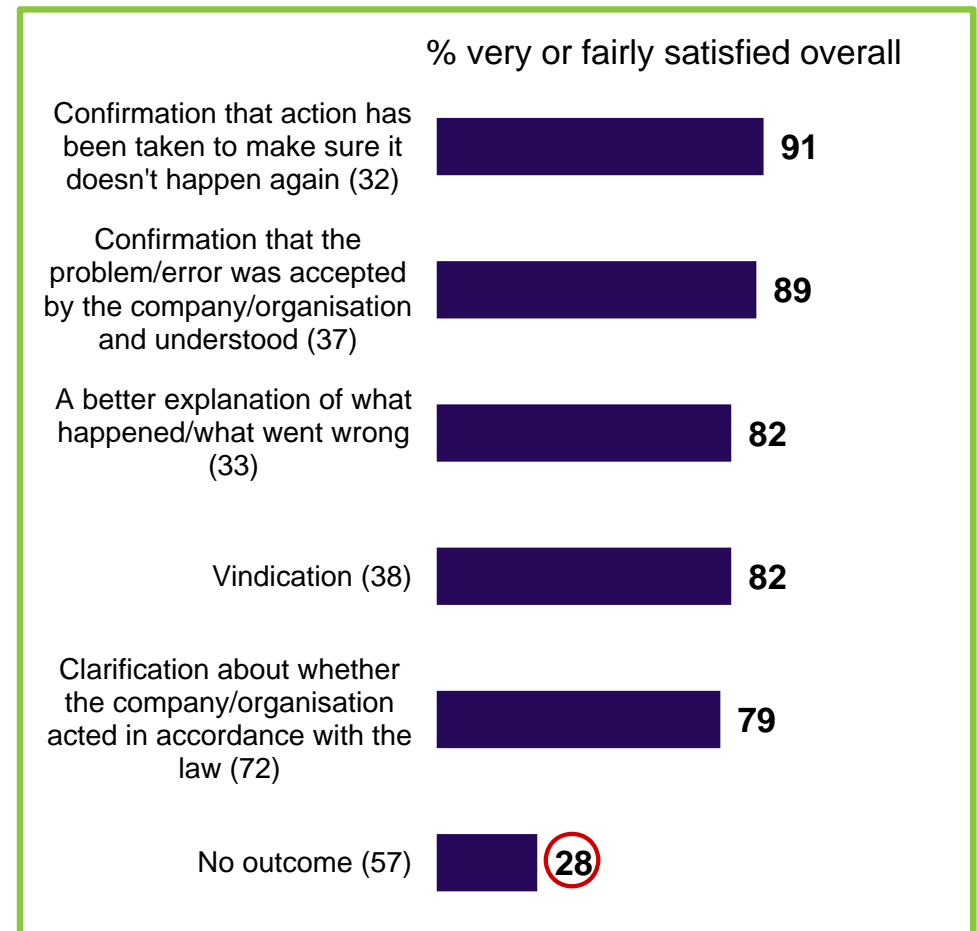
Overall satisfaction with complaint handling

ICO obtains the highest overall satisfaction ratings for its complaint handling for FOI complaints and where there are tangible outcomes following the complaint

By complaint type



By outcome



Q31 So how satisfied are you overall with the way your complaint was handled by the ICO?

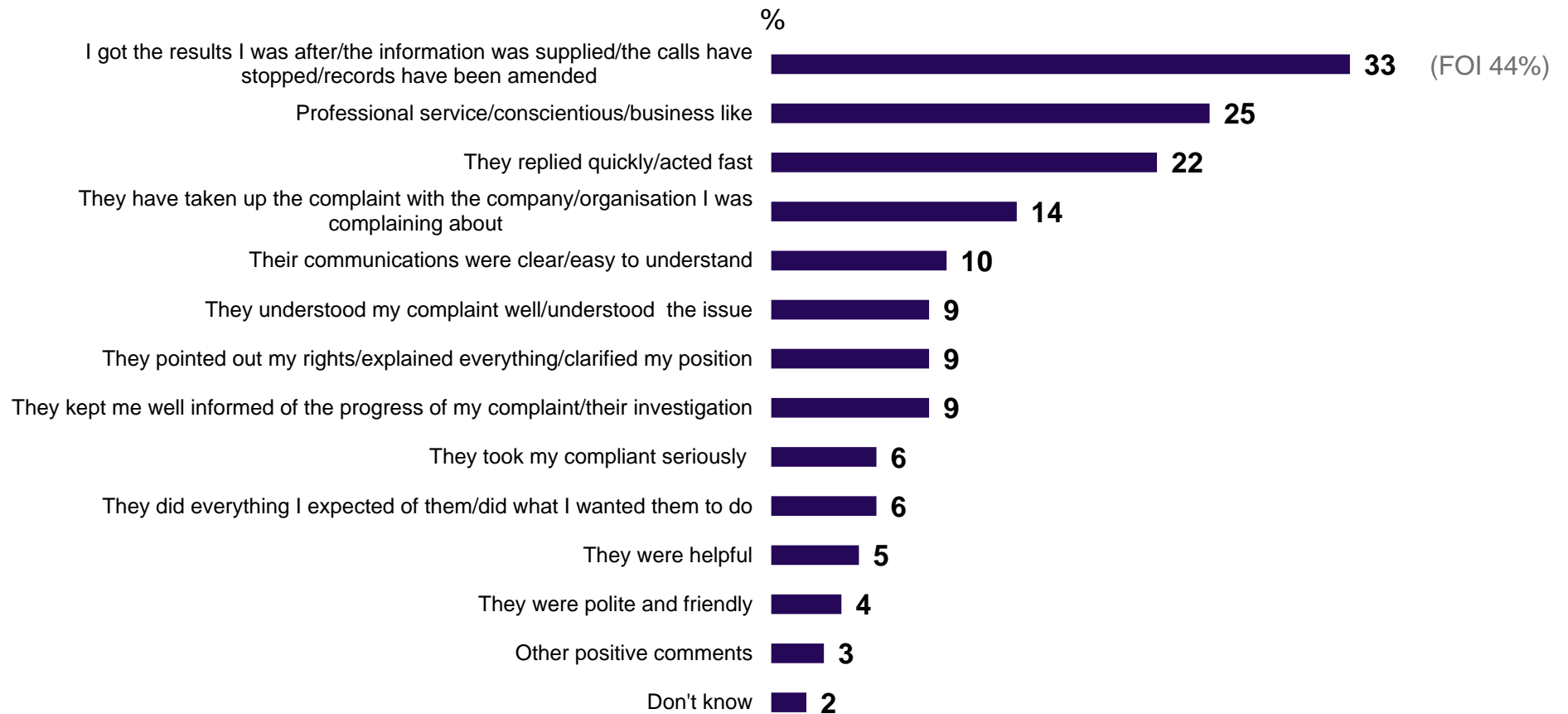
Base: All except those not supplying requested documents

 = Significantly different



Reasons for satisfaction with complaint handling

The main reasons for satisfaction are getting the results they wanted, a professional/conscientious service, speed of resolution, evidence of action being taken and clear/easy to understand communications



Q32 Why do you say that?

Base: All very or fairly satisfied overall (100)



Reasons for dissatisfaction with complaint handling

The main reasons for dissatisfaction were lack of results, a feeling that the ICO did not carry out a full investigation, that the ICO has no teeth and that they should have taken firmer action



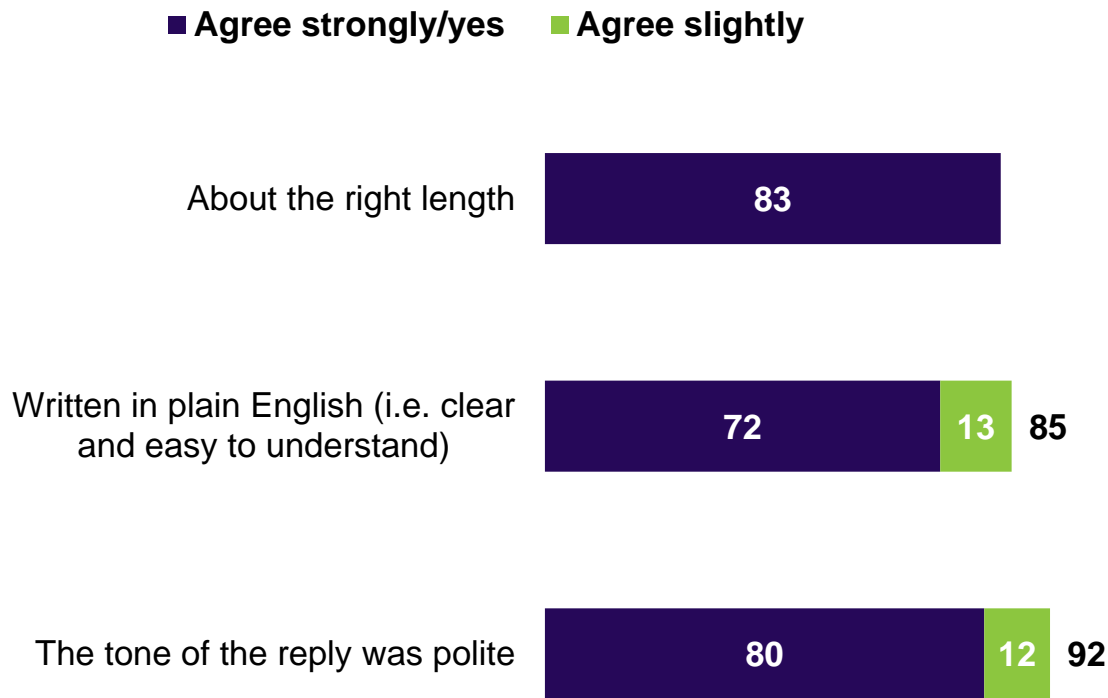
Q32 Why do you say that?

Base: All not very or not at all satisfied overall (55)



Rating of the reply – length, clarity, tone

Almost everyone agreed ICO’s reply was polite and over eight in ten, that it was written in plain English and was about the right length



Type of Complaint (ICO Records)		
DP (52) %	FOI (60) %	PECR (59) %
79	83	86
83	85	86
90	95	90

Q26 Did you feel the reply you received from the ICO was too long and detailed, about the right length or too short?

Q25a How much do you agree or disagree that the reply was written in plain English (i.e. it was clear and easy to understand)?

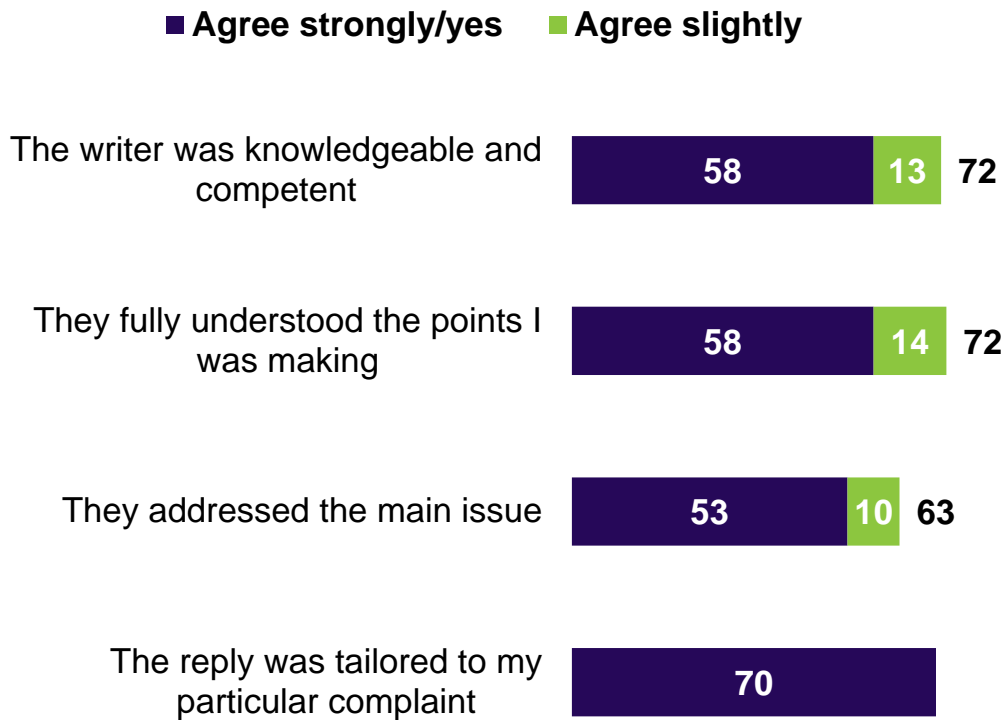
Q25b How much do you agree or disagree that the tone of the reply was polite?

Base: All except those not supplying requested documents (171)



Rating of the reply – competence of person replying

There were fairly good ratings for the competence of the writer, understanding of the points raised and how well the reply was tailored to the complaint but DP shows room for improvement



Type of Complaint (ICO Records)		
DP (52) %	FOI (60) %	PECR (59) %
62	83	69
62	82	71
52	78	56
60	83	64

Q25c How much do you agree or disagree that the writer was knowledgeable and competent?

Q25d How much do you agree or disagree that they fully understood the points you were making?

Q25e How much do you agree or disagree that they addressed the main issue?

Q27 Did you feel the reply was tailored to your particular complaint?

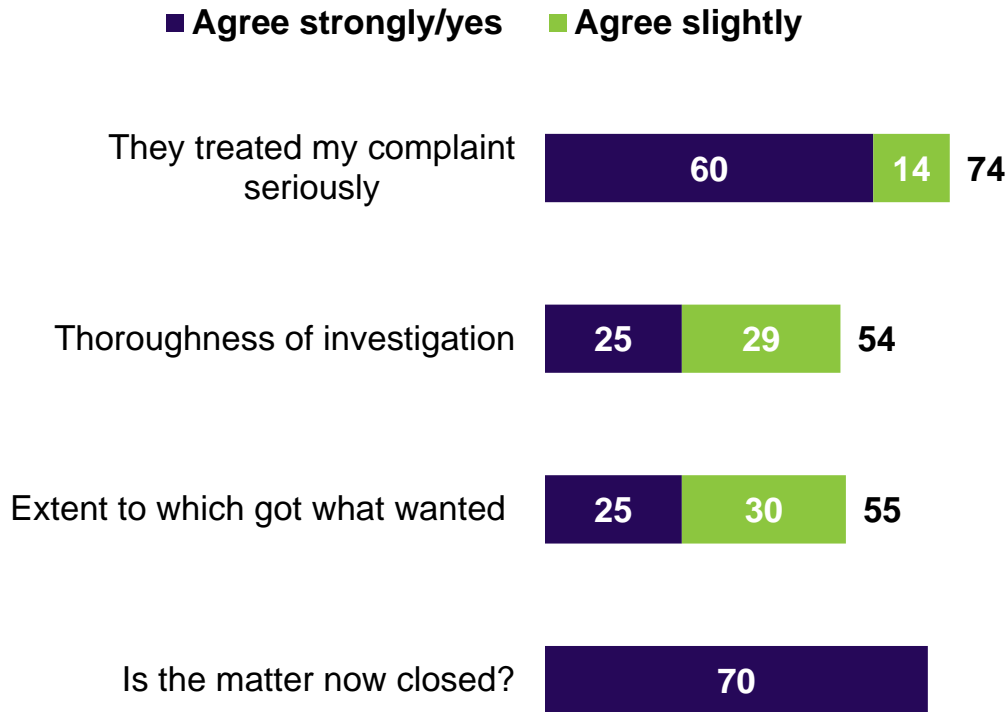
Base: All except those not supplying requested documents (171)

○ = Significantly higher



Rating of the reply – ICO commitment/resolution of complaint

Three quarters agree that their complaint was treated seriously. Only seven in ten now accept that the matter is closed



Type of Complaint (ICO Records)		
DP (52) %	FOI (60) %	PECR (59) %
63	83	75
37	73	49
47	68	49
60	65	83

Q25f How much do you agree or disagree that they treated your complaint seriously?

Q28 How thoroughly do you believe the ICO investigated your matter before coming to a conclusion and replying to your complaint?

Q29 To what extent did you get what you wanted as a result of complaining to the ICO?

Q30 As far as you are concerned, is the matter now closed?

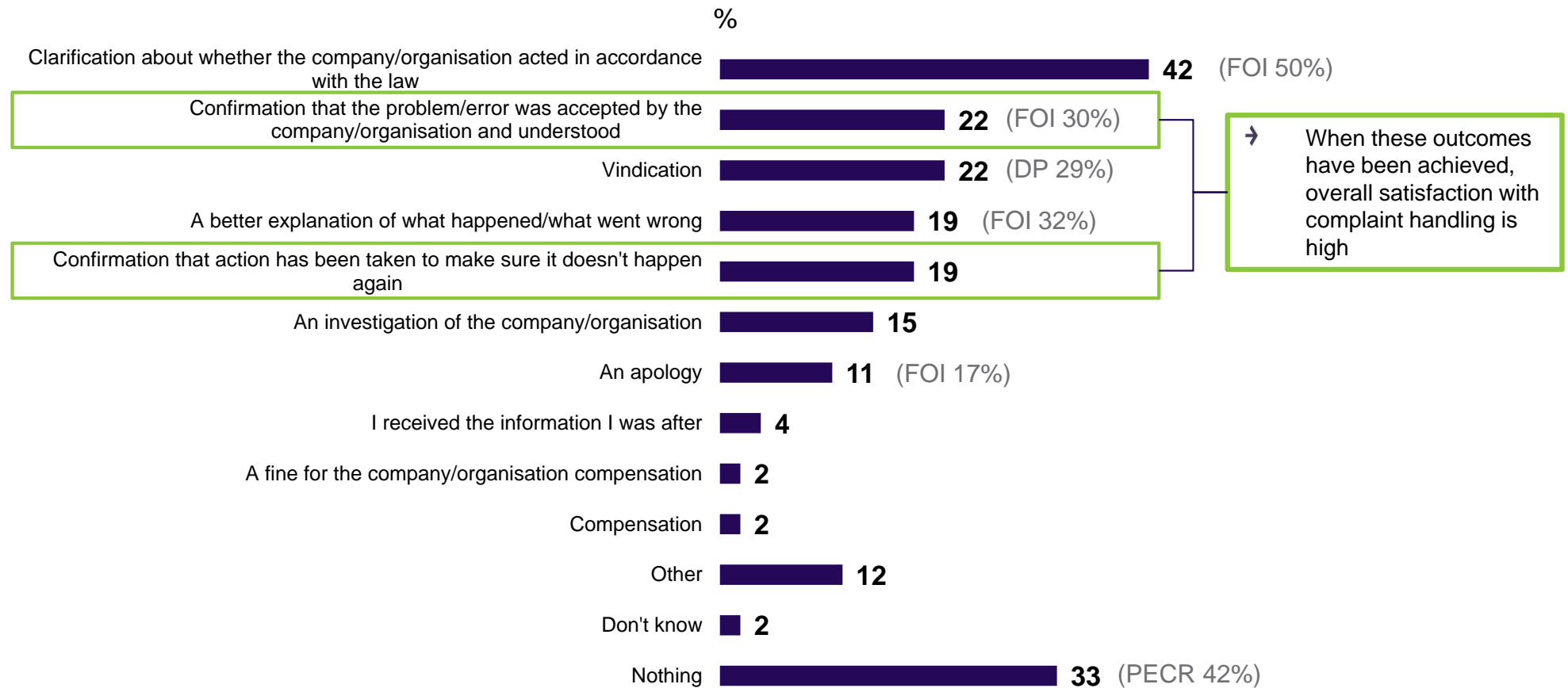
Base: All except those not supplying requested documents (171)

○ = Significantly higher



Outcomes

Four in ten received clarification about whether a company acted in accordance with the law, over a fifth obtained confirmation that the problem was accepted by the company and understood and another fifth felt vindicated after the complaint

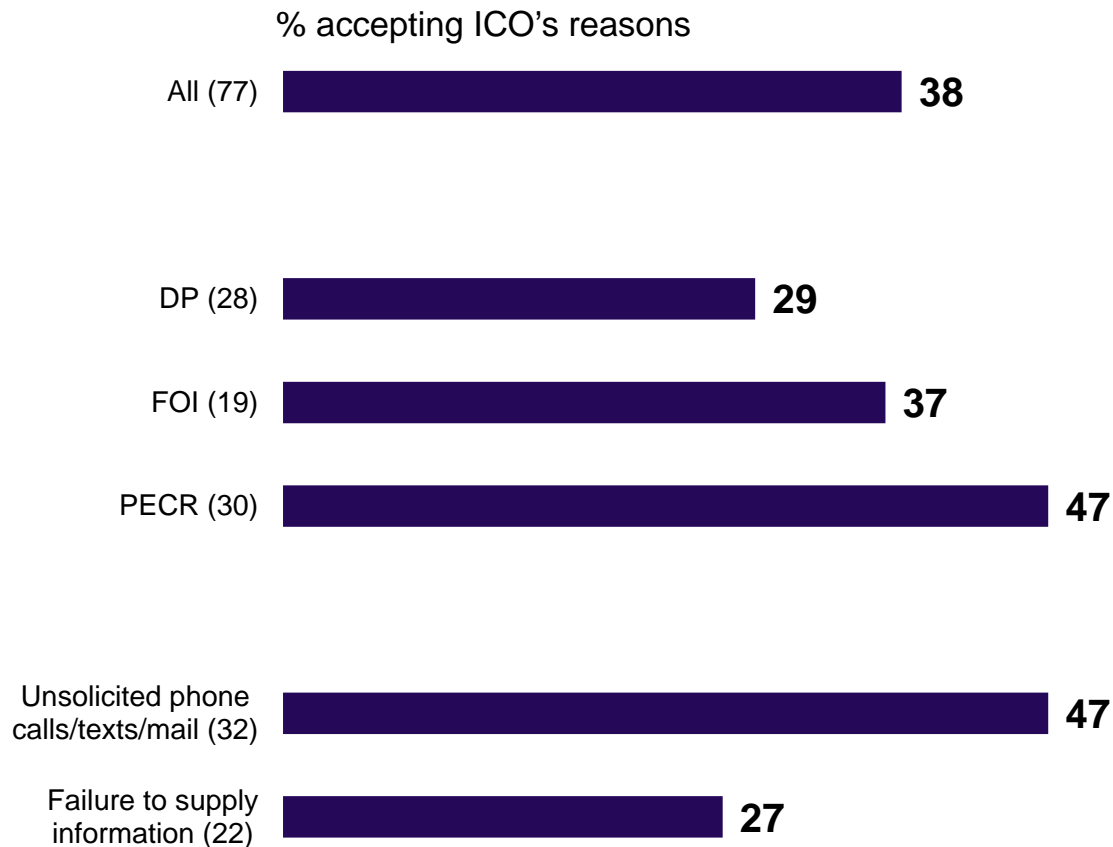


Q37 Which of the following outcomes resulted from your complaint to the ICO?

Base: All except those not supplying requested documents (171)

→ Accepted ICO's reasons

Among those not getting what they wanted as a result of their complaint, DP complainants are most likely to reject ICO's reasons for coming to the decision they did



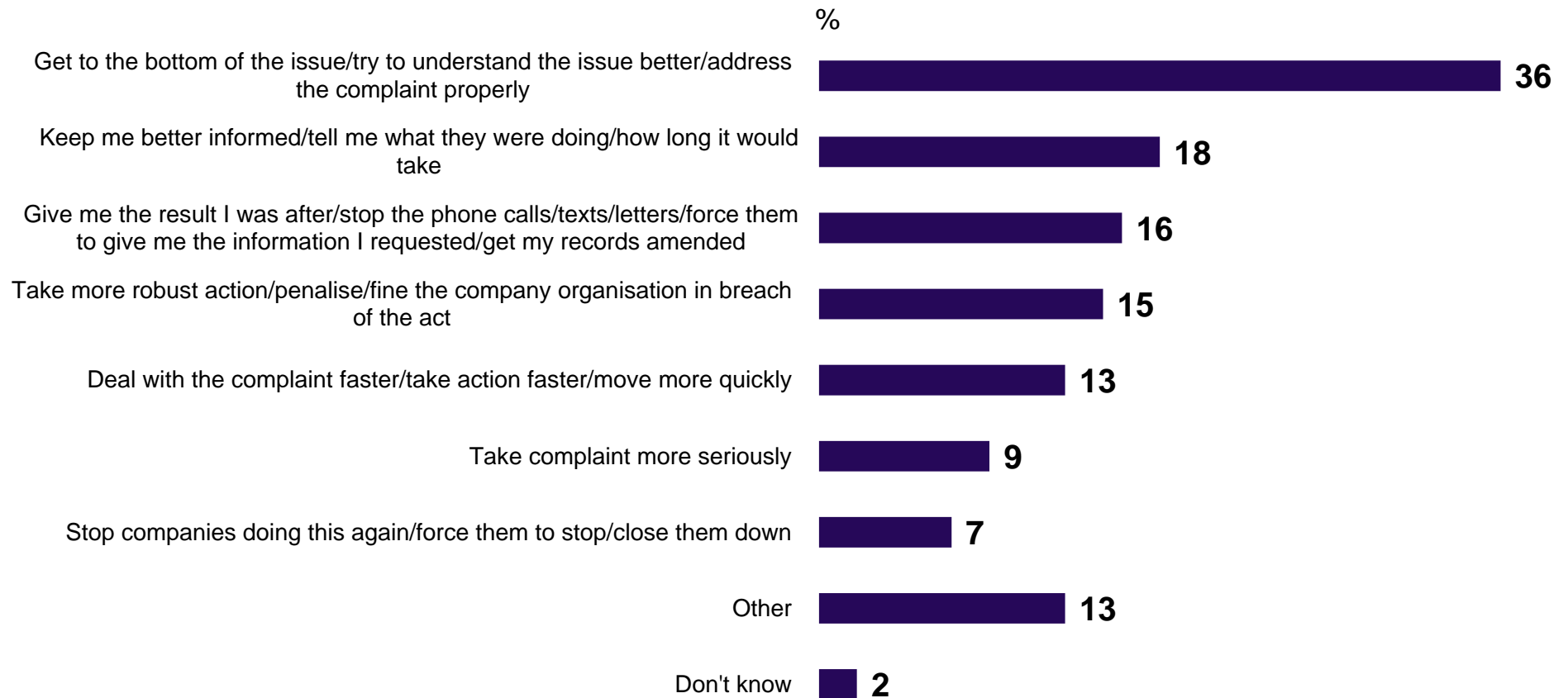
Q39 You said earlier that you did not get what you wanted as a result of complaining to the ICO but in spite of that, do you accept ICO's reasons for coming to the decision they did?

Base: All not getting what they wanted as a result of complaining (77)



Suggestions for improvement

Most suggestions for improvement among those not satisfied focused on getting to the bottom of the issue, delivering the required result, taking firmer action and keeping the complainant better informed about progress



Q33 How could they have handled your complaint better?

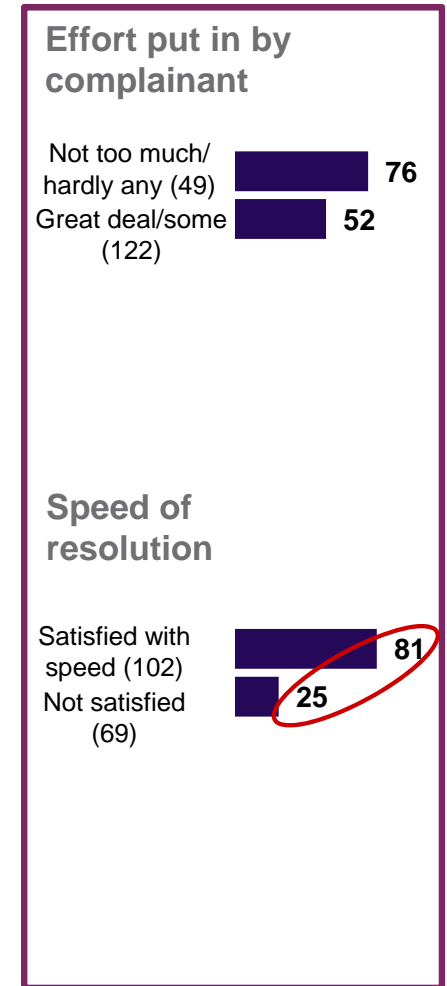
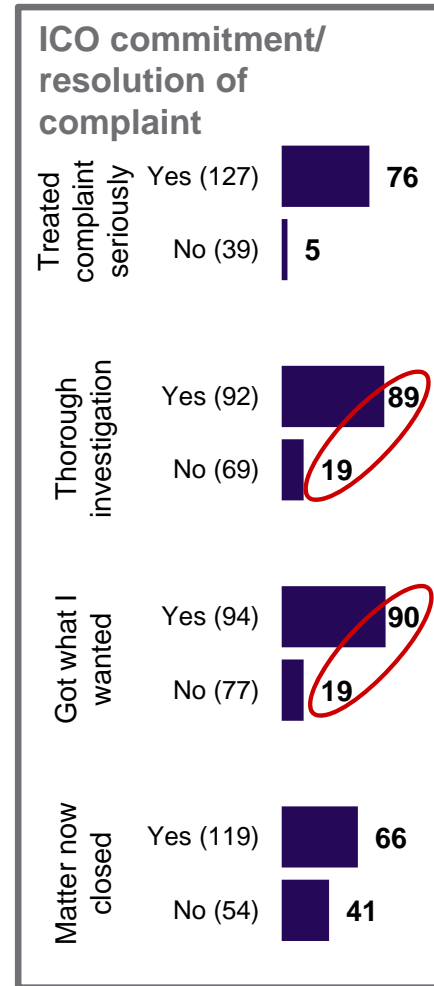
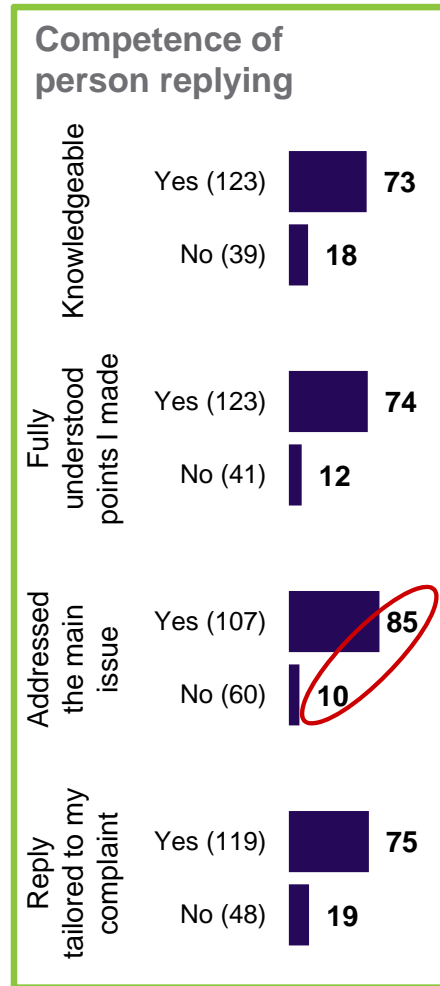
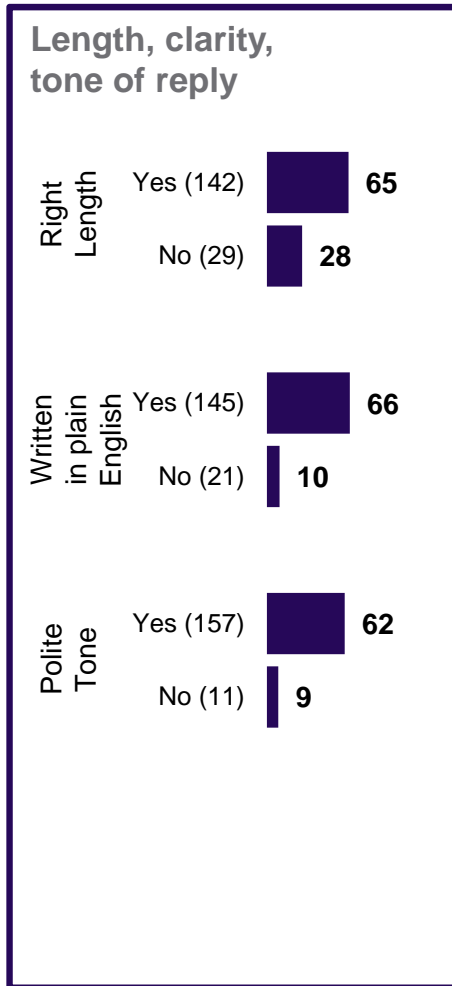
Base: All not very or not at all satisfied overall (55)



Overall satisfaction with complaint handling

Addressing the main issue, showing evidence that a thorough investigation has taken place, giving complainants what they want and speed of response are key to improving overall satisfaction

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



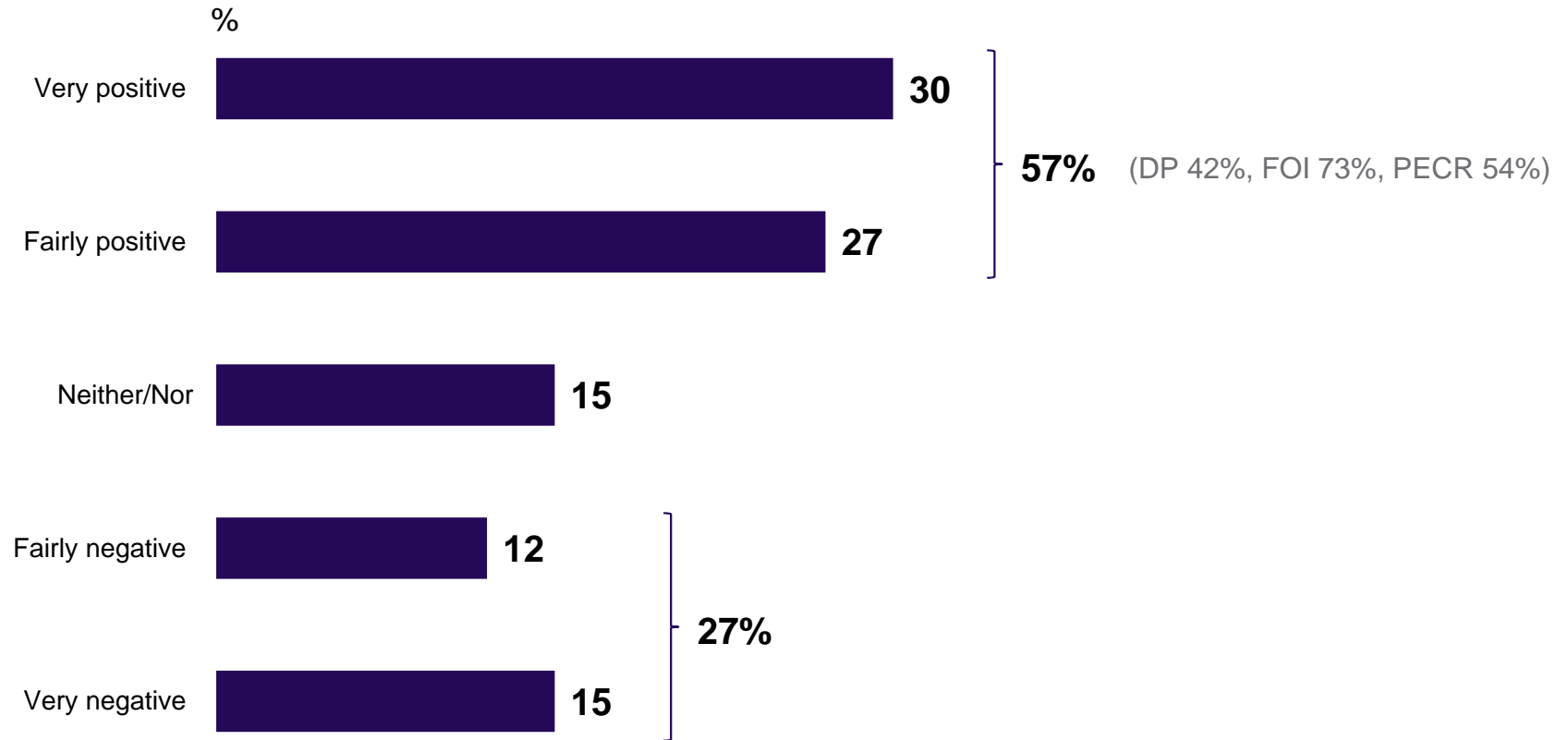
Q31 So how satisfied are you overall with the way your complaint was handled by the ICO?

Base: All except those not supplying requested documents



Impression of ICO

On balance more complainants formed a positive impression of the ICO after the experience of complaining (57%) than a negative one (27%)



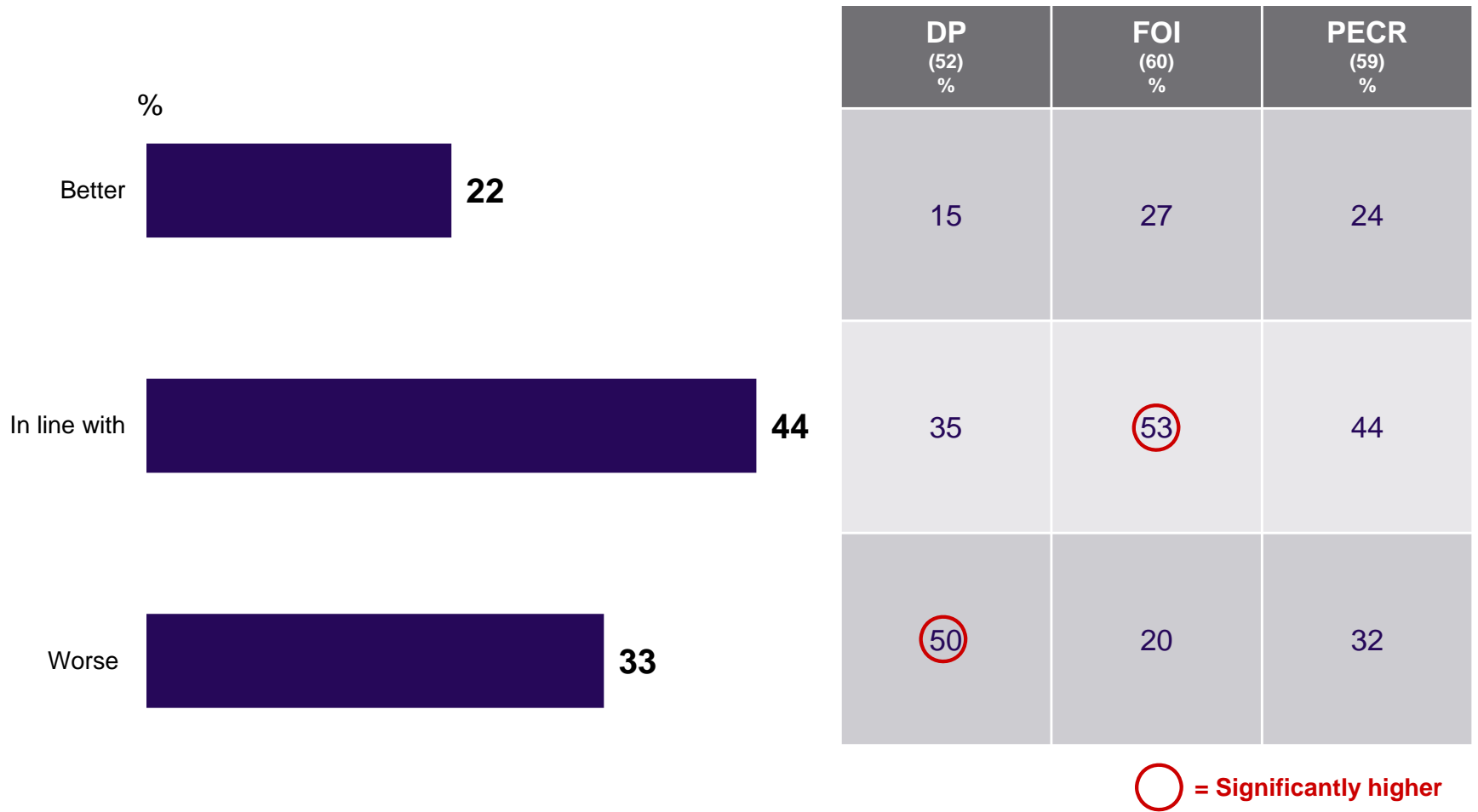
As with overall satisfaction, impressions of ICO are particularly high among complainants who received confirmation that action has been taken to make sure the breach doesn't happen again and who received confirmation that the problem/error was accepted by the company/organisation and understood

Q34 Thinking of how they dealt with your complaint, what sort of impression did this give you of the ICO?

Base: All except those not supplying requested documents (171)

➔ Expectation versus reality

The experience of complaining to the ICO was often worse than expected among DP complainants



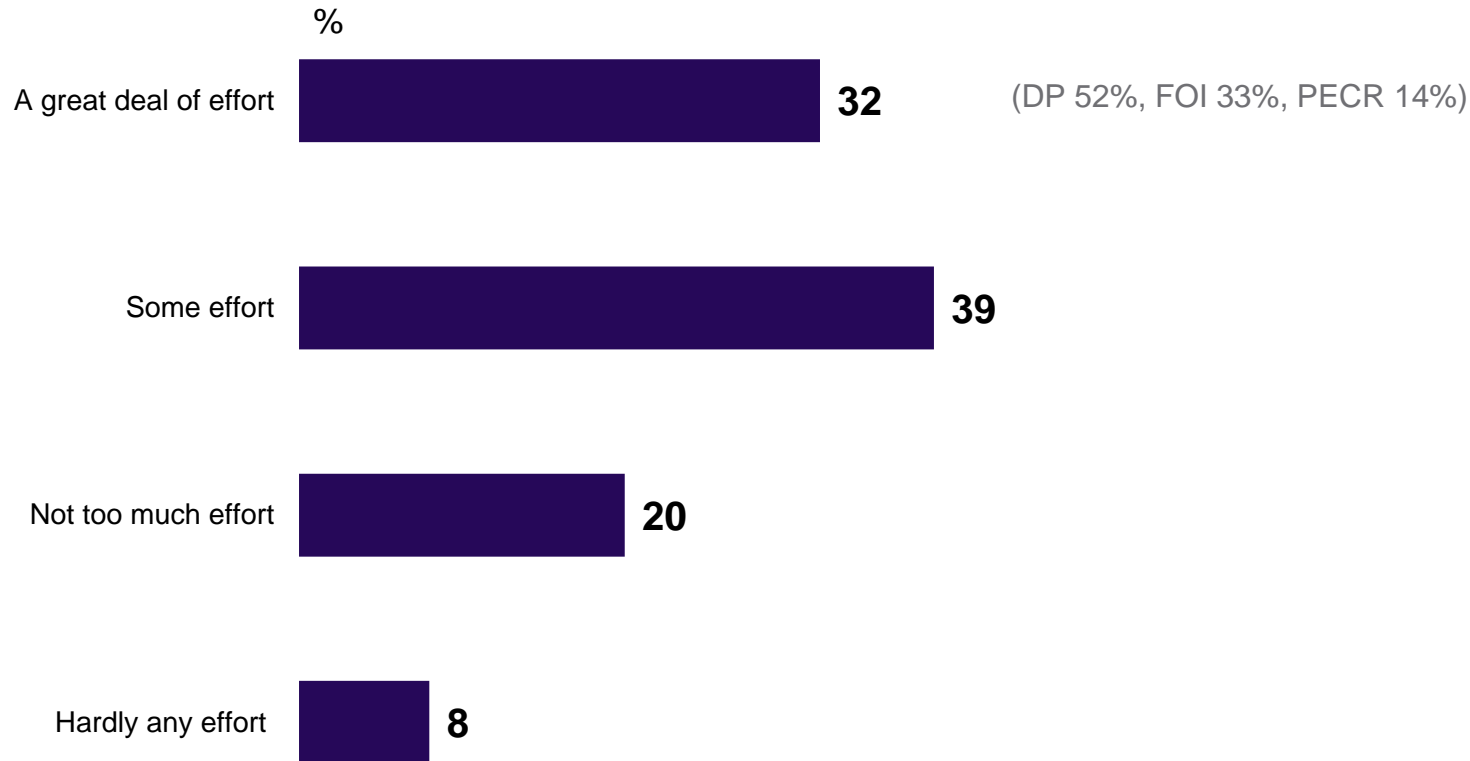
Q35 Thinking back to what you were expecting at the outset when you first complained to the ICO, has the experience of dealing with them been better than, in line with or worse than you expected?

Base: All except those not supplying requested documents (171)



Effort

A third claimed they had to put a great deal of effort into raising their complaint with the ICO and this was higher for DP complaints (52%)



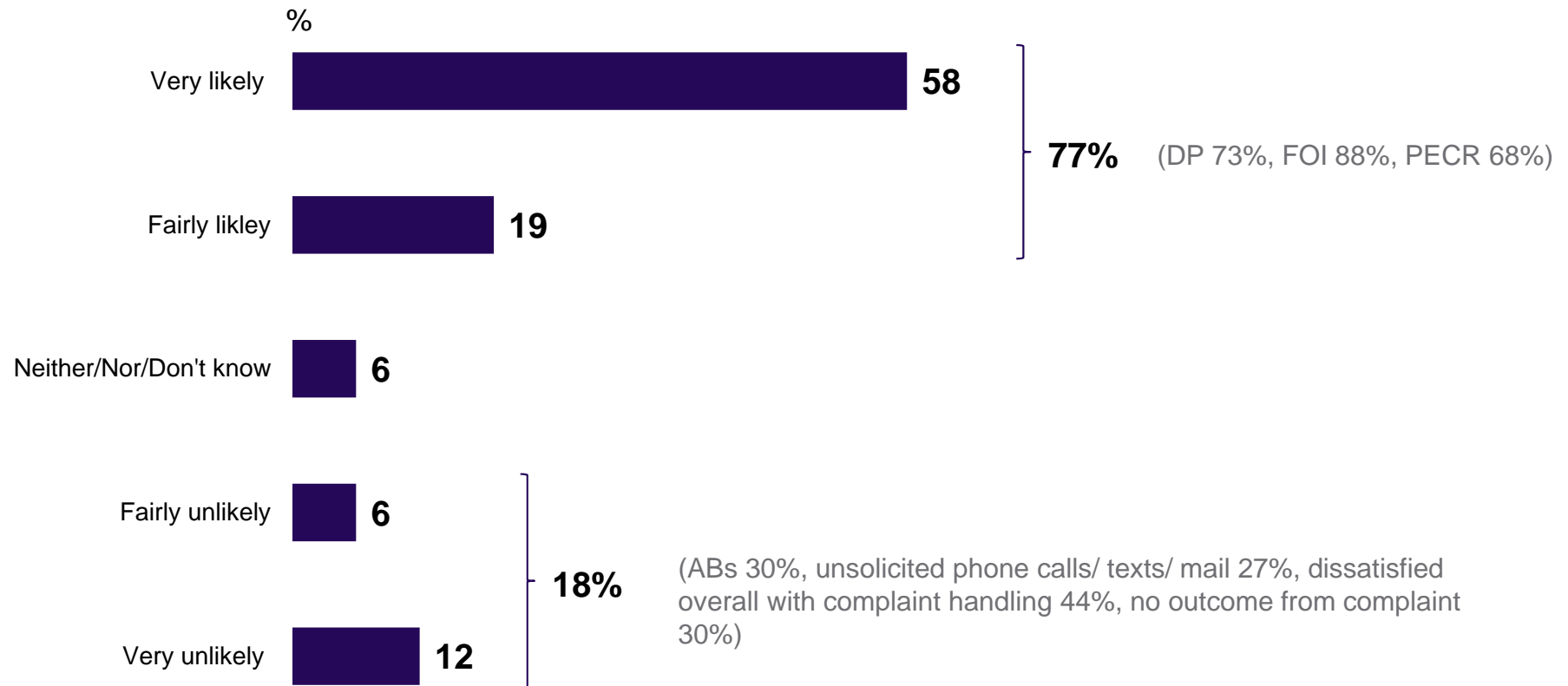
No significant differences by channel used to register complaint

Q36 How much effort have you personally had to put into raising this complaint with the ICO?
Base: All except those not supplying requested documents (171)



Likelihood of approaching ICO again

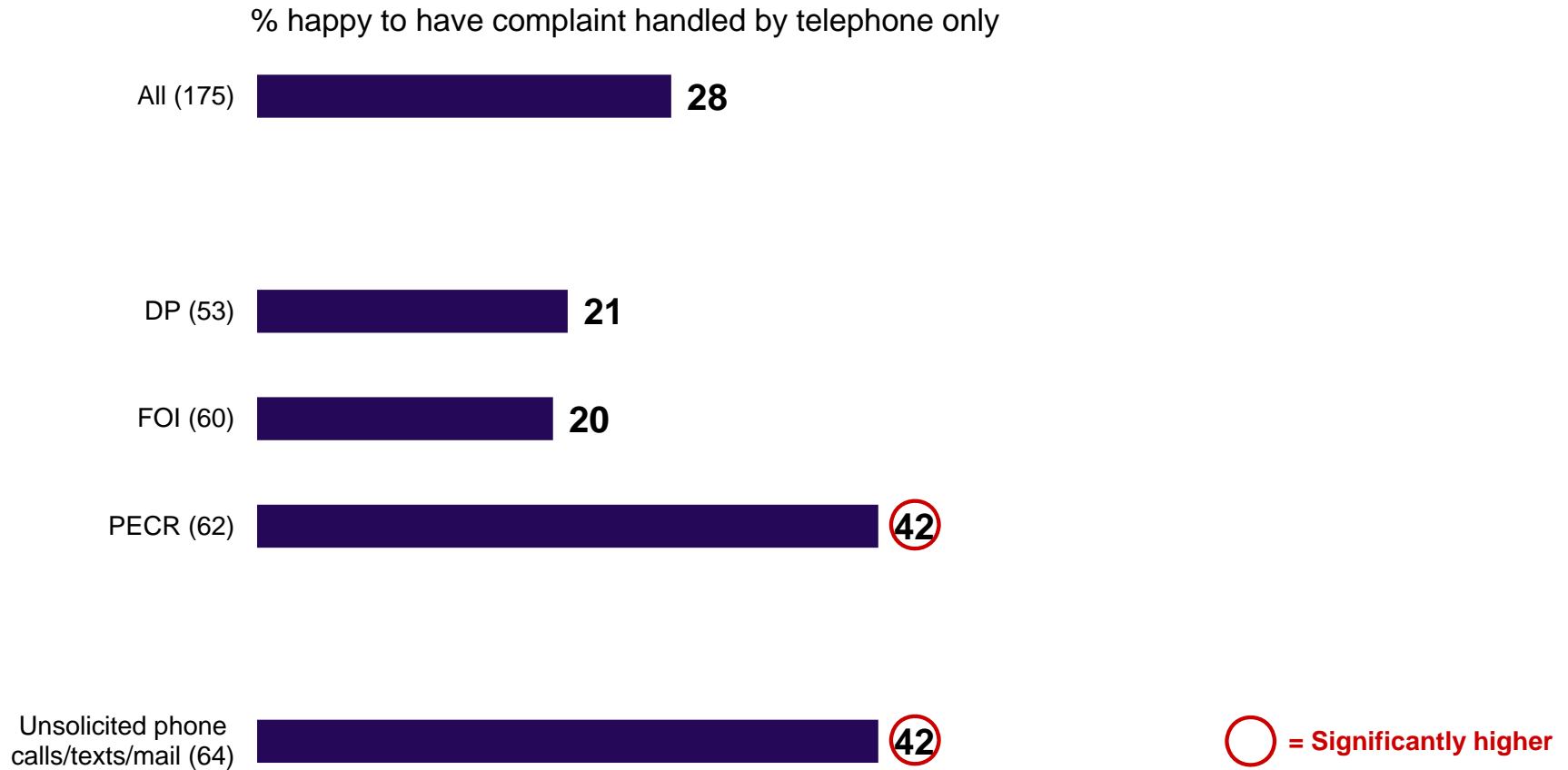
Just over three quarters would approach ICO if they had a similar complaint. 18% are not likely to approach ICO again (higher among ABs, those complaining about unsolicited calls/texts/mail and those not satisfied this time)



Q38 How likely are you to approach the ICO again if you had a similar complaint?
Base: All except those not supplying requested documents (171)

→ Telephone only complaints

Only 28% would have been happy to have had their complaint handled by phone. This rises to over four in ten among PECCR complainants and those complaining about unsolicited phone calls/texts/mail



Q41 Would you have been happy to have had your complaint handled by telephone only or would you always expect a written response?

Base: All (175)