

## **Forward**

This survey is the first that the Advertising Standards Authority has undertaken on such a comprehensive basis. In commissioning an independent company, Paul Winstone Research, to conduct the survey we aimed to take a hard look at the quality of service provided to just some of the people we consider to be our customers; the public and the advertising industry. The survey focuses on three key areas: complaint handling, our public enquiry service and the CAP Copy Advice service. These operations are provided by the Secretariat that services the Authority and the Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP).

The ASA is often seen only as a complaint handling organisation. In fact, the self-regulatory system performs many other core activities, but for the ASA much of our external credibility relies on our ability to resolve complaints about advertisements. It is essential therefore that this, our most public and high profile service, is conducted professionally and with integrity.

The results of this customer satisfaction survey are largely positive and a tribute to the high standards, care and commitment we strive to put into resolving complaints. The ASA Council and the Authority's Secretariat are conscious of the need to put every effort into assessing and resolving complaints quickly and fairly. That this has been acknowledged by those who make complaints, and the advertisers who are on the receiving end of them, is heartening. There is, however, no cause for complacency. In using these findings the Authority will focus on those areas where levels of satisfaction are low.

Past surveys into the quality of the general enquiry service and anecdotal evidence from those who use the CAP copy advice service have shown that the levels of customer satisfaction are high in these areas. This new survey shows that customers using these facilities continue to rate the professionalism and quality of service highly. Again, though, we will be looking for ways to maintain and improve our operations in these areas.

I am grateful to the whole Secretariat for the professionalism, hard work and commitment they put in to making sure that the self-regulatory system operates smoothly and effectively for the public and for the advertising business.

**Matti Alderson**  
**Director General**  
**Advertising Standards Authority**

# **CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY**

**A review of the standards of service provided by the  
ASA/CAP Secretariat in handling complaints, general enquiries and  
pre-publication advice**

**by**

**Paul Winstone Research**

**27 September 1999**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) receives around 12,000 complaints a year and some 15,000 general enquiries. In addition, around 11,000 pre-publication advice requests are received annually by the Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) Copy Advice team.

In 1998 the ASA commissioned an independent research company, Paul Winstone Research (PWR) , to carry out a survey into the attitudes of those who use these services. The findings of this research project are examined in this report.

For the purposes of this survey, those who use the services in each of the areas examined are referred to as “customers” for the ASA and CAP:

- ?? complaints (advertisers, and their agents, and complainants)
- ?? enquiries (general public, students, advertising industry, etc)
- ?? copy advice (advertisers, agencies, publishers and service suppliers)

In its examination of complaints, the ASA seeks to balance fairness with efficiency in undertaking thorough investigations. This enables the ASA’s Council to make considered decisions under the British Codes of Advertising and Sales Promotion. The depth of examination that some complaints need can sometimes involve lengthy investigations and the ASA was concerned to assess the attitudes of those customers involved in the procedure.

Many of those who wish to make a complaint contact first the ASA’s enquiry service. This operates from 9.00am to 5.30pm each weekday. Some callers want more information about how the ASA and the self-regulatory system works, others are looking for facts and figures for school or other academic projects. Those who use the service are as varied as the information requests themselves. Often this service is the first point of contact that the outside world has with the ASA or CAP. The research aimed to check the quality of service provided and whether or not people were satisfied with the advice and help given.

The service provided by the CAP Copy Advice team is essential to the success of the industry’s system of self-regulation. Except for the mandatory requirement to pre-vet all cigarette advertisements, and some poster campaigns which are subject to the Poster Pre-vetting Procedure, seeking advice is voluntary. It is free and confidential from competitors and 95% of requests for advice are responded to within 24 hours. Anecdotal evidence from those who regularly use the service indicated that the CAP Copy Advice team provide the industry with an excellent service but the independent research project set out to gain a real understanding of the value of the service to its customers.

## 2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of conducting this research was to check the quality of service provided by the Secretariat to the “customers” of ASA and CAP. The Authority was not seeking to check whether or not consumers and companies agreed with the final decision made on their complaint or copy advice request: It was recognised that complainants who had their “complaints not upheld” might be rather less satisfied than those with “complaints upheld”.

In order to gauge customer satisfaction with the service provided, the ASA briefed Paul Winstone Research (PWR) to conduct research using the ten key dimensions generally recognised in the research world to check quality of service. This would enable ASA/CAP to check how the Secretariat were performing in each area and to examine where improvements might be necessary. The assessment factors, which are listed below, formed the basis of simple multiple choice questionnaires adapted as appropriate for the groups of recipients:

1. Reliability: checking consistency of performance and dependability
  - ?? Honouring promises
  - ?? Performing services at or within designated time frames
  - ?? Keeping accurate records
2. Responsiveness
  - ?? Promptness of acknowledgement
  - ?? Returning calls quickly
  - ?? Giving prompt service (ie making decisions swiftly)
3. Competence
  - ?? Knowledge and skill of contact personnel
  - ?? Knowledge and skill of support personnel (ie receptionist/secretaries)
  - ?? Depth and persistence of investigation
4. Access: approachability and ease of contact
  - ?? Easy access by telephone (ie lines are not busy and customer is not put on hold)
  - ?? Convenient hours of operation
  - ?? Convenient method of contact (ie complaints in writing)
5. Courtesy: politeness, respect and friendliness of contact
  - ?? Telephone manner
  - ?? Written manner

6. Communication: keeping customers informed in language they can understand
  - ?? Adjusting language for different customers (ie don't use jargon with consumers)
  - ?? Explaining the adjudication process and the Code requirements
  - ?? Assuring complainants that their complaint will be dealt with
  - ?? Keeping customers informed regularly
7. Credibility: trustworthiness, believability, honesty
  - ?? Having customers' interests at heart
  - ?? Power to do something about the complaint
  - ?? Reputation of the ASA in dealing with complaints (eg was the customer's experience worse or better than they had expected)
  - ?? Personal characteristics of contact personnel
8. Security
  - ?? Confidentiality of public complainants
  - ?? Commercial confidentiality
  - ?
9. Understanding
  - ?? Consideration of the customer's point of view (empathy)
  - ?? Providing individualised attention
10. Tangibles: the physical evidence of the service
  - ?? Initial acknowledgement (ie post card or telephone call)
  - ?? Follow up letters
  - ?? Final letter detailing decision
  - ?? Decisions reported in the media (where applicable)

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Questionnaire development

Using the key dimensions outlined in section 2 of this report, four multiple choice questionnaires were developed by PWR after interviews with Managers from the complaints, external affairs and copy advice teams. Two questionnaires were prepared for testing customer satisfaction in complaint handling: one for complainants and one for the advertiser (or their agent) on the receiving end of the complaint; one for industry customers who had used the CAP copy advice service and one for the general enquiry service provided by the external affairs team. All questionnaires included a section in which customers were invited to add any further comments.

Each questionnaire was sent out with a covering letter from the ASA Director General explaining to recipients the aims of the research and inviting them to help the Authority to assess the way that it services its customers. The letter also advised recipients that their responses would be dealt with confidentially under Market Research Society rules. All questionnaires were sent out with a reply-paid envelope addressed to PWR.

#### 3.2 Pilot study

A pilot study was conducted to test the two complaints questionnaires prepared by PWR. Also, since this was the first comprehensive survey of its type carried out for the ASA, it was important to test the internal systems needed to generate the mailing list for the research.

Each questionnaire was marked with the case reference number from the ASA database and the responses analysed alongside the case histories. The case histories on the ASA database record the dates for each stage of the complaint from the day it is received by the ASA to the day the outcome of the case is advised. It also records what type of action was carried out by the ASA, eg whether the complaint was formally investigated, informally resolved, not investigated or a mail order/database complaint.

The pilot survey was carried out on formally investigated complaints concluded between 23 March and 23 April 1998. Questionnaires were sent to complainants and advertisers one week after they had been advised about the ASA's ruling.

In total, 251 questionnaires were sent out: 116 to advertisers and 135 to complainants. The pilot achieved a response rate of 37% from the advertisers with 43 questionnaires returned and 71% of complainants, 97 responded.

No significant problems were revealed with the questionnaires although many recipients had used the comment form to ask the ASA questions. The survey was conducted confidentially under Market Research Society rules and the ASA was unable to identify respondents in order to answer their questions. Therefore the

letter from the ASA accompanying the questionnaire was revised to inform recipients to address any questions they wanted to raise about the survey to the ASA rather than the research company.

### 3.3 Main survey stage

The main survey stage was carried out in three phases:

#### *Complaints*

A total of 1,755 questionnaires was sent out on all complaint cases concluded between 28 September and 21 December 1998. Of these, 1,000 went to the complainant in each case and 755 to the advertiser. Where multiple complaints were received about an advertisement, the first three complainants in each case were sent questionnaires. In the advertiser's sample the questionnaire was sent to the person who had responded to the ASA's investigation letters. In some cases this was the agency who was responding on behalf of the advertiser.

Complaint investigations are separated into six types:

- ?? Formally Investigated - Complaints on which the ASA Council adjudicates on after thorough investigation by the Secretariat.
- ?? Informally Investigated - complaints resolved by the ASA Secretariat
- ?? Not Justified - complaints dismissed by the ASA Council as having no case to answer.
- ?? Not investigated - complaints requiring no ASA action.
- ?? Mail Order Investigation - complaints about non-receipt of goods and refunds.
- ?? Database Investigation - complaints about the receipt of direct mail.

#### *General enquiries*

A total of 707 questionnaires were sent to all those who contacted the ASA's enquiry service by telephone or in writing between 2 November and 21 December 1998.

#### *CAP Copy Advice enquiries*

Many of those using the copy advice service do so on a daily basis and sometimes more than once each day. As a result, to avoid enquirers receiving more than one questionnaire which recipients would find difficult to relate to one particular enquiry, questionnaires were sent to 204 individuals who telephoned, faxed or wrote to the Copy Advice team between 9 November 1998 and 1 February 1999.

## 4. RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

### 4.1 Complainants

The majority of the 12,217 complaints received in 1998 were from members of the public who felt that they had been misled or offended by an advertisement. But not all complainants are members of the general public. Those who complain also include consumer organisations, trading standards departments, pressure groups or other informed groups. In addition, some 10% of complaints each year are made by competing companies.

1,000 questionnaires were sent out to complainants whose cases were concluded between 28 September and 21 December 1998. This section of the survey achieved a 60% response rate: 600 questionnaires were completed and returned to Paul Winstone Research and the results analysed against the case histories detailed in the ASA database. The results are summarised below:

#### Outcome of complaints

In terms of outcome, the data provided by the ASA on the response sample indicated that just over a third of complainants who responded to the research had had their complaints upheld (34%), while close to a fifth had had their complaint not upheld (19%). This left over two-fifths of the main stage complaints sample (43%) with their complaint 'not investigated'. It should be noted that the mail out sample for the main stage complaints sample was not restricted, as the pilot stage had been, to those people who had had their complaints formally investigated and for whom a decision had been published. This inevitably will mean that not all respondents can comment on all stages of the complaints process.

Base: All respondents (600)

	%
Upheld	34
Not upheld	19
Not investigated	43
Not stated	4

#### Duration of cases

The results indicate that most complaints (77%) were resolved within two months. Of those complaints that had been upheld, just over half (59%) had been resolved in 2 months, with 14% taking 2-3 months, 18% 3-5 months, 4% 5 months or more and a further 4% stating that their case was still ongoing.

Base: All respondents (600)

	%
Up to 2 months	77
2-3 months	7
3 months or more	12
Not stated	4

## Awareness of ASA as complaint handling organisation

Almost half of complainants claimed they were already aware of the ASA. The other most common sources of awareness were seeing an advertisement in a newspaper or magazine (20%), another organisation recommending them to contact the ASA (18%), and hearing about the ASA through media coverage of their decisions (11%). (Some respondents ticked more than one box which accounts for the total percentage equalling more than 100).

*How did you know to complain to the ASA on this occasion?*

Base: All respondents (600)

	%
Was already aware of the ASA as the organisation to complain to	47
Saw an advertisement for the ASA in newspaper or magazine	20
Recommended to contact the ASA by another organisation contacted	18
Heard about the ASA through media coverage of their decisions	11
Was recommended to contact the ASA by a friend or relative	3
Saw a poster advertisement for the ASA	2
Saw an advertisement for the ASA at the cinema	2
Was recommended to contact the ASA by a colleague or work contact	1
Some other way	13
Not stated	1

## First contact with ASA

Just over a quarter of complainants initially contacted the ASA by telephone, with over two-thirds of respondents claiming to make their first contact in writing.

*And how did you first contact the ASA concerning your recent complaint about advertising?*

Base: All respondents (600)

	%
In writing	70
By telephone	26
Not stated	4

## Satisfaction with initial contact with ASA

Those who made initial contact by telephone expressed greatest satisfaction in relation to the politeness of the enquiries staff, followed by the ease of obtaining the telephone number, the politeness of the switchboard staff, the speed the call was answered by the switchboard, the speed the call was put through to the enquiries department and the professionalism of the enquiries staff. Each of these aspects attracted very or fairly satisfied ratings from close to three-quarters of the respondents and the mean scores were somewhere between very and fairly satisfied.

The opening hours of the switchboard and the knowledge and expertise of the enquiries staff attracted very or fairly satisfied ratings from closer to three-fifths of respondents and mean scores approximated to the point 'fairly satisfied' on the scale.

*And how satisfied were you with each of the following aspects of your initial telephone contact?*

Base: All making first contact with the ASA by telephone (156)

	Very satisfied %	Fairly satisfied %	Neither Satisfied nor dis-satisfied %	Fairly dis-satisfied %	Very dis-satisfied %	Mean Score (+2 to-2)	Not Stated %
Politeness of enquiries staff	57	23	8	1	-	+1.51	10
Ease of obtaining tel. number	61	18	10	3	-	+1.48	8
Politeness of switchboard staff	58	22	11	1	-	+1.48	7
Speed your call was answered by switchboard	52	28	11	1	1	+1.39	8
Speed your call was then put through to enquiries dept	49	29	10	1	1	+1.38	10
Professionalism of enquiries staff	53	19	13	3	-	+1.37	12
Opening hours of switchboard	35	24	25	3	-	+1.05	13
Knowledge and expertise of enquiries staff	42	21	19	4	4	+1.04	10

### **Ease of finding ASA contact details**

The majority of respondents (75%) also expressed satisfaction with the ease of obtaining the address to write to, with only 5% expressing any dissatisfaction, and a mean score (+1.39) better than the position fairly satisfied on the scale (+1.00).

*And how satisfied were you with the ease of obtaining the address to write to?*

Base: All respondents (600)

	Very satisfied %	Fairly satisfied %	Neither Satisfied nor dis-satisfied %	Fairly dis-satisfied %	Very dis-satisfied %	Mean Score (+2 to-2)	Not Stated %
Ease of obtaining address	58	17	12	4	1	+1.39	9

## Redirection of complaints outside ASA remit

Almost nine out of ten complainants said that the ASA had been able to deal directly with their complaint (87%), with just 8% claiming that the ASA had advised them of another organisation to contact, and the remainder (5%) ticking 'not relevant'.

*Some complaints do not fall within the ASA's remit. In these cases the ASA tries to point the complainants in the direction of the organisation which would be responsible. Was the ASA able to deal with your complaint directly or did they advise you of another organisation to contact?*

Base: All respondents (600)

	%
Able to deal with complaint directly	87
Advised of another organisation to contact	8
Not relevant	5

## Satisfaction with complaints needing to be made in writing

Amongst those respondents who had made complaints that the ASA could deal with directly, once again the vast majority felt that it was reasonable for the ASA to require all complaints to be made in writing, with just 8% disagreeing.

*The ASA requires all complaints to be made in writing so that they have a full and clear understanding of each complaint. Do you think this is reasonable?*

Base: All respondents whose complaint the ASA was able to deal with directly (520)

	%
Yes	90
No	8
Not stated	2

## ASA's response to complaint

In general, there was net satisfaction with all aspects of the ASA's response to complaints, with at least half of all complainants, who expressed an opinion in relation to each aspect of their contact, saying that they were very or fairly satisfied, and generating mean scores typically closer to 'fairly satisfied' on the scale than to the neutral mid-point.

The strongest average ratings from complainants, exceeding 'fairly satisfied' on the scale, were observed amongst members of the public, in terms of the confidentiality of their complaint (+1.34), and amongst the entire sample in terms of the speed of receiving written acknowledgement of their complaints (+1.36), the tone of that written acknowledgement (+1.17), and the tone of any initial assessment, where that occurred (+1.11). However, responses in relation to the latter statement also showed high levels of not stated answers (58%), indicating that by no means all complainants felt they had received an initial assessment. The same observation of high levels of non-response was noted in relation to keeping complainants informed throughout the complaints process (56%), the speed of the initial assessment (58%),

the clarity of explaining the complaints procedure (61%), and the fact that the ASA would be publishing its decision on the complaint (61%). These non-response levels were accounted for primarily by complainants whose cases had not been upheld or were 'not investigated'.

More qualified ratings of the complaints service amongst complainants were in terms of the reasons given for the final adjudication and the depth the complaint was looked into where average ratings, although still on balance positive, were closer to the neutral mid-point on the scale (+0.38 in each case), with as many as a quarter of complainants claiming they were very or fairly dissatisfied in each case (28% and 25% respectively). As many as a fifth of complainants were also dissatisfied with the final letter detailing the ASA's decision (22%) and the ASA's understanding their specific complaint (20%), though these levels were clearly exceeded by those claiming they were very or fairly satisfied (55% and 60% respectively).

Some variation in ratings was seen in relation to the length of time the ASA had taken to resolve complaints. In particular, the 14% of cases that took three months or more to be resolved generated greater claimed dissatisfaction in terms of dealing with complaints in a reasonable time (28%), the speed of the initial response (26%), keeping complainants informed throughout the complaints process (23%) and the speed of receiving written acknowledgement of the complaint (18%). Interestingly, however, complaints settled within two months showed greater dissatisfaction with the depth the complaint was looked into (26%).

Outcome also affected average ratings of the complaints process, with those whose complaint had not been upheld more likely to express dissatisfaction in terms of the reasons given for the final adjudication (49%), the depth the complaint was looked into (37%), the final letter detailing the ASA's decision (34%) and the understanding of their specific complaint (29%).

*And how satisfied were you with each of the following aspects of the ASA's response to your complaint?*

Base: All respondents whose complaint the ASA was able to deal with directly (520)

	Very satisfied %	Fairly satisfied %	Neither Satisfied nor dis-satisfied %	Fairly dis-satisfied %	Very dis-satisfied %	Mean Score (+2 to-2)	Not Stated %
Speed of receiving written acknowledgement	58	26	8	5	2	+1.36	1
Tone of the acknowledgement	48	27	15	3	3	+1.17	4
Dealing with your complaint in a reasonable time	46	28	10	6	7	+1.05	3
Professionalism of the staff that dealt with your complaint	37	22	19	5	4	+0.96	13

Understanding your specific complaint	36	24	13	9	11	+0.70	6
ASA actually doing what they said they would do	34	21	21	5	8	+0.77	12
Final letter detailing the decision	34	21	14	9	13	+0.60	9
Knowledge and expertise of staff that dealt with complaint	30	17	22	6	8	+0.66	16
Reasons given for final adjudication made	28	23	12	12	16	+0.38	9
Depth the complaint was looked into	26	22	18	11	14	+0.38	9
Keeping you informed throughout the complaints process	21	10	6	3	3	+1.01	56
Speed of the ASA's initial assessment of your complaint	20	13	6	3	3	+1.01	56
Tone of that assessment	19	12	7	1	2	+1.11	58
That the ASA will be publishing its decision on your complaint	19	9	8	1	2	+1.08	61
Clarity of explaining the complaints procedure	16	12	8	2	1	+1.04	60

Base: All members of the public whose complaint the ASA was able to deal with directly (457):

	%	%	%	%	%	(+2 to-2) %	
Confidentiality	50	16	19	*	1	1.34	14

Base: All competitive companies or organisations whose complaint the ASA was able to deal with directly (86):

	%	%	%	%	%	(+2 to-2) %	
That your company/orgn is named as complainant	33	48	26	3	3	+0.87	20

### Satisfaction with ASA after contact

Approaching two-thirds of the sample were satisfied that the ASA is independent of the advertising industry and has consumers' interests at heart, and half were satisfied that the ASA had a good reputation in dealing with complaints, generating mean scores in each case approaching 'fairly satisfied' on the scale (+0.96, +0.74 and +0.70 respectively).

However, dissatisfaction was more marked in terms of the ASA's powers, with only two-fifths of the sample feeling satisfied that these were sufficient to deal with complaints and getting advertisers to comply, compared with over a quarter of complainants (28%) who were critical in this respect.

Once again, dissatisfaction was greater amongst those complainants whose complaint was not upheld, specifically in relation to perceptions that the ASA has consumers' interest at heart (34%) or is independent of the advertising industry (21%).

*And how satisfied are you with each of the following aspects of the ASA, now that you have had some direct contact with them?*

Base: All complaints the ASA was able to deal with directly (520)

	Very satisfied %	Fairly satisfied %	Neither Satisfied nor dis-satisfied %	Fairly dis-satisfied %	Very dis-satisfied %	Mean score (+2 to-2)	Not stated %
The ASA is independent of the advertising industry	43	21	17	5	7	+0.96	7
The ASA has consumers' interests at heart	36	27	15	9	10	+0.74	4
The ASA has a good reputation in dealing with complaints	27	23	27	6	5	+0.70	13
The ASA has sufficient powers in dealing with complaints and getting advertisers to comply with decisions made	20	20	22	14	14	+0.20	11

### **Satisfaction among those whose complaints fell outside ASA's remit**

Amongst the small group of complainants whose complaint fell outside the ASA's area of responsibility, almost three-fifths were very or fairly satisfied with the helpfulness of the ASA's advice about other organisations or options to try (57%), but just over a fifth were critical (22%).

*If your complaint was outside the ASA's area of responsibility, how satisfied were you with the helpfulness of the their advice, in terms of other organisations or options you might try?*

Base: All respondents who were advised by the ASA to contact another organisation (49)

	Very satisfied %	Fairly satisfied %	Neither Satisfied nor dis-satisfied %	Fairly dis-satisfied %	Very dis-satisfied %	Mean score (+2 to-2)	Not stated %
Helpfulness of advice	33	24	12	14	8	+0.64	8

### **Overall levels of satisfaction with the ASA**

Overall, three-fifths of complainants were very or fairly satisfied with the ASA's response (59%). This proportion rose to almost three-quarters of those whose complaint was upheld (73%), but fell to less than half those with complaints that were not upheld (44%).

*So overall how satisfied were you with the ASA's response to your enquiry?*

Base: All complaints (600)

	Very satisfied %	Fairly satisfied %	Neither Satisfied nor dis-satisfied %	Fairly dis-satisfied %	Very dis-satisfied %	Mean Score (+2 to-2)	Not Stated %
Overall satisfaction with ASA's response	33	26	9	17	12	+0.54	4

### **ASA performing to expected standard**

When asked whether the ASA had performed better or worse than expected, opinion was almost exactly balanced, with almost a quarter of complainants stating that the ASA had performed better (23%) and a similar proportion that it had performed worse than expected (24%). Almost half of the respondents stated that the ASA had performed about the same as they had expected (49%).

Amongst those whose complaint had been upheld the balance of opinion favoured the ASA being seen as better rather than worse than expected (32% versus 12% respectively), while those whose complaint had been not upheld were more likely to see the ASA as worse rather than better than expected (30% versus 18% respectively).

*And would you say that the ASA performed better, worse or about the same as you had expected, in handling your complaint?*

Base: All complaints (600)

	%
Better	23
About the same	49
Worse	24
Not stated	4

### **Complainants profile**

The vast majority of the complainants' sample (87%) were members of the public, while just under one in ten (9%) complained on behalf of a competitive company and slightly fewer on behalf of an organisation or special interest group (7%), implying a small level of double claiming, primarily between claims of complaining as an organisation or special interest group and also as a member of the general public (3%).

*In what capacity did you complain to the ASA?*

Base: All complaints (600)

	%
As a member of the public	87
On behalf of a competitive company in relation to a competitive product or service	9

On behalf of an organisation or special interest group	7
Not stated	2

### Summary of other comments made

When asked whether they had any other comments or suggestions about the complaints service just over two thirds of complainants (68%) made some comment, with positive answers focusing mainly on mentions of it being a first rate, quick, effective or professional service, mentioned spontaneously by 1 in 7 respondents (14%).

This was followed by a range of somewhat more critical comments made by closer to one in twenty respondents in each case, such as the ASA not being strong enough or needing more power or 'teeth' (6%), being slow to respond to complaints or the process taking too long (6%), generally not being impressed or feeling that the process was no help or a waste of time (5%), disagreement with the ASA's assessment of the complaint (5%), feeling that the ASA needed to understand their complaint more thoroughly or that the ASA had missed the point (4%), wishing to be informed of the outcome and sent copies of relevant data or documentary evidence (4%) and feeling that there was insufficient comment or depth shown in the ASA's response and a general lack of information (4%).

*Are there any other comments or suggestions you would like to make about the complaints service at the ASA?*

Base: All complaints (600)

	%
<b>Favourable</b>	
A first rate service/quick/effective/professional	14
ASA is necessary to protect public from misleading/abusive advertising	1
<b>Unfavourable</b>	
ASA not strong enough/needs more power/'teeth'	6
Slow to respond to complaints/too long to final outcome	6
Not impressed/no help/waste of time/no interest shown/do nothing	5
Disagree with ASA assessment response	5
ASA should understand complaint more thoroughly/wider issues not grasped/missed the point	4
Complainants should be informed of outcome/sent relevant data	4
Insufficient comment/depth shown in response/lack of information	4
Advert claims still appearing	3
ASA should advertise service more widely/Yellow Pages/phone books	3
Poor administration/wrong letters sent/sent to wrong address/duplicates received	2
ASA should have telephone service/answering service to log complaints	2
Complaint not yet processed	2
ASA's role should be publicised/understood/should give wider explanation of process/adjudication	2
ASA should use e-mail	2
ASA failed to address complaint fully	2
ASA/MPS versus unsolicited mail	2

ASA funded by advertising industry/vested interest/biased towards business, not the consumer	2
ASA should have more power to apply fines/punishment	2
ASA standards/moral standards unacceptably low	2
ASA should have more experienced/responsible/helpful staff	1
Offending advertisers should be brought to book/fined more quickly	1
ASA reluctant to use 'teeth'/use guidelines as excuse to do nothing	1
ASA accepts what advertisers say at face value	1
Adjudications should all be published/advertiser should publish retraction	1
Disappointed in non-involvement of ASA	1
ASA should ban the use of religious themes/phrases in advertising	1
ASA ruling should be before campaign breaks - not after the event/damage is done	1
ASA's dependence on numbers defeats ordinary citizen	1
More protection for children is needed	1
Codes of decency/British Codes of Advertising need revision	1
Why so many questionnaires?	1
ASA should research complaints more thoroughly	1
Others (mentioned by less than 3 respondents)	14
None/no other comments/suggestions	32

## 4.2 Advertisers

In addition to the questionnaires sent to complainants, the ASA asked 755 advertisers to take part in the survey. The response rate from advertisers, or agents acting on their behalf, was lower than that for the complainant's sample: 259 (34%) of advertisers completed and returned their questionnaires compared with 60% of complainants.

The advertisers' responses were analysed by Paul Winstone Research using the dates and details provided in the relevant case history from the ASA's database. The results are shown below:

### Outcome of complaints

In terms of outcome, the data provided by the ASA on the advertisers' response sample indicated that just over half of all advertisers responding to the research had had the complaints against them upheld (55%), while closer to two-fifths of the sample had their complaints not upheld (41%).

Base: All advertisers (259)

	%
Upheld	55
Not upheld	41
Not stated	4

### Duration of cases (data supplied by ASA from case files)

The results indicated that most advertisers (64%) had cases lasting up to two months, with 14% taking 2-3 months, 11% 3-5 months and 7% 5 months or more.

Base: All advertisers (259)

	%
Up to 2 months	64
2-3 months	14
3-5 months	11
5 months or more	7
Not stated	4

### First contact with the ASA

Just under one fifth of advertisers were initially contacted by the ASA by telephone, with the vast majority (80%) reporting initial contact from the ASA in writing.

*How were you first contacted by the ASA concerning the recent complaint about your advertising?*

Base: All advertisers (259)

	%
In writing	80
By telephone	18
Not stated	2

### **Satisfaction with initial telephone contact from ASA**

Those who were initially contacted by telephone expressed greatest satisfaction in relation to the clarity of the explanation given for the call, the tone of the initial contact and the professionalism of the caller. Each of these factors attracted very or fairly satisfied ratings from close to three-quarters of advertisers (73%-75%) and mean scores slightly above the point 'fairly satisfied' (+1) on the scale (ranging from +1.12 to +1.24).

The knowledge and expertise of the caller generated slightly less positive ratings, but nevertheless attracted very or fairly satisfied ratings from just over three-fifths of advertisers, and a mean score (+0.79) above the mid-point between 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' (0) and 'fairly satisfied' (+1) on the scale. Even on this attribute only roughly one in seven advertisers expressed any direct criticism (13%).

*And how satisfied were you with each of the following aspects of this initial telephone contact from the ASA?*

Base: All advertisers first contacted by telephone (47)

	Very satisfied %	Fairly satisfied %	Neither Satisfied nor dis- satisfied %	Fairly dis- satisfied %	Very dis- satisfied	Mean Score (+2 to-2)	Not stated %
Clarity of the explanation given for the telephone call	43	30	13	4	-	+1.24	11
Tone of the initial contact from the ASA	49	26	13	7	1	+1.18	4
Professionalism of the caller	43	32	6	6	4	+1.12	9
Knowledge and expertise of the caller	28	34	17	9	4	+0.79	9

### **Satisfaction with initial written contact from ASA**

All advertisers were also asked how satisfied they were with any initial written contact from the ASA. In this case close to three-fifths of advertisers were very or fairly satisfied with the clarity of explanation given for the written contact (61%), its tone (59%) and the professionalism of the writer (58%), generating mean scores approaching the 'fairly satisfied' point on the scale (+0.86 to +0.84). Once again the perceived knowledge and expertise of, in this case, the writer received slightly less positive ratings, with just under half (45%) of advertisers stating they were very or

fairly satisfied. However, there was little claimed dissatisfaction (16% very or fairly dissatisfied), leading to a net positive mean score (+0.48) close to the mid-point between 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' (0) and 'fairly satisfied' (+1) on the scale.

*And how satisfied were you with each of the following aspects of any initial written contact from the ASA?*

Base: All advertisers (259)

	Very satisfied %	Fairly satisfied %	Neither Satisfied nor dis-satisfied %	Fairly dis-satisfied %	Very dis-satisfied %	Mean score (+2 to-2)	Not stated %
The clarity of the explanation given for the written contact	29	32	19	6	3	+0.86	11
Tone of the written contact	27	32	24	4	3	+0.85	9
Professionalism of the writer	26	32	24	5	2	+0.84	11
Knowledge and expertise of the writer	20	25	29	9	7	+0.48	10

### **Satisfaction with ASA complaint handling**

Advertisers' ratings of the action taken by the ASA in relation to their advertising were again broadly positive, with the greatest satisfaction expressed in relation to the ASA dealing with the complaint in what was thought to be a reasonable time (71%), the clarity of explanation given for the final decision (66%), the ASA following the complaints procedure (65%), their explanation of that complaints procedure (65%), the professionalism of the staff respondents dealt with (62%) and the tone of any further written communications from the ASA (58%). Each of these factors attracted satisfied ratings from close to three-fifths or more of the sample, and generated mean scores approaching fairly good (+1) on the scale (ranging from +1.00 to +0.77). Two further aspects of the ASA's performance attracted satisfaction from close to half of all advertisers, namely the depth the complaint was looked into by the ASA (50%) and the knowledge and expertise of the staff dealt with (47%). These factors generated mean scores close to the mid-point between 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' (0) and 'fairly satisfied' (+1) on the scale (+0.52 to +0.47).

The ASA's understanding of the respondents' advertising was also rated as satisfactory by almost half of advertisers (47%). However, with over a quarter expressing dissatisfaction (29%), the mean score in this case was closer to the mid-point on the scale (+0.36), although it was still just positive. Finally, the fact that the ASA will be publishing its ruling attracted a positive mean score (+0.28), with 23% satisfied and 10% dissatisfied in this respect, but just over half of respondents (51%) did not answer this question.

Advertisers who had had the complaint against their advertising not upheld were, not surprisingly, generally more positive about the ASA than those who had had the complaint upheld, particularly in terms the fact that the ASA will be publishing their decision (+0.90 versus +0.04 respectively), but also in terms of perceptions of the ASA's understanding of the advertising, the ASA following its complaints procedure,

the clarity of explanation of the ASA's final decision and the depth the complaint was looked into.

*And how satisfied were you with each of the following aspects of the ASA's action in relation to your advertising in this case?*

Base: All advertisers (259)

	Very satisfied %	Fairly satisfied %	Neither Satisfied nor dis-satisfied %	Fairly dis-satisfied %	Very dis-satisfied %	Mean score (+2 to-2)	Not stated %
Dealing with the complaint in what you thought was a reasonable time	34	37	15	3	4	+1.00	7
Clarity of explanation given for the ASA's final decision	32	34	14	6	7	+0.83	7
ASA following the complaints procedure	30	35	21	4	4	+0.88	6
ASA's explanation of the complaints procedure	28	37	22	4	4	+0.85	5
Professionalism of the staff you dealt with	28	34	20	7	3	+0.84	9
Tone of any further written communications from the ASA	27	31	20	8	3	+0.77	9
Depth the complaint was looked into by the ASA	25	25	24	10	9	+0.52	7
Knowledge and expertise of the staff you dealt with	20	27	25	10	19	+0.47	10
ASA's understanding of your advertising	21	26	20	16	13	-0.28	3
That the ASA will be publishing its ruling on your advertising	10	13	15	5	5	+0.36	51

### **Satisfaction with ASA after contact**

In broader image terms, over three quarters of advertisers were satisfied that the ASA is independent of the advertising industry (77%), generating a mean score (+1.22) above the point 'fairly satisfied' (+1) on the scale. Almost two-thirds of advertisers were also satisfied that the ASA has a good reputation in dealing with complaints (63%), generating a mean rating (+0.86) approaching the 'fairly satisfied' point on the scale. In this case differences in perception according to whether the case had been upheld or not did not achieve statistical significance.

*And how satisfied are you with each of the following aspects of the ASA, now that you have had some direct contact with them on this case?*

Base: All advertisers (259)

	Very satisfied %	Fairly satisfied %	Neither Satisfied nor dis-satisfied %	Fairly dis-satisfied %	Very dis-satisfied %	Mean score (+2 to-2)	Not stated %
That the ASA is independent of the advertising industry	48	29	18	2	2	+1.22	2
That the ASA has a good reputation in dealing with complaints	31	32	24	3	5	+0.86	5

### **Overall levels of satisfaction with the ASA**

In overall terms, approaching three-quarters of advertisers (71%) said they were satisfied with the ASA's handling of their case, with just one in six (16%) expressing some criticism, generating a positive mean score (+0.84) approaching the 'fairly satisfied' point on the scale (+1). Not surprisingly, opinion was even more favourable amongst those whose case was not upheld (+1.16) than amongst those where the case was upheld (+0.54%), but even the latter group gave a positive net rating, with just under a quarter expressing any dissatisfaction (23%).

*So overall, how satisfied were you with the ASA's handling of your case?*

Base: All advertisers (259)

	Very satisfied %	Fairly satisfied %	Neither Satisfied nor dis-satisfied %	Fairly dis-satisfied %	Very dis-satisfied %	Mean score (+2 to-2)	Not stated %
Overall satisfaction with ASA's response	37	34	12	8	8	0.84	1

### **Advertisers profile**

In terms of the sample of advertisers contacted, over four fifths (83%) were involved as the advertiser themselves and less than one in ten as either the advertising agency (7%) or the media company (5%).

*In what capacity were you involved in this complaints case with the ASA?*

Base: All advertisers (259)

	%
As the advertiser	83
As the advertising agency	7
As the media company	5
Other	5
Not stated	1

### **Incidences of complaint**

Over half of the respondents (57%) had been on the receiving end of a complaint from the ASA before, but very few had had regular contact of this type.

*Have you ever been on the receiving end of a complaint from the ASA before?*

Base: All advertisers (259)

	%
Yes, quite regularly	3
Yes, occasionally	23
Yes, but just once or twice	31
No, never before	41
Not stated	2

### **Advertisers as complainants**

While just under a fifth of advertisers contacted (18%) claimed to have made a complaint to the ASA about an advertisement, only 1% had done so on a regular basis.

*Have you ever made a complaint about an advertisement to the ASA?*

Base: All advertisers (259)

	%
Yes, quite regularly	1
Yes, occasionally	8
Yes, but just once or twice	9
No, never before	80
Not stated	2

### **Summary of other comments made**

When asked whether the advertisers had any other comments about the way the ASA had handled their case, almost a third of advertisers (30%) made some comment, with answers focusing on the fact that the case was not handled professionally/efficiently (7%), claims of ineptitude or 'expert' knowledge far short of acceptable (5%), perceptions that the case was pre-judged before it began or was biased in favour of the complainant (5%), feelings that the experts didn't look at or

listen to the advertisers' evidence or proof (4%) and claims that the time given to respond was too short (3%), followed by a detailed list of lesser critical comments shown above.

*Are there any other comments you would like to make about the way the ASA handled your case?*

Base: All advertisers (259)

### **Unfavourable**

	%
Case not handled professionally/efficiently	7
Ineptitude/'expert' knowledge far short of acceptable	5
Case was pre-judged before it commenced/biased in favour of complainant	5
Felt the experts didn't look at/listen to evidence/proof	4
Time given to respond was too short	3
Should look more closely at complaints from competitors	2
Shouldn't act on one single complaint	2
Standard letter doesn't always fit the problem/result	2
Need a mechanism for screening minor/frivolous complaints	2
Rudeness of staff	2
Finding was unfair	2
Would have preferred verbal communication	2
Process not explained enough	1
Complainant didn't attempt to resolve the problem with the company directly	1
Copy advice team unsatisfactory	1
Not kept informed	1
Complaint should have been rejected at the outset as having no substance	1
Others	10
None/no other suggestions	70

## Analysis of Satisfaction by Type of Investigation

Further analysis was conducted by type of investigation, ie Formally Investigated, Mail order investigation. This showed that 43% of respondents complaints were not investigated. Amongst the other cases, just over a fifth (21%) were formally investigated, 14% not justified and 8% informally investigated. In addition, 6% of complainants who returned questionnaires were mail order investigations and 5% data base investigations. Examination of the rest of the Complaints sample results by the type of investigation revealed several other significant effects worthy of note.

First in terms of duration, all but formally investigated cases were almost universally resolved within 2 months (93% to 98%). While in the case of formally investigated cases, this proportion fell to less than a fifth of complaints (16%), with a quarter taking 2-3 months (26%), almost two-fifths 3-5 months (38%) and approaching a further fifth 5 months or more (17%).

In terms of outcome, 75% of formally investigated complaints were upheld, rising to 94% of informally investigated cases and 100% of mail order and database cases.

Mail order and database cases were particularly likely to have been recommended to contact the ASA by another organisation (41% and 47% respectively), while those involved in mail order investigations were also more likely to mention seeing an advertisement for the ASA in a newspaper or magazine (35%), and data base complaints to have learnt about the ASA in some other way than those covered listed on the questionnaire (40%)

Formally investigated cases were somewhat more likely than the rest of the sample to have initially contacted the ASA by telephone (34%). While, those whose complaints were deemed to be not justified were somewhat more likely than the rest of the sample to feel that it is not reasonable to require complaints to be made in writing (16%), though this was still a minority opinion.

In overall terms satisfaction with the ASA's response was greatest for mail order investigations (91% satisfied), followed then by formally and informally investigated cases (69% and 61% respectively) and data base investigations (63%). Dissatisfaction was more noticeable for cases which were not justified (45%) and, to a lesser extent, for cases which were not investigated (35%) and for some informally investigated complaints (25%).

Within this overall finding there were some variations in the patterns observed for individual aspects of the ASA's perceived performance. For example speed of response was generally most praised for not justified and informally investigated cases and, in particular, for mail order investigations. It is interesting to note that while formally investigated cases take longer to resolve and scored slightly lower than informally investigated cases in a number of the secondary questions, the overall satisfaction for these types of investigations was higher. Understanding the respondent's specific complaint and the depth the complaint was looked into were

generally praised most in the case of mail order investigations and for both formally and informally investigated complaints. While satisfaction that the ASA will be publicising its decision received greatest ratings in relation to formally investigated cases.

Comparisons of the ASA's performance with expectations showed, once again, that the most positive ratings were derived from complaints involved with mail order investigations (56% better than expected vs 3% worse), followed then by formally investigated cases (29% better vs 15% worse) and database investigations (27% better vs 10% worse). Informally investigated cases were seen on balance to have performed as expected (21% better vs 21% worse); while both cases which were not investigated (19% better and 30% worse) and those which were not justified (16% better vs 32% worse) attracted net disappointment. In broader image terms satisfaction that the ASA's complaints service revealed that mail order investigations were far more likely to attract comments that the ASA offered a first rate, quick, efficient or professional service (53%), while formally investigated complaints were more likely to generate criticisms as being too slow to respond (12%), and not justified cases, to criticisms of the ASA's moral standards as too low (11%).

Base: All Complaints (600)

Not Investigated	43%
Formally Investigated	21%
Not Justified	14%
Informally Investigated	8%
Mail Order Investigation	6%
Database Investigation	5%
Not Matched	4%

### 4.3 General enquiries

In addition to the complaints resolved each year by the ASA, the enquiry service deals with up to 15,000 calls and letters each year from the public, teachers, students. Many want to discuss a complaint before they make it, others ask a range of questions including requesting copies of the British Codes of Advertising and Sales Promotion and information about the Authority, how it works and how the industry regulates itself.

In 1998, 14,665 general enquiries were received. Those customers using the enquiry service between 2 November and 21 December 1998 were sent questionnaires as part of this research. In total 707 questionnaires were sent out and 240 (33%) completed and returned them to Paul Winstone Research. Their responses were analysed and are reported below:

#### First contact with ASA

Almost all enquirers claimed to have initially contacted the ASA by telephone (98%). This compares with just 26% of the complainants' sample having first contacted the ASA by telephone.

*How did you first contact the ASA for information?*

Base: All enquirers (240)

	%
By telephone	98
In writing	2

#### Satisfaction with initial contact with ASA

Amongst the vast majority of enquirers who made their first contact with the ASA by telephone, ratings of the initial telephone contact were generally very positive, with in excess of three-quarters of enquirers very or fairly satisfied with all but one of the aspects prompted, generating mean scores in each case of somewhere between 'very' (+2) and 'fairly satisfied' (+1) on the scale (ranging from +1.72 to +1.36).

Only in the case of the opening hours of the switchboard did the proportion satisfied dip slightly to three-fifths (62%) and the mean score to just above 'fairly satisfied' (+1.09). Even this, however, represents a clearly positive reaction, with practically no criticism evident for this or any of the other areas prompted. Hence, the service is scored particularly highly in terms of speed, politeness and in terms of the professionalism and knowledge of the enquiries staff.

*How satisfied were you with each of the following aspects of your initial telephone contact?*

Base: All enquirers making their first contact with the ASA by telephone (234)

	Very satisfied %	Fairly satisfied %	Neither Satisfied nor dis-satisfied %	Fairly dis-satisfied %	Very dis-satisfied %	Mean score (+2 to-2)	Not stated %
Politeness of enquiries staff	77	19	2	1	*	+1.72	*
Speed enquiry was dealt with by enquiries department	69	25	5	*	-	+1.64	1
Politeness of switchboard staff	71	19	4	3	2	+1.56	1
Speed call was put through to enquiries department	66	24	5	2	1	+1.56	2
Professionalism and knowledge of enquiries staff	69	20	7	1	*	+1.60	5
Speed call was answered by switchboard	66	23	6	1	1	+1.55	2
Ease of obtaining telephone number	61	20	12	5	1	+1.36	1
Opening hours of switchboard	41	21	32	*	-	+1.09	6

### **Ease of obtaining ASA address**

Amongst the very small number who made their enquiries in writing (6 respondents), again satisfaction predominated, albeit on a small base.

*And how satisfied were you with the ease of obtaining the address to write to for the ASA?*

Base: All enquirers making their first contact with the ASA in writing (6)

	Very satisfied %	Fairly satisfied %	Neither Satisfied nor dis-satisfied %	Fairly dis-satisfied %	Very dis-satisfied % (+2 to-2)	Mean score	Not stated %
Ease of obtaining address	50	17	-	-	17	1.00	17

### **Redirection of enquiries outside ASA remit**

Over three-quarters of enquirers (78%) stated that the ASA were able to deal with their enquiry directly. Of the remainder, 1 in 10 were advised of another organisation to contact, while a similar proportion claimed that the ASA could neither help them directly, nor advise them of another organisation to contact.

*Was the ASA able to deal with your enquiry directly or did they advise you of another organisation to contact?*

Base: All enquirers (240)

	%
Able to deal with enquiry directly	78

Advised of another organisation to contact	10
Neither	10
Not stated	2

### Reasons for enquiry

Amongst the majority of enquirers whose enquiry could be dealt with by the ASA (78%), the main reason stated for contacting the ASA was as a member of the public wishing to complain or requesting information about how to complain (58%). This was followed by mentions of contacting the ASA as a student or teacher requesting information (14%), as somebody working in advertising or media industry enquiring about the Codes or copy advice (9%), as a member of the public requesting general information about the ASA or a copy of the Codes (6%), checking to see whether any complaints had already been made (3%), requesting to be put on the ASA's mailing list (2%) or as a complainant wishing to check the progress of a complaint they had already made (1%).

#### *Why did you contact the ASA?*

Base: All enquirers whose enquiry was dealt with by the ASA (212)

	%
As a member of the public wishing to complain or requesting information on how to complain	58
As a student or teacher requesting information	14
As somebody working in advertising/media inquiring about the Codes or copy advice	9
As a member of the public requesting general information on the ASA and/or a copy of the Codes	6
As a member of the public checking to see whether any complaints had already been made	3
Requesting to be put on the ASA's mailing list	2
As a complainant wishing to check the progress of a complaint you've already made	1
Other	10
Not stated	2

### Enquirers subsequently making complaints

Those enquirers who had contacted the ASA to complain, to enquire how to complain or to check whether any complaints had already been received in relation to a specific advertisement were then asked whether they had subsequently made a written complaint and, in total, just over two thirds had (68%).

#### *Did you subsequently make a written complaint to the ASA?*

Base: All enquirers who contacted the ASA to complain, to enquire how to complain or to check whether any complaints had already been received in relation to a specific advertisement (126)

	%
Yes	68
No	21
Not stated	11

### Satisfaction with complaints needing to be made in writing

Among enquirers whose query had been dealt with by the ASA, over three-quarters (78%) felt that it was reasonable that the ASA required all complaints to be made in writing with just 14% feeling that this was not a reasonable requirement.

*The ASA requires all complaints to be made in writing so that they have a full and clear understanding of each complaint. Do you think this is reasonable?*

Base: All enquirers whose enquiry was dealt with by the ASA (212)

	%
Yes	78
No	14
Not stated	11

### Satisfaction with information provided

In addition, enquirers who were sent or had requested to be sent information from the ASA were asked to rate four specific aspects of this information provision. Once again, ratings were very positive, with close to four-fifths or more of those asked claiming to be very or fairly satisfied with the speed with which the information arrived (89%), its relevance (83%), clarity (81%) and the level of detail provided (79%). The ratings generated mean scores in each case roughly midway between 'very' and 'fairly satisfied' (ranging from +1.58 to +1.44).

*How satisfied were you with each of the following aspects of the ASA's response to your enquiry?*

Base: All enquirers who were sent or requested to be sent information from the ASA (86)

	Very satisfied %	Fairly satisfied %	Neither Satisfied nor dis-satisfied %	Fairly dis-satisfied %	Very dis-satisfied %	Mean score (+2 to -2)	Not stated %
Speed the information arrived	72	17	6	1	2	+1.58	1
Relevance of the information	66	17	3	-	3	+1.58	9
Clarity of the information	66	15	6	1	-	+1.66	12
Detail of the information	58	21	8	-	3	+1.44	9

### Satisfaction with advice provided for enquiries outside ASA remit

Of the 10% of respondents who were advised to contact another organisation, almost two thirds claimed to be satisfied (65%), generating a mean score close to the midpoint between 'very' and 'fairly satisfied' (+1.39) with very little claimed dissatisfaction (4%).

*If your enquiry was outside their area of coverage, how satisfied were you with the helpfulness of the ASA's advice, in terms of other organisations or options you might try?*

Base: All enquirers who were advised to contact another organisation (23)

	Very satisfied %	Fairly satisfied %	Neither Satisfied nor dis-satisfied %	Fairly dis-satisfied %	Very dis-satisfied %	Mean score (+2 to-2)	Not stated %
Helpfulness of advice	48	17	9	4	-	1.39	22

### **Overall levels of satisfaction with the ASA enquiry service**

In overall terms, enquirers were very positive about the way the ASA dealt with their enquiry, with over four fifths expressing satisfaction (85%) and a mean score, once again, midway between the points 'very' and 'fairly satisfied' on the scale (+1.45).

This finding was significantly higher than the 59% satisfied response from the complainants' sample, which nevertheless generated a broadly positive mean score of +0.54. However, it was also higher than the 73% satisfied response from complainants whose complaint was actually upheld.

*Overall, how satisfied were you with the way the ASA dealt with your enquiry?*

Base: All enquirers (240)

	Very satisfied %	Fairly satisfied %	Neither Satisfied nor dis-satisfied %	Fairly dis-satisfied %	Very dis-satisfied %	Mean score (+2 to-2)	Not stated %
Overall satisfaction	62	23	5	3	2	1.45	5

### **ASA performing to expected standard**

Almost half of all enquirers (48%) felt that the ASA had performed roughly as they had expected, while almost one on ten did not answer this question (8%). However, amongst the rest, the balance of opinion was very favourable, with almost two-fifths (38%) stating that the ASA had performed better than expected, compared with just 7% who felt it had performed worse.

*Would you say that the ASA performed better, worse or about the same as you had expected, in handling your enquiry?*

Base: All enquirers (240)

	%
Better	38
About the same	48
Worse	7
Not stated	8

### Internet access by those using ASA enquiry service

Over three-fifths of enquirers claimed to have access to the Internet, either at home or at work (62%).

*Do you have any access to the Internet, either at home or at work?*

Base: All enquirers (240)

	%
Yes	62
No	35
Not stated	3

### Awareness of ASA website

Amongst those enquirers with Internet access, just over a quarter (28%) claimed to be aware that the ASA also provides information on its website ([www.asa.org.uk](http://www.asa.org.uk)).

Once aware of the ASA web site, a fifth of enquirers with Internet access claimed to have already used it (19%), while almost a further three-quarters (73%) said they would consider doing so in the future. This left just 7% who said they would not consider using the Internet for information in the future.

*Were you aware that the ASA also provides information on its website ([www.asa.org.uk](http://www.asa.org.uk)) on the Internet?*

Base: All enquirers with access to the Internet (148)

	%
Yes	28
No	70
Not stated	2

*Now you know it exists, would you consider accessing the ASA website on the Internet for information in the future?*

Base: All enquirers with access to the Internet (148)

	%
Yes, have already accessed it	19
Yes, would consider accessing it in the future	73
No, would not consider accessing it in the future	7
Not stated	1

### **Sources of ASA awareness**

Awareness of the ASA among enquirers came primarily from media coverage of the ASA's decisions or rulings (28%) or from recommendations to contact the ASA by another organisation (21%). This was followed by advertisements for the ASA in newspapers or magazines (13%), recommendations to contact the ASA by a colleague or work contact (10%) and then by a range of more fragmented sources.

*Where did you hear about the ASA?*

Base: All enquirers (240)

	%
Media coverage of the ASA's decisions or rulings	28
Recommended to contact the ASA by another organisation	21
Advertisement for the ASA in newspaper or magazine	13
Recommended to contact the ASA by a colleague or work contact	10
Poster advertisement for the ASA	3
Recommended to contact the ASA by a friend or relative	3
Some other way	19
Not stated	4

### **Summary of other comments made**

Finally, enquirers were asked whether they had any other comments or suggestions about the enquiry service at the ASA. In total almost a fifth made favourable comments (17%) while closer to a quarter made some suggestion for change (24%). Favourable comments focused on satisfaction with the enquiry service (9%) and praise for the helpfulness of the staff (7% and 3% respectively), while suggestions identified a range of possible changes and, occasionally, minor criticisms.

*Are there any other comments or suggestions you would like to make about the enquiry service at the ASA?*

Base: All enquirers (240)

	%
<b>Favourable</b>	
Satisfied with service/satisfactory	9
Helpfulness	7
Politeness	3
Impressed with speed of response/prompt service	3

Ability to access adjudications on the Internet	2
Excellent for research purposes	2
Efficiency	1
Staff very knowledgeable	1
Query outside their coverage, but pointed us in the right direction	1
Professionalism	1
Others	1
None/no other positive comments	83

### **Suggestions/unfavourable**

Would have liked verbal advice/advice over the phone	3
Should publish telephone no./address more widely	3
Lack of feedback re. the progress of my complaint	3
Too early to judge	3
Various comments on questionnaire/envelope	2
Wouldn't help till I sent my enquiry in writing*	2
Enquiry in writing only is frustrating*	2
Should accept legitimate complaints over the phone	2
Being kept on hold/unable to ask questions while on hold	1
ASA has no teeth	1
Reply had mistakes in my name and address	1
Should use thinner paper for questionnaire	1
Would like more information/video on work of ASA	1
Advertisers get away with too much	1
Others	6
None/no other negative comments	76

\* General enquiries can be made over the telephone, complaints need to be in writing

### 3.4 CAP Copy Advice enquiries

Requests from the advertising industry for pre-publication advice have risen steady year on year. In 1998 just under 4,200 written and 8,200 telephone requests for advice were handled: an 8% increase on 1997.

Many of the advertisers, agencies and publishers who use the service do so on a regular basis and sometimes more than once each day. Questionnaires were sent to individuals who used the service between 9 November 1998 and 1 February 1999: 204 in total. The response rate was 49% with 101 questionnaires completed and returned to the research company. The results were analysed by Paul Winstone Research and the findings are shown below:

#### First contact with CAP Copy Advice

Two thirds of those seeking copy advice initially contacted CAP by telephone, with the remaining third contacting CAP by fax.

*How did you first contact the Copy Advice team?*

Base: All seeking copy advice (101)

	%
By telephone	67
In writing by fax	33
In writing by post	-

#### Satisfaction with contact with Copy Advice

Those who contacted the Copy Advice service by telephone expressed very positive ratings towards this initial contact, with more than three quarters very or fairly satisfied with the politeness of the Copy Advice team (95%), the professionalism and knowledge of the staff at this stage (91%), the speed their call was put through (87%) and even the ease of obtaining the telephone number (78%). These factors generated mean scores close to midway between 'very' and 'fairly satisfied' (ranging from 1.46 to 1.87). Indeed, never more than 2% of those initially contacting the service by telephone for copy advice expressed dissatisfaction with any element of that contact.

*And how satisfied were you with each of the following aspects of your initial telephone contact?*

Base: All contacting the Copy Advice team by telephone (68)

	Very satisfied %	Fairly satisfied %	Neither Satisfied nor dis-satisfied %	Fairly dis-satisfied %	Very dis-satisfied %	Mean score (+2 to-2)	Not stated %
Politeness of the copy advice staff at this stage	88	7	3	-	-	+1.87	1
Professionalism and knowledge of the staff at this stage	75	16	6	1	-	+1.67	1
Speed your call was put through to the person giving you copy advice (if relevant)	72	15	4	1	1	+1.67	6
Ease of obtaining telephone number	62	16	18	-	-	+1.46	4

### **Referred to Copy Advice by ASA**

Spontaneous comments in relation to the politeness and professionalism of ASA the switchboard in transferring calls to the CAP Copy Advice team were also predominantly positive, with 24% making some favourable comment, compared with just 10% making some criticism. Positive comments were led by mentions that the switchboard was very good, efficient, polite and helpful, while criticisms included the fact that they could sometimes seem brusque or abrupt.

*If your call came in through the ASA switchboard, on 0171-580-5555, do you have any comments about the politeness and professionalism of the reception/switchboard staff?*

Base: All contacting Copy Advice by telephone (68)

	%
<b>Favourable</b>	
Very good	10
Efficient	6
Polite	6
Helpfulness	4
Others	6
None/no other comments	76
<b>Unfavourable</b>	
Sometimes brusque/abrupt	4
Others	6
None/no other negative comments	90

## Satisfaction with written approach to Copy Advice

Those who initially approached the Copy Advice service by fax were similarly positive in their reactions, with more than four-fifths very or fairly satisfied both with the speed of response (91%) and the ease of obtaining an address or fax number (85%), generating mean scores just above the midpoint between 'very' and 'fairly satisfied' on the scale (+1.63 and +1.52 respectively).

*How satisfied were you with each of the following aspects of your written approach for copy advice?*

Base: All contacting copy advice in writing by fax (33)

	Very satisfied %	Fairly satisfied %	Neither Satisfied nor dis-satisfied %	Fairly dis-satisfied %	Very dis-satisfied %	Mean score (+2 to-2)	Not stated %
Speed of response	67	24	6	-	-	+1.63	3
Ease of obtaining address or fax number (as appropriate)	70	15	12	3	-	+1.52	-

## Satisfaction with initial contact with Copy Advice

The ratings of the copy advice given were universally very positive, with at least nine out of ten of those seeking copy advice satisfied with each of the aspects prompted, but led in particular by ratings of the politeness of the copy advice staff (97%) and the quality of copy advice given (95%), and then the relevance of the advice to their specific situation (92%), the professionalism and knowledge of the copy advice staff (92%) and the rationale for any copy advice given (91%). These factors all generated mean scores above the midpoint between 'very' and 'fairly satisfied' (ranging from +1.88 to +1.59).

*And how satisfied were you with each of the following aspects of the copy advice given?*

Base: All seeking copy advice (101)

	Very satisfied %	Fairly satisfied %	Neither Satisfied nor dis-satisfied %	Fairly dis-satisfied %	Very dis-satisfied %	Mean score (+2 to-2)	Not stated %
Politeness of the person who gave the copy advice	91	6	3	-	-	+1.88	-
Overall quality of the copy advice	66	29	3	1	-	+1.62	1
Relevance of the advice given to your specific situation	66	26	3	-	-	+1.67	5
Professionalism and knowledge of the person who gave the copy advice	67	25	5	2	-	+1.59	1
Rationale for any copy advice given	61	30	4	-	-	+1.60	5

## Overall levels of satisfaction with CAP Copy Advice service

Not surprisingly, given the very positive ratings given to all aspects of the copy advice service, overall ratings also indicated broad satisfaction from more than nine out of ten users (92%), with three quarters actually stating that they were 'very satisfied' (76%), and with a mean rating once again above the midpoint between 'very' and 'fairly satisfied' (+1.68).

*So overall how satisfied were you with the Copy Advice team's response to your enquiry?*

Base: All seeking copy advice (101)

	Very satisfied %	Fairly satisfied %	Neither Satisfied nor dis-satisfied %	Fairly dis-satisfied %	Very dis-satisfied %	Mean score (+2 to -2)	Not stated %
Overall satisfaction	76	16	5	2	-	+1.68	1

## Copy Advice performing to expected standard

The performance of the Copy Advice team was viewed as either better (49%) or about the same as expected (50%), with better responses rising to two-thirds for first time users (66%). Only 1% of users stated that the performance was worse than expected.

*Would you say that the Copy Advice team performed better, worse or about the same as you had expected, in handling your enquiry?*

Base: All seeking copy advice (101)

Better	49
About the same	50
Worse	1
Not stated	1

## Frequency of use of the Copy Advice service

In terms of previous usage of the copy advice service, almost two-fifths of users had never used the copy advice service before (38%), with a further fifth claiming to have used it only once or twice (21%). A quarter used it occasionally (26%), while one in six claimed to use it regularly (16%). Regular usage was more common amongst advertising agency respondents (25%).

*Have you used the copy advice service before this most recent occasion?*

Base: All seeking copy advice (101)

	%
Yes, regularly	16
Yes, occasionally	25
Yes, but only once or twice	21
No, never	38
Not stated	1

### **Future use of the Copy Advice service**

Following their recent usage, approaching half of all respondents (47%) felt they would become regular users of the copy advice service in the future, with a further half (50%) claiming they would use it occasionally. Only 1% stated that they never expected to use it again.

*Do you think you will use the copy advice service again in the future?*

Base: All seeking copy advice (101)

	%
Yes, regularly	47
Yes, occasionally	50
Yes, but only once or twice	2
No, never	1

### **Profile of Copy Advice enquirer**

In terms of the sample of copy advice users contacted, just over a third were from an advertising agency (36%), just under a third from a media or publisher company (30%) and a sixth from advertisers, leaving a fifth who fell outside these three categories (20%).

*In what capacity did you seek advice from the copy advice service?*

Base: All seeking copy advice (101)

	%
As an advertising agency	36
As a media company	30
As an advertiser	15
Some other way	20

### **Use of other Copy Advice services**

Specifically in relation to CAP Help Notes or Guidance Notes, roughly a fifth of those seeking copy advice (21%) claimed that they had ever received these.

Amongst those who had received CAP Help Notes or Guidance Notes all found them either very (62%) or 'quite useful' (38%).

Similarly, almost all those who had never received Help Notes or Guidance Notes, also expected them to be 'very' (52%) or 'quite useful' (34%), with just 5% stating that they be not particularly useful and 9% who did not answer this point.

*Have you ever received any of the Help Notes or Guidance Notes, issued from time to time by the Copy Advice team, offering copy advice on various complex issues such as the advertising of flight prices?*

Base: All seeking copy advice (101)

	%
Yes	21
No, never	78
Not stated	1

*How useful do you find these Help Notes or Guidance Notes?*

Base: All who have received Help/Guidance Notes (21)

	(+)	%
Very useful	(+4)	62
Quite useful	(+3)	38
Not particularly useful	(+2)	-
No use at all	(+1)	-
Mean score	+3.62	

*Now you are aware of them, how useful do you think these Help Notes or Guidance Notes would be to you?*

Base: All who have not received Help/Guidance Notes (79)

	(+)	%
Very useful	(+4)	52
Quite useful	(+3)	34
Not particularly useful	(+2)	5
No use at all	(+1)	-
Not stated		9
Mean score	+3.51	

### **New CAP services on the Internet**

At the same time there was marked interest in the possibility of having Help Notes or Guidance Notes available in the future on the CAP web site, with approaching three-quarters of those seeking copy advice (72%) interested in such a development (47% 'very' and 25% 'quite').

Broadly similar levels of interest were also expressed about the opportunity to make copy advice enquiries by e-mail (50% 'very' and 21% 'quite') or to receive copy advice by e-mail (50% 'very' and 25% 'quite').

**a** *Next year the Copy Advice team hopes to make these Help Notes or Guidance Notes and recent Ad Alerts available on a web site. How interested would you be in such a web site?*

**b** *How interested would you be in the opportunity to make copy advice enquiries by e-mail?*

**c** *And how interested would you be in the opportunity to receive copy advice by e-mail?*

Base: All seeking Copy Advice (101)		a.	b.	c.
		Help Notes & Ad Alerts on Web site %	Make enquiries by e-mail %	Receive copy advice by e-mail %
Very interested	(+4)	47	50	50
Quite interested	(+3)	25	21	23
Not particularly interested	(+2)	15	12	11
Not at all interested	(+1)	8	6	6
Not stated		6	12	10
Mean score		+3.17	+3.29	+3.31

### **Awareness of Copy Advice as a CAP service**

The current perception amongst the majority of users is that the Copy Advice team is an ASA service (68%), with just 18% aware that it is a service provided by the Committee of Advertising Practice, 12% who did not know and 2% who did not answer the question.

*Before you contacted the Copy Advice team on this occasion, did you think it was an ASA (Advertising Standards Authority) service or CAP (Committee of Advertising Practice) service?*

Base: All seeking copy advice (101)

	%
An ASA service	68
A CAP service	18
No idea	12
Not stated	2

## Summary of other comments made

Finally, when users asked whether they had any other comments or suggestions about the copy advice service, positive responses were led by comments that it was helpful (10%), fast and provided a quick response by phone (9%), as well as simply praise for an excellent service (8%). However, others made the suggestions that they would like to know how binding the Copy Advice team's approval is (10%) and that phone conversations and advice should be confirmed in writing (8%).

*Are there any other comments or suggestions you would like to make about the copy advice service?*

Base: All seeking copy advice (101)

	%
<b>Favourable</b>	
Helpful service	10
Fast service/quick response by phone	9
Excellent service/keep up the good work	8
Always receive good advice	4
Efficient service	3
Informative	1
Others	7
<b>Unfavourable</b>	
Would like to know how binding their approval is	10
Phone conversations should be confirmed in writing	8
Others	3

## 5. KEY FINDINGS

In each area of the research it is not possible to draw any conclusions from those choosing not to respond to the questionnaires. Response rates from complainants were high at 60% but this is perhaps unsurprising since these are people who feel moved to take action and go to the trouble of making a complaint. Response rates for complainants and advertisers were very similar to the pilot survey: 71% and 37% respectively. In the main survey stage 34% of advertisers responded to the questionnaire.

Response rates for general enquiries and CAP copy advice were 33% and 49% respectively.

This section of the report aims to highlight some of the key findings from the research. These have been singled out either because they are areas where the Authority has received some criticism in these respects, or because the findings were surprising or highlight areas for action.

### 5.1 Complainants

In ASA attitude research conducted in 1998 and 1996 46% of a representative sample of the public agreed that the ASA “would be quite easy to get in touch with the ASA”. It is reassuring that complainants’ experience is more positive than the public perception: 96% of respondents found it easy to find the ASA’s telephone number and only 5% said they were dissatisfied with the ease of finding the ASA’s address.

The vast majority, 90% of respondents in the survey, felt that it was reasonable for the ASA to require all complaints in writing. Those using the general enquiry service, who in many cases had already talked through their complaint with a member of ASA staff, also generally agreed that it was a reasonable requirement: only 14% disagreed.

Although the satisfaction ratings for the complaints handling process were positive overall with 55% claiming to be satisfied with the final letter detailing the ASA’s decision and 60% satisfied that the ASA had understood their specific complaint, a number of areas are worth highlighting:

- ?? More than a quarter (28%) claimed to be very or fairly dissatisfied with the reasons given for the final adjudication and the depth the complaint was looked into.
- ?? Just over a fifth (22%) were dissatisfied with the letter detailing the ASA’s decision on their complaint and 20% felt dissatisfied with the ASA’s understanding of their specific complaint.

?? Only 31% were very or fairly satisfied that they had been kept informed throughout the complaints process although only 6% very dissatisfied in this respect.

Not surprisingly, the outcome of a complaint affected the satisfaction ratings with those whose complaints had not been upheld more likely to express dissatisfaction in terms of the reasons given for the adjudication (46%) and the understanding of their specific complaint (29%).

In terms of the length of time taken on investigations, 74% of complainants were very or fairly satisfied that the time taken was reasonable. The 14% of cases that took three months or more to resolve generated greater claimed dissatisfaction in terms of dealing with complaints in a reasonable time (28%) and keeping complainants informed (23%). However, complaints settled within two months showed greater dissatisfaction with the depth the complaint was looked into.

It is interesting to note that formally investigated cases that take longer to resolve scored slightly lower than informally investigated cases in the secondary questions. However, overall satisfaction was higher.

Overall, two thirds of the sample were satisfied that the ASA is independent and has consumers' interests at heart. Half were satisfied that the ASA had a good reputation in dealing with complaints.

However, only two fifths were satisfied that the ASA had sufficient powers to deal with complaints and get advertisers to comply with the Codes. 28% were critical of the ASA in this respect and dissatisfaction was more marked amongst those whose complaints were not upheld.

Overall, 59% were very or fairly satisfied with the ASA's handling of their complaint: 73% of those whose complaints were upheld were overall satisfied.

## **5.2 Advertisers**

Those who were contacted by ASA staff initially by telephone (10%) expressed greatest satisfaction in terms of professionalism of the staff and understanding the reasons for the contact. However, although the written contact scored positively overall, 16% claimed dissatisfaction with the perceived knowledge and expertise of the ASA staff.

The knowledge and expertise of the ASA staff attracted very or fairly satisfied ratings from just over three fifths of the sample. However, 13% of advertisers expressed direct criticism.

In terms of time taken in conducting the investigation, 71% thought the ASA dealt with the complaint in a reasonable time. Overall, satisfaction levels were high with little dissatisfaction expressed. However, 29% were dissatisfied with the ASA's

understanding of their advertising. Not surprisingly dissatisfaction was greatest among those attracting upheld ASA rulings.

77% were satisfied that the ASA is independent of the industry and 63% felt that the ASA had a good reputation in resolving complaints. Only 4% and 8% respectively were dissatisfied in these respects.

Overall, 71% said they were satisfied with the ASA's handling of their case but 16% expressed criticism. Not surprisingly opinion was more favourable amongst the not upheld cases but even the upheld cases gave an overall positive rating: 23% expressed dissatisfaction.

### **5.3 General enquiries**

The enquiries service rated highly in every area. Overall 85% were very or fairly satisfied with the service they received and 79% claimed to be satisfied with the clarity and quality of information provided on request. The service scored particularly highly in respect of politeness of staff: 96%, speed: 94% and professionalism and knowledge of enquiries staff: 89%.

58% of those using the service were enquiring about how to complain or find out whether a complaint had been already made about an advertisement. 68% of those subsequently made a complaint.

62% of enquirers claimed to have Internet access and once made aware of the ASA's website, 73% who were not already using the site said that they would use it in the future.

### **5.4 CAP Copy Advice service**

The anecdotal evidence of the excellent service provided by the CAP Copy Advice team was proved in the high levels of satisfaction claimed by respondents. The team scored highly in all areas, especially in terms of efficiency, professionalism and knowledge of the staff. Indeed never more than 2% expressed dissatisfaction with any element of contact with the service.

38% were first time users of the service. Following usage, 47% felt they would become regular users with a further 50% claiming that they would use it occasionally. Only 1% said they never expected to use the service again.

In terms of the Internet and the proposed CAP website, 72% said they would like to be able to access CAP Help Notes on-line. 71% said they would like to make copy advice enquiries by e-mail and 75% claimed that they would like to receive advice by e-mail.

68% believed that Copy Advice is provided by ASA with only 18% aware that it is a CAP service. It is not possible to tell from the findings how many callers used the

CAP Copy Advice direct lines since all of those who contacted the copy advice team answered the questions about satisfaction with the ASA switchboard.

## 6. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) receives around 12,000 complaints a year and some 15,000 general enquiries. In addition, around 11,000 pre-publication advice requests are received annually by the Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) Copy Advice team.

In 1998 the ASA commissioned an independent research company, Paul Winstone Research (PWR), to carry out a pilot survey into the attitudes of those who use these services. This was followed by a main survey stage on all complaint cases concluded between 28 September and 21 December 1998, on general enquiries received between 2 November and 21 December 1998 and on copy advice enquiries between 9 November 1998 and 1 February 1999. 1,000 questionnaires were sent to complainants, 755 to advertisers, 707 to general enquirers and 204 copy advice enquirers. The questionnaires were devised by PWR with input from the ASA/CAP secretariat. The findings were analysed by PWR and a report drawn up with recommendations by the ASA/CAP management in July 1999.

For the purposes of this survey, those who use the services in each of the areas examined are referred to as “customers” for the ASA and CAP:

- ?? complaints (advertisers, and their agents, and complainants)
- ?? enquiries (general public, students, advertising industry, etc)
- ?? copy advice (advertisers, agencies, publishers and service suppliers)

### Complainants

In the complainants sample, 60% (600) of the questionnaires were returned and analysed by PWR. Just over a third (35%) had had their complaints upheld, while a fifth (19%) had received not upheld rulings. The remainder of the respondents (43%) had raised complaints that were not investigated by the ASA.

Most complaints (77%) had been resolved within two months. Of those upheld, just over half (59%) had been resolved in 2 months with 14% taking 2-3 months, 4% took 5 months or more and 4% said their cases were still ongoing.

Just over a quarter (26%) first contacted ASA by telephone before writing to complain. 90% said they thought it was reasonable for the ASA to ask for complaints in writing; 8% disagreed and 2% did not answer this question.

In general, there was net satisfaction with all aspects of the ASA's response to complaints with at least half saying they were very or fairly satisfied with ASA in respect of professionalism of staff (59%), tone of correspondence (75%), dealing with complaint in a reasonable time (74%), understanding the complaint (60%).

Some variation in ratings was seen in relation to the length of time the ASA had taken to resolve complaints. In particular, the 14% of cases that took 3 months or more to be resolved generated greater claimed dissatisfaction in terms of dealing with complaints in a reasonable time (28%) and keeping complainants informed throughout the complaints process (23%). Interestingly, however, complaints settled within 2 months showed greater dissatisfaction with the depth the complaint was looked into (26%).

Outcome also affected ratings, with those whose complaints had not been upheld more likely to express dissatisfaction in terms of the reasons given for the final adjudication (49%), the depth the complaint was looked into (37%) and the understanding of their complaint (29%).

Respondents were also asked how they felt about the ASA after making contact: two thirds (64%) were very or fairly satisfied that the ASA is independent of the industry and has consumers' interests at heart. Half (50%) felt that the ASA has a good reputation in dealing with complaints. Only two fifths (40%) felt the ASA has sufficient powers with over a quarter (28%) who were critical in this respect.

Overall, 59% were very or fairly satisfied with the ASA's handling of complaints: 73% of those whose complaint was upheld were satisfied compared to 44% who were satisfied among not upheld complaints. 49% said that the ASA had performed as they had expected compared to 23% who said the Authority had performed better and 24% who said the performance was worse than expected.

## **Advertisers**

Of the 755 questionnaires sent to advertisers, or agents acting on their behalf, 34% (259) responded. Of those just over half (55%) had had complaints upheld against them and 41% were not upheld. Most respondents (64%) had cases lasting up to 2 months, with 14% taking 2-3 months, 11% taking 3-5 months and 7% 5 months or more.

In terms of time taken in conducting the investigation, 71% thought the ASA dealt with the complaint in a reasonable time. However, 29% were dissatisfied with the ASA's understanding of their advertising. Not surprisingly dissatisfaction was greatest among those attracting upheld ASA rulings.

77% were satisfied that the ASA is independent of the industry and 63% felt that the ASA had a good reputation in resolving complaints. Only 4% and 8% respectively were dissatisfied in these respects.

In respect of satisfaction after contact with the ASA, over three quarters (77%) were satisfied that the ASA is independent, almost two thirds (63%) felt that the ASA has a good reputation in dealing with complaints. In these answers, differences in perceptions did not differ significantly between upheld and not upheld cases.

Overall, 71% said they were satisfied with the ASA's handling of the complaint against their advertisement. Not surprisingly opinion was more favourable amongst the not upheld cases but even the upheld cases gave an overall positive rating: 23% expressed dissatisfaction.

### **General enquiries**

Of the 707 questionnaires sent to those who use the ASA general enquiry service, 33% (240) were returned. Just over two thirds (68%) went on to make a complaint to the ASA after receiving telephone advice.

Overall 85% were very or fairly satisfied with the service they received and 79% claimed to be satisfied with the clarity and quality of information provided on request. The service scored particularly highly in respect of politeness of staff: 96%, speed: 94% and professionalism and knowledge of enquiries staff: 89%.

62% of enquirers claimed to have Internet access and once made aware of the ASA's website, 73% who were not already using the site said that they would use it in the future.

### **CAP Copy Advice service**

Out of the 204 questionnaires sent to those who used the Copy Advice service, 49% (101) were returned. The anecdotal evidence of the excellent service provided by the CAP Copy Advice team was proved in the high levels of satisfaction claimed by respondents. The team scored highly in all areas, especially in terms of efficiency, professionalism and knowledge of the staff. Indeed never more than 2% expressed dissatisfaction with any element of contact with the service.

38% were first time users of the service. Following usage, 47% felt they would become regular users with a further 50% claiming that they would use it occasionally. Only 1% said they didn't expect to use the service again.

In terms of the Internet and the proposed CAP website, 72% said they would like to be able to access CAP Help Notes on-line. 71% said they would like to make copy advice enquiries by e-mail and 75% claimed that they would like to receive advice by e-mail.

68% believed that Copy Advice is provided by ASA with only 18% aware that it is a CAP service.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, in each service area, customers rated the quality of service received positively. While this is welcome in accessing the results it is more important to focus on the areas of dissatisfaction in determining recommendations for action. It is notable that the research was carried out during a period in which 35% of investigations staff were new to their posts. It is proposed that the findings are used as a benchmark against which to assess the effectiveness of the proposals outlined below and the ASA's objectives for 2000.

Evaluation of these results will be ongoing but in the short to medium term the following recommendations are proposed:

### **Complainants**

#### *Speed of complaint handling*

It is recommended that the ASA continues to focus on improving the efficiency of resolving complaints but this should not be at the expense of the investigation itself. Speed of complaint handling needs to be carefully balanced with the need for careful investigation. The depth of understanding and care taken to examine complaints should remain paramount to enable ASA Council to make informed and considered adjudications. The ASA's target is to resolve all complaints in an average of 35 days for 1999 and the aim is to sustain this target in 2000.

#### *Communication*

The ASA's letters to complainants and advertisers should be reviewed to address dissatisfaction expressed concerning explaining the ASA's adjudication and in checking the draft basis of complaint with the complainant to ensure that they feel that their objection has been clearly understood and reflected. Where the complainant has raised points of objection that cannot be considered under the Codes the reasons for not including them in investigation should be clearly explained.

For investigations exceeding three months procedures should be examined for keeping complainants and advertisers better informed about progress. ASA should examine options for keeping complainants and advertisers informed by e-mail or telephone. This is reflected in the ASA's objectives for 2000.

To address dissatisfaction about the perceived powers of the ASA to bring advertisers into line with the Codes, the final letter to the complainants should make clear not just the ruling that has been made but what the advertiser has been asked to do as a result. They should also be informed at that stage that the ASA carries out follow up investigations to check that the advertisement has been changed or withdrawn.

### **CAP Copy Advice**

More needs to be done to correct the impression that copy advice is an ASA service. Copy Advice will, where necessary, correct wrong impressions to reinforce CAP's role.

The launch of the CAP website, the new edition of the Codes and the possibility of an advertising campaign to promote CAP Copy Advice will all contribute towards the more visible promotion of CAP in 2000.

No recommendations are made on the service itself which scored highly in every respect.

### **General enquiries**

No recommendations are made on the general enquiry service provided which scored highly in every respect.

### **Other recommendations**

The ASA should evaluate action taken as a result of this research on a quarterly basis over the next 12 months.

A further check on customer satisfaction should take place at the end of 2000 to update these findings. The findings of the 1998/99 survey will be used as a benchmark.

Consideration should be given to using the questionnaires and findings to develop a simple evaluation form to be sent to each set of "customers" when a complaint or copy advice case has been concluded. This would enable the ASA and CAP to monitor the quality of customer service on a regular basis to see whether improvements made in handling customers has translated into better levels of satisfaction.

**CSC/27 September 1999**