



# Complaint Handler Workshops 2023

Summary report

# Introduction

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In February and March 2023, the IOPC's Oversight team hosted face-to-face workshops for Professional Standards Departments (PSD) and Local Policing Bodies (LPB) in England and Wales. In numbers these comprised of:



This year we identified reflective practice as the theme for the workshops. This was to accompany the publication of Focus 21 which was on the subject area of reflective practice.

It was recognised that reflective practice is a relatively new framework within the complaint handling process and there had been some early challenges in how effectively it had embedded within forces.

In addition to covering reflective practice, we also used the workshops as an opportunity to work collaboratively with our colleagues in the Casework team. The IOPC casework team review serious complaints which have been investigated by the police and are subject to a right of review to the IOPC. Casework managers conduct a desk-based review of the forces' handling of the complaints and can substitute their own findings and recommendations. Casework will be involved in our 'Right First Time' initiative where we will aim to work collaboratively with PSDs to share best practice and identify learning to improve complaints handling and reviews going forward.

## Pre workshop analysis

To prepare for the workshops we carried out consultation and analysis to understand what challenges forces were having with reflective practice. This involved:

- Analysing the records of queries that we had received from forces regarding reflective practice.
- Reviewing professional discussion records we had held with forces on reflective practice.
- Speaking with the project leads who had written Focus 21.
- Identifying key areas from the Focus publication.

This identified the key areas of reflective practice that were causing the most challenges for forces and LPBs. These were:



**Principles of Reflective Practice** – covering why reflective practice was introduced and the basic principles of how and when it should be used.



**Record keeping** – guidance was needed on what should be included as a part of a reflective log. Forces were reporting that the process can feel bureaucratic and time consuming.



**Culture** – some forces felt that reflective practice was seen as a ‘soft touch’ whereas others felt it was overly punitive.



**Review rights** – there was a lack of understanding of what a review right applies to.

We created and delivered an interactive presentation to cover these key areas of reflective practice across six regional workshops.

## Principles of Reflective Practice

We began each session by providing an introduction to the general principles of reflective practice and used a flow chart to help attendees visualise this. However, we discussed how the flow chart was just an example of how reflective practice could be used as a means to resolving a complaint or conduct matter. We explained that more examples could be found in the Home Office guidance (which we link to in Focus 21) to develop understanding of the different routes it could take.

To explore attendees’ understanding, we used a case study and invited them to discuss within their tables whether they thought reflective practice would be used in that incident. This generated lots of discussion and interaction from participants and provoked questions which we were able to answer, reinforcing understanding.

## Record Keeping

Evidence obtained from professional discussions carried out as part of work on Focus 21 identified that forces sometimes viewed reflective practice discussions as bureaucratic and time consuming, especially in terms of the level of detail required in the record keeping aspect of the discussions. We wanted to address this and provide some reassurance to attendees that the process of having and recording reflective practice discussions does not need to be overly time consuming or bureaucratic.

We provided attendees with a College of Policing template of a reflective log with headings to prompt responses to key elements of the reflective discussion. We also emphasised that the log only needed to contain enough detail so that a third party would be able to understand the incident that had taken place and the nature of the

reflection that had been undertaken by the officer (what had gone well or badly, what steps they would take to prevent it happening in future or build on positive experience.) Third party understanding of a record of a reflective discussion is important to retain the knowledge and learning from the incident, even where officers or supervisors move roles or leave the force.

We encouraged attendees to discuss the templates in their tables and this prompted some really useful discussion and sharing of best practice, as well as areas of concern, that might not have occurred if we hadn't provided the space to view and discuss the reflective log. Such discussion included:

At least one force did not previously have a standard form for completing reflective practice discussions. This discussion about the log provided them with an example going forward.

One force shared that their PSD checks reflective logs once they have been completed and if a supervisor hasn't completed a reflective log before, the PSD go through the log with them beforehand. It was reported that this leads to forms being completed right the first time.

Another force shared that the use of reflective logs is built into the training for new officers.

A further force shared that they use a reflective practice board which reviews the learning outcomes each month, which is shared with sergeants and inspectors.

One force suggested that they had found a workaround for linking in with HR systems.

We added that forces could consider auto populating the forms to save time where possible.

It is hoped that such sharing of ideas and best practice will ensure that reflective logs are completed correctly and to a high standard amongst forces, which is a positive impact of the workshops.

## Culture

We were aware from our pre-workshop analysis that there was a common misconception that reflective practice was only intended to be used when something had gone wrong or as part of a formal PDR process. As part of the workshop, we promoted a cultural shift towards more 'everyday' reflective discussions between line managers and officers, reflecting not just on where things had gone wrong but also positive performance that should be praised and built upon.



Issues identified by attendees from a cultural perspective included:

Sometimes it is difficult to match shift patterns with line managers to enable discussions to take place.

Front line supervisors often have a high workload, meaning there is limited time to carry out reflective discussions.

Some forces felt that reflective practice was seen as a 'soft touch' because it is not seen as serious as misconduct, whereas others felt it was overly punitive because it requires more than an 'informal' chat.

Evidence coming out of the feedback survey (see Impact heading below) suggests that there was a positive change in perception with attendees regarding the culture of reflective practice.

## Review Rights

Evidence from the Oversight team's records showed that there was some confusion amongst forces regarding review rights and reflective practice.

We used a case study to explore an incident where a complainant wanted to ask for a review because they were not happy with the manner of the reflective practice discussion that had taken place. We asked attendees to discuss whether the review right would be applicable in this incident and whether they had any similar experience from within their forces of this happening.

One key area of discussion prompted by this case study was whether forces should always communicate the outcome of a reflective practice discussion with complainants. We have addressed this point in an FAQ document which accompanies this report and was circulated to all attendees.

This allowed us to reinforce understanding and clear up any misconceptions.

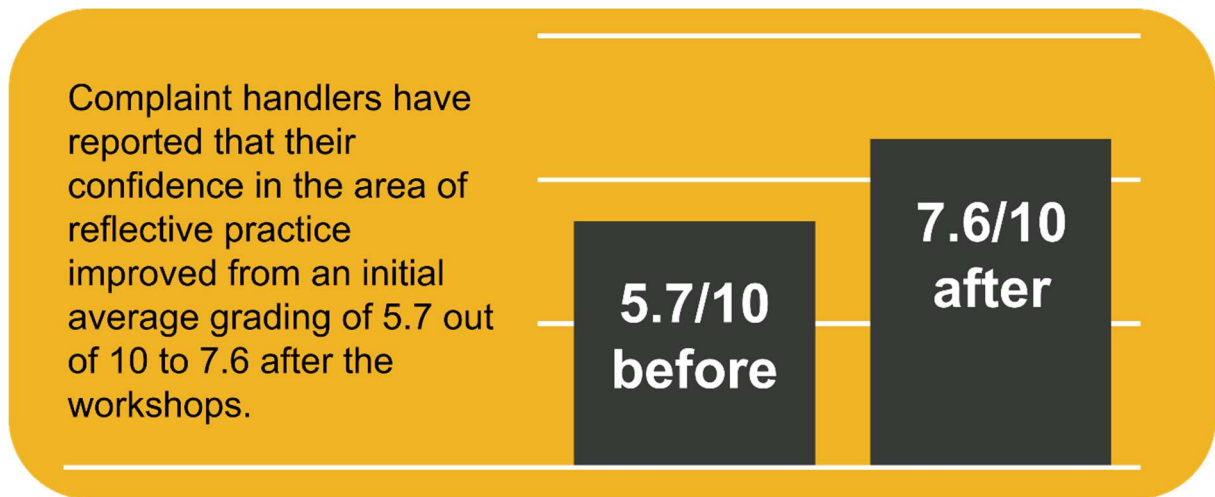
## Right First Time

In this section of the workshop we introduced attendees to the IOPC's 'Right First Time' initiative, where we will aim to work collaboratively with PSDs to share best practice and identify learning to improve practice in complaints handling and reviews going forward. To do this, we invited members of IOPC Casework staff to also attend the workshops as they will be heavily involved in this initiative.

# Impact

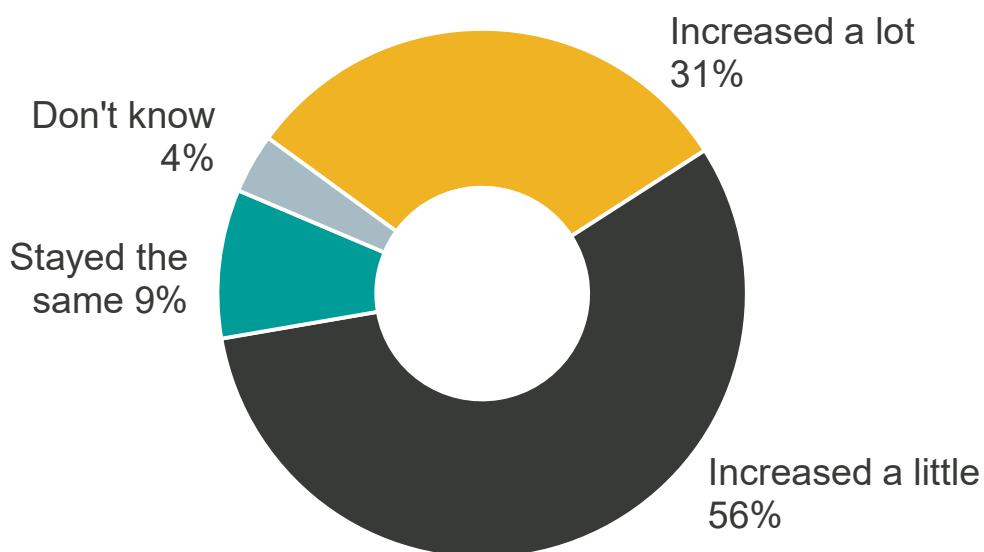
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We carried out a baseline poll at the beginning of each workshop to understand attendees' level of confidence in reflective practice as a subject area and then followed this up by asking the same question at the end of the workshop. In both cases attendees were asked to rate their understanding out of 10.



## Feedback survey

As part of the feedback survey we asked respondents to tell us to what extent they felt their understanding of reflective practice had improved as a result of the workshops. The results were as follows:



We also asked respondents to tell us one thing they would do differently as a result of the workshops. We received 35 responses. Some examples were:

“Attempt to involve the complainant more in the RPRP process and instil in supervisors that this is not solely a PSD tool, or a punitive measure.”

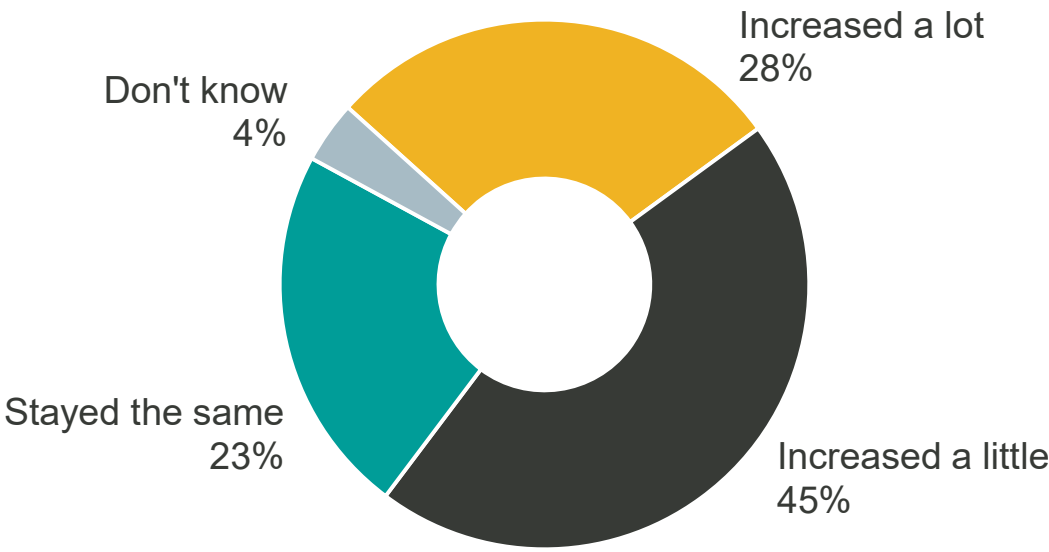
“Provide positive feedback as well as areas of reflective learning when dealing with officers and staff. I was only focusing on learning before.”

“Ensure that RPRP forms are being accurately documented for all levels of learning.”

“Take back the approach that RPRP can be used widely across the organisation and not just for complaints. This will help break down the stigma attached.”

“Ensure that sufficient and accurate record keeping is followed by the supervisors that are conducting the RPRP, e.g. not just ticking boxes, but making sure the subject and supervisor have a good clear outcome agreed.”

In relation to ‘Right First Time’, we asked respondents to what extent their understanding of the ‘right first time’ approach had increased or decreased. The results were:





## Other evidence of impact

Having involved Casework Managers in the workshops as part of the Right First Time section, we established a positive networking opportunity which has resulted in a new process within our Casework team. This will involve Casework Managers introducing themselves to Investigating Officers (IOs) or complaint handlers when they begin a review. The purpose of this would be to advise the complaint handler or IO that the review is now “live” so that they can be prepared for any imminent conversations with the Casework Manager, prepare any background papers or refresh their memories of the case. It is hoped that this will result in more effective engagement between the Casework Manager and complaint handler during the review process, quicker responses to background papers being provided and an overall more effective relationship between the IOPC and PSDs.

## Next Steps

The workshops provided a springboard for us to share more information on their content. Steps already taken include:

- Sharing the presentation we used.
- Circulating IOPC policies in relation to managing contact from complainants/service users.
- Creating a ‘Frequently asked questions’ document which addresses common questions that came up across the six workshops. Our aim is that this will provide attendees with a consistent response to questions and concerns to assist in their complaint handling.

We will be including an article in the Oversight newsletter to all forces and LPB’s on aspects covered in the workshops and key outputs.

We will continue to work with forces and LPBs to share knowledge and effective practices across the workshop topics.

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