

# PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS

## **of the Queensland Public Service and Local Government**

**Findings from the 2002 Public Attitudes Survey**

*Public Perceptions Series*

November 2003

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**Acknowledgments:**

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**Other title in the Public Perceptions series:**

*Public Perceptions of the Queensland Police Service: Findings from the 2002 Public Attitudes Survey*

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# Contents

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<b>Key findings</b>	<b>1</b>
General perceptions	1
Knowledge of improper behaviour	1
Complaining about improper behaviour	2
Comparison of perceptions of public service and local government	3
Implications	4
<b>Background</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Structure of the report</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Part A: Methodology</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Part B: Behaviour of public service employees</b>	<b>10</b>
General perceptions	10
Knowledge of improper behaviour by public service employees	12
Forms of improper behaviour	14
Action taken in response to improper behaviour	16
Public confidence in the complaints process	17
<b>Part C: Behaviour of local government employees</b>	<b>22</b>
General perceptions	22
Knowledge of improper behaviour by local government employees	25
Forms of improper behaviour	26
Action taken in response to improper behaviour	27
Public confidence in the complaints process	29
<b>Part D: Comparison of perceptions of public service and local government employees</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Summary</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>37</b>



# Key findings

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## General perceptions

### Behaviour of public service employees

This survey was the second of two that included questions relating to public service and local government employees, the first having been carried out in 1999. A majority of respondents in both surveys agreed that most public service employees are honest, and generally behave well. Overall, older respondents had the most favourable views of public service employees' behaviour. Most respondents felt that there had been little change in public service employees' behaviour in recent years.

Despite these favourable perceptions, almost 90 per cent of respondents in each survey period agreed or strongly agreed that there would always be some degree of corruption in the public service.

### Behaviour of local government employees

Overall, respondents had a favourable view of local government, with the majority agreeing that council employees were honest and generally behaved well. Not surprisingly, most respondents also believed that local government employees' behaviour had stayed about the same in recent years. Male respondents were more likely than females to hold these views, and the proportion of respondents with favourable opinions of local government employees increased with age and level of education.

The proportion of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that there would always be some degree of local government corruption increased to 87 per cent in 2002 (up from 83% in 1999).

## Knowledge of improper behaviour

### Public service employees

Only 8 per cent of people surveyed in 2002 felt that they, or someone they knew, had been affected by public service employee misconduct in the last year. Younger respondents were more likely to believe that they had experienced such behaviour, as were those who were unemployed.

Most of the behaviour that was believed to be improper related to customer service issues (for example the employee had been 'unfriendly, rude, arrogant or too casual', had 'behaved unreasonably or unfairly' or had been 'uncaring'). However, there was a considerable decline in the proportion of respondents

experiencing these types of conduct over the two survey periods. Very few respondents reported knowledge of criminal or corrupt behaviour among public service employees.

### **Local government employees**

Only 6 per cent of those surveyed in 2002 felt that they or someone they knew had been affected by local government employee misconduct in the last year. Male respondents, and those with at least some tertiary education, were more likely than other respondents to believe that they had experienced such behaviour.

The findings were very similar to those for public service employees. Most of the behaviour that was believed to be improper among local government employees related to customer service issues (for example the employee had been ‘unfriendly, rude, arrogant or too casual’, had ‘behaved unreasonably or unfairly’ or had been ‘uncaring’). Again, the proportion of respondents reporting these types of behaviours had declined over the two survey periods, and very few respondents reported knowledge of criminal or corrupt behaviour among local government employees.

## **Complaining about improper behaviour**

### **Public service employees**

Around two-thirds of respondents who believed they had experienced improper behaviour in the last 12 months reported that they had felt like complaining, and 58 per cent of those people actually proceeded to make or attempt to make an official complaint. In 1999 only about 34 per cent of those who felt like making a complaint proceeded to do so.

For respondents who felt like making a complaint, but decided not to, the most common reason reported for not complaining was the belief that ‘it would not do any good’. Very few respondents reported that they were afraid of possible repercussions.

Overall, public confidence in the complaints process has increased significantly since 1999. In 2002, 67 per cent of respondents who had never made an official complaint stated that they would be ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ confident of a proper investigation — up from 56 per cent in 1999.

Over 60 per cent of all survey respondents considered that more should be done about reducing corruption in the public service, and just over 50 per cent of respondents believed there was only a slim chance that wrongdoing by a public service employee would be detected. Twenty-six per cent of people surveyed believed there was no point in reporting corruption because nothing useful would be done about it, and around 24 per cent felt that people who complained about a public servant were likely to suffer.

## **Local government employees**

Half of those respondents who believed they had experienced improper behaviour in the last 12 months reported that they had felt like complaining, and approximately two-thirds of these people actually proceeded to make or attempt to make an official complaint.

For respondents who felt like making a complaint but decided not to, the most common reason reported for not complaining was the belief that 'it would not do any good'. None of the respondents in 2002 reported that they were afraid of possible repercussions.

Overall public confidence in the complaints process has increased significantly since 1999. In 2002, 73 per cent of respondents who had never made an official complaint stated that they would be 'very' or 'fairly' confident of a proper investigation if they were to make a complaint against a local government employee.

Around half of the respondents surveyed in both 1999 and 2002 considered that more should be done about reducing local government corruption. Similarly, about half of the survey respondents felt there was only a slim chance that wrongdoing in local government would be detected. Twenty-five per cent of people surveyed believed there was no point in reporting corruption because nothing useful would be done about it, and 20 per cent believed that people who complained about local government employees were likely to suffer repercussions.

## **Comparison of perceptions of public service and local government**

The findings revealed a high degree of consistency in people's views about public service and local government misconduct. To the extent that there were differences, respondents tended to have a more positive view of local government. For example:

- ▶ Respondents were more prepared to make a complaint about a local government employee than about a public service employee.
- ▶ Those who chose not to complain about misconduct in the public service were more likely to believe that it would not do any good.
- ▶ Around 73 per cent of respondents felt 'very' or 'fairly' confident that misconduct by local government employees would be properly investigated, compared to 67 per cent in relation to the public service.
- ▶ Fifty-eight per cent of respondents felt that not enough was being done about corruption in the public sector, but the corresponding figure was only 49 per cent in relation to local government corruption.

## Implications

The implications of the 2002 survey results include the following:

- ▶ Very few survey respondents felt that they had experienced serious misconduct by public service or local government employees, but many reported that they had experienced rudeness, unreasonable behaviour and/or a lack of caring. These ‘customer service’ issues can have a serious impact on public perceptions of state government departments and local government. Public sector organisations therefore need to place additional emphasis on good communication and improved relations with the public in order to improve their public image.
- ▶ Around 30 per cent of respondents reported a lack of confidence that complaints would be properly investigated; and many of those who felt like complaining, but chose not to, reported that making a complaint would not do any good. It is vital to maintain public confidence in the complaints process by ensuring that people feel they will be listened to. The CMC’s commitment to capacity development within organisations has a role in improving the way in which complaints are handled within the public service and local government.
- ▶ There were very few reports of behaviour that could have amounted to misconduct in the public service and local government. This may indicate resistance to and intolerance of serious misconduct by public sector organisations, which is consistent with an increasing commitment to integrity issues. In general, public service departments and local governments need to pay particular attention to their complaints-handling systems to ensure that appropriate procedures are in place and operating effectively.

# Background

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In July 2002 the Office of Economic and Statistical Research (OESR), on behalf of the Crime and Misconduct Commission (CMC), conducted a telephone survey of 1551 Queensland residents. The survey was primarily concerned with measuring public attitudes towards the Queensland Police Service (QPS), public servants and local government employees, as well as public knowledge of and confidence in the complaints process.

Changes in attitudes can be reliably assessed over time by the repeated administration of the survey. The 2002 survey was the fifth in a series of such surveys, and the second to include questions relating to public service and local government employees. This report focuses on attitudes towards Queensland public servants and local government employees, and compares the results of the current survey with those from the 1999 survey. A separate report on public perceptions of the Queensland Police Service was released in March 2003.

# Structure of the report

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The report is divided into four main parts:

- ▶ Part A provides a brief description of the survey methodology and the sample.
- ▶ Part B describes general perceptions of behaviour within the public service, public knowledge of improper behaviour by public servants, and perceptions of the complaints process.
- ▶ Part C describes these same issues in relation to local government employees.
- ▶ Part D presents a summary of the survey findings and compares public perceptions of the public service with those of local government.

In Parts B and C, differences in the way various demographic groups responded to the survey questions are presented. In particular, comparisons are shown for age, gender, employment status and level of education.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Analyses were also run for geographical location, but few differences were found among these groups. The results of these analyses are available from the CMC on request.

# Part A: Methodology

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In this study, as with the earlier surveys, a random sample was drawn from the population of all Queensland residents aged 18 years and over who were usual residents in a private dwelling with a telephone. The sample was selected using random-digit dialling, and one resident aged 18 years or over was randomly selected from the household to complete the survey.<sup>2</sup> After excluding out-of-scope numbers, the final sample consisted of 1551 residents. The response rate for the survey was 48 per cent.

In both the 2002 and the 1999 survey, almost 60 per cent of the sample was female (see Figure 1, next page). The age distribution differed significantly between the two surveys ( $p < .05$ )<sup>3</sup>, with the 2002 survey having a larger proportion of respondents in the '55 and over' age group than was the case in 1999 (see Figure 2). The 2002 survey also included a higher proportion of respondents who said they were retired or on a pension and a smaller proportion who said they were employed full-time, part-time or on a casual basis ( $p < .001$ ; see Figure 3).

Figure 4 shows the highest level of education reached by respondents to both surveys. There is a significant difference in the profile of the two samples, with the 2002 sample including a smaller proportion of tertiary-educated respondents and a larger proportion who indicated that they had reached year 12 or gained a technical or trade certificate ( $p < .01$ ).

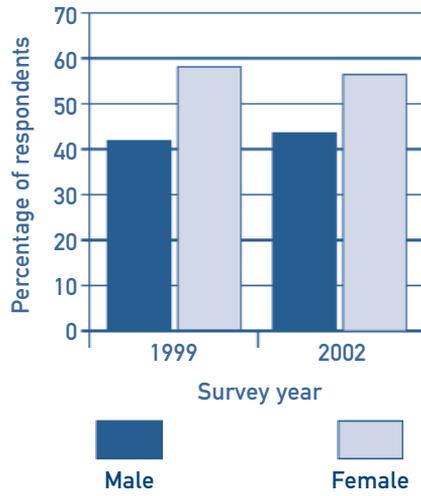
The survey results for each year were weighted for age, gender and geographic location to ensure an accurate representation of the state. This report presents the unweighted data, because only slight differences were found between the weighted and unweighted responses.

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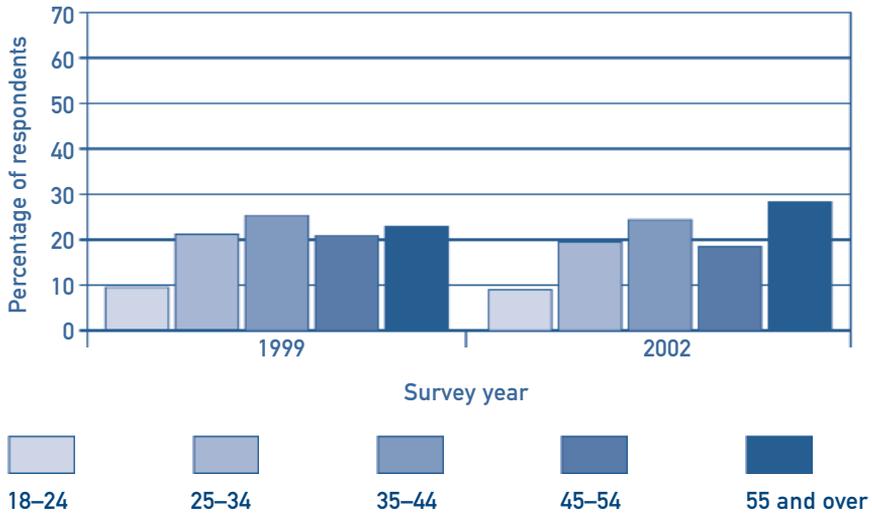
2 A sample unit (telephone number) was deemed to be finalised when contact with the household/person had been completed, or the telephone number was found to be out of scope for the survey, or the predetermined number of attempts to reach numbers not answering had been reached.

3 Chi-square tests were used to examine whether differences between survey years or demographic variables were statistically significant.

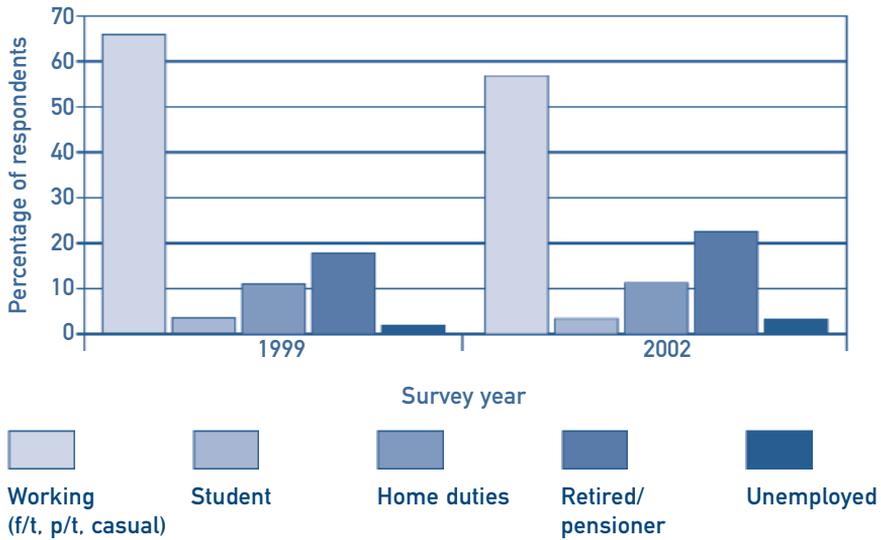
**Figure 1. Respondents by gender (1999 and 2002)**



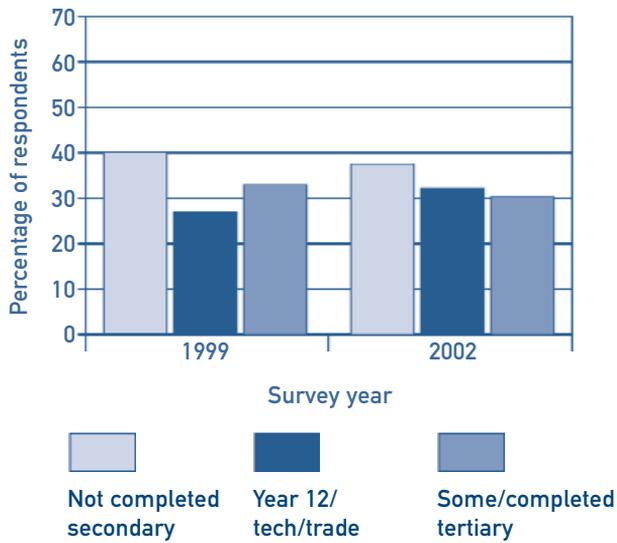
**Figure 2. Respondents by age (1999 and 2002)**



**Figure 3. Respondents by employment status (1999 and 2002)**



**Figure 4. Respondents by highest level of education (1999 and 2002)**

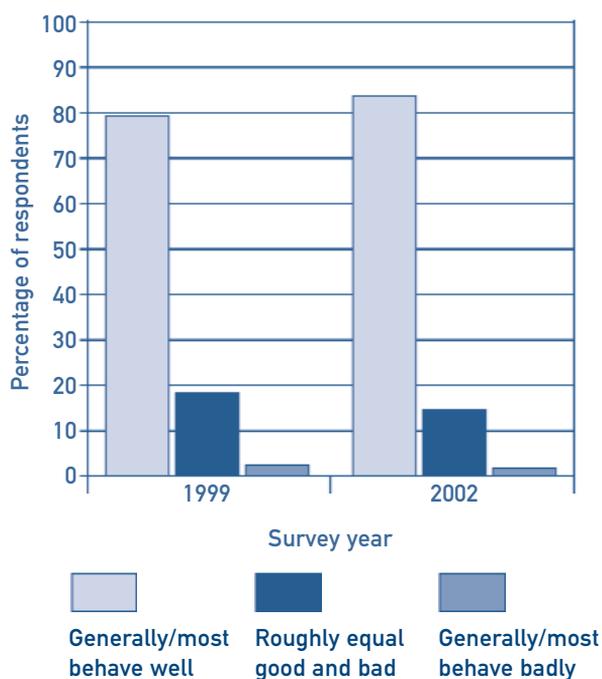


# Part B: Behaviour of public service employees

## General perceptions

Both the 1999 and 2002 surveys showed that most Queenslanders have a positive view of public servants. As Figure 5 shows, around 80 per cent of respondents thought that public servants ‘generally’ or ‘most’ behave well. Less than 3 per cent of respondents in each group stated that they ‘generally’ or ‘most’ behave badly.

**Figure 5. General perceptions of public servants’ behaviour (1999 and 2002)**



Note: A small number of respondents from each group who answered ‘don’t know’ were excluded.

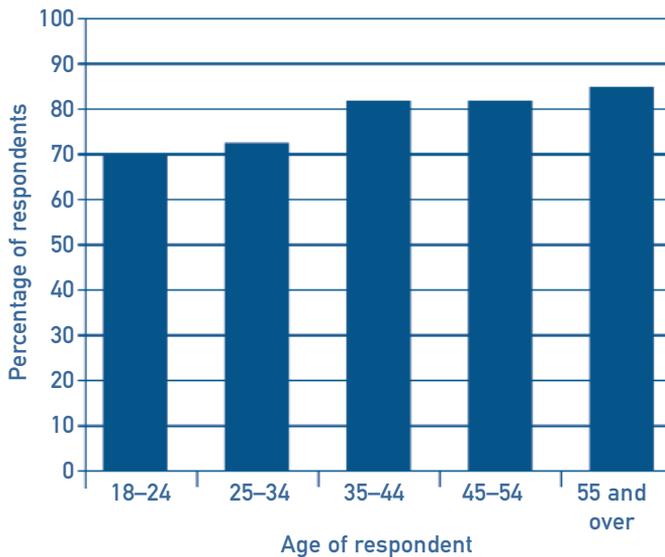
Across the two survey periods, almost 80 per cent of respondents also agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that ‘most government employees are honest’ (see Table 1). The table also shows that male respondents generally held this view more strongly than female respondents ( $p < .05$  for 1999;  $p < .01$  for 2002).

**Table 1. Perceptions of public servants' honesty (1999 and 2002)**

	Percentage of respondents	
	1999 (n = 1467)	2002 (n = 1485)
'Most government employees are honest.'	77.1	79.6
Male	80.7	83.9
Female	74.5	76.3

Notes: 1. Data presented are the proportions of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.  
 2. Thirty-five people in 1999 and 66 people in 2002 did not respond to this question.

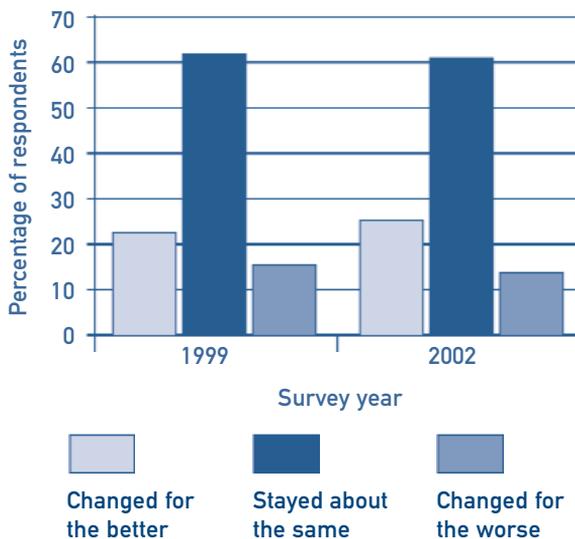
**Figure 6. Perception of public servants' honesty by age (2002 survey)**



Note: Data presented are the proportions of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

Additional analyses revealed that the proportion of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with this statement also differed significantly according to age and employment status ( $p < .001$  for both). In particular, older respondents, or those who were retired or on a pension, were more likely to agree that public service employees are honest, while those aged 25–34 and those who were unemployed were less likely to agree. As shown in Figure 6, the proportion of respondents who believe that ‘most government employees are honest’ increases significantly with age. This trend is consistent with the 1999 survey.

**Figure 7. Perceived changes in public servants' behaviour over time (1999 and 2002)**



As Figure 7 shows, most of the people surveyed believed that the behaviour of public service employees had stayed about the same over the last few years. Male respondents were significantly more likely than females to state that they thought public service employees' behaviour had improved (29%, compared with 22% of females), while female respondents were more likely to state that their behaviour had 'stayed about the same' (63%, compared with 59% of males;  $p < .05$ ). These findings are similar to those of the 1999 survey.

Approximately 15 per cent of respondents in each survey thought that public service employees' behaviour had changed for the worse. Equally small proportions of males and females held this view.

Despite the overwhelmingly positive views held by most respondents, almost 90 per cent of people in each survey still agreed or strongly agreed that 'you will always get some corruption in the public service'.

Overall, older people tend to be far more likely to agree that some misconduct will always exist in the public service, when compared with other age groups. In both the 1999 and 2002 surveys, the proportions of respondents who agreed that 'you will always get some corruption in the public service' increased significantly with age ( $p < .01$  for 1999;  $p < .001$  for 2002).

## **Knowledge of improper behaviour by public service employees**

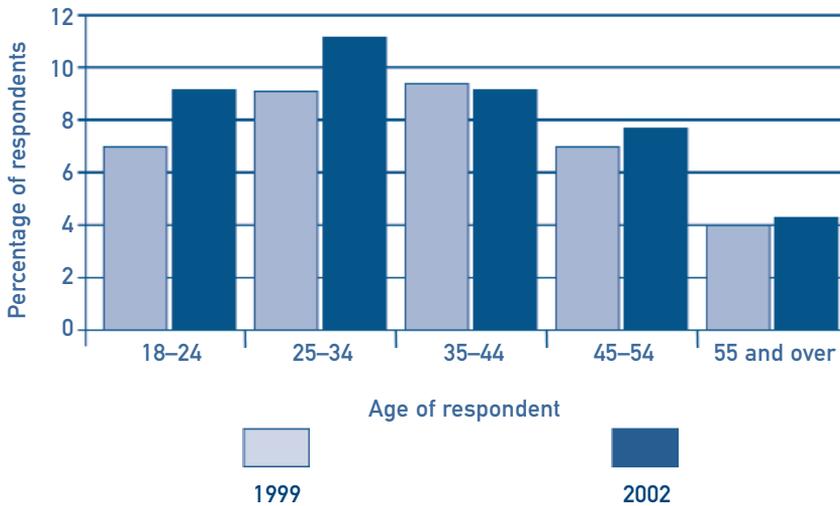
Almost 14 per cent of respondents in the 2002 survey perceived that a state government employee had behaved improperly in a way that affected them or someone they knew. Fifty-eight per cent of those respondents — or almost

8 per cent of the total sample — reported that this behaviour had occurred in the last 12 months. These results are similar to those observed in the 1999 data.

Just over half of the respondents who felt they had experienced improper behaviour by a public service employee in the last 12 months reported that this behaviour had affected them personally. Another 35 per cent said it had affected someone else, and the remaining 12 per cent reported that the behaviour had affected both them and someone else.

In both the 1999 and 2002 samples, the proportion of respondents who believed that they, or someone they knew, had experienced improper behaviour by a public service employee declined significantly with increasing age (see Figure 8).<sup>4</sup> In the 2002 sample around 11 per cent of respondents aged 25–34 reported improper behaviour, compared with only 4 per cent of respondents aged 55 or over. This suggests that interactions between young people and public servants are generally more problematic.

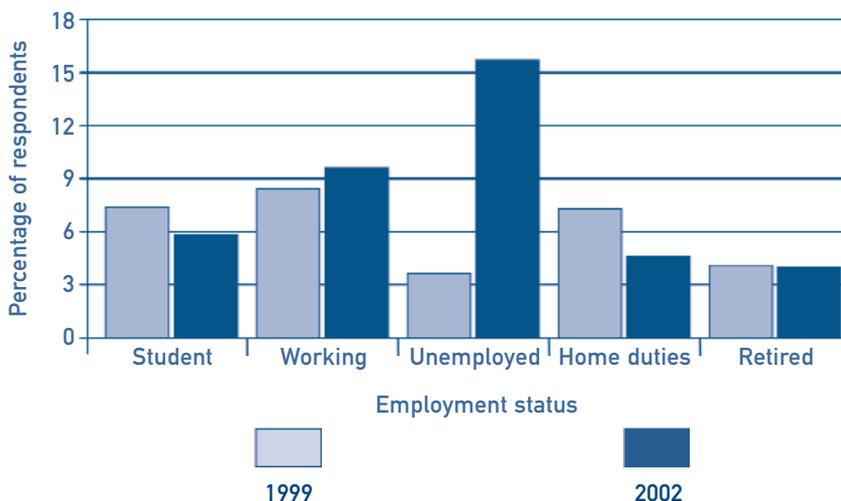
**Figure 8. Experiences of improper behaviour by a public service employee in the last 12 months, by age (1999 and 2002)**



In the 2002 sample, unemployment status was also significantly related to respondents’ perceptions that they had experienced improper conduct ( $p < .01$ ). In particular, unemployed respondents were significantly more likely than any other group to report improper behaviour by a public service employee in the last 12 months (see Figure 9, next page). This trend is quite different from that observed in 1999, where unemployed respondents were the group least likely to report that they had experienced

<sup>4</sup>  $p = .05$  for 1999;  $p < .01$  for 2002

**Figure 9. Experiences of improper behaviour by a public service employee in the last 12 months, by employment status (1999 and 2002)**



improper behaviour by a public service employee in the last 12 months.<sup>5</sup> This may be due to changes in employment services between the two survey periods. For example, increased government funding for programs targeting unemployment may have resulted in changes in the level or type of contact between unemployed people and public servants.

### Forms of improper behaviour

Table 2 presents the types of improper behaviour experienced by respondents in the last 12 months. Across the two samples, the largest proportion of respondents reported that the employee had behaved in a way that was unfriendly, rude, arrogant or too casual. Although more than 50 per cent of respondents still gave this reason in 2002, this represents a significant decline from the 77 per cent recorded in 1999 ( $p < .001$ ).<sup>6</sup>

Other common types of improper behaviour experienced by respondents in 2002 included employees behaving ‘unreasonably or unfairly’ (26%) or being ‘uncaring’ (24%). These proportions also were smaller than those recorded in 1999, but the differences are not statistically significant.

Reports of illegal behaviour, the release of confidential information, misuse of money or resources, and stealing were far less common. The results clearly show that serious forms of misconduct in the public service, as reported from this survey, are rare.

<sup>5</sup> Differences in the proportions for 1999 were not statistically significant.

<sup>6</sup> When interpreting these findings, please note that the issues raised relate only to those respondents who felt that they had experienced improper behaviour by a government employee in the last 12 months (i.e.  $n = 111$  for 1999;  $n = 123$  for 2002).

**Table 2. Types of improper behaviour by public service employees in the last 12 months (1999 and 2002)**

	Percentage of respondents		
	1999 (n = 111)	2002 (n = 123)	% change
Manner unfriendly/rude/arrogant/too casual	76.6	51.2	-33.1*
Behaved unreasonably or unfairly	34.2	26.0	-24.0
Uncaring	31.5	24.4	-22.6
Did wrong thing/were incompetent	20.7	17.1	-17.6
Did nothing/didn't do enough	19.8	17.1	-13.9
Did not keep person informed/did not come back	2.7	6.5	140.7
Behaved illegally/broke the rules	3.6	3.3	-9.8
Released confidential information	2.7	2.4	-9.8
Used undue force or violence or assaulted someone	0.9	1.6	80.5
Favouritism	1.8	1.6	-9.8
Racist language or behaviour	1.8	1.6	-9.8
Slow to arrive/did not come when sent for/no-one available	3.6	0.8	-77.4
Stole money or goods	0.0	0.8	-
Misused public money or resources	1.8	0.0	-100.0
Cheated on the system	0.9	0.0	-100.0
Other	11.7	14.6	25.0

**Notes:**

1. Numbers will add up to more than 100% because multiple responses were allowed for this question.
2. Percentage changes are affected by the small sample size.
3. \* p < .001

Across the 2002 sample, the types of improper conduct reported by respondents did not vary significantly by any of the demographic variables examined.

The decline in reports of rudeness and the apparent lack of any significant increase in other forms of improper conduct are indications that there has been an improvement in public service behaviour — or at least perceptions of behaviour — since 1999. However, between the two survey periods the total number of respondents who believed that they had experienced improper conduct has remained relatively stable. These results suggest that there may simply have been a change in the 'mix' of behaviours experienced by survey respondents, rather than any actual decline in improper behaviour. For example, in the past respondents may have considered that, in addition to any other form of improper conduct, public service employees were 'unfriendly, rude, arrogant or too casual'.

While the decline in reports of rudeness by public service employees is encouraging, it still represents the largest area of concern among respondents and suggests a need for further improvement.

## Action taken in response to improper behaviour

Table 3 shows that 4.6 per cent of the total sample — or approximately 60 per cent of respondents who stated that they had experienced improper behaviour by a public service employee in the last 12 months had felt like making an official complaint.<sup>7</sup> This percentage level was the same as that found in 1999.

**Table 3. Summary of respondents who have experienced improper behaviour by a public service employee (1999 and 2002)**

	1999		2002	
	<i>n</i>	% of total ( <i>n</i> = 1502)	<i>n</i>	% of total ( <i>n</i> = 1551)
Have experienced improper behaviour	204	13.6	212	13.7
Experienced in the last 12 months	111	7.4	123	7.9
▶ Felt like making a complaint	68	4.5	72	4.6
▶ Made or tried to make a complaint	23	1.5	42	2.7
<b>Ratio of respondents who felt like complaining to those who made or tried to make a complaint</b>	<b>3.0:1</b>		<b>1.7:1</b>	

Note: One person in 2002 made or tried to make an official complaint after initially indicating that they did not feel like complaining.

Fifty-eight per cent of these respondents (or just over one-third of those who had experienced improper behaviour in the last 12 months) actually made or attempted to make an official complaint about the behaviour. This proportion has increased significantly since 1999 ( $p < .01$ ), when only 34 per cent of those who felt like complaining proceeded to make or attempt to make an official complaint.

Thus, while similar proportions of respondents in 1999 and 2002 said they felt like complaining, a significantly higher proportion reported actually making or attempting to make an official complaint in 2002 (see Table 3). Expressing this as a ratio, one in three people who felt like complaining in 1999 actually made a complaint, compared with more than one in two in 2002.

<sup>7</sup> Official complaints are those made to the department itself, the police, the Commission, the Ombudsman, an MP or local member, or a lawyer.

**Figure 10. Summary of respondents who experienced improper behaviour by a public service employee (2002)**



In 2002, female respondents were significantly more likely than males to report that they felt like making an official complaint ( $p = .001$ ). Seventy-one per cent of female respondents who felt that they had experienced improper behaviour by a public service employee in the last 12 months reported that they had felt like complaining, compared with only 43 per cent of male respondents. This finding is similar to that for the 1999 survey.

The overall increase in willingness of people to complain about improper behaviour by public service employees is encouraging, and may signify an increase in public confidence in the complaints process. Similarly, increased willingness to report could be a result of new or improved complaints processes within state government departments.

Table 4 (next page) illustrates that, among those respondents who stated that they felt like complaining but chose not to, the most common reason for not complaining given over the last two survey periods was a belief that 'it would not do any good' (almost 40% in each survey). Other common reasons in both surveys included a belief that 'it would be too much trouble' (19% in 2002) or that 'it was not serious enough' (16% in 2002). Only 3 per cent of respondents in the 2002 survey period said that they were worried about repercussions associated with their complaint.

A certain degree of caution should be exercised when interpreting these results, in view of the small numbers of people involved. Nevertheless, it is of some concern that a reasonable proportion of respondents still believe that complaining about improper conduct by public service employees will not do any good.

### **Public confidence in the complaints process**

The increased likelihood that respondents who believe they have experienced improper conduct will make an official complaint may be a reflection of increasing public confidence in available complaints-handling processes.

**Table 4. Reasons for not making an official complaint (1999 to 2002)**

	Percentage of respondents	
	1999 ( <i>n</i> = 45)	2002 ( <i>n</i> = 31)
It would not do any good	37.8	38.7
It would be too much trouble	28.9	19.4
It was not serious enough	13.3	16.1
You would not be believed	6.7	9.7
Did not know how to make a complaint	11.1	9.7
Not my problem/situation didn't involve me	2.2	6.5
Worried about repercussions/fearful of retaliation	6.7	3.2
Other	20.0	19.4

Note: This information is based on the number of respondents who felt like making an official complaint after experiencing improper behaviour in the last 12 months but chose not to.

Survey respondents who had never made an official complaint against a public service employee were asked the following question:

If you were to make a complaint, how confident would you be that your complaint would be properly investigated?

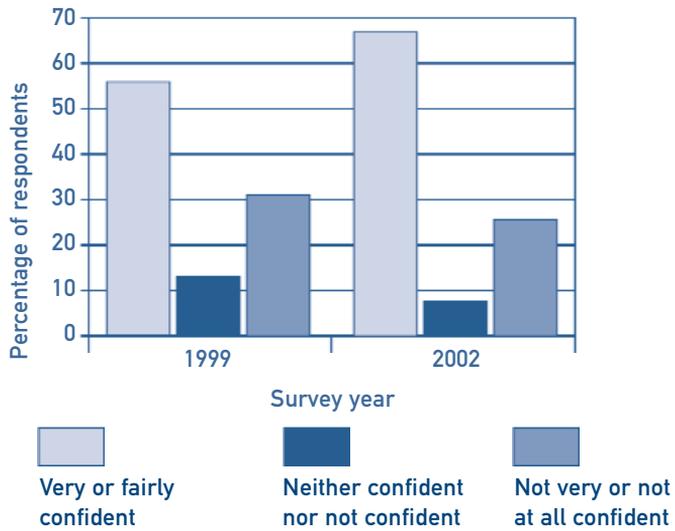
In general, the response was positive (see Figure 11), with the proportion of people who stated that they would be 'very' or 'fairly' confident increasing from 56 per cent in 1999 to 67 per cent in 2002.<sup>8</sup>

In 2002, female respondents were significantly more likely to express confidence in the complaints system. Sixty-nine per cent of female respondents said they would be 'very' or 'fairly' confident compared with 64 per cent of male respondents ( $p < .05$ ), whereas in the 1999 sample there was no difference between males and females.

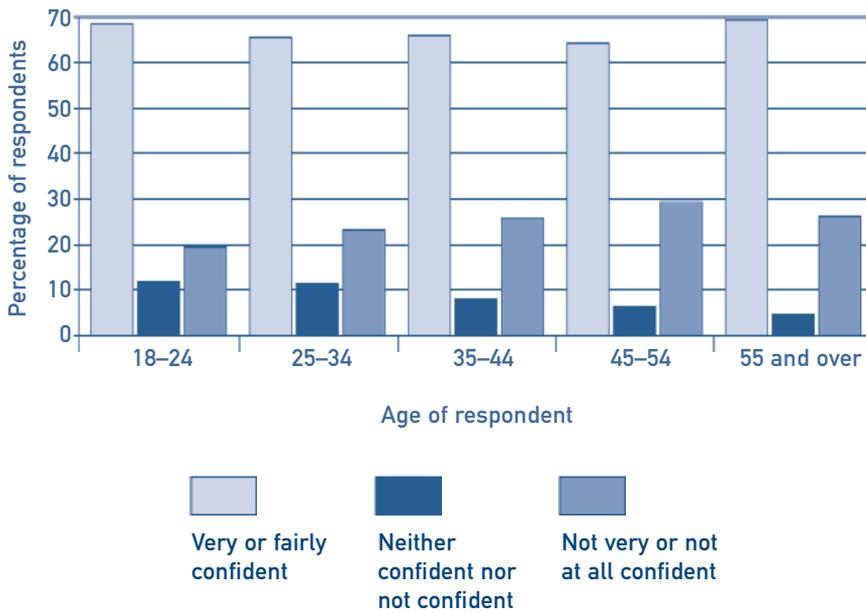
Respondents of different age groups also differed significantly in reported levels of confidence in the complaints process ( $p < .05$ ). In particular, respondents aged 55 and over were more likely to state that they would be 'very' or 'fairly' confident (70%), followed closely by respondents aged 18–24 (68%). The proportion of respondents who stated that they would be 'not confident at all' or 'not very confident' increased between those aged 18–24 and those aged 45–54 (see Figure 12). This trend was similar to that observed in 1999.

8 Responses to this question differed significantly between the two survey periods ( $p < .001$ ).

**Figure 11. Public confidence in complaints being properly investigated (1999 and 2002)**



**Figure 12. Confidence in a proper investigation by age (2002 survey)**



In 2002, 58 per cent of respondents believed that ‘not enough is being done about government corruption’. This is a significantly lower proportion than the 63 per cent recorded in 1999 ( $p < .01$ ).

Employment status also had a significant effect on perceptions that not enough is being done ( $p < .01$ ), with students most likely to agree, and those who indicated that they were employed (full-time, part-time or on a casual basis) least likely to agree. The proportion of respondents who agreed with this statement also declined significantly as age increased ( $p < .001$ ).

In 2002, just over 50 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: ‘The chances of getting caught doing something corrupt in a government job are slim.’ This proportion is significantly smaller than that found in the 1999 survey ( $p < .01$ ). The proportion of respondents who agreed with this statement increased significantly with age in both the 1999 ( $p < .01$ ) and 2002 ( $p < .05$ ) survey periods. Responses also differed significantly by employment status ( $p < .05$ ), with those who were unemployed being least likely to agree when compared with other respondents.

On the other hand, only about 22 per cent of respondents in 2002 agreed that there was no point reporting government corruption because nothing useful would be done about it. This is a significant drop from almost 30 per cent in 1999 ( $p < .001$ ). In 2002, 24 per cent of males agreed with this statement compared with 21 per cent of females ( $p < .05$ ).

Only 24 per cent of respondents in 2002 agreed or strongly agreed that ‘people who complain about the public service are likely to suffer for it.’<sup>9</sup> Respondents who were most likely to agree with this were those aged over 44 years or retired or on a pension, while younger respondents (aged 18–34) or those who indicated that they were either students or unemployed were least likely to agree.<sup>10</sup>

Level of education was significantly related to perceptions of the complaints process, with the proportion of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with each of the statements decreasing significantly as their level of education increased (see Figure 13). This relationship was also observed in 1999.

In particular, in the 2002 survey:

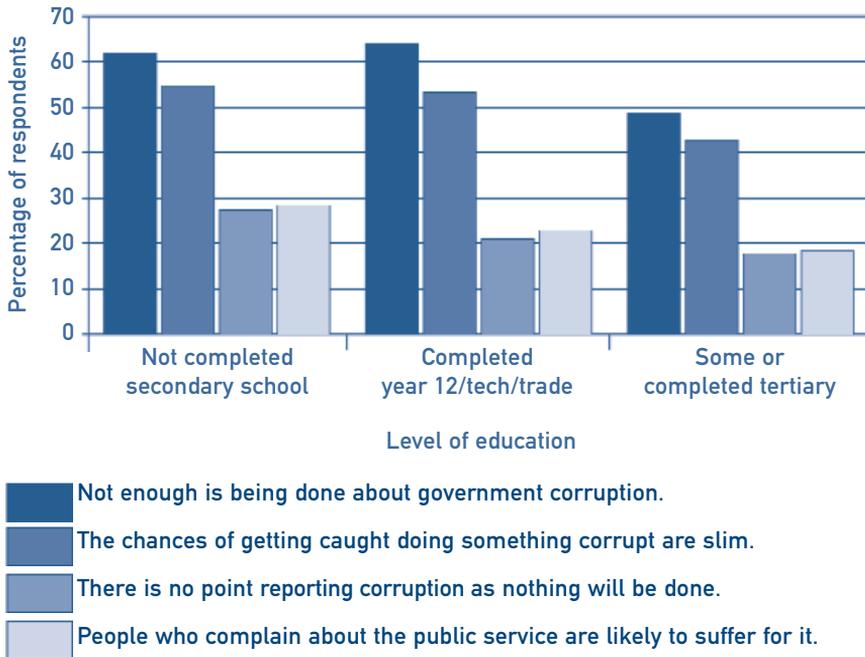
- ▶ Sixty-two per cent of people who had not completed secondary school agreed that not enough was being done about government corruption, compared with only 48 per cent of those who had at least some tertiary education ( $p < .001$ ).

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9 This question was not asked in the 1999 survey.

10  $p < .01$  for age;  $p < .001$  for employment status.

**Figure 13. Perceptions of corruption in the public service by level of education**



Note: Data presented are the proportions of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with each statement.

- ▶ Fifty-five per cent of those who had not completed secondary school agreed that the chances of getting caught doing something corrupt were slim, compared with only 43 per cent of those who had at least some tertiary education ( $p < .01$ ).
- ▶ Twenty-seven per cent of respondents who had not completed secondary school thought that there was no point reporting government corruption, compared with only 18 per cent of those who had at least some tertiary education ( $p = .001$ ).
- ▶ Twenty-eight per cent of those who had not completed secondary school agreed that people who complain are likely to suffer for it, compared with only 18 per cent of tertiary-educated respondents ( $p < .01$ ).

# Part C: Behaviour of local government employees

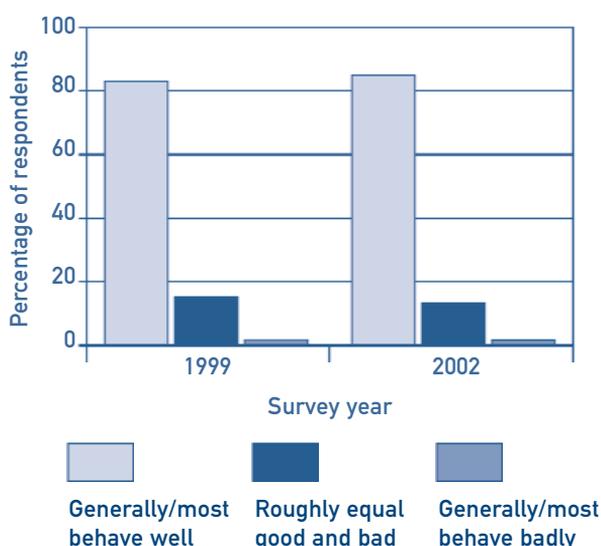
## General perceptions

Both the 1999 and 2002 surveys found that most Queenslanders have a positive view of local government employees. As Figure 14 shows, around 80 per cent of respondents thought that local government employees ‘generally’ or ‘most’ behave well. Less than two per cent of respondents in each group stated that they ‘generally’ or ‘most’ behave badly.

In 2002, male respondents had the most positive views, with 87 per cent believing that local government employees ‘generally’ or ‘most’ behave well — significantly higher than the 83 per cent of females who held this view ( $p < .01$ ). The 1999 survey results also showed males to have the most positive views, but the difference in the views of men and women was not statistically significant in 1999.

Across the two survey periods, the vast majority of respondents also agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: ‘Most council employees are honest’ (see Table 5). Male respondents also held this view more strongly than female respondents ( $p < .01$  for 1999;  $p < .05$  for 2002).

**Figure 14. General perceptions of local government employees’ behaviour (1999 and 2002)**

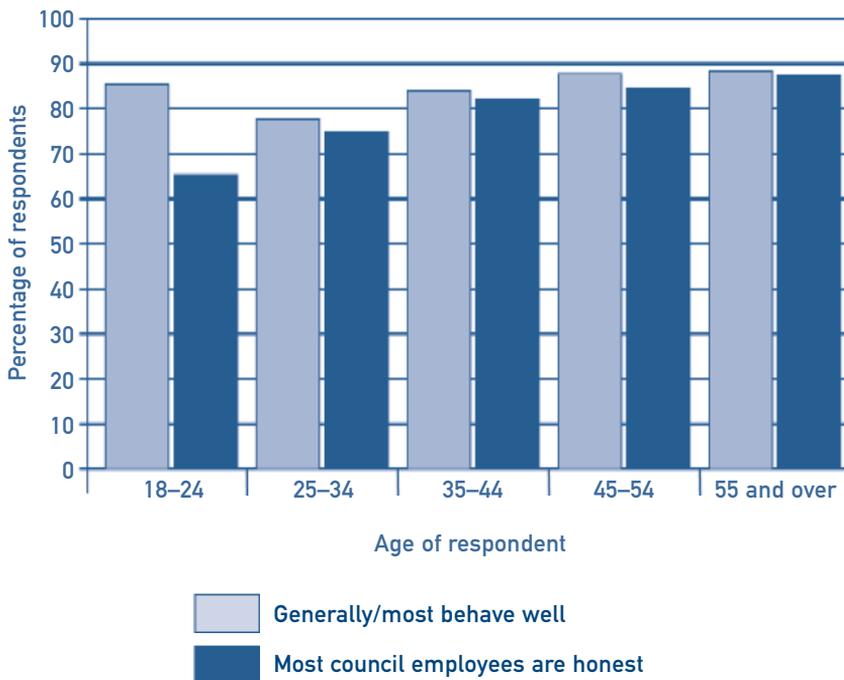


**Table 5. Perceptions of local government employees' honesty (1999 and 2002)**

	Percentage of respondents	
	1999 (n = 1470)	2002 (n = 1490)
'Most council employees are honest.'	80.0	81.2
Male	83.8	84.2
Female	77.2	78.8

Notes: 1. Data presented are the proportions of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.  
2. Thirty-two people in 1999 and 61 people in 2002 did not respond to this question.

**Figure 15. Perception of local government employees' honesty by age (2002 survey)**



Note: Data presented are the proportions of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

Age of the respondent also had a significant effect on general perceptions of local government employees' behaviour ( $p < .01$ ; see Figure 15). In 2002, 88 per cent of those aged 55 or over felt that local government employees 'generally' or 'most' behave well, compared with only 78 per cent of those aged 25-34. It is interesting to note that, while there is a significant increase in positive opinions as age increases, a surprisingly high proportion

of respondents in the youngest age group (18–24) also felt this way (86%). Data for 1999 show a similar trend ( $p < .05$ ).

Figure 15 also shows that the proportion of respondents who agree or strongly agree with the statement, ‘Most council employees are honest’ increases significantly with age ( $p < .001$ ). This trend is also consistent with the findings from the 1999 survey.

Additional analyses (not presented) showed that level of education and current employment status were also significantly related both to respondents’ general perceptions of local government employees’ behaviour<sup>11</sup> and to perceptions of honesty.<sup>12</sup> Respondents with at least some tertiary education were more likely to believe that local government employees ‘generally’ or ‘most’ behave well and that ‘most council employees are honest’, compared with respondents who had either not completed secondary school or who had completed grade 12 or a technical or trade certificate. These results were similar in the 1999 survey.

Respondents who indicated that they were students also held most strongly to the view that local government employees ‘generally’ or ‘most’ behave well (90%), followed by those who were retired or on a pension (87%), or working full-time, part-time or in casual employment (85%). Those who indicated that they were unemployed or engaged in home duties held this view least strongly (78% and 79% respectively). Respondents who were retired or on a pension were most likely to agree or strongly agree that ‘most council employees are honest’, and unemployed respondents were least likely to agree.

Results reported in Figure 16 reveal that most of the people surveyed believed that the behaviour of local government employees had stayed the same over the last few years (between 60 and 70 per cent of respondents).

Responses varied significantly by gender of the respondent ( $p < .01$ ). Male respondents were more likely than females to state that they thought local government employees’ behaviour had improved (32%, compared with 24%) while female respondents were more likely to state that their behaviour had ‘stayed about the same’ (67%, compared with 59% of males). These findings are similar to those of the 1999 survey.

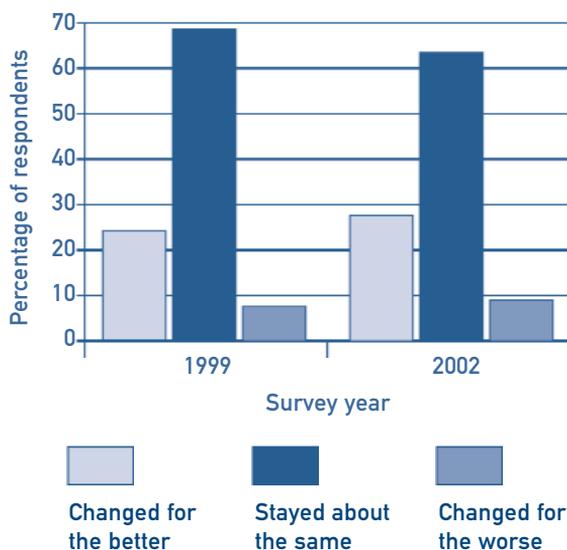
In 2002, older respondents and those who were retired or on a pension were also more likely to believe that local government employees’ behaviour had changed for the better. Approximately 35 per cent of those aged over 45 years held this view, compared with only around 20 per cent of respondents in the younger age groups.

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11  $p < .05$  for education;  $p < .01$  for employment

12  $p < .05$  for education;  $p = .01$  for employment

**Figure 16. Perceived changes in local government employees' behaviour over time (1999 and 2002)**



Less than 10 per cent of respondents in the 1999 and 2002 surveys thought that local government employees' behaviour had changed for the worse.

Despite the strong positive views held by most respondents, more than 80 per cent of people in each survey still agreed or strongly agreed that 'you will always get some corruption in local councils'. This proportion increased significantly between the two surveys — from 83 per cent in 1999 to 87 per cent in 2002 ( $p < .001$ ).

Overall, older people tend to hold firmer beliefs about the existence of corruption in local government when compared with other age groups. In both the 1999 and 2002 surveys, the proportion of respondents who agreed that there will always be some corruption increased significantly with age ( $p < .001$  for 1999;  $p < .05$  for 2002).

## **Knowledge of improper behaviour by local government employees**

Almost 11 per cent of respondents in the 2002 survey reported that a Queensland local government employee had behaved improperly in a way that affected them or someone they knew. This finding is consistent with the 1999 survey.

Fifty-four per cent of those respondents — or almost 6 per cent of the total sample — reported that this behaviour had occurred in the last 12 months. This also was similar to the percentage recorded in 1999.

Approximately 40 per cent of these respondents reported that the behaviour had affected them personally. Another 38 per cent said it affected someone else, and the remaining 21 per cent said the behaviour affected both them and someone else. In the 1999 survey 53 per cent of respondents reported that the behaviour had affected them personally.

In 2002, male respondents were significantly more likely than females to report that they had experienced improper behaviour by local government employees in the last 12 months ( $p < .05$ ). Experiences also differed significantly by level of education ( $p < .05$ ), with those who had not completed secondary school the least likely to report improper behaviour.

## Forms of improper behaviour

Table 6 presents the types of improper behaviour believed to be experienced by respondents in the last 12 months. Across the two samples, the largest proportion of respondents felt that the employee had behaved in a way that was unfriendly, rude, arrogant or too casual. In 1999 more than 55 per cent of respondents gave this reason. While it was still the most common reason in 2002, the proportion had dropped by one-third to around 38 per cent ( $p < .05$ ).

Other types of improper behaviour that were perceived as common in the 2002 survey included: 'behaved unreasonably or unfairly' (34%), 'uncaring' (23%), and 'did the wrong thing or were incompetent' (21%). All except the third of these categories have reduced slightly since 1999; however, the differences are not statistically significant.

Reports of local government employees releasing confidential information, misusing money or resources, stealing, and using undue force were far less common.

Across the 2002 sample, the types of improper conduct reported by respondents did not vary significantly by any of the demographic variables examined.

The decline in reports of rudeness, and the apparent lack of any significant increase in other forms of improper conduct, indicates that there has been an improvement in behaviour among local government employees — or at least perceptions of behaviour — since 1999. However, between the two survey periods the total number of respondents who believed that they had experienced improper conduct has remained relatively stable. These results suggest that there may simply have been a change in the 'mix' of behaviours experienced by survey respondents, rather than any actual decline in improper behaviour. For example, in the past respondents may have considered that, in addition to any other form of improper conduct, local government employees were 'unfriendly, rude, arrogant or too casual'.

**Table 6. Types of improper behaviour by local government employees in the last 12 months (1999 and 2002)**

	Percentage of respondents		
	1999 (n = 104)	2002 (n = 91)	% change
Manner unfriendly/rude/arrogant/too casual	55.8	38.5	-31.0*
Behaved unreasonably or unfairly	36.5	34.1	-6.8
Uncaring	25.0	23.1	-7.7
Did the wrong thing/were incompetent	20.2	20.9	+3.4
Did nothing/didn't do enough	18.3	16.5	-9.8
Behaved illegally/broke the rules	3.8	7.7	+100.0
Favouritism	5.8	4.4	-23.8
Did not keep person informed/did not come back	3.8	3.3	-14.3
Cheated on the system	2.9	3.3	+14.3
Racist language or behaviour	2.9	2.2	-23.8
Misused public money or resources	1.9	2.2	+14.3
Used undue force or violence or assaulted someone	1.9	2.2	+14.3
Slow to arrive/did not come when sent for/no one available	1.0	1.1	+14.3
Stole money or goods	0.0	1.1	-
Released confidential information	1.0	0.0	-100.0
Other	16.3	6.6	-59.7*

**Notes:**

1. Numbers will add up to more than 100% because multiple responses were allowed for this question.
2. Percentage changes are affected by the small sample size.
3. \* p < .05

While the decline in reports of rudeness by local government employees is encouraging, it still represents the largest area of concern among respondents and suggests a need for further improvement.

### Action taken in response to improper behaviour

Table 7 (next page) shows that just over half of the respondents who stated that they had experienced improper behaviour by a local government employee in the last 12 months had felt like making an official complaint. This is less than in the 1999 survey.

Sixty-five per cent of these respondents (or just over 37 per cent of those who had experienced improper behaviour in the last 12 months) actually made or attempted to make an official complaint about the behaviour. These proportions are similar to those found in the 1999 survey. Expressing this as a ratio, slightly more respondents actually made or attempted to make an official complaint in 2002 — 1 in 1.4 as opposed to 1 in 1.8 in 1999 — however, the difference between the years was not statistically significant.

**Table 7. Summary of respondents who have experienced improper behaviour by a local government employee (1999 and 2002)**

	1999		2002	
	<i>n</i>	% of total ( <i>n</i> = 1502)	<i>n</i>	% of total ( <i>n</i> = 1551)
Have experienced improper behaviour	186	12.4	168	10.8
Experienced in the last 12 months	104	6.9	91	5.9
▶ Felt like making a complaint	69	4.6	48	3.1
▶ Made or tried to make a complaint	39	2.6	34	2.2
<b>Ratio of respondents who felt like complaining to those who made or tried to make a complaint</b>		<b>1.8:1</b>		<b>1.4:1</b>

Note: One person in 1999 and three people in 2002 made or tried to make an official complaint after initially indicating that they did not feel like complaining.

**Figure 17. Summary of respondents who experienced improper behaviour by a local government employee (2002)**



Female respondents were significantly more likely than males to report both that they felt like complaining ( $p < .05$ ) and that they had actually made or attempted to make an official complaint ( $p < .01$ ). In 2002, 64 per cent of female respondents who had experienced improper behaviour by a local government employee in the last 12 months reported that they had felt like complaining, compared with only 43 per cent of male respondents. Similarly, 52 per cent of female respondents indicated that they had made or attempted to make an official complaint, compared with only 25 per cent of male respondents.

The higher proportion of female respondents who stated that they felt like complaining about improper behaviour, and their greater willingness to make a complaint in comparison with male respondents, are issues that warrant further examination.

For those respondents who stated that they felt like complaining but chose not to, the most common reason given in both surveys was a belief that ‘it would not do any good’ (around 30% in each survey — see Table 8). Other common reasons included a belief that ‘it would be too much trouble’ (18% in 2002) or that ‘you would not be believed’ (18% in 2002). In the 1999 survey 13 per cent of respondents indicated that they did not make a complaint because they were afraid of repercussions or retaliation; in 2002, however, no respondent gave this reason.

Due to the small numbers of people involved, caution should be exercised when interpreting these results. However, it is still of some concern that almost one-third of these respondents believed that complaining would not do any good.

**Table 8. Reasons for not making an official complaint (1999 to 2002)**

	Percentage of respondents	
	1999 ( <i>n</i> = 31)	2002 ( <i>n</i> = 17)
It would not do any good	35.5	29.4
It would be too much trouble	19.4	17.6
You would not be believed	6.5	17.6
Did not know how to make a complaint	9.7	11.8
Worried about repercussions/fearful of retaliation	12.9	0.0
It was not serious enough	9.7	0.0
Not my problem/situation didn’t involve me	6.5	0.0
Other	12.9	35.3

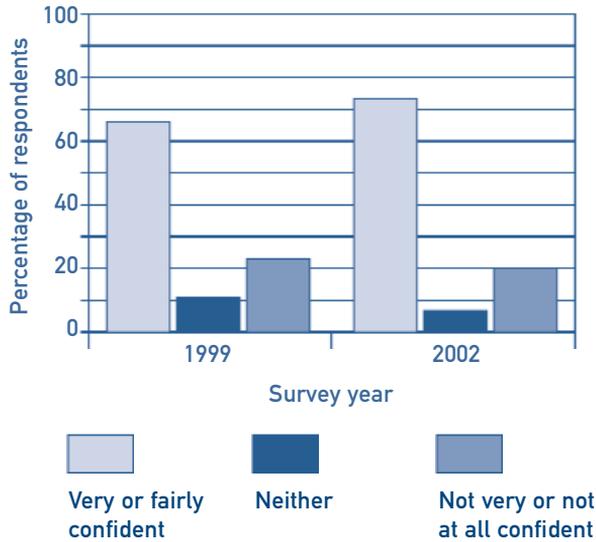
Note: This information is based on the number of respondents who felt like making an official complaint after experiencing improper behaviour in the last 12 months but chose not to.

## Public confidence in the complaints process

The level of under-reporting of complaints may raise questions regarding public confidence in the complaints process. To address this issue, survey respondents who had never made an official complaint against a local government employee were asked the following question:

If you were to make a complaint, how confident would you be that your complaint would be properly investigated?

**Figure 18. Public confidence in complaints being properly investigated (1999 and 2002)**



In general, the response was positive (see Figure 18), with the proportion of people who stated that they would be ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ confident increasing from 66 per cent to 73 per cent since the last survey in 1999.<sup>13</sup>

Level of education also had a significant effect on respondents’ confidence in the complaints process ( $p < .01$ ). In 2002, respondents who had not completed secondary school had the strongest opinions — both positive and negative — regarding confidence in the complaints system. Respondents with a tertiary education, on the other hand, were those most likely to remain neutral.

Age was related to reported levels of confidence in the complaints process ( $p < .01$ ). In particular, older respondents were more likely to state that they would be ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ confident, whereas a larger proportion of younger respondents reported that they were unsure (see Figure 19). This difference in responses by age was also observed in the 1999 survey results ( $p < .001$ ).

In both the 1999 and 2002 surveys, around half the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the following two statements:

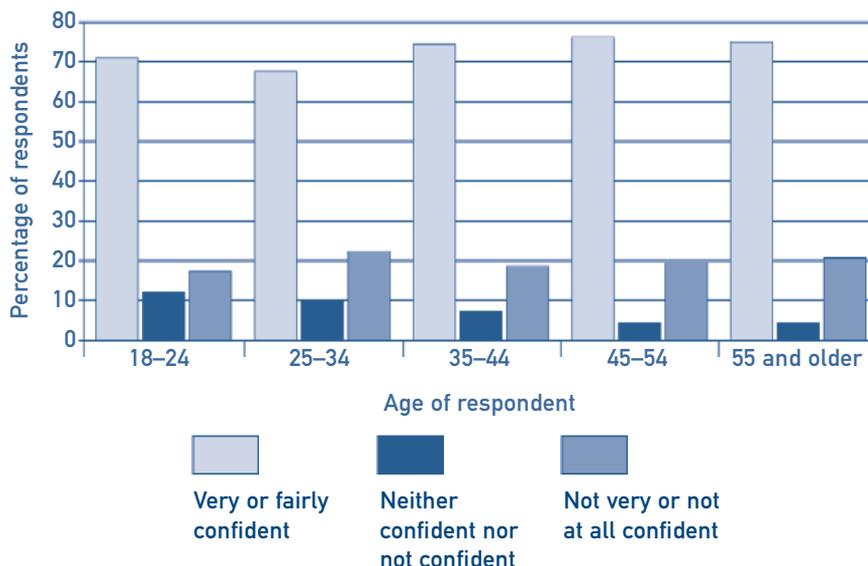
Not enough is being done about council corruption.

The chances of getting caught for doing something corrupt in a council job are slim.

Respondents aged 18–24 years were more likely to agree that ‘not enough is being done about council corruption’ and the proportion declined with

<sup>13</sup> Responses to this question differed significantly between the two survey periods ( $p < .001$ )

**Figure 19. Confidence in a proper investigation by age (2002)**



age ( $p < .01$ ). Responses to the statement that ‘the chances of getting caught for doing something corrupt in a council job are slim’ also differed significantly by both age and employment status ( $p < .05$  for both). Those aged 55 years or over, or retired or on a pension, were more likely to agree; while those aged 18–24 or unemployed were more likely to disagree.

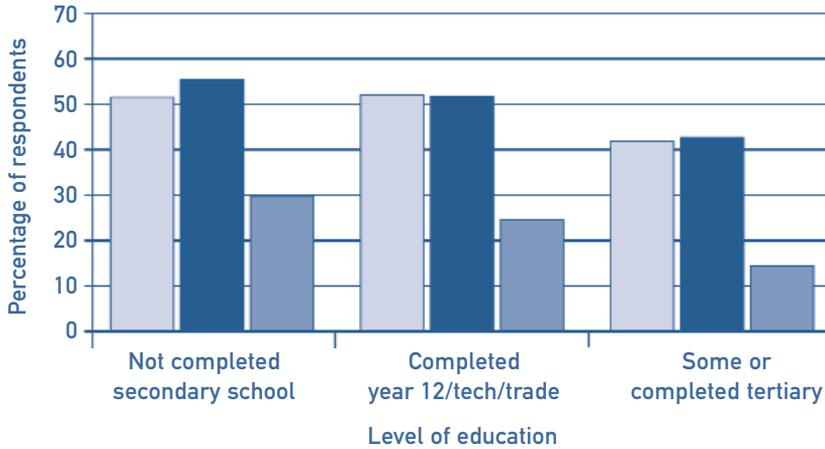
Approximately 23 per cent of respondents in 2002 agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: ‘There is no point reporting corruption in Queensland local councils because nothing useful will be done about it.’ While still high, this is a drop from 27 per cent in 1999. Around 20 per cent of respondents in both the 1999 and 2002 survey periods agreed that ‘people who complain against council employees are likely to suffer for it’.

Education level was significantly related to perceptions of the complaints process, with the proportion of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed decreasing as their level of education increased (Figure 20, next page). In particular:

- ▶ Only about 40 per cent of respondents with a tertiary education agreed or strongly agreed that ‘not enough is being done about council corruption’, compared with more than 50 per cent of those without a tertiary education ( $p < .01$ ).
- ▶ Fifty-six per cent of respondents who had not completed secondary school agreed or strongly agreed that ‘the chances of getting caught for doing something corrupt in a council job are slim’. Just over 40 per cent of those with a tertiary education also agreed with this statement ( $p < .01$ ).

- ▶ Respondents who had not completed secondary school were twice as likely as tertiary-educated respondents to agree that there was no point reporting local government corruption (30% compared with 14%;  $p < .001$ ).

**Figure 20. Perceptions of corruption in local government by level of education (2002 survey)**



- Not enough is being done about council corruption.
- The chances of getting caught doing something corrupt are slim.
- There is no point reporting corruption as nothing will be done.

Note: Data presented are the proportions of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with each statement.

# Part D: Comparison of perceptions of public service and local government employees

Overall, there was a high level of consistency in the 2002 survey between the public's perceptions of public servants and of local government employees. Differences were mainly in relation to the making of complaints. For example:

- ▶ Whereas 58 per cent of respondents felt that not enough was being done about corruption among public servants, only 49 per cent of respondents considered this to be the case in relation to local government employees.
- ▶ Where respondents felt that they had experienced improper behaviour by a state or local government employee, the types of behaviours reported were very similar. However, the proportions varied across the two sectors. For example, respondents were considerably more likely to report that a public service employee had behaved in a way that was unfriendly, rude, arrogant or too casual, but were more likely to report that a local government employee had behaved unreasonably or unfairly (see Table 9).

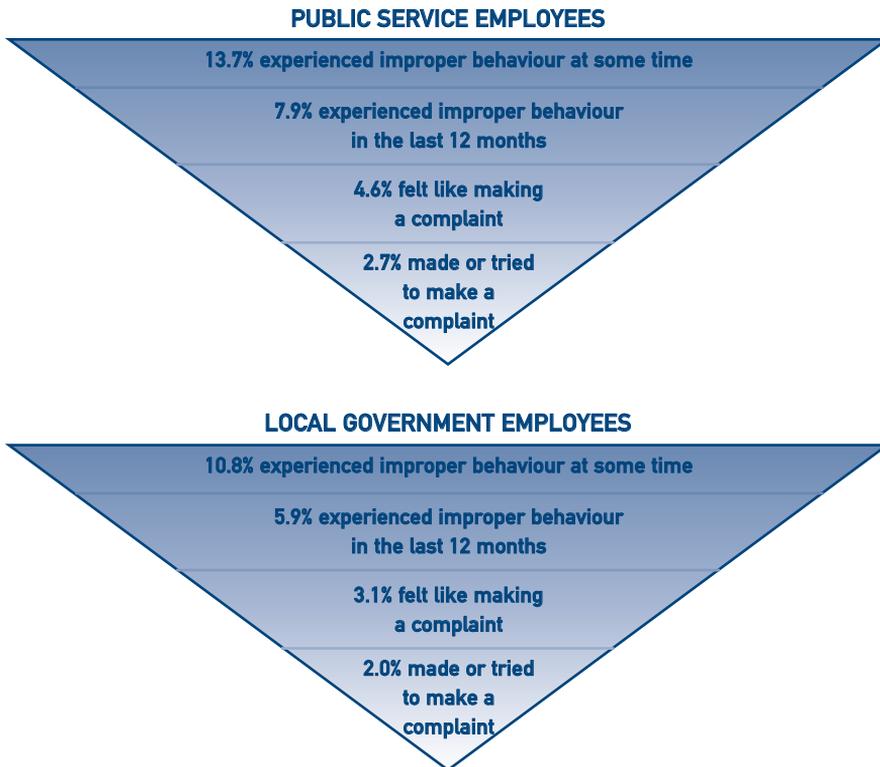
**Table 9. Type of improper behaviour in the last 12 months (2002)**

	Percentage of respondents	
	Public service ( <i>n</i> = 123)	Local government ( <i>n</i> = 91)
Manner unfriendly/rude/arrogant/too casual	51.2	38.5
Behaved unreasonably or unfairly	26.0	34.1
Uncaring	24.4	23.1
Did wrong thing/were incompetent	17.1	20.9
Did nothing/didn't do enough	17.1	16.5

Note: Numbers will add up to more than 100% as multiple responses were allowed for this question.

- ▶ Approximately 8 per cent of respondents felt that they had experienced improper conduct by a state government employee in the previous 12 months, whereas less than 6 per cent of respondents felt that a local government employee had behaved improperly (see Figure 21, next page).

**Figure 21. Summary of respondents who had experienced improper behaviour (2002)**



A larger proportion of respondents indicated that they felt like making a complaint against a state government employee (59%) than felt like doing so against a local government employee (53%); but respondents who reported that they felt like complaining about improper behaviour were more likely to make or attempt to make a complaint about a local government employee (71%) than about a public service employee (58%).

- ▶ Among respondents who felt like complaining but chose not to, a greater proportion felt that complaining against a public servant ‘would not do any good’ than felt this in relation to local government employees (see Table 10). Respondents were far more likely to feel that a complaint about a public service employee was not serious enough to merit reporting; but respondents were almost twice as likely to feel that a complaint against a local government employee would not be believed, compared with a complaint against a public servant.
- ▶ Almost 75 per cent of respondents felt ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ confident that misconduct by local council employees would be properly investigated, compared with 67 per cent who felt this in relation to public servants.

- ▶ Twenty-four per cent of respondents agreed that people who complain against a public service employee would be likely to suffer for it, whereas 20 per cent of respondents agreed that people would suffer for complaining against a local government employee.

**Table 10. Reasons for not making an official complaint (2002)**

	Percentage of respondents	
	Public service ( <i>n</i> = 31)	Local government ( <i>n</i> = 17)
It would not do any good	38.7	29.4
It would be too much trouble	19.4	17.6
It was not serious enough	16.1	0.0
You would not be believed	9.7	17.6
Did not know how to make a complaint	9.7	11.8
Not my problem/situation didn't involve me	6.5	0.0
Worried about repercussions/fearful of retaliation	3.2	0.0
Other	19.4	35.3

Note: Numbers will add up to more than 100% as multiple responses were allowed for this question.

# Summary

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The main points revealed by the survey were:

- ▶ The majority of respondents felt that most state and local government employees were honest and generally behaved well. They also agreed that behaviour within these organisations had remained much the same in recent years.
- ▶ Despite the generally favourable views, most respondents believed that there would always be some degree of corruption in the public service and local government.
- ▶ Only a small proportion of respondents felt that they had experienced improper behaviour by public service or local government employees. Most of the perceived improper behaviour related to customer service issues (such as unfriendly, rude, unreasonable or uncaring behaviour), with very few people being aware of any serious misconduct.
- ▶ Around 60 per cent of respondents who felt they had experienced improper behaviour by a public service employee felt like complaining, and of those around half actually made a complaint. For those who felt they had experienced improper behaviour by a local government employee, about half felt like complaining and two-thirds of these actually made a complaint. In both cases, this represents a greater tendency by respondents to make use of the complaints system than was the case in 1999.
- ▶ Respondents who chose not to complain about public service or local government employees were most likely to believe that it would not do any good.
- ▶ Public confidence in the complaints process has increased significantly since 1999, with 67 per cent of respondents in 2002 who had never made a complaint stating that they would be 'very' or 'fairly' confident of a proper investigation if they were to make a complaint against a public service or local government employee.
- ▶ Around 60 per cent of respondents considered that more should be done about reducing government corruption, and about half felt this way in regard to local government corruption. Approximately 50 per cent of those surveyed felt that there was only a slim chance of wrongdoing by a public service or local government employee being detected.
- ▶ Over 20 per cent of people surveyed agreed that there was no point reporting corruption, either in the public service or in local government, because nothing useful would be done about it. A similar proportion agreed that people who complain about public service or local government employees are likely to suffer negative consequences.

# Conclusion

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This report has revealed generally positive findings with regard to both public service and local government employee behaviour.

Very few respondents indicated knowledge of serious misconduct by either public service or local government employees. However, issues relating to customer service (such as rudeness, unreasonable behaviour, or an uncaring manner) were seen to be relatively common.

The CMC's role in monitoring public perceptions of misconduct in local government and the public service presents an important opportunity to assess changes in the public sector over time and to respond to emerging issues.

In addition, the CMC's role in capacity development provides an ongoing opportunity to ensure that complaints are dealt with effectively and appropriately. In this regard, the data presented in this report will act as an important benchmark from which future achievements in this area can be assessed.