

PUBLIC

PERCEPTIONS

of the
Queensland
public service
and local
government

Findings from the
2005 Public Attitudes Survey

Public Perceptions Series

September 2007

CRIME AND
MISCONDUCT
COMMISSION



QUEENSLAND

CMC vision:

To be a powerful agent for protecting Queenslanders from major crime and promoting a trustworthy public sector.

CMC mission:

To combat crime and improve public sector integrity.

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Foreword

Assessing the public's perceptions of the Queensland Police Service, public service departments and local government is an important aspect of the Crime and Misconduct Commission's monitoring function. To achieve this we have commissioned a series of surveys of Queensland residents to:

- ▶ assess how the public view the behaviour and the 'image' of the QPS, public service departments and local government
- ▶ examine the extent to which the public perceive there to be misconduct or lesser forms of improper behaviour within these organisations
- ▶ ascertain the public's willingness to use complaints systems.

To date, we have conducted six surveys; in July 1991, July 1993, June 1995, June 1999, June 2002 and July 2005. This report summarises the key findings of the 2005 survey in relation to public service departments and local government. It also identifies some interesting changes over time. A separate report examining the findings relating to the QPS was released in June 2006.

This report was prepared by Kelly Ede with the assistance of Anna Sheehan. We are grateful to the University of Queensland Social Research Centre for administering the survey in 2005. The Communications Unit of the CMC prepared the report for publication.

Robert Needham
Chairperson

Abbreviations

CJC	Criminal Justice Commission
CMC	Crime and Misconduct Commission
OR	Odds Ratio
QPS	Queensland Police Service

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Key findings

To date, the CMC has conducted six statewide surveys to assess the attitudes of the public towards misconduct and ethical issues in the context of government service providers in Queensland. The first three surveys (in 1991, 1993 and 1995) focused exclusively on attitudes towards the QPS and the CMC's predecessor organisation, the Criminal Justice Commission (CJC). The subsequent surveys (1999, 2002 and 2005) also included questions relating to the Queensland public service and local government.

Since the first public attitudes survey was conducted, there have been considerable changes within the public service; there have also been changes in the way the CMC handles complaints about public service and local government employees and monitors other integrity issues.

The key findings of the 2005 survey are described below, in relation first to public service employees and then to local government employees. In the final chapter, comparisons are made between perceptions of the two groups and of the Queensland Police Service, as well as observations about interesting trends over time.

General perceptions

Behaviour of public service employees

Most respondents in the 1999, 2002 and 2005 survey groups (about 80%) held a favourable view of the behaviour of public service employees, stating that most were honest and that they generally behaved well. In 2005, older respondents and those with at least some tertiary education were the most positive in their views of public service employees' behaviour.

Most of the 2005 respondents felt that there had been little change over time in the behaviour of public service employees, although older respondents were more likely than younger ones to feel that public service behaviour had changed for the worse.

Despite generally favourable perceptions, more than 85 per cent of respondents in each of the last three surveys agreed that there would always be some corruption in the public service. In 2005, older respondents and those who had not completed secondary school were more likely to agree with this statement than were younger respondents and those with higher levels of education.

Behaviour of local government employees

Overall, most respondents from each of the last three surveys held a favourable view of local government employees' behaviour. The majority stated that most local government employees were honest and that they generally behaved well. In 2005, older respondents and those with at least some tertiary education were more positive in their views of local government employees' behaviour than were the younger and less well educated respondents, and males were also more likely than females to state that employees were honest. Over the last three surveys, most respondents felt that there had been little change in the behaviour of local government employees in recent years.

More than 85 per cent of respondents in each of the last three surveys agreed that there would always be some corruption in local government. Older respondents and those who had not completed secondary school were more likely than younger and more educated respondents to agree with this statement.

Experiences of improper behaviour

Public service employees

Seven per cent of people surveyed in 2005 reported experiencing improper behaviour by a public service employee in the preceding 12 months. Tertiary educated respondents were about 40 per cent more likely than respondents with lower levels of education to report having experienced improper behaviour.

The most common forms of improper behaviour reported were in relation to customer service; for example the employee had been unfriendly, rude or arrogant, had behaved unreasonably or unfairly, or was uncaring. Very few people reported serious forms of misconduct or illegal behaviour (e.g. took a bribe).

Local government employees

Only about 5 per cent of those surveyed in 2005 stated that they had experienced improper behaviour by a local government employee in the preceding 12 months. There were no differences in experiences of improper behaviour by local government employees on the basis of any of the demographic variables we examined.

As with public service employees, customer service shortfalls accounted for the majority of improper conduct, with a large proportion of respondents stating that the employee had been unfriendly, rude or arrogant during the encounter, or had behaved unreasonably or unfairly. Serious forms of misconduct or illegal behaviour reported by the respondents to the survey were rare.

Complaining about improper behaviour

Public service employees

In 2005, around 60 per cent of respondents who believed they had experienced improper behaviour by a public service employee in the preceding 12 months reported that they had felt like lodging a complaint. Half of those people actually proceeded to make or attempt to make an official complaint. This is an increase in the use of complaints processes since 1999, when only just over one-third of those who felt like complaining actually made or attempted to make a complaint.

Across the last three surveys, the most common reason respondents gave for choosing not to complain, despite feeling like doing so, was a belief that ‘it would not do any good’.

Overall, however, public confidence in the complaints processes for public service employees decreased in 2005 after a peak in 2002, with fewer respondents stating that they would be confident of a proper investigation were they to make a formal complaint. Females and younger respondents were more likely than males and older respondents to report confidence in complaints processes.

Approximately half the respondents in 2005 felt that ‘not enough is being done about government corruption’ — a decrease since the 1999 survey, when 63 per cent believed this to be the case; and half agreed that ‘the chances of getting caught doing something corrupt in the public service are slim’. Around 30 per cent felt there was ‘no point reporting corruption’ and 30 per cent agreed that ‘people who complain against public service employees will suffer’.

Where respondents had chosen to make a complaint, they were most likely to have reported the matter directly to the agency in which the behaviour had occurred.

Local government employees

In the 2005 survey, 70 per cent of respondents who reported that they had experienced improper behaviour by a local government employee in the preceding 12 months said they felt like lodging a complaint. Almost two-thirds of those people actually proceeded to make or attempt to make an official complaint. This is an increase since 1999, when just over half of those who felt like complaining made or attempted to make a complaint.

As for the results in relation to public service employees, the most common reason respondents gave, in all three surveys, for choosing not to complain although they felt like doing so was a belief that ‘it would not do any good’.

The proportion of respondents who stated they did not know how to make a complaint about improper behaviour almost doubled between 1999 and 2005.

Overall, public confidence in the complaints processes for local government employees decreased in 2005, after a peak in 2002, with fewer respondents stating that they would be confident of a proper investigation.

Almost half the respondents in 2005 felt that 'not enough is being done about local government corruption', and half agreed that 'the chances of getting caught doing something corrupt in a local government are slim'. Around 25 per cent felt that there was 'no point reporting corruption' and 20 per cent agreed that 'people who complain against local government employees will suffer'.

Where respondents had chosen to make a complaint, they were most likely to have reported the matter directly to the local government in which the behaviour had occurred.

Introduction

About the survey

The Public Attitudes Survey consists of a series of telephone surveys of Queensland residents on behalf of the Crime and Misconduct Commission (formerly the Criminal Justice Commission). The first was in 1991 and the most recent in 2005. Its purpose is to assess the attitudes of Queensland residents towards the QPS, public service employees and local government employees. It also aims to examine public knowledge of, and confidence in, complaints processes. These are important issues, as a lack of public confidence may result in:

- ▶ an unwillingness to make complaints, possibly due to fear of retaliation or the feeling that it would do no good
- ▶ an unwillingness to remain involved with the public sector organisation
- ▶ financial costs associated with investigations
- ▶ low morale in the organisation.

The 2005 Public Attitudes Survey is the sixth in the survey series and the third to include questions relating to the Queensland public service and Queensland local government. This report presents the findings relating to these two sectors; a separate report examining the QPS was released in June 2006.¹

Structure of the report

This report is divided into four main parts:

- ▶ **Part A** provides a brief description of the survey methodology and the sample.
- ▶ **Part B** describes perceptions among the general public of the behaviour of public service employees, experiences of improper behaviour by these employees and perceptions of complaints processes.
- ▶ **Part C** explores the same issues in relation to local government employees.
- ▶ **Part D** summarises the findings of the survey and compares public perceptions of public service employees with the equivalent perceptions of local government employees.

Parts B and C also show the influences of various socio-demographic factors on responses to the survey questions. In particular, comparisons are made on the basis of gender, age, employment status, level of education and survey region.

¹ Crime and Misconduct Commission 2006, *Public perceptions of the Queensland Police Service: findings from the 2005 Public Attitudes Survey*, CMC, Brisbane.

Part A: Methodology

Survey administration

The 2005 survey employed the same methodology as previous surveys, with the University of Queensland Social Research Centre collecting the data.

The survey sample was drawn from five statistical divisions: Brisbane, South-East Queensland (excluding Brisbane), South-West Queensland, Central Queensland and Far North Queensland.² Quota sampling was used for location and gender to avoid over-sampling. Telephone numbers were drawn at random from a list of all possible telephone numbers in each division, and the sample approximated a 50:50 gender split.

The sample frame included people aged 18 years or over residing in private dwellings in Queensland. One person aged 18 years or over was randomly selected from each household sampled to answer the survey questions. Telephone interviews were conducted using the Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing system. Potential respondents were excluded if they were members of the QPS or local government employees.

The response rate for the survey was 43 per cent — which was similar to the rates for previous public attitudes surveys — and the final sample consisted of 1505 respondents. Survey responses were weighted for age, gender and location to ensure an accurate representation of the state. As with previous surveys, very few differences were found between the weighted and unweighted responses, and the data in this report are therefore based on unweighted responses.

Data analysis

Various statistical techniques were used to analyse the survey data, including frequencies, descriptives, t-tests, cross-tabulations (chi-square analysis) and multivariate analyses (logistic regression).

The bivariate analyses indicated a number of statistically significant associations between socio-demographic factors and survey responses. To exclude confounding between these factors and to determine the most significant predictors of the survey responses, all variables found to be significant at bivariate level were entered into

2 The Queensland Government Office of Economic and Statistical Research and the Australian Bureau of Statistics define 11 statistical regions. To ensure that there are sufficient respondents in each region for statistical purposes, we have combined several regions and refer to five regions only. A complex sampling frame has been used consistently throughout all the surveys to ensure comparability over time. Information about the sampling frame is available from the CMC on request.

logistic regression models. Only the results of the logistic regression models are presented in this report, though the results of bivariate analyses are available from the CMC on request. Odds ratios (ORs) indicate the strength of these associations; p values and confidence intervals indicate the statistical significance and precision of these associations.

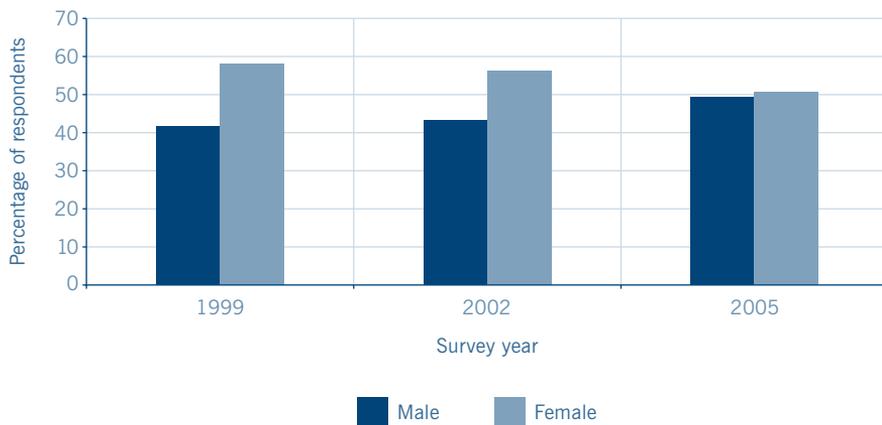
For readers who may be unfamiliar with ORs and confidence intervals, the figures provided can be interpreted in the following way:

- ▶ The larger the size of the OR, the greater is the magnitude of the association between a possible predictor, or risk factor (i.e. a demographic factor such as age or gender), and an outcome (e.g. the expression of a belief in, or agreement with, a statement provided in the survey). The closer the OR is to 1, the smaller is the measure of association; and the larger the OR, the greater is the association. Therefore, an OR of 1.5, for example, indicates that the outcome is about 50 per cent more likely to occur among the predictor or risk factor group than its counterparts; an OR of 2.00 indicates that the outcome is twice as likely to occur among the predictor or risk factor group than its counterparts.
- ▶ The width of the confidence interval indicates the amount of variability inherent in the OR estimates, and thus the precision of the findings and the confidence we can place in the estimate of the OR. For example, a confidence interval of 1.3–1.8 indicates a much smaller degree of variability than one of 1.2–7.6, and is much more informative about the true magnitude of the OR.

Respondents

Gender: Figure 1 shows the proportion of male and female respondents in each survey period. The significantly higher proportions of female respondents included in the 1999 and 2002 survey groups are the result of random, rather than quota, sampling in those years ($p < .001$).

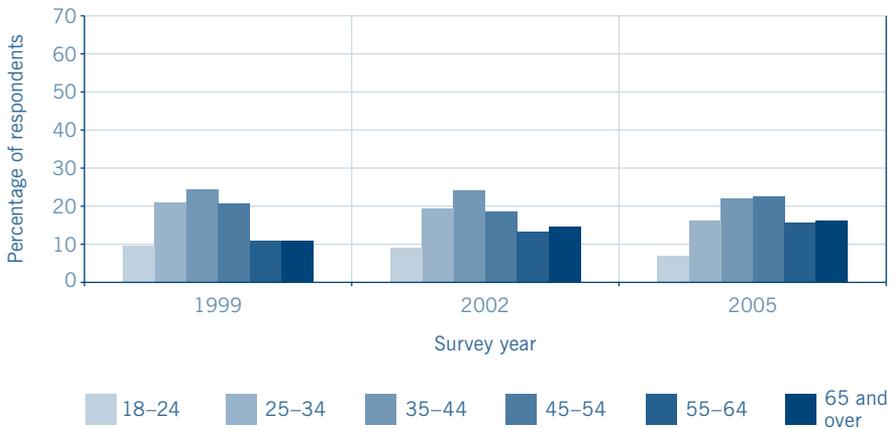
Figure 1. Survey respondents by gender, 1999–2005



Age: The data presented in Figure 2 show significant changes in the age distribution of respondents over time ($p < .001$). From 1999 to 2005 there was an increase in the proportion of respondents aged 55–64 and 65 years and older; correspondingly, there was a decrease in respondents aged 18–24 years. This trend is reflective of Queensland’s ageing population.

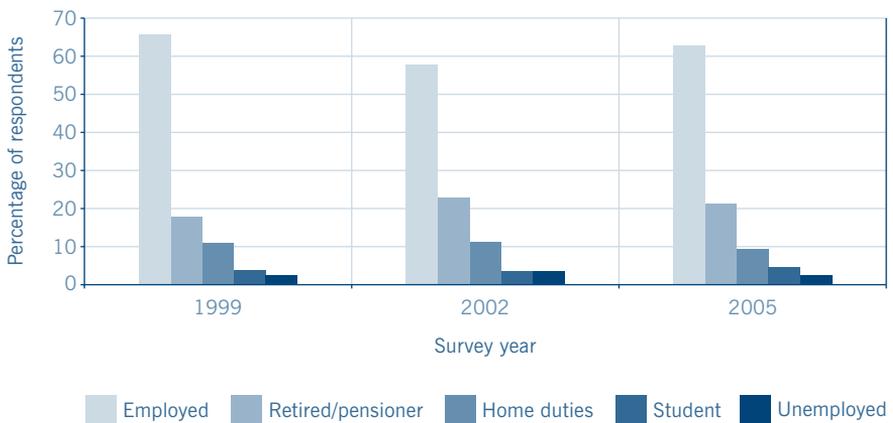
Employment status: As Figure 3 shows, the majority of respondents to each survey were employed. There have been some fluctuations over time in the proportion of respondents who are retired or receiving a pension ($p < .001$).

Figure 2. Survey respondents by age, 1999–2005



Note: In 2005, 1 per cent of respondents did not state their age.

Figure 3. Survey respondents by employment status, 1999–2005



Note: Data exclude a small number of respondents in each survey group who refused to answer this question.

Education: Figure 4 shows a significant decline over time in the proportion of respondents who had not completed secondary school and a complementary increase in the proportion who had completed some tertiary training ($p < .001$).

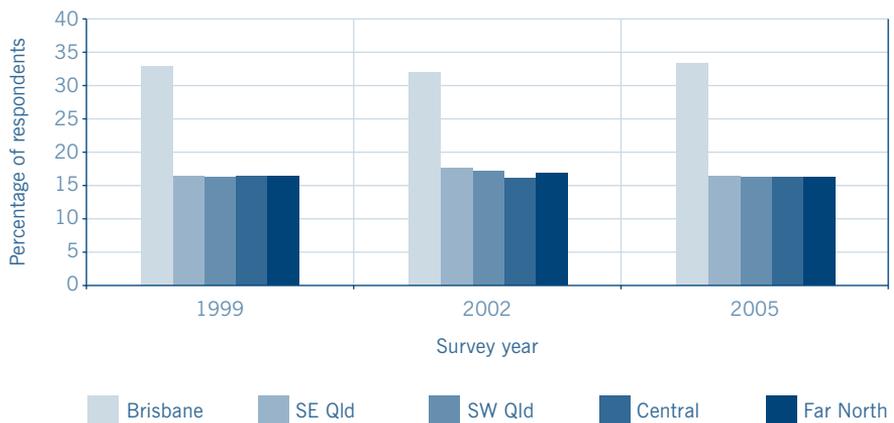
Region: The data presented in Figure 5 show the breakdown of respondents by region. The similarity in proportions across years is a result of quota sampling.

Figure 4. Survey respondents by highest level of education, 1999–2005



Note: Data exclude a small number of respondents in each survey group who refused to answer this question.

Figure 5. Survey respondents by region, 1999–2005



Interpretation of findings

The findings in this report should be interpreted in light of the following cautionary notes:

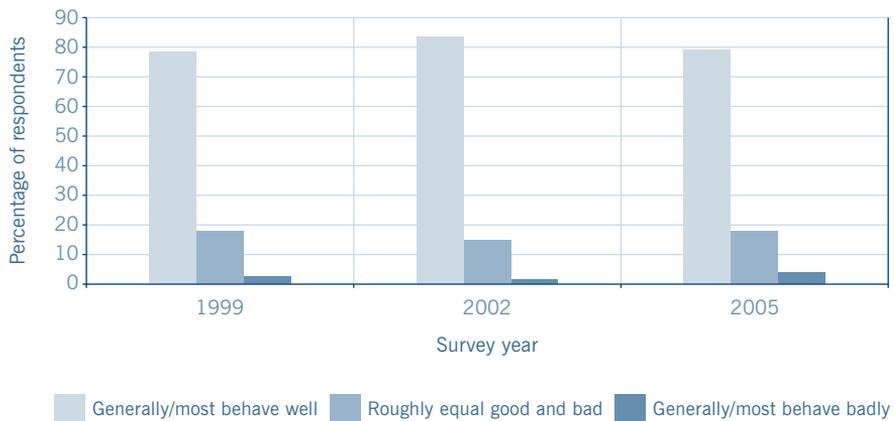
- ▶ The results pertain only to those Queenslanders who reside in a private dwelling, and cannot be generalised to those who, for example, live in shelters or have no fixed address.
- ▶ It is unclear to what extent the media influence public perceptions.

Part B: Behaviour of public service employees

General perceptions

The majority of respondents in the 2005 survey had a favourable view of public service employees' behaviour. Across the last three surveys around 80 per cent of respondents have stated that public service employees 'generally' or 'mostly' behaved well and less than 3 per cent stated that they 'generally' or 'mostly' behaved badly (see Figure 6).³ Further analyses of the 2005 data showed no significant differences in the way respondents answered this question by the various socio-demographic variables collected for the survey.

Figure 6. General perceptions of public service employees' behaviour, 1999–2005



Note: Data exclude a small number of respondents in each survey group who did not answer this question.

Respondents were also asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement that 'most public service employees are honest'. Across the three surveys, more than 75 per cent of respondents stated that they agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.⁴ Multivariate analyses showed that, in 2005, older respondents and those with at least some tertiary education were significantly more likely to agree with the statement than younger respondents and those with lower educational qualifications (see Table 1 and Figure 7, next page, and Figure 8, p. 8).

³ The differences across the years were not statistically significant.

⁴ As note 3.

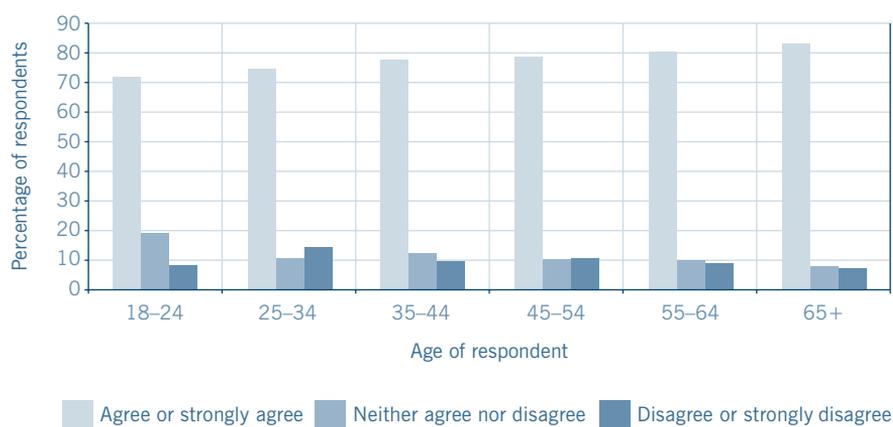
It is important to remember that there are various factors, in addition to the socio-demographic variables presented in this report, that can influence perceptions of public service employees' behaviour. For example, the nature of the contact, and how it was initiated, may account for some differences in perceptions. Unfortunately, data collected in this survey do not allow for examination of such factors. Issues relating to the nature of the contact may be considered in future surveys.

Table 1. Socio-demographic predictors of agreement with the statement that 'most public service employees are honest', 2005

Variable	Significance (p value)	Odds ratio [Exp(B)]	95% confidence interval	
Gender	n.s.	1.089	0.839	1.412
Age (older respondents)	0.000	1.248	1.128	1.381
Education (higher level of education)	0.000	1.513	1.283	1.784
Employment	n.s.	0.927	0.847	1.015
Region	n.s.	0.952	0.873	1.038

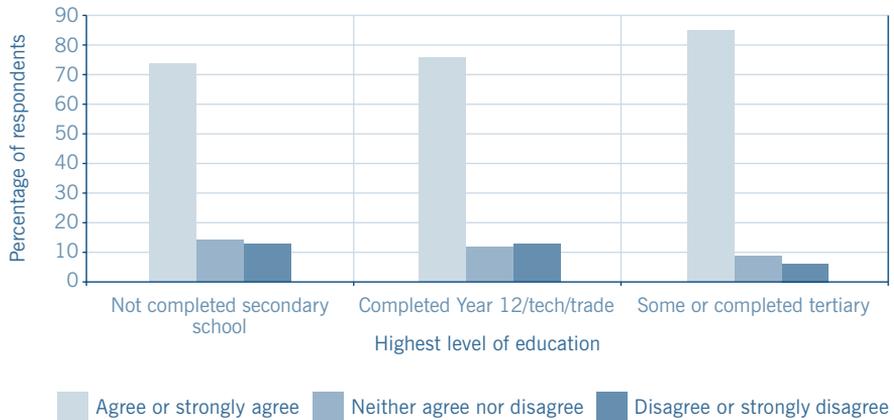
Note: n.s. = not significant.

Figure 7. Agreement with the statement that 'most public service employees are honest' by age, 2005



Note: Data exclude 3 per cent of respondents who did not answer this question or who did not state their age.

Figure 8. Agreement with the statement that ‘most public service employees are honest’ by level of education, 2005

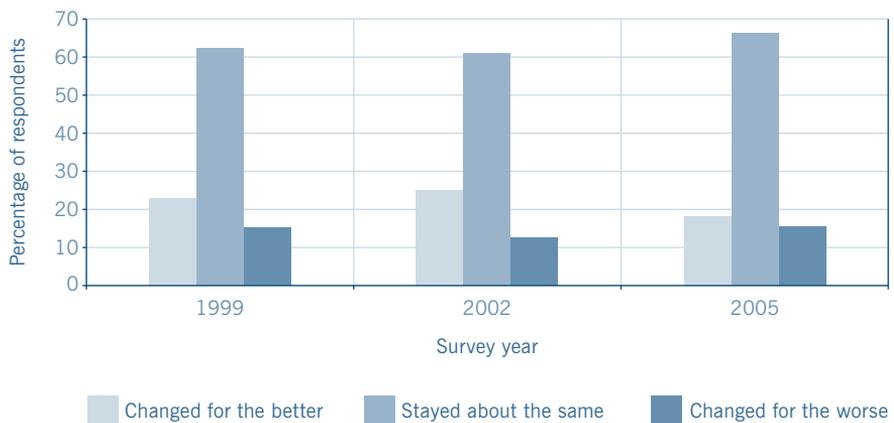


Note: Data exclude four per cent of respondents who did not answer this question or who did not state their highest level of education.

Changes over time

To assess perceptions of change within the public service, respondents were asked to state whether they believed public service employee behaviour in recent years had ‘changed for the better’, ‘stayed about the same’ or ‘changed for the worse’. Figure 9 shows that the majority of respondents to the 1999, 2002 and 2005 surveys (between 60% and 70%) stated that they thought public service employees’ behaviour had stayed about the same.

Figure 9. Perceptions of changes in public service employee behaviour over time, 1999–2005



Note: Data exclude respondents who did not answer this question (between 7% and 16% in each survey group).

In 2005 there was a significant increase in the proportion of people responding in this way (from 62% to 66%) and a corresponding decrease in the proportion who felt that behaviour has changed for the better (from 22% to 18%; $p < .001$). There was no change in the proportion of respondents stating that employee behaviour had changed for the worse.

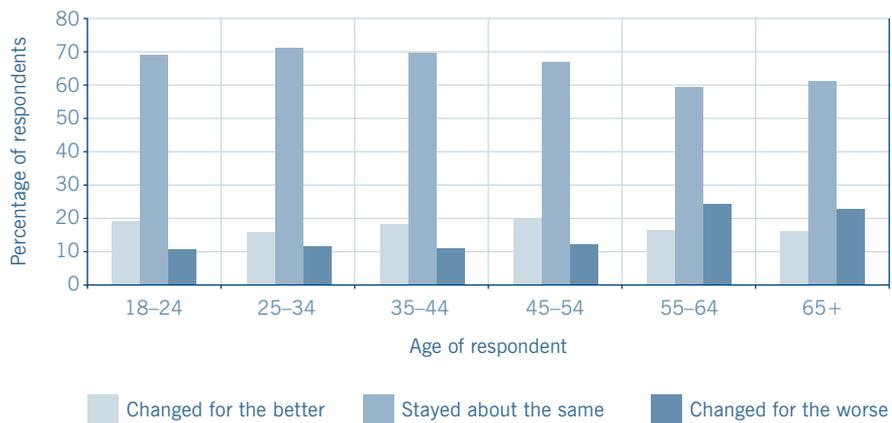
The 2005 data also show that older respondents were around 20–30 per cent more likely than younger respondents to state that public service employees’ behaviour had changed for the worse ($p < .001$; see Table 2 and Figure 10). Figure 10 also shows a corresponding decline in the belief that public service employees’ behaviour has ‘stayed about the same’, as the age of respondents increases.

Table 2. Socio-demographic predictors of the belief that public service employees’ behaviour has changed for the worse, 2005

Variable	Significance (p value)	Odds ratio [Exp(B)]	95% confidence interval	
Gender	n.s.	0.939	0.696	1.265
Age (older respondents)	0.000	1.269	1.122	1.435
Education	n.s.	0.998	0.830	1.201
Employment	n.s.	1.001	0.905	1.107
Region	n.s.	1.000	0.904	1.105

Note: n.s. = not significant.

Figure 10. Perceptions of change in public service employees’ behaviour over time by age, 2005



Note: Data exclude approximately 8% of respondents who did not answer this question or who did not provide their age.

Given the generally favourable responses in each survey to public service employees' behaviour as described above (i.e. that most behave well and are honest), it is not surprising that many respondents felt that the behaviour of public service employees had 'stayed about the same' in recent years.

It is interesting to note, however, that older respondents were significantly more likely to state that public service employee behaviour had changed for the worse.

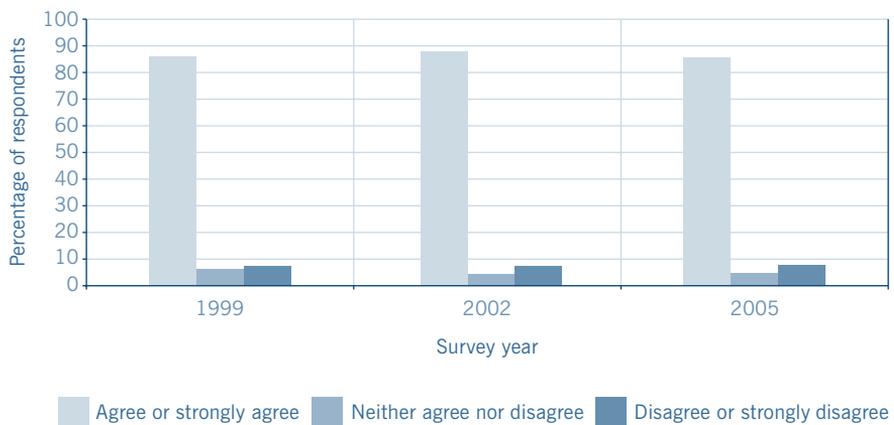
Attitudes to misconduct

In each survey, respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement that 'you will always get some corruption in the public service'. This question was intended to measure respondents' attitudes towards misconduct within the public service.

Figure 11 shows that a vast majority of respondents (more than 85% in each survey group) agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. The proportion peaked slightly in 2002 and then decreased in 2005 ($p < .05$).

In 2005 both age and level of education were shown to have significant influence on respondents' belief that 'you will always get some corruption in the public service' (see Table 3). Specifically, older respondents were almost 20 per cent more likely than younger respondents to agree with the statement. Respondents who had not completed secondary school were also around 20 per cent more likely to agree with this statement than were respondents with higher levels of education.

Figure 11. Agreement with the statement 'you will always get some corruption in the public service', 1999–2005



Note: Data exclude respondents who did not answer this question (between 2% and 4% in each survey group).

Table 3. Socio-demographic predictors of agreement with the statement that 'you will always get some corruption in the public service', 2005

Variable	Significance (p value)	Odds ratio [Exp(B)]	95% confidence interval	
Gender	n.s.	0.930	0.690	1.255
Age (older respondents)	0.000	1.237	1.103	1.386
Education (lower level of education)	0.049	1.211	1.001	1.464
Employment	n.s.	0.946	0.850	1.053
Region	n.s.	1.096	0.990	1.213

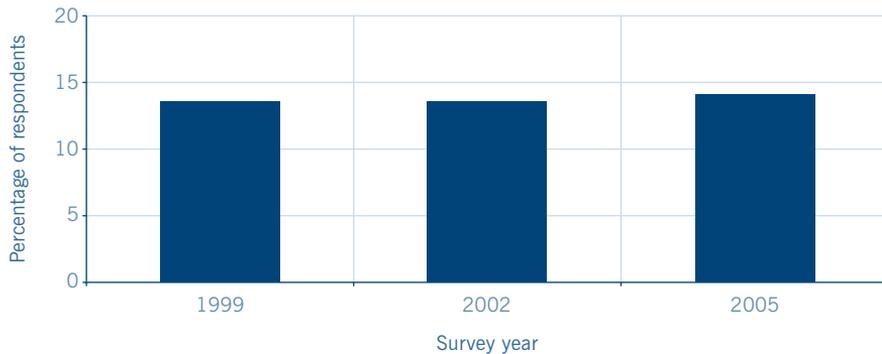
Note: n.s. = not significant.

Experiences of improper behaviour by public service employees

Fourteen per cent of respondents in 2005 reported that a Queensland government employee had behaved improperly in a way that adversely affected either them or someone they knew. This finding is consistent with previous survey results (Figure 12).

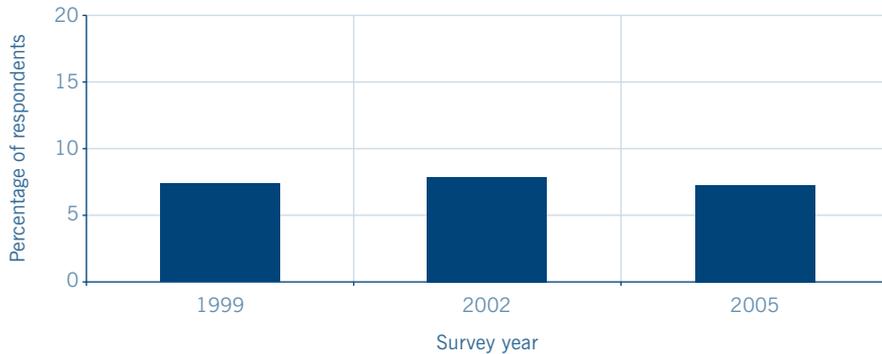
Approximately 7 per cent of the total 2005 sample (or around 50% of those who reported they had experienced improper behaviour) stated that the incident had occurred in the preceding 12 months. This finding is also consistent with previous survey results (see Figure 13, next page).

Figure 12. Proportion of respondents who stated a public service employee had behaved improperly (ever), 1999–2005



Note: Percentages are based on the total number of respondents.

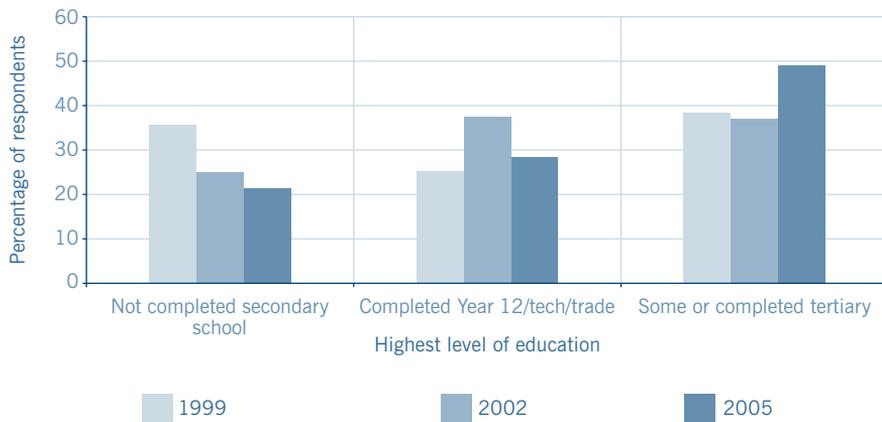
Figure 13. Proportion of respondents who stated that a public service employee had behaved improperly (in the last 12 months), 1999–2005



Note: Percentages are based on the total number of respondents.

Multivariate analyses showed that, in 2005, respondents with a tertiary education were about 40 per cent more likely than respondents with lower levels of education to state that a public service employee had behaved improperly towards them, or someone they knew, in the preceding 12 months (see Figure 14 and Table 4).

Figure 14. Experiences of improper behaviour by public service employees in the last 12 months by level of education, 1999–2005



Notes:

- 1 Percentages are based on the number of respondents who reported experiencing improper behaviour in each survey group.
- 2 Data exclude a small number of respondents who did not provide their age.

Table 4. Socio-demographic predictors of experiences of improper behaviour by a public service employee in the last 12 months, 2005

Variable	Significance (p value)	Odds ratio [Exp(B)]	95% confidence interval	
Gender	n.s.	1.378	0.920	2.064
Age	n.s.	1.115	0.957	1.300
Education (higher level of education)	0.009	1.412	1.090	1.830
Employment	n.s.	0.980	0.846	1.135
Region	n.s.	1.037	0.909	1.184

Note: n.s. = not significant.

Forms of improper behaviour

In each survey, respondents were asked to indicate in what way they felt the behaviour of a public service employee was improper. When considering experiences within the last 12 months, the most common forms of improper behaviour given by respondents to the 2005 survey were that the employee had been unfriendly, rude or arrogant during the encounter or, to a lesser extent, that they had behaved unreasonably or unfairly or were uncaring (see Table 5). These responses have consistently been the most common across all three surveys. However, it is encouraging to note that the proportions have substantially and steadily declined over the years; for example, 77 per cent of respondents in 1999 stated that an employee had been ‘unfriendly, rude, arrogant or too casual’ compared with only 47 per cent in 2005.

Reports of illegal behaviour, the release of confidential information, misuse of money or resources, and stealing were far less common. From the perspective of respondents to the survey at least, serious forms of misconduct are rare in the public service and some are non-existent.

Table 5. Forms of improper behaviour by public service employees in the preceding 12 months, 1999–2005

	Percentage of respondents			
	1999 (n = 111)	2002 (n = 123)	2005 (n = 110)	Change since 2002
Manner unfriendly/rude/arrogant/too casual	76.6	51.2	47.3	-7.7*
Behaved unreasonably or unfairly	34.2	26.0	24.5	-5.7
Uncaring	31.5	24.4	12.7	-47.8*
Did wrong thing/were incompetent	20.7	17.1	12.7	-25.5
Did nothing/didn’t do enough	19.8	17.1	10.0	-41.4
Did not keep person informed/did not come back	2.7	6.5	5.5	-16.1
Behaved illegally/broke the rules	3.6	3.3	4.5	+39.8

(Continued)

Table 5, continued

	Percentage of respondents			
	1999 (n = 111)	2002 (n = 123)	2005 (n = 110)	Change since 2002
Slow to arrive/did not come when sent for/no one available	3.6	0.8	3.6	+347.3
Favouritism	1.8	1.6	2.7	+67.7
Stole money or goods	0.0	0.8	2.7	+235.5
Racist language or behaviour	1.8	1.6	1.8	+11.8
Took a bribe	0.0	0.0	1.8	–
Released confidential information	2.7	2.4	0.9	–62.7
Used undue force or violence or assaulted someone	0.9	1.6	0.9	–44.1
Failed to declare a conflict of interest	0.0	0.0	0.9	–
Cheated on the system	0.9	0.0	0.0	–
Misused public money or resources	1.8	0.0	0.0	–
Other	11.7	14.6	14.5	–0.6

Notes:

* Differences were statistically significant; $p < .001$

1 Numbers will add up to more than 100% because multiple responses were allowed for this question.

2 Large percentage change may be the result of small sample size.

Action taken about improper behaviour

Survey respondents who indicated that they had experienced improper behaviour by a government employee were asked whether they had ever felt like making an official complaint.⁵ Less than 5 per cent of the total 2005 sample, but about 60 per cent of those dissatisfied in the preceding 12 months, stated that they had felt like making a complaint (see Table 6). However, only about 2 per cent of the total sample (30% of those dissatisfied in the preceding 12 months) actually made or attempted to make an official complaint.⁶

These results are consistent with the 2002 findings, but show an increased willingness to complain when compared with respondents in 1999. Expressed as a ratio, one in two people who felt like complaining in 2005 actually made or attempted to make a complaint, compared with only one in three people in 1999. This is a promising result, as it may reflect greater public confidence in complaints processes.

5 Official complaints are those made to the police, the CMC, a member of parliament or local government, a lawyer, the Ombudsman, etc.

6 No significant differences were found between respondents from different socio-demographic groups for either feeling like complaining or actually making complaints.

Table 6. Summary of respondents who had experienced improper behaviour by a public service employee, 1999–2005

	1999 (n = 1502)	2002 (n = 1551)	2005 (n = 1505)
Experienced improper behaviour (ever)	204 (13.6%)	212 (13.7%)	213 (14.2%)
Experienced improper behaviour in preceding 12 months	111 (7.4%)	123 (7.9%)	110 (7.3%)
Felt like making a complaint	68 (4.5%)	72 (4.6%)	66 (4.4%)
Made or tried to make a complaint	23 (1.5%)	42 (2.7%)	33 (2.2%)
Ratio of 'felt like' complaining to 'made or tried to make' a complaint	3.0 : 1	1.7 : 1	2.0 : 1

Note: A small number of people who made or tried to make an official complaint initially indicated that they did not feel like complaining.

Reasons for not making a complaint

Respondents who reported that they had experienced improper behaviour by a public service employee in the preceding 12 months, and who stated that they had felt like complaining but did not do so, were asked to provide reasons why they did not make a complaint. As Figure 15 (next page) shows, the most common reason across the last three surveys was a belief that 'it would not do any good'. While there has been a decrease in 2005 in the proportion of respondents giving this reason, differences between years were not statistically significant.

Confidence in complaints processes

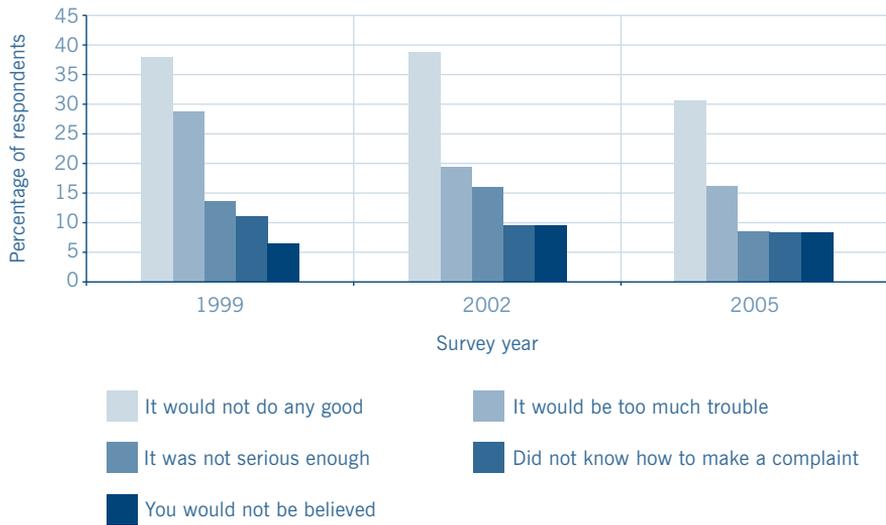
In each survey, respondents who had never made an official complaint were asked how confident they would be, if they were to make a complaint, that the matter would be properly investigated.

While Figure 16 (next page) shows a decrease in 2005 since 2002 in the proportion of respondents who stated they would be 'very' or 'fairly' confident of a proper investigation, the results are similar to those found in the 1999 survey.

Multivariate analyses indicated that there were gender and age differences in these views. Females were about 50 per cent more likely than males, and younger people were about 10 per cent more likely than older people, to report confidence in complaints processes (see Table 7, p. 17).

The proportion of respondents indicating that they were 'not very' or 'not at all' confident that a complaint would be investigated properly has remained relatively stable, at around 30 per cent of all respondents to the last three surveys.

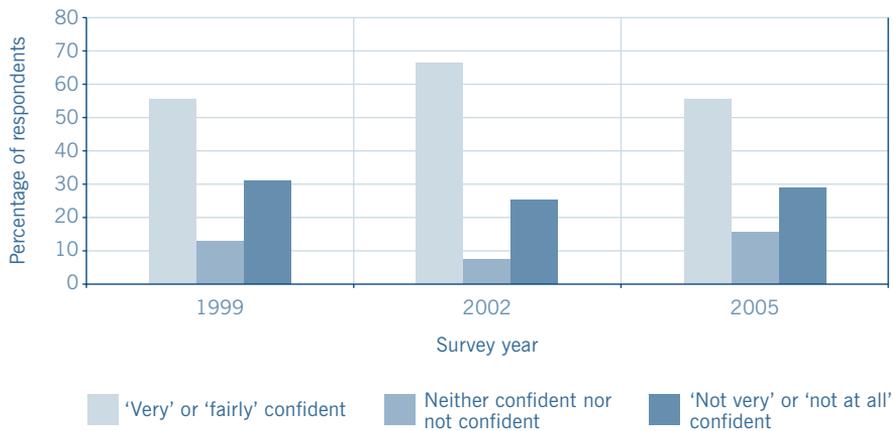
Figure 15. Reason for not making an official complaint, 1999–2005



Notes:

- 1 Data are based on those respondents who reported experiencing improper behaviour by a government employee in the preceding 12 months and who stated that they felt like making a complaint but chose not to.
- 2 Multiple responses were allowed for this question.
- 3 Data exclude respondents who gave some 'other' reason, or who stated 'don't know' or 'can't remember'.

Figure 16. Confidence that a complaint would be properly investigated, 1999–2005



Note: Data exclude a number of respondents in each survey group who did not answer this question.

Table 7. Socio-demographic predictors of being 'very or fairly' confident of a proper investigation, 2005

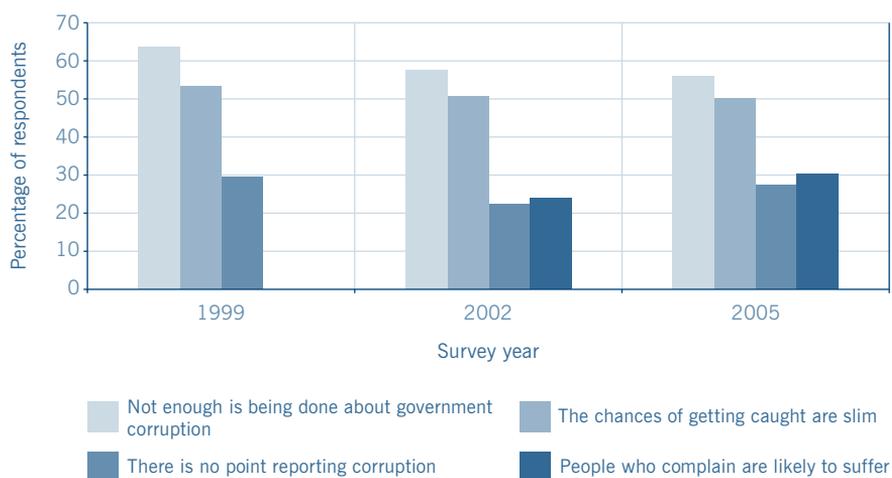
Variable	Significance (p value)	Odds ratio [Exp(B)]	95% confidence interval	
Gender	0.000	1.542	1.244	1.911
Age (younger respondents)	0.007	1.124	1.033	1.223
Education	n.s.	0.971	0.858	1.122
Employment	n.s.	0.978	0.907	1.054
Region	n.s.	1.055	0.981	1.134

Note: n.s. = not significant.

Factors affecting public confidence in complaints processes

To further explore factors that affect public confidence in complaints systems, respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with various statements about the public service. Figure 17 shows the proportions of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with each of the statements presented.

Figure 17. Agreement with statements reflecting public confidence in the public service, 1999–2005



Notes:

- 1 Data show proportions of respondents who 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with each statement
- 2 For each question, data exclude a small proportion of respondents in each survey group who did not answer the question.
- 3 The question 'people who complain are likely to suffer' was not asked in the 1999 survey.

In 2005, 56 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that 'not enough is being done about government corruption'; this was a significant decrease from the 1999 figure of 63 per cent ($p < .01$). The 2005 data show that respondents who had not completed secondary school were almost 40 per cent more likely than respondents with higher levels of education to agree with this statement ($p = .000$).

Across the last three surveys, approximately 50 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the chances of employees getting caught doing something corrupt in the public service were slim. In 2005, male respondents were more than 40 per cent more likely than female respondents to agree with this statement ($p = .002$). Older respondents and those who had not completed secondary school were also more likely to agree that the chances of getting caught doing something corrupt were slim ($p = .006$ and $p = .042$ respectively).

Between 20 and 30 per cent of respondents to each survey from 1999 to 2005 agreed that 'there is no point reporting corruption as nothing useful will be done about it'. In 2005, respondents who had not completed secondary school were about 40 per cent more likely than those with higher levels of education to agree with this statement ($p = .000$). Those who were retired or on a pension were about 10 per cent more likely than respondents in other 'employment' categories to agree with this statement ($p = .024$).

In the last two surveys, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the statement that 'people who complain against public service employees are likely to suffer'. In 2005 almost 30 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, compared with 24 per cent in 2002. Respondents who were retired or on a pension were about 15 per cent more likely than respondents in other employment categories to agree with this statement ($p = .001$).

Experiences with complaints processes

Over the past three surveys only 98 respondents had made, or attempted to make, an official complaint in the 12 months preceding their participation in the survey, after experiencing what they perceived to be improper conduct by a state government employee. Therefore, caution should be applied to the following analyses as these estimates are based on a small number of respondents only.

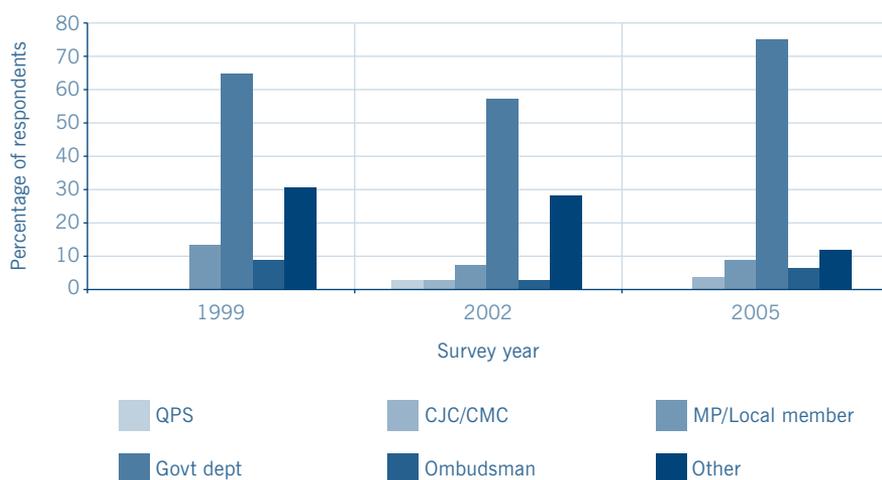
These respondents were asked to whom they had made, or attempted to make, their most recent complaint. Just over three-quarters of respondents in 2005 stated that they had reported the matter to the public service department in which the behaviour had occurred. While this was also the predominant course of action for respondents in previous surveys, the proportion in 2005 was noticeably higher than in previous years (see Figure 18).

Only a small proportion of respondents in 2005 had taken their complaint to a member of parliament or local member (9%) or to the CJC/CMC (3%). These proportions are similar to those in previous years.

The proportion of matters reported to some ‘other’ agency, including the media, decreased from around 30 per cent in 1999 and 2002 to just over 10 per cent in 2005.

The large increase in matters reported directly to the relevant government department in 2005 may reflect increasing public awareness of the principle of devolution. Since the CMC came into existence in 2002 it has referred many allegations of misconduct to agencies to investigate themselves, with the CMC usually only overseeing or monitoring the investigation.⁷ Many of the issues uncovered in the survey related to customer service problems rather than serious forms of misconduct, so it is appropriate that these matters were addressed directly with the agency.

Figure 18. Agency to which complaints were reported, 1999–2005



Notes:

- 1 Data are based on those respondents who reported that they had made a complaint about an incident that had occurred within the preceding 12 months.
- 2 Multiple responses to this question were allowed.

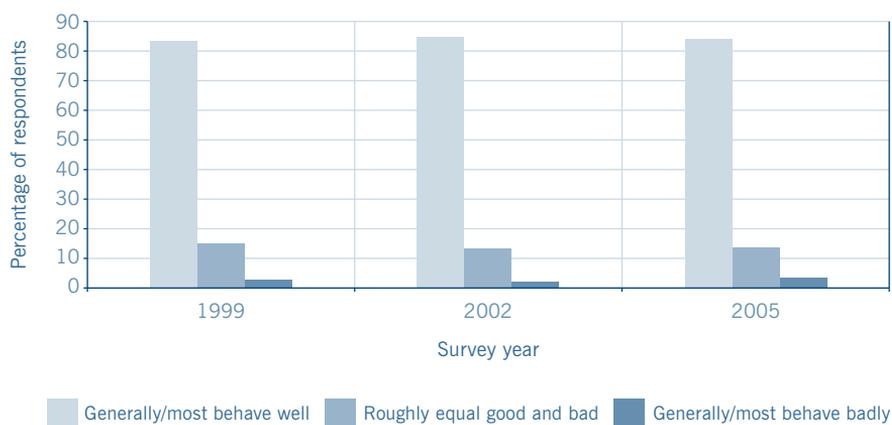
⁷ The aim of the CMC’s misconduct function is to raise integrity and standards of conduct in the Queensland public sector. The principle of devolution, spelt out in the *Crime and Misconduct Act 2001*, gives public sector managers responsibility to prevent and deal with misconduct within their agency, which generates a strong culture of integrity within the agency. The CMC’s capacity-building role and prevention function provides support for managers. The CMC continues to investigate serious misconduct, matters where the public interest requires an independent investigation, and matters where the agency lacks the capacity to investigate. The CMC also retains the ability to monitor and review any matter dealt with by any agency.

Part C: Behaviour of local government employees

General perceptions

The majority of respondents in the 2005 survey held a favourable view of local government employees. Across the last three surveys almost 85 per cent of respondents stated that employees ‘generally’ or ‘mostly’ behaved well. Only about 2 per cent of respondents in each survey group felt that local government employees ‘generally’ or ‘mostly’ behaved badly (see Figure 19).⁸

Figure 19. General perceptions of local government employee behaviour, 1999–2005



Note: Data exclude a small number of respondents in each survey group who did not answer this question.

Multivariate analyses show that in 2005 age and educational achievements significantly influenced the respondents’ answers to this question. As illustrated in Table 8, older respondents were about 10 per cent more likely than younger respondents to state that local government employees behaved well. Respondents with at least some tertiary education were also almost 30 per cent more likely than respondents with lower levels of education to state that local government employees behaved well.

⁸ The differences across the years were not statistically significant.

Table 8. Socio-demographic predictors of the belief that local government employees 'generally' or 'mostly' behave well, 2005

Variable	Significance (p value)	Odds ratio [Exp(B)]	95% confidence interval	
Gender	n.s.	0.988	0.745	1.310
Age (older respondents)	0.019	1.141	1.022	1.273
Education (higher level of education)	0.010	1.263	1.058	1.508
Employment	n.s.	1.037	0.937	1.146
Region	n.s.	1.061	0.964	1.167

Note: n.s. = not significant.

Respondents were also asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement that 'most local government employees are honest'. Across the three survey periods, almost 80 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.⁹ Multivariate analyses revealed that responses varied significantly on a number of socio-demographic variables in 2005. Male respondents and those with higher educational qualifications were around 40 per cent more likely than females and those with lower levels of education to agree with this statement (see Table 9 below, and Figures 20 and 21, next page). Older respondents were around 20 per cent more likely than younger respondents to agree that most local government employees were honest.

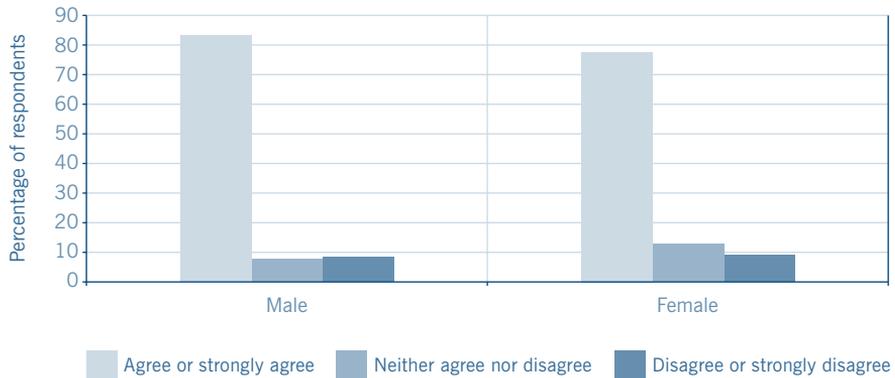
Table 9. Socio-demographic predictors of agreement with the statement that 'most local government employees are honest', 2005

Variable	Significance (p value)	Odds ratio [Exp(B)]	95% confidence interval	
Gender (males)	0.017	1.394	1.061	1.831
Age (older respondents)	0.001	1.198	1.078	1.331
Education (higher level of education)	0.000	1.405	1.184	1.667
Employment	n.s.	1.016	0.924	1.118
Region	n.s.	0.964	0.880	1.055

Note: n.s. = not significant.

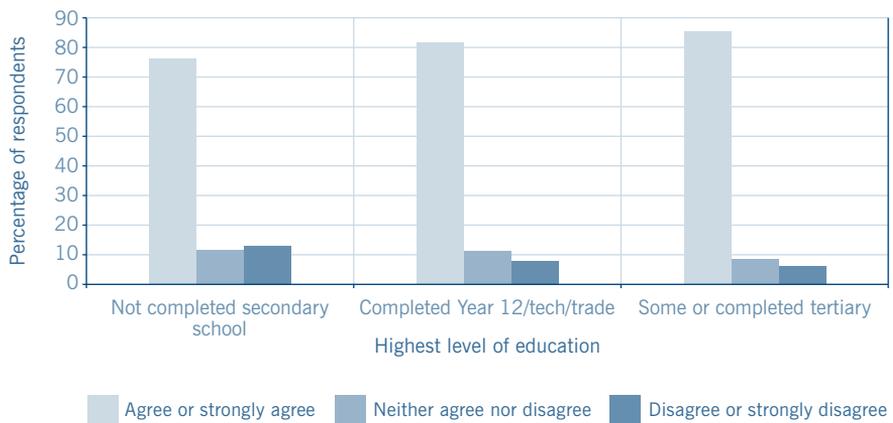
⁹ The differences across the years were not statistically significant.

Figure 20. Agreement with the statement that ‘most local government employees are honest’ by gender, 2005



Note: Data exclude 3% of respondents who did not answer this question or who did not state their gender.

Figure 21. Agreement with the statement that ‘most local government employees are honest’ by level of education, 2005



Note: Data exclude 4% of respondents who did not answer this question or who did not state their highest level of education.

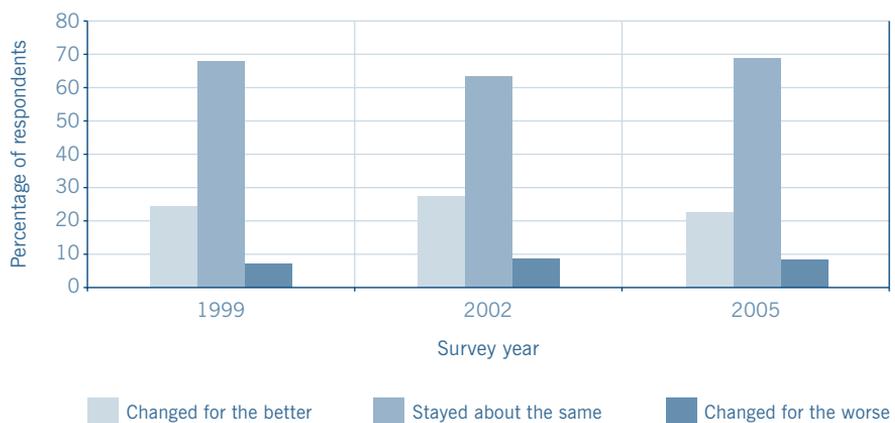
Changes over time

To assess perceptions of change within local government, survey respondents were asked to state whether they believed local government employee behaviour had ‘changed for the better’, ‘stayed about the same’ or ‘changed for the worse’ in recent years. Figure 22 shows that, in each survey from 1999 to 2005, the majority of respondents (between 60% and 70%) stated that they thought local government employees’ behaviour had stayed about the same. The 2005 survey data are similar to those for 1999; however, in 2002 there was a significant decrease in the number

of people responding in this way (from 68% to 63%) and a corresponding increase in the proportion who felt that local government employees' behaviour had changed for the better (from 24% to 28%; $p < .01$). There was no change in the number of respondents stating that employees' behaviour had changed for the worse. Multivariate analyses revealed no significant differences among respondents in 2005 in the way they responded to this question on the basis of any socio-demographic variables.

Given the generally favourable perceptions of local government employees' behaviour described above (i.e. that most behaved well and were honest), it is not surprising that many respondents felt that the behaviour of local government employees had 'stayed about the same' in recent years.

Figure 22. Perceived changes in local government employees' behaviour over time, 1999–2005



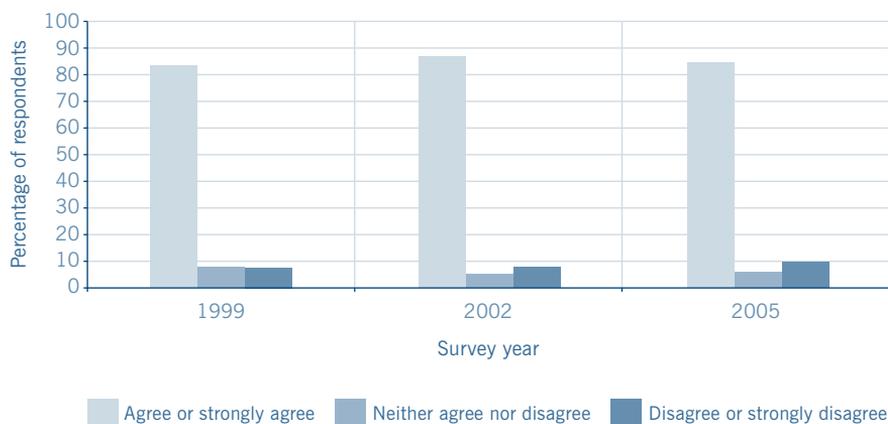
Note: Data exclude respondents who did not answer this question (between 4% and 12% in each survey group).

Attitudes to misconduct

In each survey, respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement that 'you will always get some corruption in local government'. This question was intended to measure respondents' attitudes towards misconduct within local government. Approximately 85 per cent of respondents to each survey agreed or strongly agreed with the statement (see Figure 23, next page).

In 2005 both age and level of education were shown to influence respondents' attitudes to misconduct significantly (see Table 10, next page). Specifically, older respondents were about 10 per cent more likely than younger respondents to agree that there would always be some corruption in local government. Respondents who had not completed secondary school were almost 30 per cent more likely to agree with this statement when compared with respondents with higher levels of education.

Figure 23. Level of agreement with the statement that 'you will always get some corruption in local government', 1999–2005



Note: Data exclude respondents who did not answer this question (between 2% and 5%) in each survey group.

Table 10. Socio-demographic predictors of agreement with the statement that 'you will always get some corruption in local government, 2005

Variable	Significance (p value)	Odds ratio [Exp(B)]	95% confidence interval	
Gender	n.s.	0.853	0.639	1.140
Age (older respondents)	0.030	1.131	1.012	1.264
Education (lower level of education)	0.003	1.293	1.076	1.553
Employment	n.s.	0.925	0.835	1.024
Region	n.s.	1.004	0.912	1.106

Note: n.s. = not significant.

Experience of improper behaviour by local government employees

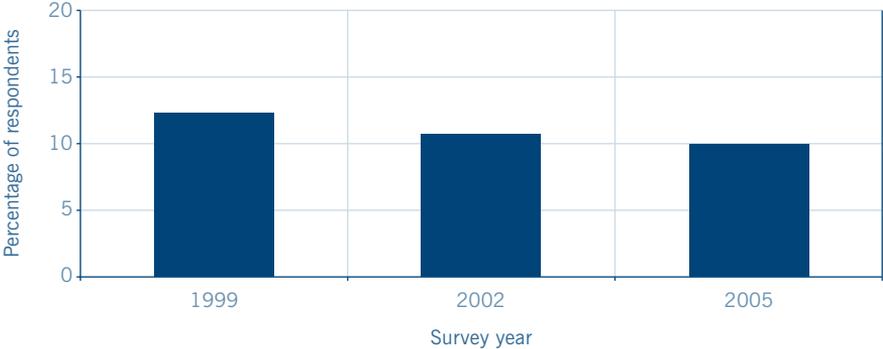
One in ten respondents in the 2005 survey reported that a Queensland local government employee had behaved improperly in a way that affected them or someone they knew. This proportion has declined slightly over the years, from about 12 per cent in 1999 to 10 per cent in 2005 (see Figure 24).¹⁰

Approximately five per cent of the total 2005 sample (or just over 50% of those who reported they had experienced improper behaviour) stated that the incident had occurred in the last 12 months. This figure has also decreased steadily, albeit very slightly, since earlier surveys (see Figure 25).

Multivariate analyses showed no differences in experiences of improper behaviour by a local government employee based on any of the demographic variables.

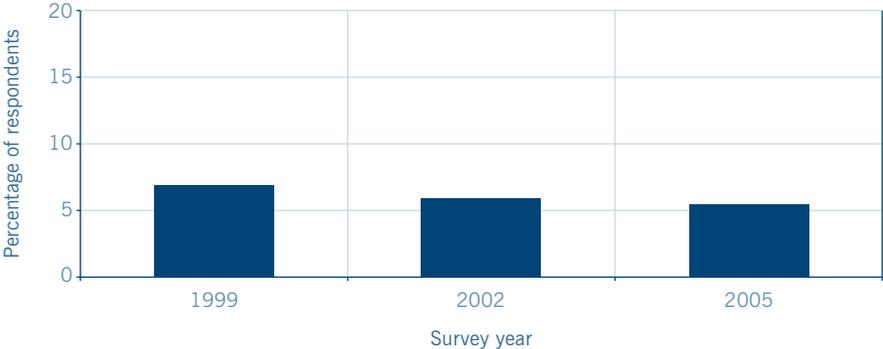
¹⁰ The difference between years is not statistically significant.

Figure 24. Proportion of respondents who stated that a local government employee had behaved improperly (ever), 1999–2005



Note: Percentages are based on the total number of respondents.

Figure 25. Proportion of respondents who stated that a local government employee had behaved improperly (in the preceding 12 months), 1999–2005



Note: Percentages are based on the total number of respondents.

Forms of improper behaviour

In each survey, respondents were asked to indicate why they felt the behaviour of the local government employee had been improper. When considering experiences within the preceding 12 months, the most common form of improper behaviour encountered by respondents to the 2005 survey was that the employee had been unfriendly, rude or arrogant during the encounter (see Table 11, next page). This has consistently been the most common response across the last three surveys. There was an increase in the proportion of people giving this response between 2002 and 2005 (from 38% to 48%), but the proportion in 2005 was smaller than that in 1999 (56%).

The second most common response was that the employee had behaved unreasonably or unfairly. The proportion of respondents giving this reason has declined consistently over the years, from 36 per cent in 1999 to 22 per cent in 2005.

Reports of illegal behaviour, the release of confidential information, misuse of money or resources, and stealing were far less common. From the perspective of respondents to this survey at least, serious forms of misconduct are rare in local government.

Table 11. Forms of improper behaviour by local government employees in the preceding 12 months, 1999–2005

	Percentage of respondents			
	1999 (n = 104)	2002 (n = 91)	2005 (n = 81)	Change since 2002
Manner unfriendly/rude/arrogant/too casual	55.8	38.5	48.1	+25.2
Behaved unreasonably or unfairly	36.5	34.1	22.2	-34.8
Uncaring	25.0	23.1	13.6	-41.2
Did wrong thing/were incompetent	20.2	20.9	11.1	-46.8
Slow to arrive/did not come when sent for/no one available	1.0	1.1	7.4	+574.1
Did nothing/didn't do enough	18.3	16.5	6.2	-62.6
Behaved illegally/broke the rules	3.8	7.7	3.7	-51.9
Cheated on the system	2.9	3.3	3.7	+12.3
Favouritism	5.8	4.4	2.5	-43.8
Did not keep person informed/did not come back	3.8	3.3	2.5	-25.1
Misused public money or resources	1.9	2.2	2.5	+12.3
Racist language or behaviour	2.9	2.2	2.5	+12.3
Released confidential information	1.0	0.0	0.0	-
Stole money or goods	0.0	1.1	0.0	-100.0
Used undue force or violence or assaulted someone	1.9	2.2	0.0	-100.0
Other	16.3	6.6	13.6	+106.0

Notes:

- 1 Numbers will add up to more than 100% because multiple responses were allowed for this question.
- 2 Large percentage change may be the result of small sample size.

Action taken about improper behaviour

Respondents who indicated that they had experienced improper behaviour by a local government employee were asked whether they had ever felt like making an official complaint. Only 4 per cent of the total 2005 sample — but 70 per cent of those dissatisfied in the preceding 12 months — stated that they had felt like making a complaint (see Table 12). However, only about 2 per cent of the total sample (44% of

those dissatisfied in the preceding 12 months) actually made or attempted to make an official complaint.¹¹

These results are consistent with those from previous surveys and show a reasonable willingness to complain about improper behaviour. When this is expressed as a ratio, about two out of every three people who felt like complaining in 2005 actually made or attempted to make a complaint. In 1999 the ratio was slightly higher (i.e. one out of two people making a complaint). This is a very promising finding for local government and may reflect improved public confidence in complaints processes.

Table 12. Summary of respondents who had experienced improper behaviour by a local government employee, 1999–2005

	1999 (n = 1502)	2002 (n = 1551)	2005 (n = 1505)
Experienced improper behaviour (ever)	186 (12.4%)	168 (10.8%)	150 (10.0%)
Experienced improper behaviour in preceding 12 months	104 (6.9%)	91 (5.9%)	81 (5.4%)
Felt like making a complaint	69 (4.6%)	48 (3.1%)	56 (3.7%)
Made or tried to make a complaint	39 (2.6%)	34 (2.2%)	35 (2.3%)
Ratio of 'felt like' complaining to 'made or tried to make' a complaint	1.8 : 1	1.4 : 1	1.6 : 1

Note: A small number of people who made or tried to make an official complaint initially indicated that they did not feel like complaining.

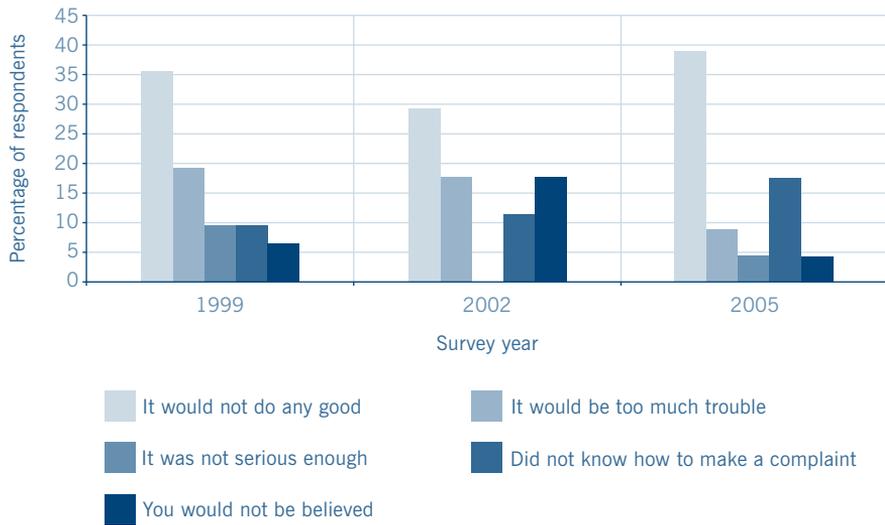
Reasons for not making a complaint

Respondents who reported that they had experienced improper behaviour by a local government employee in the preceding 12 months, and who stated that they had felt like complaining but did not do so, were asked to provide reasons why they did not make a complaint. As Figure 26 (next page) shows, the most common reason provided across the last three surveys was a belief that 'it would not do any good'. The proportion of respondents giving this reason decreased from 35 per cent to 29 per cent between 1999 and 2002, before increasing again to 39 per cent in 2005.¹² The proportion of respondents who stated that they did not know how to make a complaint rose from about 10 per cent in 1999 to about 17 per cent in 2005.

11 No significant differences were found between respondents from different socio-demographic groups either feeling like or actually making complaints.

12 Differences between years were not statistically significant. This may be due to insufficient power to detect a significant difference, given the small sample size — only 71 respondents across the three years indicated that they felt like making a complaint but chose not to.

Figure 26. Reason for not making an official complaint, 1999–2005



Notes:

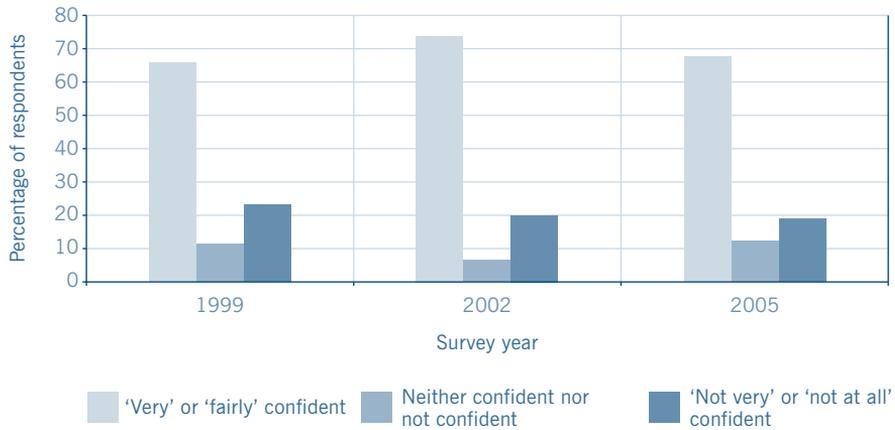
- 1 Data are based on those respondents who reported they had experienced improper behaviour by a local government employee in the last 12 months and who stated that they had felt like making a complaint but chose not to.
- 2 Multiple responses were allowed for this question.
- 3 Data exclude respondents who gave some ‘other’ reason, or who stated ‘don’t know’ or ‘can’t remember’.

Confidence in complaints processes

In each survey, respondents who have never made an official complaint were asked how confident they would be, if they were to make a complaint, that the matter would be properly investigated. Figure 27 shows a decrease in 2005 in the proportion of respondents who stated they would be ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ confident of a proper investigation, after a peak in 2002 ($p < .001$). The proportion of respondents indicating that they were ‘not very’ or ‘not at all’ confident that a complaint would be investigated properly has remained relatively stable, at around 20 per cent of all respondents to the last three surveys.

Multivariate analyses revealed no significant differences among respondents in their level of confidence on the basis of the socio-demographic variables.

Figure 27. Confidence that a complaint would be properly investigated, 1999–2005

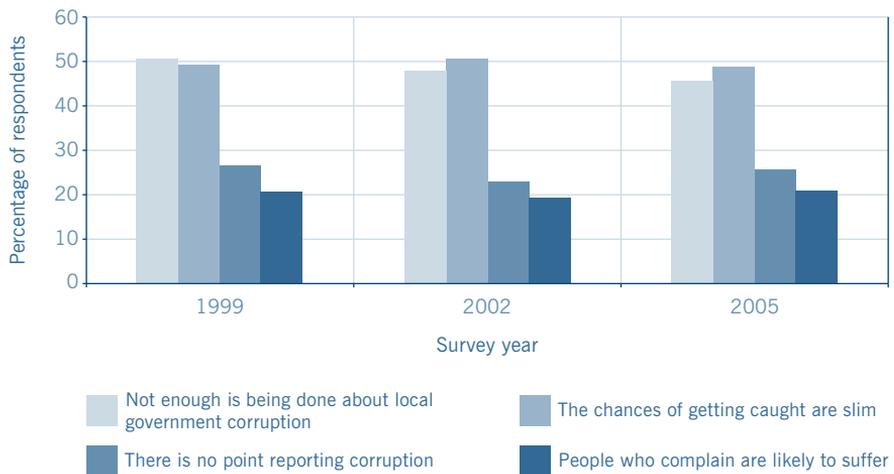


Note: Data exclude a small number of respondents (between 6% and 8%) in each survey group who did not answer this question.

Factors affecting public confidence in complaints processes

To further explore factors that affect public confidence in complaints systems, respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with various statements about local government. Figure 28 shows the proportions of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with each of the statements presented.

Figure 28. Level of agreement with statements reflecting public confidence, 1999–2005



Notes:

- 1 Data show proportions of respondents who 'agree' or 'strongly agree'.
- 2 For each question, data exclude a small proportion of respondents in each survey group who did not answer the question.

In 2005, 46 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that ‘not enough is being done about local government corruption’ — down from 51 per cent in 1999. The 2005 data show that respondents who had not completed secondary school were almost 40 per cent more likely than respondents with higher levels of education to agree with this statement ($p = .000$).

Across the last three surveys, approximately 50 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that ‘the chances of getting caught doing something corrupt in a local government job are slim’. In 2005, male respondents were more than 50 per cent more likely than female respondents to agree with this statement ($p = .000$).

Around 25 per cent of respondents to each survey agreed that ‘there is no point reporting corruption as nothing useful will be done about it’. Respondents who had not completed secondary school were about 60 per cent more likely than those with higher educational achievements to agree with this statement ($p = .000$).

In the last three surveys about 20 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that ‘people who complain against local government employees are likely to suffer’. In 2005, respondents who had not completed secondary school were almost 30 per cent more likely than those with a higher level of education to agree with this statement ($p = .003$). Respondents from North and South-West Queensland were about 15 per cent more likely than respondents from other areas of the state to agree with the statement ($p = .003$).

Experiences with complaints processes

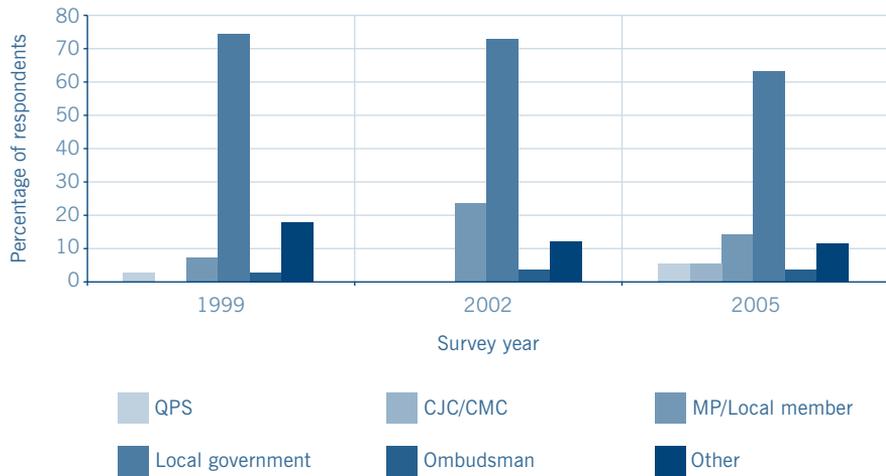
Over the past three surveys only 108 respondents had made, or attempted to make, an official complaint in the 12 months preceding their participation in the survey, after experiencing what they believed to be improper conduct by a local government employee. Therefore, caution should be applied to the following analyses as these estimates are based on a small number of respondents only.

These respondents were asked to whom they had made, or attempted to make, their most recent complaint. Just over 60 per cent of respondents in 2005 stated that they had reported the matter to the local government in which the behaviour had occurred. While this was also the predominant course of action for respondents to previous surveys, the proportion in 2005 was much lower than in previous years (see Figure 29).

Taking their complaint to a member of parliament or local member was the second most common avenue in 2002 and 2005, but the proportion in 2005 was much lower (14% in 2005; 24% in 2002). Only a small proportion of respondents reported their complaints to the CMC or the QPS in 2005 (less than 6% in each case).

The proportion of matters reported to some ‘other’ agency (including the Department of Local Government and Planning and the media) halved between 1999 and 2002, and remained low in 2005.

Figure 29. Agency to which complaints were reported, 1999–2005



Notes:

- 1 Data are based on those respondents who reported that they had made a complaint about an incident that had occurred within the preceding 12 months.
- 2 Multiple responses to this question were allowed.
- 3 The decline in 2005 in the proportion of respondents reporting the matter to their local government or to an MP or local member, without a corresponding increase in other categories, is due to the capacity for multiple responses. In 2002 respondents were more likely to complain to more than one agency than in 2005.

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

Overall, in 2005 public perceptions of the behaviour of public service and of local government employees were very similar. For example, in relation to both sectors:

- ▶ More than 80 per cent of respondents agreed that most employees behave well.
- ▶ Over 75 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that most employees are honest; the proportion was slightly higher for local government.
- ▶ Most respondents (between 60% and 70%) felt that employees' behaviour has 'stayed about the same' in recent years.
- ▶ Eighty-five per cent agreed or strongly agreed that there will always be some corruption in the public service or local government.
- ▶ For those who had never made a complaint, the proportion who said they would be 'very' or 'fairly' confident of a proper investigation decreased between 2002 and 2005 in relation to both the public service and local government. Female respondents were more likely than males, and younger respondents were more likely than older ones, to report confidence in the complaints system in relation to the public service. No significant differences were found between respondents, on the basis of socio-demographic variables, in their confidence in the handling of complaints about local government employees.
- ▶ Around half of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that not enough was being done about public service and local government corruption (although more held this belief in 1999). Respondents who had not completed secondary school were more likely than those with higher levels of education to agree with this statement in relation to both groups of employees.
- ▶ Approximately half of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the chances of getting caught doing something corrupt in the public service or local government were slim. Male respondents were more likely than female respondents to agree with this statement about both the public service and local government. Compared to younger and more educated participants, older respondents and those who had not completed secondary school were also more likely to agree when asked about the public service, but no such differences were found when asked about local government.

- ▶ Over time, between 20 and 30 per cent of respondents agreed that there was no point in reporting corruption against public service or local government employees because nothing useful would be done about it. In 2005, respondents who had not completed secondary school were more likely than respondents with higher levels of education to agree with this statement. Those who were retired or on a pension were more likely than respondents in the other employment categories to agree with this statement about the public service, but these differences were not detected for local government.
- ▶ Most respondents had reported complaints against public service employees to the government department in which the behaviour had occurred. Similarly, respondents were most likely to have taken complaints against local government employees to the relevant local government.

Where respondents' views about the public service differed from their views about local government, it was primarily in relation to improper behaviour and the use of complaints systems. For example:

- ▶ Around 50 per cent of respondents who reported experiencing improper conduct by a public service or local government employee said that the incident had occurred in the preceding 12 months. The survey results showed that respondents with tertiary education were more likely than those with lower education levels to report having experienced improper conduct by public service employees, but no demographic variables were linked with reports of experiences of improper conduct by a local government employee.
- ▶ The most common forms of improper behaviour reported about public service and local government employees largely concerned customer service issues, such as employees being unfriendly, rude or arrogant. The proportion of respondents reporting these behaviours has declined significantly since 2002 in relation to public service employees, but increased in relation to local government employees.
- ▶ Sixty per cent of respondents who reported improper conduct by a public service employee in the preceding 12 months said they had felt like complaining, compared with 70 per cent of those who stated that they had experienced improper conduct by a local government employee.
- ▶ Respondents were more likely to have made a complaint about perceived improper conduct by local government employees than by public service employees. Expressed as a ratio, two out of three people who felt like complaining about a local government employee actually made or attempted to make an official complaint. The ratio for the public service was two out of four people.
- ▶ In 2005 almost 30 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that 'people who complain against public service employees are likely to suffer'. Only 20 per cent agreed when asked about local government. Respondents who were retired or on a pension were more likely to agree with this statement in relation to the public service, but respondents who had not completed secondary school, and those from North and South-West Queensland, were most likely to agree when asked about local government.

Comparison with public perceptions of the QPS

We released our report about public perceptions of the Queensland Police Service in June 2006. The survey responses described in that report were based on the same surveys used for this report, and were from the same respondents. We therefore include below a brief comparison of the 2005 survey results for the public service, local government and the QPS.

- ▶ Across the three sectors, respondents were more likely to feel that the police ‘generally’ or ‘mostly’ behaved well (89% in 2005), compared with their attitude to public service (79%) or local government employees (84%). Similarly a larger proportion of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that most police are honest (83%), than held that view about public service (76%) or local government employees (79%).
- ▶ While the majority of respondents felt that behaviour within the three sectors had largely ‘stayed about the same’ in recent years, a larger proportion saw a ‘change for the better’ among police (36% in 2005 compared with only around 20% in relation to the public service and local government). Further, older respondents were significantly more likely than younger respondents to state that public service employees’ behaviour had changed for the worse; the opposite was true for the police.
- ▶ The perception that ‘you will always get some corruption’ was consistent across all sectors, at around 85 per cent of respondents.
- ▶ Similarly small numbers of respondents reported being annoyed or dissatisfied (with police) or experiencing improper conduct (by public service or local government employees) in the preceding 12 months, although the proportion was slightly higher for the police (10% compared with 7% and 5% respectively). In each case, the behaviour most frequently reported by respondents was an officer or employee behaving in an ‘unfriendly, rude or arrogant’ manner.
- ▶ Respondents experiencing improper behaviour were most likely to have complained if the matter involved a local government employee (two out of three people who felt like complaining actually made a complaint) and least likely to complain if the matter involved a police officer (one out of three).
- ▶ The most common reason provided for not making a complaint against a public service or local government employee or a police officer was a belief that it would not do any good. However, this was least likely when the matter involved a public servant (30% compared with 40% for police and local government).
- ▶ The proportion of respondents who felt that they would be ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ confident of a proper investigation if they were to make a complaint was similar for the QPS and the public service (around 60% in each case) but higher for local government (almost 70%).

- ▶ Respondents were about 10 percentage points more likely to agree that ‘the chances of getting caught doing something corrupt are slim’ in public service and local government (around 50%) than in the QPS (40% agreed). Similarly, respondents were twice as likely to agree that ‘there is no point reporting corruption’ against a public service or local government employee (30%) than against a QPS officer (16%).

Conclusion

This report presents the findings of the 2005 Public Attitudes Survey relating to Queensland public service and local government employees. The findings from the survey indicate that public perceptions of behaviour within these sectors generally remain favourable.

Our role in monitoring public perceptions of misconduct among Queensland public service and local government employees allows us to assess possible changes in the public sector over time and respond to any emerging problems. The principle of devolution enshrined in the Crime and Misconduct Act gives agencies increasing responsibility for conducting their own investigations. It is important to maintain public confidence in complaints processes, and the CMC's monitoring and reviewing role plays a vital part in this.