

Perceptions of the Ministerial Public Appointments Process

Research Study Conducted for the Office of the
Commissioner for Public Appointments Northern Ireland

01 May 2009



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Background & methodology

1. Background and methodology

1.1 Background

The Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments Northern Ireland was created in 1995, in response to the first report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life. The Commission is independent of government, and its remit is to provide guidance based on the Commissioner's Code of Practice for Government departments on procedures for making public appointments. OCPANI also audit and report on these procedures and investigate complaints about appointment processes.

OCPANI commissioned research to examine the general public's:

- Awareness of the appointments process;
- Understanding of how the process currently operates;
- Perception of how the process should operate in the future;
- Suggestions for how public perceptions of the process could be improved.

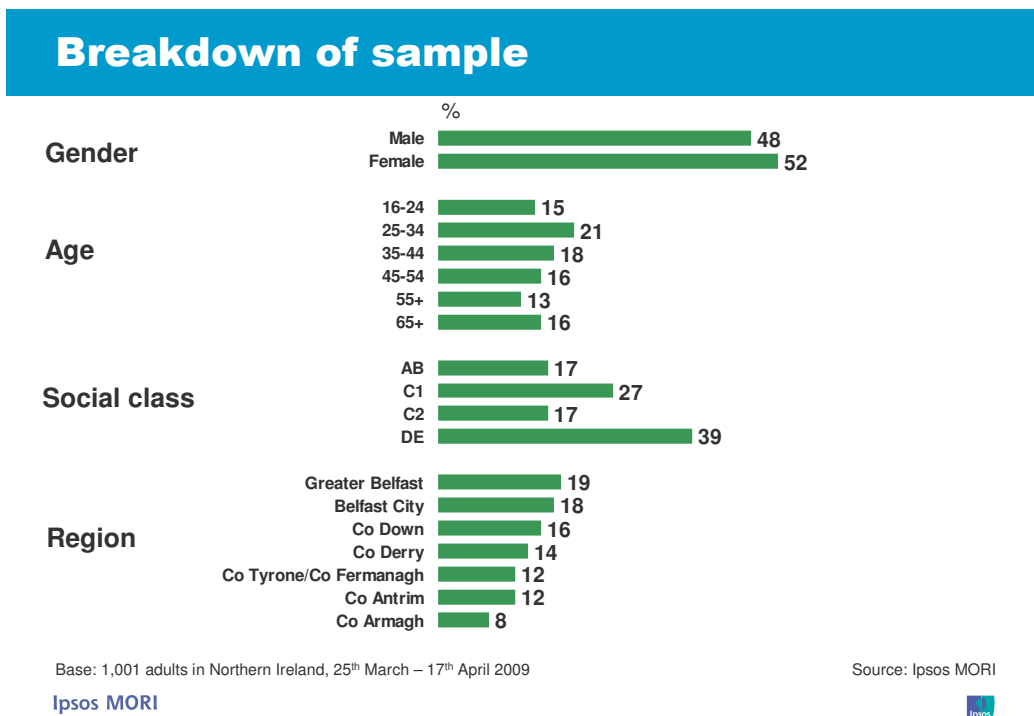
This research is a follow-up of UK wide research conducted by Ipsos MORI on behalf of OCPA in 2004. Unlike the previous research, this survey was conducted for Northern Ireland only, carried out on a larger scale.

Ipsos MORI Ireland would like to thank Felicity Huston and the rest of the team at OCPANI for their helpful assistance throughout the project.

1.2 Methodology

A questionnaire was designed in consultation with OCPANI, and placed on Ipsos MORI’s Northern Ireland Omnibus. Data was collected from 25th March to 17th April 2009. Interviewing was conducted face-to-face, in-home using CAPI (computer assisted personal interviewing) across 51 sample points. 1,001 interviews were conducted in total with quota placed on age, gender and social class.

A breakdown of the sample is as follows:



Source: Ipsos MORI

1.3 Technical note on rounding of results

In some instances there may be a difference of 1% between the figures depicted on the charts and in the commentary e.g. 45% agree strongly, 45% agree slightly, but the overall agree figure is 89%. This is due to a rounding of decimal places. In this example, the original results may have been 44.6% and 44.6% thus each rounded up to 45%. When combined this equals 89.2%, which is presented as 89%.

1.4 Publication of findings

As with all our studies, these findings are subject to our standard Terms and Conditions of Contract. Any press release or publication of the findings of this survey requires the advance approval of Ipsos MORI. Such approval is only refused on the grounds of inaccuracy or misinterpretation of the research findings.

Executive summary

2. Executive summary

- Knowledge of the public appointment process in Northern Ireland is low with only one in eight adults feeling informed about it. Awareness of OCPANI is somewhat higher (24%) but still lags significantly behind other public bodies in Northern Ireland (for example, the Equality Commission with 71%). There is some indication¹ that awareness of OCPANI has increased since 2004 (2004: 17%; 2009: 24%).
- The low awareness about the process is not necessarily explained by a general disinterest in the topic of public appointments. 62% agree that they would like to know more about the public appointments process and the vast majority (83%) agree that it is important that the public are informed about how the process works in Northern Ireland.
- Those aware of OCPANI and the public appointments process are much more likely to think that the system is fair and open and to express their general confidence in the system, demonstrating the importance of ensuring that the public is informed.
- As a general pattern, those in higher social classes and household income groups, people with higher educational attainment, people who are actively participating in political / social activities in their local communities and middle age groups tend to be better informed about and more interested in the public appointment process. These groups are also more likely to apply for a public appointment.
- Newspapers and TV are the main sources of information, mentioned by more than a third of those who feel informed about the process. One in four named the internet as a source of information, and another quarter stated they received information through the news without further specifying the medium.
- As in 2004, there is high agreement that public appointment processes should be regulated (83%); that the appointments should be based on merit (74%); and appointees should be remunerated (59%).
- However, only three in ten (28%) agree that they are confident in the public appointments system in Northern Ireland. It can be assumed that this rather low figure is mainly due to a lack of knowledge as a high share of respondents neither agree nor disagree or have no opinion about how confident they feel about the system.

¹ Please note the difference between 2004 and 2009 is not significant in a statistical sense because of the small sample of only 100 respondents in Northern Ireland in 2004.

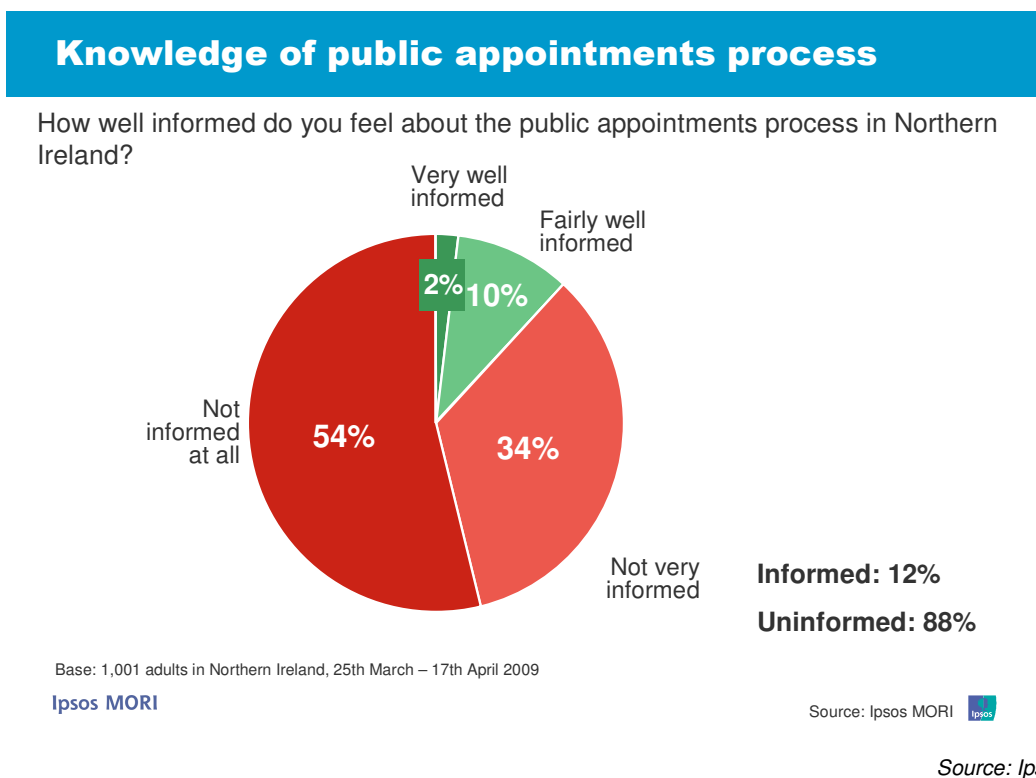
- There is clearly room for OCPANI to improve awareness of the organisation and the public appointment process, particularly given the call for further information from the public. This research shows that knowledge is without doubt a driving factor for people's positive perceptions regarding trustworthiness and fairness of the public appointments process and the likelihood of becoming more involved.

**Knowledge of the public
appointments process in
Northern Ireland**

3. Knowledge of the public appointments process in Northern Ireland

3.1 Current knowledge

Knowledge of the public appointments process is low with only 12% of the adult population feeling fairly or very well informed about it. More than half (54%) state they are not informed at all and one in three (34%) say they feel not very informed.



The level of knowledge significantly depends on social class², educational attainment and whether or not a person is classified as an activist (activists are defined as those who have taken part in three or more social, political or community activities in the last year – see appendix 3 for the full definition).

A greater proportion of people in social classes AB (23%) feel informed about the public appointment process than those in social classes DE (6%). In addition, a strong relation exists between the working status and knowledge about the process (19% among people who work full-time compared to 8% among people not working). With regard to educational attainment, the percentage of those who are informed is more than double among those with a degree (19%) than among those who have no formal qualifications or only reached GCSE level (9%).

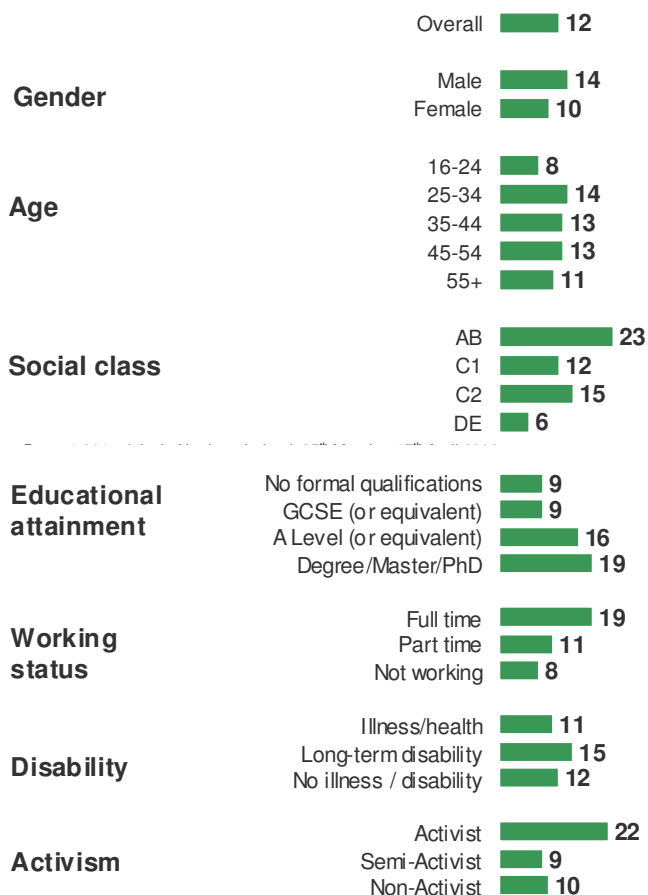
² Please see appendix 2 for the definition of social classes.

In addition to the more affluent and well-educated, knowledge of the public appointments process is greater among those familiar with the OCPANI (25%, compared to 8% of those not familiar) and activists (22%, compared to 10% of non-activists).

Informed of public appointments process in Northern Ireland: Subgroups

How well informed do you feel about the public appointments process in Northern Ireland?

% very well or fairly well informed of public appointments process



Base: 1,001 adults in Northern Ireland, 25th March – 17th April 2009

Source: Ipsos MORI

Ipsos MORI



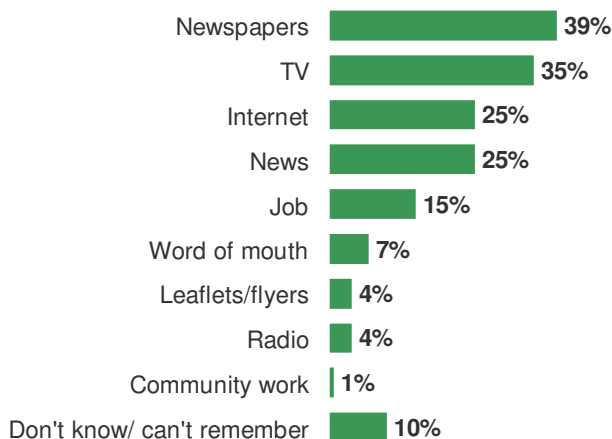
Source: Ipsos MORI

3.2 Information on public appointments process

Among those who do feel informed, newspapers and TV are the main sources of information, each mentioned by more than a third (newspapers: 39%; TV: 35%). One in four named the internet as a source of information, and another quarter stated they received information through the news without further specifying the medium. Interestingly, 15% mentioned they gained their knowledge about the public appointment process through their job.

Sources of information

Where did you get your information or learn about the public appointments process in Northern Ireland?



Base: 118 adults in Northern Ireland who feel informed about public appointments process, 25th March – 17th April 2009

Ipsos MORI

Source: Ipsos MORI

Source: Ipsos MORI

3.3 Demand for more information

The relatively low knowledge of public appointments made in Northern Ireland can not be explained by a general disinterest in the process. 62% agree that they would like to know more about the public appointments process with only 17% disagreeing.

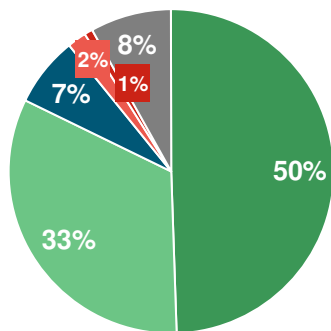
Again, those active in the community (78% of activists, and 72% of semi-activists), those educated to degree level (73%), full-time workers (70%) and high earners (73%) are all more likely than average to want to know more.

The vast majority (83%) agree that it is important that the public are informed about how the process works in Northern Ireland. This increases to 90% of those with high incomes, 90% of those with a degree and 94% of those active in their community.

Perceived importance of and demand for more information

- % Strongly agree
- % Tend to agree
- % Neither / nor
- % Tend to disagree
- % Strongly disagree
- Don't know

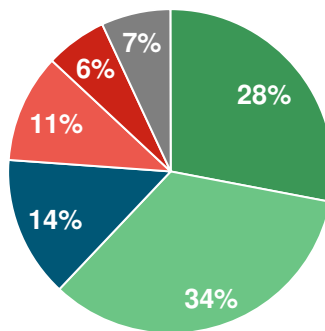
It's important that the public is informed about how the public appointments process works in NI



Base: 1,001 adults in Northern Ireland, 25th March – 17th April 2009

Ipsos MORI

I would like to know more about how the public appointments process works in NI



Source: Ipsos MORI



Source: Ipsos MORI

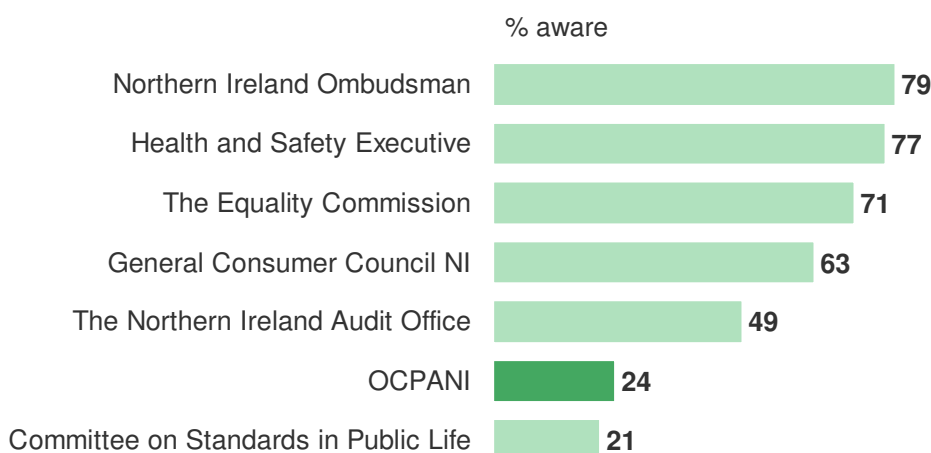
Awareness of OCPANI

4. Awareness of OCPANI

Almost one in four (24%) state they are aware of OCPANI. Although not a significant difference because of a small sample size in 2004, this can be taken as an indication that the level of awareness has increased (2004: 17%). However, this level of awareness is far behind other public bodies such as the Northern Ireland Ombudsman (79%), the Health and Safety Executive (77%) and the Equality Commission (71%).

General awareness of public bodies

Which, if any, of these organisations have you heard of?



Base: 1,001 adults in Northern Ireland, 25th March – 17th April 2009

Source: Ipsos MORI

Ipsos MORI



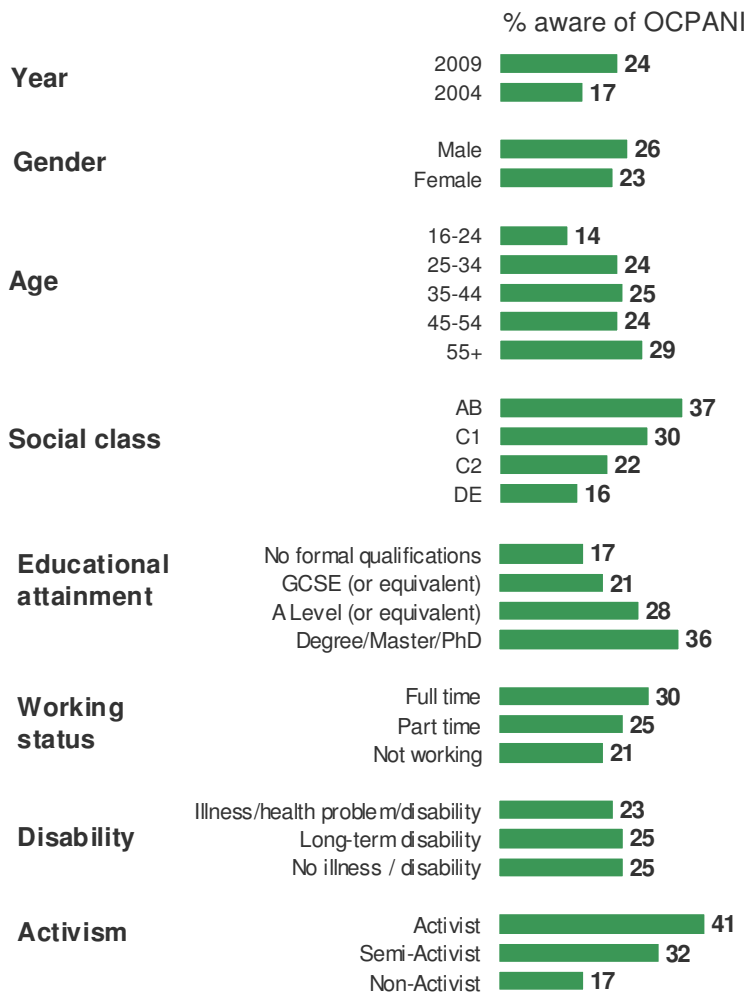
Source: Ipsos MORI

There is some variation across demographics and the pattern is similar to those more likely to know about the appointments process as a whole; familiarity is greater among higher earners (36% of those who have a household income over £30,000), ABs (37%), C1s (30%), full-time workers (30%) and owner/occupiers (29%). Awareness of OCPANI is also higher among activists (41%), semi-activists (32%) and those from Greater Belfast (37%).

Young people (aged between 16-24) are much less likely to have heard of OCPANI (14% vs. 26% of those aged 25 and over). However, 16-24 year olds are less likely to be aware of most other organisations, reflecting a lower awareness of public bodies in general.

Awareness of OCPANI: Subgroups

Which, if any, of these organisations have you heard of: OCPANI



Base: 1,001 adults in Northern Ireland, 25th March – 17th April 2009

Source: Ipsos MORI

Ipsos MORI



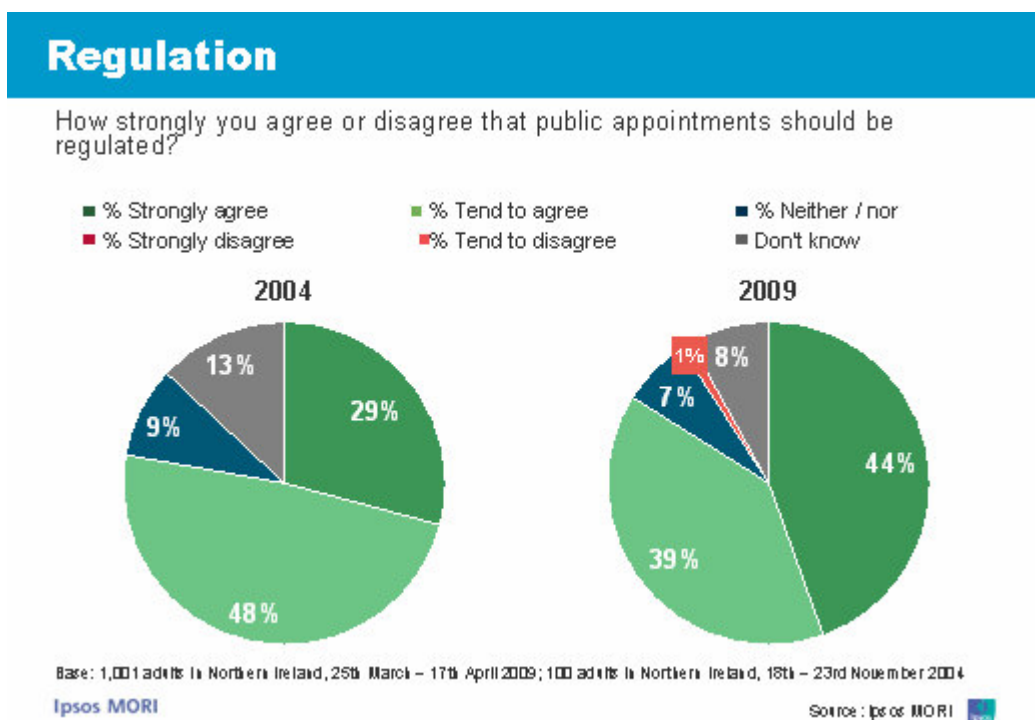
Source: Ipsos MORI

Views on the public appointments process

5. Views on the public appointments process

5.1 Regulation

The vast majority (83%) think that public appointments should be regulated. The level of agreement is highest among those who are aware of OCPANI (93%) and among activists (94%). In addition, agreement with regulation increases as income and educational attainment increase.



Source: Ipsos MORI

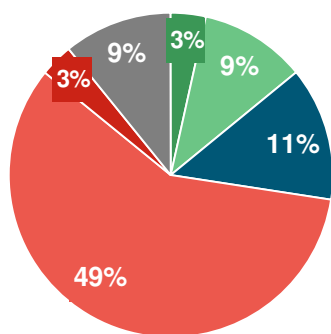
5.2 Applying for a public appointment

The number of people who are interested in applying for a public appointment is quite low with only one in eight agreeing (13%) that they would consider to do so. Men (15%), ABC1s (16%), high earners (18% of those with a household income of more than £30,000 per annum), those with a degree (22%) and activists (22%) are more likely to consider applying. A disability or long-term illness does not seem to be a barrier as agreement among this group of people is not significantly different from people without disabilities or long-term illnesses (11%). However, the likelihood of applying for a public appointment decreases among those over the age of 55 (7% versus 14% of those under the age of 55).

Applying for a public appointment

■ % Strongly agree ■ % Tend to agree ■ % Neither / nor
■ % Tend to disagree ■ % Strongly disagree ■ Don't know

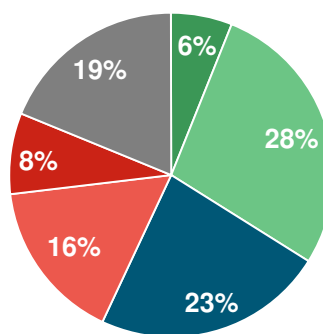
I would consider applying for a public appointment



Base: 1,001 adults in Northern Ireland, 25th March – 17th April 2009

Ipsos MORI

It is easy for people from all communities and sections of society to apply for a public appointment



Source: Ipsos MORI



Source: Ipsos MORI

The low number of people who would apply for a public appointment can partly be explained by the fact that only one third (34%) agree that it is easy for people from all communities and sections of society to apply. Again, the fact that 23% have no clear opinion if it is easy for people from all backgrounds to apply and 19% are not able to comment on that statement at all points out the lack of information among large parts of the general public

Obviously, those most likely to apply are those who are better informed.

5.3 A fair system?

One third feel that the public appointments system is fair and open (30%) and is fairer now than it was before devolution (35%). Linked to the lack of awareness of the public appointments process, about one quarter say they do not know for both statements (23% and 26% respectively) and three in ten neither agree nor disagree (31% and 30%). Those aware of the OCPANI and the public appointments process are much more likely to think that the system is fair and open (42% and 71% respectively) and that it has got fairer since devolution (47% and 60%).

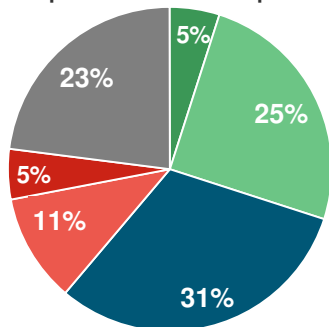
In comparison to 2004 when only 18% agreed that the public appointments system was fairer than five years before, this year's results indicate a much more positive picture of perceived improvements among the general public.

A fair system?

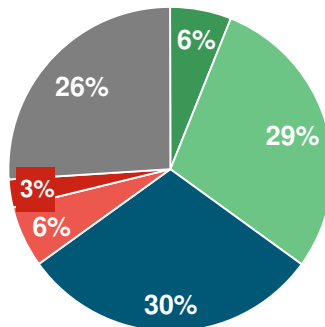
I am going to read out a number of statements about the public appointments process. I would like you to tell me, from this card, how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.

- % Strongly agree
- % Tend to agree
- % Neither / nor
- % Strongly disagree
- % Tend to disagree
- Don't know

The public appointments process is fair and open



The public appointments system is fairer now than it was before devolution



Base: 1,001 adults in Northern Ireland, 25th March – 17th April 2009

Source: Ipsos MORI



Source: Ipsos MORI

5.4 Based on merit?

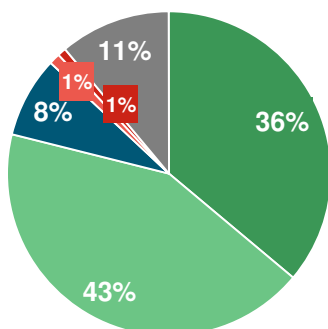
The majority (74%) agree that appointments process should be based on merit, with almost two in five (37%) agreeing strongly. High earners (84%), ABs (82%) and activists (89%) are most likely to agree, however a significantly greater proportion of 16-24 year olds disagree (15% versus 5% of those aged 25 and over).

Merit

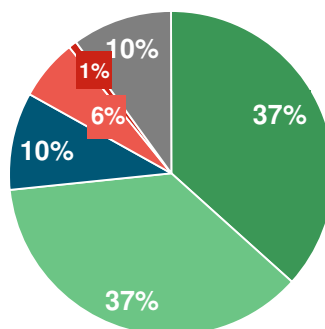
How strongly you agree or disagree that: Public appointments should be based on merit

- % Strongly agree
- % Tend to agree
- % Neither / nor
- % Tend to disagree
- % Strongly disagree
- Don't know

2004



2009



Base: 1,001 adults in Northern Ireland, 25th March – 17th April 2009; 100 adults in Northern Ireland, 18th – 23rd November 2004



Source: Ipsos MORI



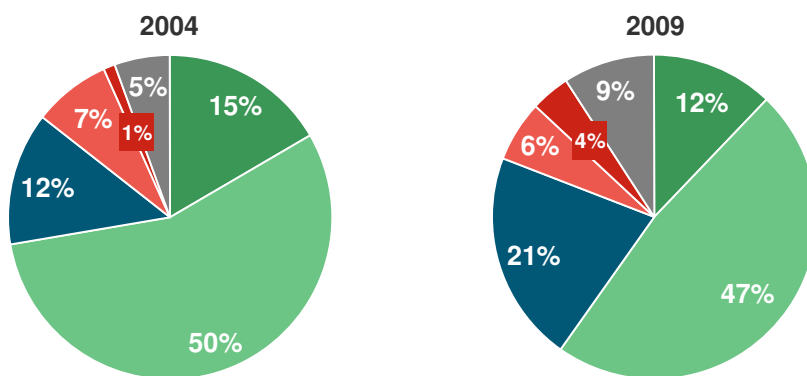
5.5 Remuneration

Six in ten (59%) think that appointees should be remunerated with one in ten (10%) disagreeing. Agreement is highest among those educated to degree level (68%) and those who are familiar with the public appointments process (76%).

Remuneration

How strongly you agree or disagree that: Public appointees should be paid

- % Strongly agree
- % Tend to agree
- % Neither / nor
- % Tend to disagree
- % Strongly disagree
- Don't know



Base: 1,001 adults in Northern Ireland, 25th March – 17th April 2009; 100 adults in Northern Ireland, 18th – 23rd November 2004

Ipsos MORI

Source: Ipsos MORI

Source: Ipsos MORI

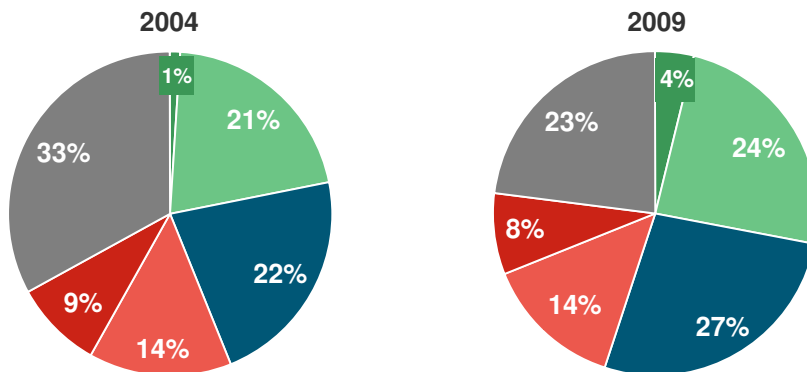
5.6 Confidence in the system

Only three in ten (28%) have confidence in the public appointments system in Northern Ireland. There is a strong link between the level of information about the process and OCPANI and the confidence in the system: Those who are informed of the public appointments process (67%) are more than twice as likely to have confidence in the system, and the awareness of OCPANI significantly impacts on people’s confidence in Northern Ireland’s appointments system as well (40%). Again, lack of knowledge of the system is a limiting factor - half neither agree nor disagree or have no opinion about how confident they feel about the public appointments system.

Confidence in the system

How strongly you agree or disagree that: I have confidence in the public appointments system in this country

- % Strongly agree
- % Tend to agree
- % Neither / nor
- % Tend to disagree
- % Strongly disagree
- Don't know



Base: 1,001 adults in Northern Ireland, 25th March – 17th April 2009; 100 adults in Northern Ireland, 18th – 23rd November 2004

Ipsos MORI

Source: Ipsos MORI 

Source: Ipsos MORI

Appendices

Appendices

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

AQ1 Which, if any, of these organisations have you heard of?			
<i>Type</i>	<i>Multi punch</i>		
<i>Interviewer instruction</i>	SHOWCARD AQ1		
<i>Programme instruction</i>			
<i>Answers</i>	<i>Codes</i>	<i>Programme</i>	
Health and Safety Executive (HSE)	1		
General Consumer Council NI	2		
Northern Ireland Ombudsman	3		
The Northern Ireland Audit Office	4		
The Committee on Standards in Public Life	5		
The Equality Commission	6		
The Commissioner for Public Appointments Northern Ireland	7		
None of these	8		

A public appointment allows individuals from different backgrounds to play a part in directing and managing the services that government provides. People who hold public appointments come from all walks of life and their involvement in the running of public bodies provides accountability, brings skills and experience and supports democracy by allowing 'ordinary' people to play an important and constructive role in the process of local, regional and national government.

AQ2 How well informed do you feel about the public appointments process in Northern Ireland?			
<i>Type</i>	<i>Single punch</i>		
<i>Interviewer instruction</i>			
<i>Programme instruction</i>			
<i>Answers</i>	<i>Codes</i>	<i>Programme</i>	
Very well informed	1		
Fairly well informed	2		
Not very informed	3		
Not informed at all	4		

AQ3 Where did you get your information or learn about the public appointments process in Northern Ireland?			
Type	OPEN		
Interviewer instruction			
Programme instruction	If very/fairly well informed in AQ2		
Answers	Codes	Programme	
(please specify)	1		

AQ4 I am going to read out a number of statements about the public appointments process. I would like you to tell me, from this card, how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.			
A	Public appointees should be paid		
B	The public appointments process is fair and open		
C	Public appointments should be made based on merit		
D	The public appointments process should be regulated		
E	I would consider applying for a public appointment		
F	It is easy for people from all communities and sections of society to apply for a public appointment		
G	The public appointments system is fairer now than it was before devolution		
H	I have confidence in the public appointments system in this country		
I	I think it's important that the general public is informed about how the public appointments process works in Northern Ireland		
J	I would like to know more about the public appointments process in Northern Ireland.		
Type	Single punch		
Interviewer instruction	SHOWCARD AQ4		
Programme instruction		Programme	
Answers	Codes		
Strongly agree	1		
Tend to agree	2		
Neither/nor	3		
Tend to disagree	4		
Strongly disagree	5		
No opinion	6		

AQ5 Which, if any of the things on this list have you done in the last two or three years? Just read out the letters that apply.			
<i>Type</i>	<i>Multi punch</i>		
<i>Interviewer instruction</i>	SHOWCARD AQ5		
<i>Programme instruction</i>			
<i>Answers</i>	<i>Codes</i>	<i>Programme</i>	
A - Presented my views to a local councillor or MLA	1		
B - Written a letter to an editor	2		
C - Urged someone outside my family to vote	3		
D - Urged someone to get in touch with a local councillor or MLA	4		
E - Made a speech before an organised group	5		
F - Been an officer of an organisation or club	6		
G - Stood for public office	7		
H - Taken an active part in a political campaign	8		
I - Helped on fund raising drives	9		
J - Voted in the last general election	10		
None of these	11		

Appendix 2: Social class definitions

A	Professionals such as doctors, surgeons, solicitors or dentists; chartered people like architects; fully qualified people with a large degree of responsibility such as senior editors, senior civil servants, town clerks, senior business executives and managers, and high ranking grades of the Services.
B	People with very responsible jobs such as university lecturers, hospital matrons, heads of local government departments, middle management in business, qualified scientists, bank managers, police inspectors, and upper grades of the Services.
C1	All others doing non-manual jobs; nurses, technicians, pharmacists, salesmen, publicans, people in clerical positions, police sergeants/ constables, and middle ranks of the Services.
C2	Skilled manual workers/craftsmen who have served apprenticeships; foremen, manual workers with special qualifications such as long distance lorry drivers, security officers, and lower grades of Services.
D	Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers, including labourers and mates of occupations in the C2 grade and people serving apprenticeships; machine minders, farm labourers, bus and railway conductors, laboratory assistants, postmen, door-to-door and van salesmen.
E	Those on lowest levels of subsistence including pensioners, casual workers, and others with minimum levels of income.

Appendix 3: Definition of activism within the community

Activists are defined as doing three or more of the following activities. Semi-activists are classed as having done two of the following:

- Presented my views to a local councillor or MLA
- Written a letter to an editor
- Urged someone outside my family to vote
- Urged someone to get in touch with a local councillor or MLA
- Made a speech before an organised group
- Been an officer of an organisation or club
- Stood for public office
- Taken an active part in a political campaign
- Helped on fund raising drives
- Voted in the last general election

Appendix 4: Statistical Reliability for General Public Survey

Because a sample, rather than the entire population, was interviewed the percentage results are subject to sampling tolerances – which vary with the size of the sample and the percentage figure concerned. For example, for a question where 50% of the people in a (weighted) sample of 1,000 respond with a particular answer, the chances are 95 in 100 that this result would not vary more than 3 percentage points, plus or minus, from the result that would have been obtained from a census of the entire population (using the same procedures). An indication of approximate sampling tolerances are given in the table below.

Approximate sampling tolerances applicable to percentages at or near these levels (at the 95% confidence level)			
	10% or 90%	30% or 70%	50%
Size of sample or sub-group on which survey result is based	+/-	+/-	+/-
General public (1,000)	2	3	3
Men (480)	3	4	5
<i>Source: Ipsos MORI</i>			

Strictly speaking the tolerances shown here apply only to random samples; in practice good quality quota sampling has been found to be as accurate.

Tolerances are also involved in the comparison of results between different elements of the sample. A difference must be of at least a certain size to be statistically significant. The following table is a guide to the sampling tolerances applicable to comparisons between sub-groups.

Differences required for significance at the 95% confidence level at or near these percentages			
	10% or 90%	30% or 70%	50%
Size of sample on which survey result is based			
Men vs Women (480 vs 521)	4	6	6
<i>Source: Ipsos MORI</i>			