



I N F O R M A T I O N

B U L L E T I N

Magistrates' Courts Waiting Times on the Day and User Reaction Surveys, 2000

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INTRODUCTION

Two distinct quality of service surveys are carried out by magistrates' courts in England and Wales. One survey measures the time adult defendants in criminal cases wait on the days of their hearings, and the other survey collects data on the satisfaction of court users with non-judicial aspects of the service received. In 2000 for the first time the surveys were carried out twice, in

April and October. Previously they were conducted annually, normally in October.

This bulletin presents the results from the 2000 surveys, and is in four sections. The first two sections present results from the surveys. The last two sections contain tables of detailed results from the most recent and earlier surveys, and methodological notes and further information.

MAIN POINTS

Waiting times on the day survey

- **Average waiting time has risen:** The average time defendants had to wait at court before the start of hearings was 71 minutes in October 2000, the highest over the period since 1992. The increase from 65 minutes in April 2000 represents the largest rise between directly comparable surveys.
- **An increase in the proportion of defendants waiting more than one hour:** Forty two per cent of defendants waited more than 1 hour in October 2000 compared to 38 per cent in April 2000 and October 1999.
- **A further increase in use of block listing:** The proportion of defendants reporting at or after 11 am increased to 33 per cent in October 2000 from 31 per cent in October 1999, although there was no change between April and October 2000. Average waiting times tended to be lower in areas making more use of block listing.

User reaction survey

- **Satisfaction with facilities broadly unchanged:** The proportion of court users reporting that the quality of facilities provided at the courts were satisfactory or very good remained at 71 per cent in October 1999, April and October 2000.
- **No significant change in satisfaction with information and assistance:** An average 89 per cent of respondents reported that the quality of information and assistance was satisfactory or very good in October 1999, April and October 2000.

Waiting times on the day survey

Introduction

1. In 2000 this survey was conducted by magistrates' courts in April and October, having previously been run once each year normally in October. The survey records how long adult defendants in criminal cases wait on the day of the court hearing before their case is heard. Results from both the April and October 2000 surveys have been circulated to courts. More details on the survey methodology can be found in the notes section.

2. Magistrates' courts (Petty Sessions Areas or PSAs) record the time at which defendants in criminal cases report to court and the time at which hearings begin. The report time is defined as the time they are required to attend court or the time they actually attend, whichever is later. The difference between the report time and the start of the hearing is taken to be the defendant's waiting time.

Average waiting times

3. In October 2000 the average waiting time was 71 minutes, the highest over the period since 1992, as shown in figure 1 and table 1. The increase from 65 minutes in April 2000 represents the largest rise between directly compatible surveys. It followed a very stable period from October 1997 during which waiting time averaged 65 minutes. It is uncertain whether this increase is permanent or temporary in nature. The Human Rights Act which was introduced in the same week as much of the October 2000 survey was conducted is a possible cause of the rise.

4. In line with the increase in average waiting time, the proportion of defendants waiting over 2 hours rose from 15 per cent in April 2000 to 17 per cent in October 2000. The proportion of defendants waiting over 1 hour and up to 2 hours increased from 23 per cent in April 2000 to 25 per cent in October 2000. Previously from October

FIGURE 1: Average waiting time on the day for defendants (minutes), 1992 to 2000

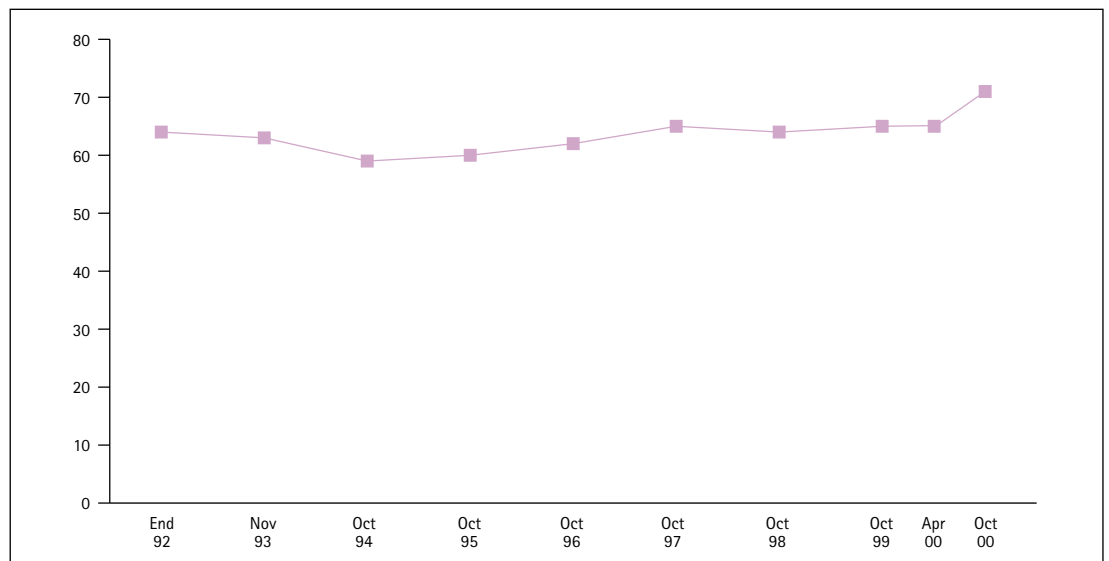
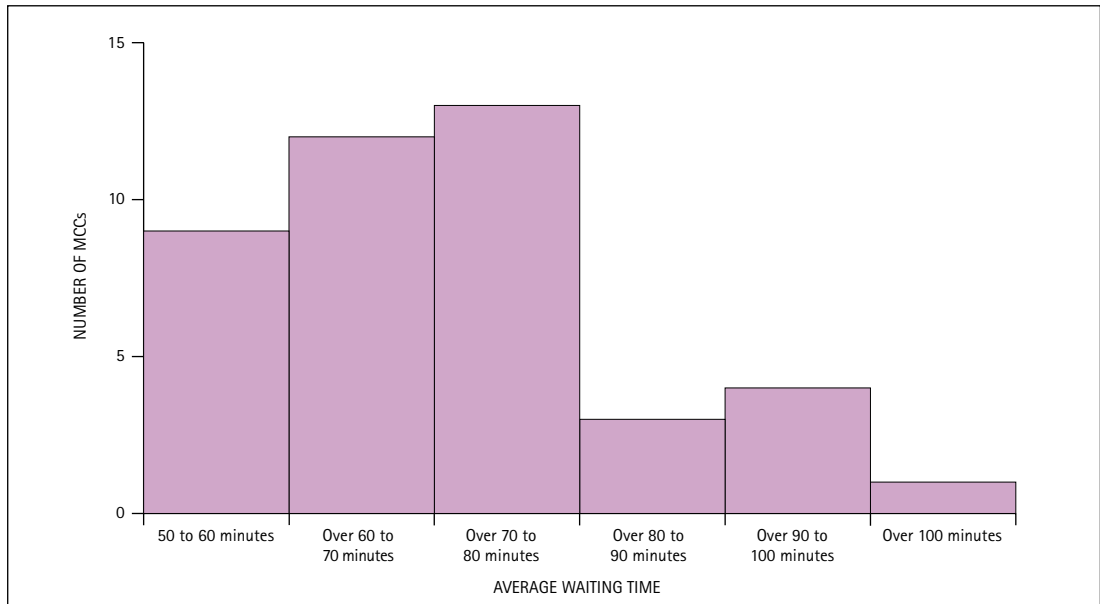


FIGURE 2 : Magistrates' Courts Committees by average waiting time, October 2000



1996 the overall proportion waiting longer than 1 hour had been relatively stable, as shown in table 2.

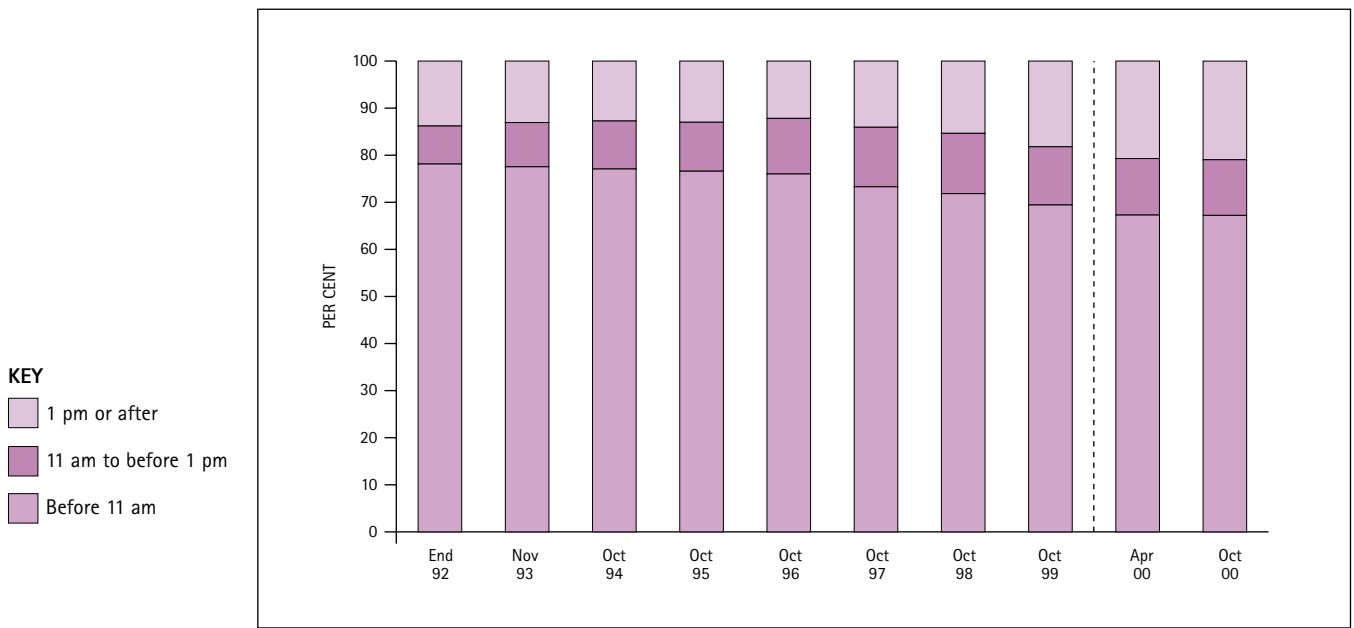
Analysis by MCC areas

5. Amongst Magistrates' Courts Committees (MCCs) the most common average waiting time in October 2000 was between 70 minutes and 80 minutes, as shown in figure 2. Defendants waited over an hour on average in 79 per cent of MCCs, a large increase from 62 per cent in April 2000 and October 1999.

6. The results according to individual MCCs are shown in table 5. The average time defendants had to wait at court before the start of hearings varied from 51 minutes in Gloucestershire and 53 minutes in Lincolnshire to 100 minutes in Dyfed Powys and 111 minutes in Wiltshire. Defendants in Greater London waited 61 minutes on average, some 10 minutes less than the overall average in England and Wales.

7. The greatest improvements in average defendant waiting times between October 1999 and October 2000 were in West Yorkshire (a decrease from 72 minutes to 56 minutes) and Nottinghamshire (a fall from 89 minutes to 75 minutes). In contrast average waiting times lengthened most in Staffordshire (an increase from 68 minutes to 92 minutes) and Cambridgeshire (a rise from 58 minutes to 95 minutes). The increase in Greater London from 58 minutes in October 1999 to 61 minutes in October 2000 was much lower than the overall rise in England and Wales.

FIGURE 3: Proportion of defendants with report times before 11 am, from 11 am to before 1 pm and 1 pm or after, 1992 to 2000



Listing times

8. The waiting times on the day survey enables an analysis to be made of the times when defendants in criminal cases report. Figure 3 and table 3 show that the gradual annual decline in the proportion of defendants who reported before 11am continued in April and October 2000. Although 67 per cent of defendants reported before 11am in both April and October 2000, 69 per cent did so in October 1999. The proportion of defendants reporting from 11 am to before 1 pm maintained its slight decline since October 1998 after an upwards trend since the beginning of the period covered by figure 3. The proportion of defendants reporting at or after 1 pm continued its rise since October 1996. Twenty one per cent of defendants reported at or after 1 pm in October 2000 compared with 18 per cent in October 1999.

9. The results of different listing practices used by the PSAs are shown in figure 4 and table 4. There are three possible blocks during which defendants can report: before 11 am, from 11 am to before 1 pm and 1 pm or after (the same as the intervals used in figure 3). For the purposes of this analysis the number of blocks used in a PSA is

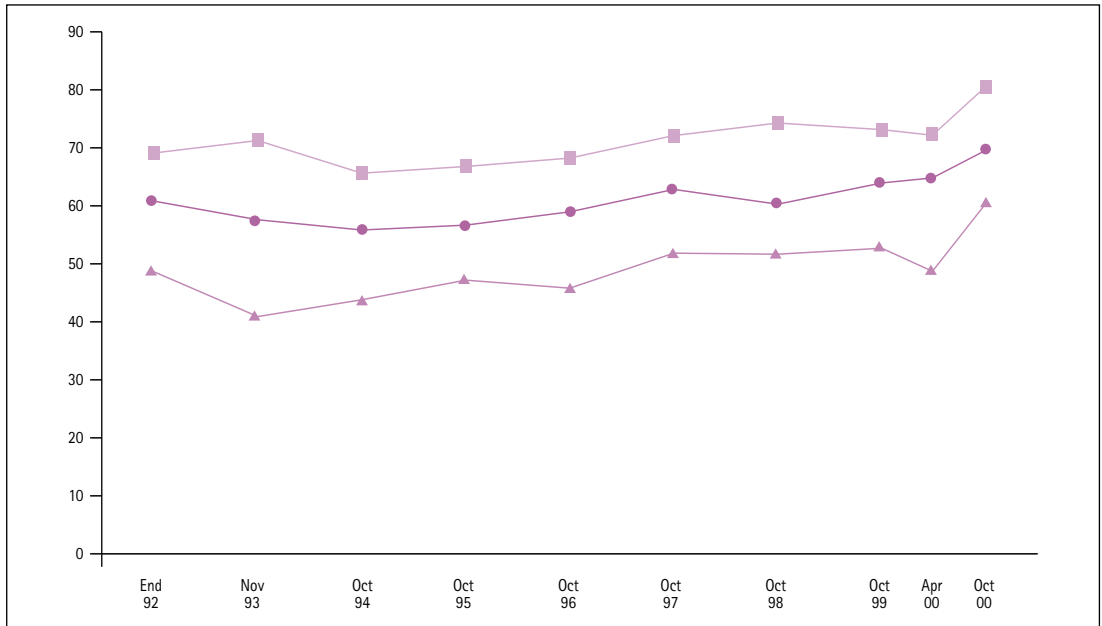
defined as the number of these time periods which contained report times for more than 15 per cent of defendants. In October 2000, the average waiting time for defendants in PSAs which under this definition used one block was 81 minutes. This compares with 70 minutes for PSAs using two blocks and 60 minutes for PSAs using all three blocks. There is therefore a tendency for average waiting times to be lower in areas making more use of block listing.

10. Table 4 also indicates that changes in the proportions of PSAs using 1, 2 and 3 blocks were not a cause of the rise in average waiting time. Indeed, there was increased use of block listing in April and October 2000 compared with October 1999. The proportion of PSAs that made use of just 1 block was 24 per cent in both April and October 2000 compared to 29 per cent in October 1999. The proportion of PSAs that used 2 blocks was 61 per cent in October 2000 and 65 per cent in April 2000 compared with 56 per cent in October 1999. Ten per cent of PSAs made use of 3 blocks in October 2000 and 9 per cent in April 2000 compared with 11 per cent in October 1999.

FIGURE 4: Average waiting time on the day for defendants (minutes), by number of reporting blocks PSAs used, 1992 to 2000¹

1 Note: PSAs with sample sizes less than 20 are excluded from the analysis shown in the graph.

KEY
■ 1 block
● 2 block
▲ 3 block



User reaction survey

Introduction

11. The magistrates' courts user reaction survey records the views of court users about non-judicial aspects of the service received. From 1999 onwards the survey covered all court users, prior to this only covering those who were non-professional. In 2000 for the first time the survey was carried out twice (in April and October), previously being conducted annually, normally in October. Results from both 2000 surveys have been circulated to courts. More details on the survey methodology can be found in the notes section.

12. The user reaction survey asks court users to answer a total of eleven questions. Six of the questions deal with the quality of the facilities provided at the court, and the other five relate to the information and assistance received before and during the court visit. The survey requests that court users rate their views on a scale comprising very good, satisfactory and poor. The subjects of the questions are:

Facilities

- Comfort of the waiting area
- Amount of seating in the waiting area
- Privacy in the waiting area
- Toilet facilities
- Refreshment facilities
- Availability of telephones

Information and assistance

- Quality of information provided in advance
- Quality of information provided by ushers or other court officials on arrival
- The readability and helpfulness of documents and forms
- The availability of court staff to deal with queries
- The helpfulness and friendliness of court staff

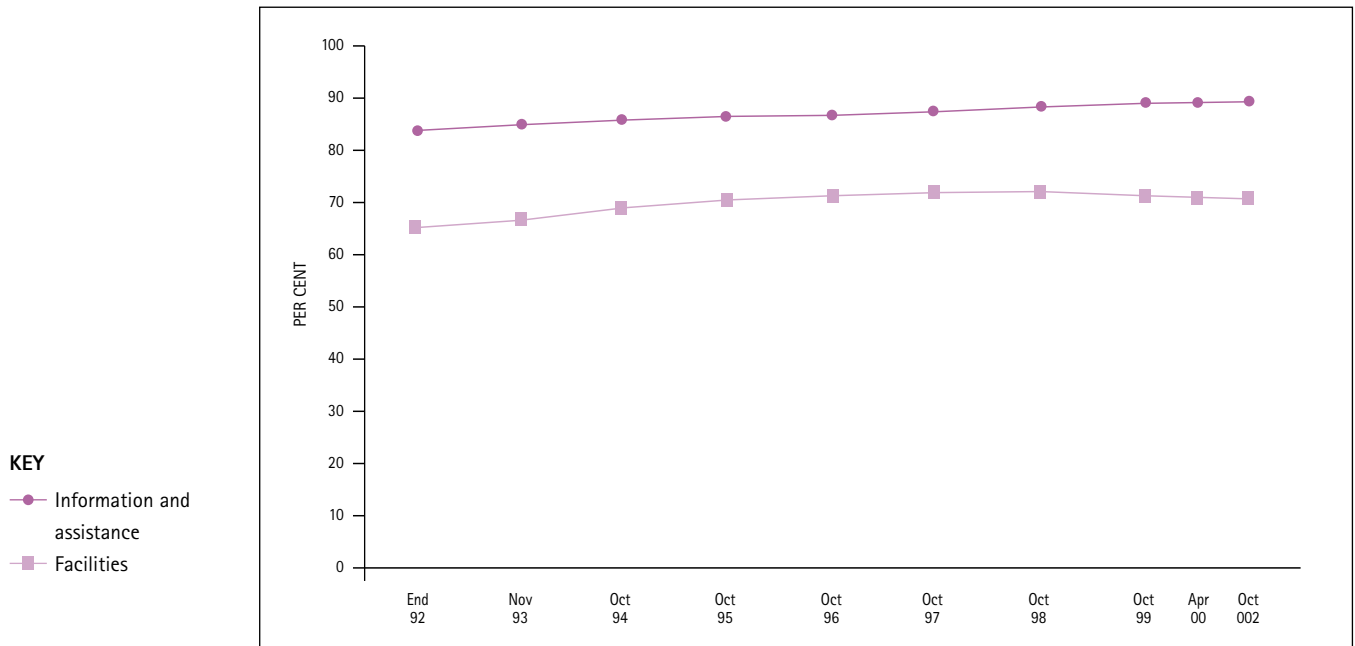
Overall results on facilities, and information and assistance

13. Court users generally rate the quality of the information and assistance they receive more highly than the quality of facilities provided at the court, as shown in figure 5. An average of 89 per cent of responses to quality of information and assistance questions were either satisfactory or very good in October 1999, April and October 2000. In contrast, 71 per cent of responses to questions on the quality of facilities were satisfactory or very good in the 3 surveys between October 1999 and October 2000 (see tables 7 and 8).

Responses to individual questions on facilities

14. The highest quality rating in October 2000 was given to the amount of seating in the waiting area – figure 6 and table 7 show that 82 per cent of respondents gave a rating of satisfactory or very good, a slight decrease from 83 per cent in October 1999. By far the most criticised aspect of the court's facilities was the privacy of the

FIGURE 5 : Very good and satisfactory responses to questions on facilities, and information and assistance, 1992 to 2000



waiting area. The proportion of respondents rating this aspect as satisfactory or very good was 45 per cent in October 2000, up from 43 per cent in October 1999. The rating attached to the availability of telephones also increased to 73 per cent in October 2000 from 72 per cent in October 1999. However the ratings for the other aspects

declined over the same period. Those for refreshment facilities fell from 72 per cent to 69 per cent, toilet facilities from 82 per cent to 80 per cent, and comfort of the waiting area from 76 per cent to 75 per cent. More detailed results can be found in table 7.

FIGURE 6 : Responses to individual questions on facilities, October 2000

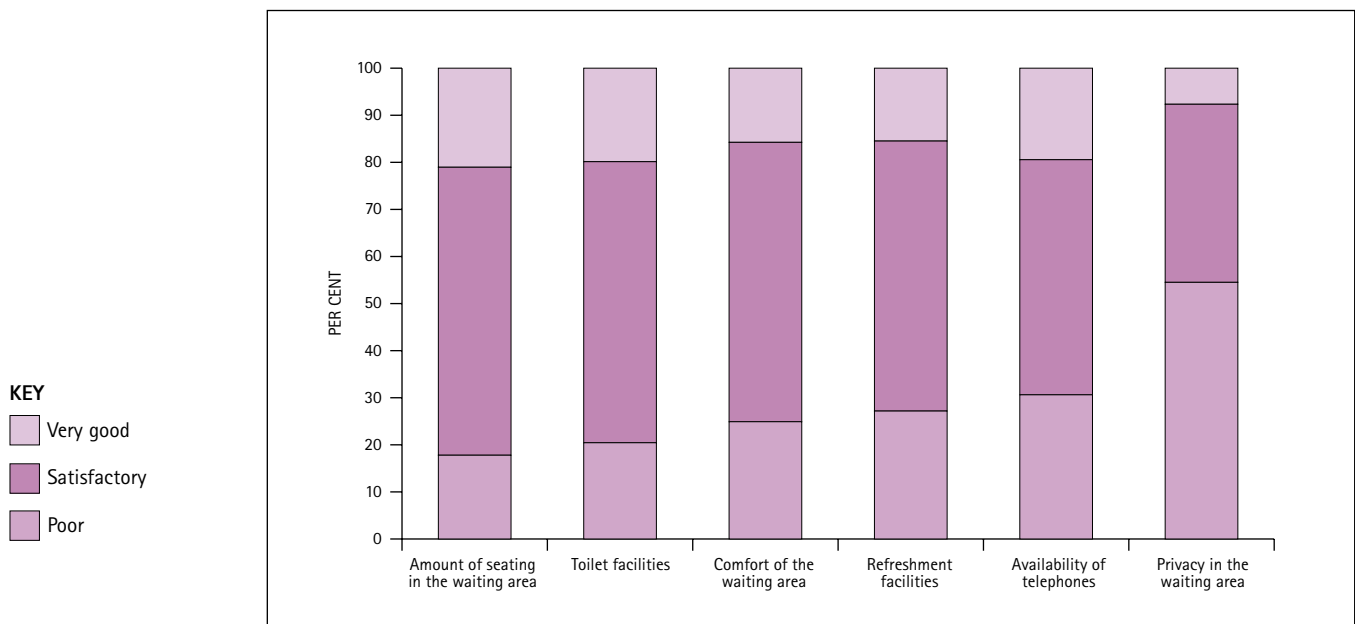
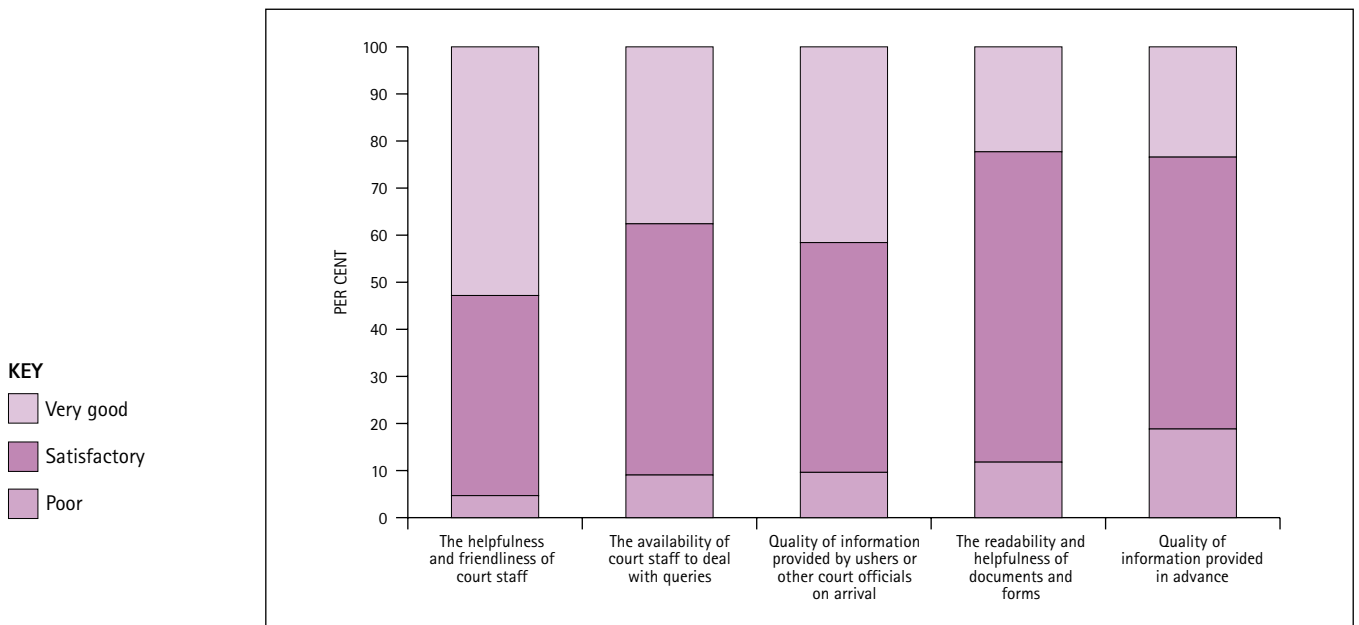


FIGURE 7: Responses to individual questions on information and assistance, October 2000



Responses to individual questions on information and assistance

15. As in previous years, respondents gave the highest quality rating in 2000 to the helpfulness and friendliness of court staff, as shown in figure 7 and table 8. The proportion of respondents rating this aspect of the service given by magistrates' courts as at least satisfactory was 95 per cent as in all surveys since October 1998. Fifty three per cent provided a rating of very good in October 2000, although lower than October 1999 (54 per cent).

16. The quality of information provided in advance has consistently been given the lowest rating by respondents since the survey started. Eighty one per cent of respondents considered it at least satisfactory in October 2000 compared with 80 per cent in October 1999.

17. Among the other aspects of information and assistance, the proportion of respondents rating these as satisfactory or very good in October 2000 were 91 per cent for the availability of court staff to deal with queries, 90 per cent for the quality of information provided by ushers or other court officials on arrival and 88 per cent for the readability and helpfulness of forms. There was little change in these ratings over the previous year's surveys.

Types of court user

18. From 1999 onwards the survey involved all magistrates' court users including professionals, previously only being completed by non-professionals. As shown in table 6, those appearing in a professional capacity accounted for 16 per cent of responses in April and October 2000 and 17 per cent in October 1999. Consequently, there were proportionally fewer responses from other types of court users than in 1998 and earlier years.

19. Table 9 shows that the responses to the questions varied between the different types of court user. In October 2000 as in previous years, the most satisfied of all court users were those who attended in connection with a liquor licence with an overall 87 per cent of responses being either satisfactory or very good. The least satisfied type of court users were friends and relatives of those involved in a case, with 77 per cent of responses to all questions being either satisfactory or very good.

20. Prosecution witnesses have consistently shown a higher degree of satisfaction than defence witnesses. Eighty three per cent of responses from prosecution witnesses in October 2000 gave a rating of either satisfactory or very good compared with 78 per cent from defence witnesses.

21. A similar proportion of respondents gave a rating of satisfactory or very good in October 2000 regardless of whether the user was professional or non-professional. However professionals gave lower than average ratings to the quality of facilities (66 per cent compared with 71 per cent on average) and higher than average ratings to the quality of information and assistance (95 per cent compared with 89 per cent on average).

Ethnic origin of court user

22. From 1999 onwards respondents have been requested to describe their ethnic origin. The vast majority of court users who did describe their ethnic origin described themselves as white, 88 per cent in October 2000. This compares to 89 per cent in April 2000 and 90 per cent in October 1999, as shown in table 10. Table 11 shows that those describing their ethnic origin as white were the most satisfied, with 80 per cent of responses in October 1999, April and October 2000 indicating at least satisfaction. Those who described their ethnic origin as Bangladeshi were the least satisfied – an average 67 per cent of responses across the three surveys from October 1999 to October 2000 gave a rating of satisfactory or very good.

Analysis by MCC areas

23. Table 12 shows results in October 2000 by MCC with a relatively high proportion of responses providing a rating of satisfactory or very good in Lancashire (87 per cent), Avon and Somerset, Cumbria and Norfolk (all 86 per cent). A relatively low proportion of responses indicated at least satisfaction in Greater Manchester and Hertfordshire (both 73 per cent), Gloucestershire (71 per cent) and Suffolk (66 per cent).

Detailed results⁽¹⁾

(1) Note: Individual figures may not sum to totals due to rounding.

Waiting times on the day survey

TABLE 1: Average time defendants had to wait at court before start of hearings, 1992 to 2000

	Minutes and numbers									
	End 92	Nov 93	Oct 94	Oct 95	Oct 96	Oct 97	Oct 98	Oct 99	Apr 00	Oct 00
Average time	64	63	59	60	62	65	64	65	65	71
Number of defendants	23,438	26,196	27,614	27,170	30,561	32,747	32,049	31,234	39,454	30,943

TABLE 2: Proportion of defendants waiting 1 hour or less, over 1 hour and up to 2 hours and over 2 hours before start of hearings, 1992 to 2000

	Percentages									
	End 92	Nov 93	Oct 94	Oct 95	Oct 96	Oct 97	Oct 98	Oct 99	Apr 00	Oct 00
One hour or less	61	63	64	64	63	62	63	62	62	58
Over 1 hour and up to 2 hours	25	23	23	23	23	23	23	23	23	25
Over 2 hours	14	14	13	13	14	15	15	14	15	17

TABLE 3: Defendants analysed by report time, 1992 to 2000

	Percentages									
	End 92	Nov 93	Oct 94	Oct 95	Oct 96	Oct 97	Oct 98	Oct 99	Apr 00	Oct 00
Before 11 am	78	78	77	77	76	73	72	69	67	67
11 am to before 1 pm	8	9	10	10	12	13	13	12	12	12
1 pm or after	14	13	13	13	12	14	15	18	21	21

TABLE 4: Average waiting time for defendants analysed by number of reporting blocks PSAs used and proportion of PSAs in each block, 1992 to 2000⁽²⁾

Average waiting times	Minutes									
	End 92	Nov 93	Oct 94	Oct 95	Oct 96	Oct 97	Oct 98	Oct 99	Apr 00	Oct 00
1 block	69	71	66	67	68	72	74	73	71	81
2 blocks	61	58	56	57	59	63	60	64	65	70
3 blocks	49	41	44	47	46	52	52	53	47	60

Proportions of PSAs in each block ³	Percentages									
	End 92	Nov 93	Oct 94	Oct 95	Oct 96	Oct 97	Oct 98	Oct 99	Apr 00	Oct 00
1 block	54	48	46	49	51	38	37	29	24	24
2 blocks	36	43	45	43	41	53	50	56	65	61
3 blocks	3	3	5	5	6	7	10	11	9	10

(2) Note: Defendants in PSAs with sample sizes less than 20 are excluded from the analyses shown in the tables

(3) Note: Figures do not sum to 100 per cent because some PSAs have been excluded due to low sample sizes (see also note 2).

TABLE 5: Average time defendants had to wait at court before the start of hearings, by Magistrates' Courts Committee area, 1997 to 2000

	Average number of days from:				
	Oct 97	Oct 98	Oct 99	Apr 00	Oct 00
(1) See paragraph 13 of the notes section for details of MCC amalgamations. Results for these MCCs are based on the results of amalgamations of old MCCs.					
Avon and Somerset ⁽¹⁾	71	70	73	50	78
Bedfordshire	60	52	58	60	58
Cambridgeshire	68	69	58	64	95
Cheshire	64	65	62	68	67
Cleveland	53	56	56	61	68
Cumbria	46	61	63	58	55
Derbyshire	56	65	59	60	68
Devon Et Cornwall ⁽¹⁾	55	42	57	54	57
Dorset	85	77	79	72	85
Durham	79	61	54	53	57
Dyfed Powys ⁽¹⁾	84	83	79	97	100
Essex	71	79	78	68	77
Gloucestershire	75	60	53	50	51
Greater London ⁽¹⁾	55	60	58	59	61
Greater Manchester ⁽¹⁾	61	61	64	59	66
Gwent	89	73	74	78	73
Hampshire and Isle of Wight ⁽¹⁾	73	78	74	73	89
Hertfordshire	72	73	66	74	67
Humberside	56	55	50	49	60
Kent	71	79	52	74	73
Lancashire	66	73	60	67	74
Leicestershire	75	62	60	65	74
Lincolnshire	51	54	62	54	53
Merseyside ⁽¹⁾	54	46	57	64	64
Norfolk	65	64	65	64	58
North Wales	63	59	69	63	66
North Yorkshire	88	80	71	64	77
Northamptonshire	56	49	53	37	64
Northumbria ⁽¹⁾	54	46	54	58	73
Nottinghamshire	61	58	89	57	75
South Wales ⁽¹⁾	64	69	60	81	77
South Yorkshire ⁽¹⁾	65	61	59	70	64
Staffordshire	55	59	68	55	92
Suffolk	69	77	72	80	92
Surrey	83	87	87	72	89
Sussex ⁽¹⁾	77	62	62	59	75
Thames Valley ⁽¹⁾	74	69	72	65	76
Warwickshire	74	50	41	65	56
West Mercia ⁽¹⁾	81	73	69	59	69
West Midlands ⁽¹⁾	66	68	73	65	77
West Yorkshire ⁽¹⁾	51	59	72	67	56
Wiltshire	73	82	92	88	111
All England and Wales	65	64	65	65	71

User reaction survey

TABLE 6: Type of court user responding to the survey, 1992 to 2000

(1) From 1999 onwards the type of witness (prosecution or defence) has been collected and users appearing as professionals (i.e. barristers, solicitors etc) have been included. Therefore comparisons of surveys from 1999 onwards with those from earlier years shown in the table above should not be made. See paragraph 18 in the main text for more details. 'n/a' in the table means results not available.

	Percentages of those giving a reason and numbers									
	End 92	Nov 93	Oct 94	Oct 95	Oct 96	Oct 97	Oct 98	Oct 99 ⁽¹⁾	Apr 00 ⁽¹⁾	Oct 00 ⁽¹⁾
Appearing in court charged with an offence	47	48	47	48	49	49	48	41	39	41
Appearing in court as a witness	13	13	13	12	11	11	12	9	13	12
Appearing in court as a defence witness	N/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2	3	3
Appearing in court as a prosecution witness	N/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	7	9	9
Applying in connection with a liquor licence	5	5	6	6	5	6	5	4	4	4
A party in a matrimonial case	5	4	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	2
Accompanying a friend or relative who is appearing in court today	22	21	23	23	24	24	24	21	19	19
Appearing in court in a professional capacity	N/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	17	16	16
Attending for any other reason	8	9	8	8	9	8	8	7	6	6
<i>Number of respondents where type of court user was known (=100%)</i>	<i>25,016</i>	<i>25,502</i>	<i>23,166</i>	<i>27,310</i>	<i>25,742</i>	<i>25,185</i>	<i>21,659</i>	<i>20,216</i>	<i>20,977</i>	<i>19,291</i>
<i>Number of respondents where type of court user was unknown</i>	<i>3,008</i>	<i>2,577</i>	<i>907</i>	<i>1,976</i>	<i>2,436</i>	<i>2,098</i>	<i>1,902</i>	<i>1,422</i>	<i>1,399</i>	<i>1,247</i>
<i>Total number of respondents</i>	<i>28,024</i>	<i>28,079</i>	<i>24,073</i>	<i>29,286</i>	<i>28,178</i>	<i>27,283</i>	<i>23,561</i>	<i>21,638</i>	<i>22,376</i>	<i>20,538</i>

TABLE 7: Responses to questions on facilities, 1992 to 2000

	Percentages									
	End 92	Nov 93	Oct 94	Oct 95	Oct 96	Oct 97	Oct 98	Oct 99	Apr 00	Oct 00
Comfort of the waiting area										
Very good	14	14	14	16	16	17	17	16	16	16
Satisfactory	56	56	58	59	59	58	59	60	60	59
Poor	31	30	27	26	25	24	24	24	25	25
Amount of seating in the waiting area										
Very good	17	19	19	21	22	22	23	22	21	21
Satisfactory	58	60	61	60	60	61	60	61	61	61
Poor	25	21	21	19	19	17	17	17	18	18
Privacy in the waiting area										
Very good	5	5	6	7	7	8	8	7	8	8
Satisfactory	31	32	34	35	36	37	38	36	37	38
Poor	64	63	60	58	58	56	54	57	55	55
Toilet facilities										
Very good	22	20	22	24	24	24	23	22	20	20
Satisfactory	61	61	61	60	60	59	61	60	60	60
Poor	18	19	17	16	16	16	17	18	20	20
Refreshment facilities										
Very good	18	19	20	20	22	21	21	21	20	19
Satisfactory	43	45	47	49	50	50	49	51	50	50
Poor	39	36	33	31	27	29	29	28	30	31
Availability of telephones										
Very good	15	15	16	16	17	17	17	15	15	15
Satisfactory	54	55	56	56	56	57	58	57	58	57
Poor	31	31	28	27	27	25	26	28	27	27
All facilities questions combined										
Very good	15	15	16	17	18	18	18	17	17	17
Satisfactory	50	51	53	53	53	54	54	54	54	54
Poor	35	33	31	30	29	28	28	29	29	29

TABLE 8 : Responses to questions on information and assistance, 1992 to 2000

	Percentages									
	End 92	Nov 93	Oct 94	Oct 95	Oct 96	Oct 97	Oct 98	Oct 99	Apr 00	Oct 00
Quality of information provided in advance										
Very good	21	20	22	22	23	24	24	24	23	23
Satisfactory	51	53	53	55	54	54	56	56	57	58
Poor	28	27	25	23	23	22	21	20	19	19
Quality of information provided by ushers or other court officials on arrival										
Very good	37	36	38	38	38	39	40	42	41	42
Satisfactory	50	51	49	50	50	50	50	48	49	49
Poor	14	13	12	12	12	11	10	10	10	10
The readability and helpfulness of documents and forms										
Very good	17	17	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	22
Satisfactory	65	66	67	67	67	67	67	66	65	66
Poor	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	12	12	12
The availability of court staff to deal with queries										
Very good	29	30	30	30	31	33	34	38	38	38
Satisfactory	57	58	58	58	57	56	56	53	54	53
Poor	13	12	12	12	11	11	10	9	8	9
The helpfulness and friendliness of court staff										
Very good	45	45	47	47	46	48	49	54	53	53
Satisfactory	47	48	47	47	47	46	46	41	42	43
Poor	7	7	6	6	6	6	5	5	5	5
All information and assistance questions combined										
Very good	30	30	31	31	32	33	34	37	36	36
Satisfactory	54	55	55	55	55	54	55	53	53	53
Poor	16	15	14	14	13	13	12	11	11	11

TABLE 9: Overall responses to all questions by type of court user, 1992 to 2000

(1) From 1999 onwards the type of witness (prosecution or defence) has been collected and users appearing as professionals (i.e. barristers, solicitors etc) have been included. Therefore comparisons of surveys from 1999 onwards with those from earlier years shown in the table above should not be made. 'n/a' in the table means results not available.

	Percentages									
	End 92	Nov 93	Oct 94	Oct 95	Oct 96	Oct 97	Oct 98	Oct 99 ⁽¹⁾	Apr 00 ⁽¹⁾	Oct 00 ⁽¹⁾
Appearing in court charged with an offence										
Very good	20	20	23	22	22	23	23	24	22	22
Satisfactory	53	55	53	56	56	56	56	56	56	57
Poor	26	25	25	22	22	21	21	20	22	22
Appearing in court as a witness (defence or prosecution)										
Very good	24	25	24	26	27	29	29	29	28	28
Satisfactory	53	53	55	53	53	53	52	53	54	54
Poor	23	23	21	21	20	19	19	18	17	18
Appearing in court as a defence witness⁽¹⁾										
Very good	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	24	23	22
Satisfactory	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	56	55	56
Poor	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	20	22	22
Appearing in court as a prosecution witness⁽¹⁾										
Very good	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	31	30	29
Satisfactory	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	53	54	53
Poor	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	17	16	17
Applying in connection with a liquor licence										
Very good	29	29	29	31	32	35	33	30	30	32
Satisfactory	54	54	55	54	54	53	54	56	56	55
Poor	17	17	16	15	14	13	13	14	14	13
A party in a matrimonial case										
Very good	24	25	25	26	28	28	26	24	28	24
Satisfactory	53	53	54	56	53	54	56	56	56	55
Poor	24	22	20	18	19	18	18	21	17	21
Accompanying a friend or relative who is appearing in court today										
Very good	20	20	21	23	23	23	24	24	22	23
Satisfactory	51	52	52	53	54	54	54	54	55	54
Poor	29	28	27	25	24	23	22	22	23	23
Appearing in court in a professional capacity⁽¹⁾										
Very good	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	33	33	32
Satisfactory	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	48	48	47
Poor	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	19	20	21
Attending for any other reason or reason for attendance not known										
Very good	23	25	23	27	27	29	28	28	29	29
Satisfactory	48	49	58	50	50	50	50	52	49	51
Poor	29	27	19	23	23	22	22	20	22	20
All types of court users combined										
Very good	22	22	23	24	24	25	25	26	25	25
Satisfactory	52	53	54	54	54	54	54	53	54	54
Poor	26	25	23	22	22	21	21	21	21	21

TABLE 10: Ethnic origin, 1999 to 2000

	Percentages of those giving ethnic origin and numbers		
	Oct 99	Apr 00	Oct 00
White	90	89	88
Black African	2	2	2
Black Caribbean	2	2	2
Black other	1	1	1
Indian	2	2	2
Pakistani	2	2	2
Bangladeshi	-	1	-
Chinese	-	1	-
Other	1	1	2
<i>Number of respondents where ethnicity of court user was known (=100%)</i>	19,606	21,408	19,653
<i>Number of respondents where ethnicity of court user was unknown</i>	2,032	968	885
<i>Total number of respondents</i>	21,638	22,376	20,538

'-' in the table means less than half of one per cent

TABLE 11: Overall responses to all questions by ethnic origin, 1999 to 2000

	Oct 99	Percentages Apr 00	Oct 00
White			
Very good	26	26	26
Satisfactory	54	54	54
Poor	20	20	20
Black African			
Very good	21	22	22
Satisfactory	56	53	51
Poor	24	25	27
Black Caribbean			
Very good	20	21	21
Satisfactory	54	51	53
Poor	26	28	26
Black other			
Very good	20	22	21
Satisfactory	54	53	50
Poor	26	25	29
Indian			
Very good	29	25	27
Satisfactory	48	54	51
Poor	23	21	22
Pakistani			
Very good	24	22	24
Satisfactory	49	50	51
Poor	27	29	26
Bangladeshi ⁽¹⁾			
Very good	23	21	24
Satisfactory	44	41	50
Poor	34	37	26
Chinese ⁽¹⁾			
Very good	29	23	25
Satisfactory	42	46	44
Poor	29	31	32
Other			
Very good	27	31	26
Satisfactory	47	45	43
Poor	26	23	31
Unknown			
Very good	26	24	21
Satisfactory	53	49	53
Poor	22	27	26
All types of ethnicity combined			
Very good	26	25	25
Satisfactory	53	54	54
Poor	21	21	21

(1) Sample size in one or more years is less than 100 defendants. Figures relating to small sample sizes will be subject to greater sampling error and therefore should be treated more cautiously than others in the table.

TABLE 12: Overall responses to all questions by Magistrates' Courts Committee area, 2000

	Percentages					
	Very good	April 2000 Satisfactory	Poor	Very good	October 2000 Satisfactory	Poor
Avon and Somerset	28	61	11	27	59	14
Bedfordshire	25	54	21	24	59	17
Cambridgeshire	20	58	22	23	56	20
Cheshire	31	53	16	29	56	15
Cleveland	22	55	23	22	57	21
Cumbria	34	48	18	38	49	14
Derbyshire	22	54	24	24	50	25
Devon & Cornwall	30	54	16	30	53	17
Dorset	24	53	23	23	56	21
Durham	23	51	25	24	55	22
Dyfed Powys	21	54	25	25	50	25
Essex	21	60	19	21	53	26
Gloucestershire	22	55	22	19	52	29
Greater London	26	52	22	28	53	19
Greater Manchester	28	53	19	22	50	27
Gwent	17	51	32	30	53	17
Hampshire and Isle of Wight	26	51	23	26	55	20
Hertfordshire	21	59	20	15	57	27
Humberside	18	59	23	23	56	22
Kent	27	53	20	22	53	25
Lancashire	25	53	22	29	58	13
Leicestershire	27	56	18	23	54	23
Lincolnshire	29	52	19	26	49	24
Merseyside	30	50	21	28	50	22
Norfolk	31	54	15	31	55	14
North Wales	22	58	20	26	55	19
North Yorkshire	23	54	23	27	55	18
Northamptonshire	26	56	18	24	59	17
Northumbria	27	57	17	22	57	21
Nottinghamshire	25	58	18	34	50	16
South Wales	24	56	20	23	57	20
South Yorkshire	27	55	18	31	54	15
Staffordshire	29	50	21	25	54	21
Suffolk	13	62	25	13	53	34
Surrey	28	53	19	27	58	15
Sussex	27	52	21	23	54	24
Thames Valley	23	55	23	21	55	24
Warwickshire	25	57	17	25	58	17
West Mercia	30	54	17	30	53	17
West Midlands	24	52	24	22	53	25
West Yorkshire	22	52	26	23	53	24
Wiltshire	27	54	19	26	56	18
All England and Wales	25	54	21	25	54	21

Notes

Introduction

1. In 2000 for the first time magistrates' courts in England and Wales conducted 2 surveys of waiting times on the day and user reaction. Previously being carried out annually since 1991, the surveys were conducted in the weeks beginning 10 April and 2 October at Petty Sessions Area (PSA) level.

2. The quality of service surveys were set up by the Home Office. With the transfer of responsibility for magistrates' courts to LCD these surveys were also moved to LCD, although the Home Office continued to provide support for the analysis of results up to the 1994 surveys.

Waiting times on the day survey

3. For the waiting times on the day survey, PSAs are asked to record the time at which the defendant was required to arrive (or the time the defendant actually arrived, whichever is later) and the time the case actually started for all adult criminal cases during the sample period. Exceptionally in cases where the hearing is postponed for another day no details are recorded. The information is requested for each courtroom in a PSA for two consecutive days or six consecutive court sittings, whichever is the greater. Since the 1993 survey PSAs have been asked to record information on at least 40 defendants and should normally carry on recording until this has been achieved. Since 1994 courts have been asked to undertake the survey in October. Before this, in 1993 the instructions were to undertake the survey in November and for the 1992 survey courts were asked to undertake the survey before January 1993.

4. This bulletin does not present the results of the 1991 survey since a change to the survey instructions means that the 1991 figures are not directly comparable with later years. The change affected the way the report time was collected. In 1991 courts were asked to merely collect the time defendants were asked to arrive but from 1992 onwards the survey has asked for the later of defendants' report or arrival time. This change will have reduced recorded waiting times.

5. The waiting times results in this bulletin differ from those published in 1997 and earlier years (covering 1996 and earlier surveys) in that custody cases have been dealt with differently in the analysis. In the analysis for results published in 1997 and earlier years custody cases were treated as having zero waiting time: the idea being that defendants in custody cases did not lose any free time while they waited for their case to be heard. Before 1996 courts were asked to record if a defendant was in custody by marking the form appropriately but from 1996 onwards a separate tick-box was added to the form for courts to record that a defendant was in custody. The new box resulted in a much greater number of defendants being recorded as in custody – which since custody defendants were treated as having zero waiting time depressed the overall reported average. From bulletin 3/99 onwards the results (including all previous years' presented) relate to the full recorded waiting time for all defendants including those in custody. This also has the advantage of better reflecting the overall time that non-defendant parties to cases, for example, the police, lawyers and witnesses wait.

6. For the block analysis in this bulletin the number of reporting blocks used by a PSA is defined as the number of the time periods (before 11 am, from 11 am to before 1 pm and 1 pm or after) which contained report times for more than 15 per cent of defendants in that PSA. This is the same methodology as used in all bulletins since bulletin 3/99. All previous analyses required more than 20 per cent of defendants.

User reaction survey

7. From 1999 onwards, the user reaction survey was designed to be completed by all magistrates' court users including professionals (i.e. barristers, solicitors etc) and also requested users to describe their ethnic origin. Previously it was only completed by non-professional court users (for example: defendants, defendants' friends or relatives, witnesses, parties in matrimonial cases, licensees, etc.)

8. Court users are asked to answer a two page self-completion questionnaire. Courts are free to choose how best to conduct the survey but the most popular method is to distribute the forms to court users as they wait for their case to be heard. PSAs are asked to carry out the survey for a whole week. To help ensure each PSA has a representative sample, they are asked to collect at least 40 forms. If a PSA fails to collect sufficient forms, then they are asked to continue the survey until they do so. The 1991 results are not consistent with the trend established since 1991 and are not included in the tables in this bulletin. However they can be found in a previous bulletin

(no. 3/97) issued by the Lord Chancellor's Department.

Quality and completeness of the data

9. The waiting times on the day collection forms and user reaction survey questionnaires are returned to Magistrates' Courts Division at the Lord Chancellor's Department. The forms are now processed electronically by data inputters at the Lord Chancellor's Department so the inputting can be better quality assured. LCD's Information Management Unit then checks the computerised records for consistency and corrects them where necessary.

10. The figures from the surveys conducted in October 1999 that are shown in this bulletin are slightly different to those shown by bulletin 2/2000. The differences are mainly due to revisions that take account of data inputted since the last bulletin was published.

11. Some PSAs are unable to participate in the collection of data due to local circumstances. The proportion of PSAs supplying data has increased since October 1999, and for the waiting times on the day survey was the highest in October 2000 since the surveys began. The sample size for the waiting times on the day survey was particularly large in April 2000 although in October 2000 it was slightly below that of October 1999. The user reaction survey while including more participants in April 2000 than October 2000 contained the fewest in October 2000 since the surveys started.

Proportion of PSAs making returns and sample sizes, 1991 to 2000

	Percentages and number									
	End 92	Nov 93	Oct 94	Oct 95	Oct 96	Oct 97	Oct 98	Oct 99	Apr 00	Oct 00
Waiting times on the day										
Proportion of PSAs making returns	71	85	91	88	92	98	94	88	93	99
Number of defendants	23,438	26,196	27,614	27,170	30,561	32,747	32,049	31,234	39,454	30,943
User reaction										
Proportion of PSAs making returns	78	86	80	93	91	98	92	86	91	98
Number of respondents	28,024	28,079	24,073	29,286	28,178	27,283	23,561	21,638	22,376	20,538

MCC amalgamations, 1997 to 2001

Date	Amalgamated MCCs	Old MCCs
1 April 1997	North & West Greater Manchester	Bolton, Bury, Rochdale, Salford, Wigan
1 April 1999	Devon and Cornwall	Devon, Cornwall
1 April 1999	Merseyside	Knowsley, Liverpool, St Helens, Sefton, Wirral
1 April 1999	Thames Valley	Berkshire & Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire
1 April 1999	West Midlands	Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall, Wolverhampton
1 April 2000	Avon and Somerset	Avon, Somerset
1 April 2000	Dyfed Powys	Dyfed, Powys
1 April 2000	Hampshire & Isle of Wight	Hampshire, Isle of Wight
1 April 2000	Northumbria	Gateshead, Newcastle Upon Tyne, North & South Tyneside, Northumberland, Sunderland
1 April 2000	South Wales	South Wales, West Glamorgan
1 April 2000	West Yorkshire	Calderdale, Leeds, West Riding
1 April 2001	Greater London	Barking & Dagenham, Barnet, Bexley, Brent, Bromley, City of London, Croydon, Ealing, Enfield, Haringey, Harrow, Havering, Hillingdon, Hounslow, Inner London, Kingston upon Thames, Merton, Newham, Redbridge, Richmond upon Thames, Sutton, Waltham Forest
1 April 2001	Greater Manchester	Manchester, North & West Manchester, Oldham, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford
1 April 2001	South Yorkshire	Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham, Sheffield
1 April 2001	Sussex	East & West Sussex
1 April 2001	West Mercia	Hereford and Worcester, Shropshire

12. PSA level results have been disseminated to local areas. These are available upon request from the contact listed in paragraph 17.

13. In the text and tables, figures may not sum exactly to totals because the numbers in this bulletin have been rounded independently of each other.

MCC amalgamations

14. For the first time the MCCs have been presented on the 42 MCC basis that will come into effect on 1 April 2001. Results for new MCCs are based on the results of amalgamations of old MCCs.

Further information

15. Information Bulletin 3/97 (covering all surveys to 1996) was the first bulletin produced on the magistrates' courts waiting times on the day and user reaction surveys by the Lord Chancellor's Department. It includes a list of references to previous publications both containing results and related to the setting up of the surveys. Information Bulletin 3/99 covers results from the 1997 and 1998 surveys and 2/2000 covers 1999 surveys.

16. The Home Office Research Bulletin No. 38 (1996): User satisfaction and waiting times in magistrates' courts – written by Patricia Morgan – provides analysis of earlier surveys.

17. This bulletin has been prepared by the Information Management Unit and Magistrates' Courts Division in the Lord Chancellor's Department. Comments on this publication or suggestions would be welcomed. If you have any enquiries about figures in this bulletin or wish to request further analysis of the data (a fee may be charged) contact Jo Peacock at the address below:

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