

Court User Survey 2012

A summary of findings

This paper summarises the results of the 2012 Court User Survey. The Ministry of Justice commissioned Colmar Brunton to conduct the survey, which is designed to measure user experience of, and satisfaction with, frontline services and facilities provided by the Ministry at court sites. The results are used to monitor and improve service delivery and facilities at courts.

Main Findings

- Overall satisfaction with services and facilities is higher in 2012 than in 2010.
- For most service-related questions around eight in ten court users were positive about their experience of using the court. There were high ratings (almost nine in ten) for staff helpfulness, staff competence, staff doing what they said they would and perceptions of being treated fairly by staff.
- Ratings for court facilities were also positive, but were generally lower (around seven in ten were positive).
- Most respondents felt safe at court.
- Less than one in ten court users encountered difficulties obtaining information or assistance in court.

Overall satisfaction with services and facilities was high

Respondents were asked overall how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with the services and facilities provided. 80% were satisfied; 6% were dissatisfied. Some groups were more or less likely to be satisfied (Table 1). The groups less likely to be satisfied also tended to be more negative about others aspects of the court user experience, including information, navigation around the court building, staff contact, and the facilities.

Table 1: Factors associated with overall satisfaction with services and facilities, compared to all court users (80% were satisfied)

More likely to be satisfied	%	Less likely to be satisfied	%
Administrative matters not related to a case	94	Taking part in a hearing or case	77
Bringing papers or forms for a case	90	Māori	76
Jurors	89	Aged under 30 years	75
Dealing with a fine or reparation	88	Attending as a support person	74
Attending a Tenancy or Disputes Tribunal	88	Visiting the court for the 12 th time or more	74
Aged 50 years or more	86	Accused in a criminal case	73
		Attending a Youth Court case	67

User experience of court services and facilities was generally positive

Information was accessible before the court visit and users preferred a variety of modes for interacting with courts

INFORMATION RECEIVED AND SOUGHT PRIOR TO COURT VISIT

The most common communications received were a letter (39%) or court summons (21%). 10% said they received a bail bond, 7% a phone call, 7% a fines notice and 6% a jury summons. Most court users found the information they received easy to understand (ranged between 88-98% depending on the type of information).

37% of court users actively sought information before going to court. Of those, the most common way of finding information was to ask a professional (46%), followed by phoning the court (20%), enquiring at the court beforehand (17%), using the internet (16%), or asking a friend or family member (15%).

PREPAREDNESS FOR VISIT TO COURT

Most people (82%) felt they knew what time to come, and 78% knew what to do when they got to court. However, 14% disagreed that they knew what to do when they got to court.

Respondents were also asked how prepared, or unprepared, they felt when they got to court. In total, 76% felt prepared and 15% said they felt unprepared.

ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY AND PREFERRED WAY TO INTERACT WITH COURT

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they have easy access to several information and communication technologies, for their personal use. 87% had cell phones (including smart phones) and 60% a landline. 59% had access to the internet and 60% of those also had access to a printer and 50% to a scanner. 12% of respondents had access to a tablet device.

When asked for their preferred communication channel for court interactions (such as submitting documents and finding out about court hearing times) the top four modes were letters (42%), face-to-face at the court (37%), by telephone (31%) and via email (26%). Via text message, secure website or using smart phone apps were preferred by a minority of respondents.

LIKELIHOOD TO USE A SECURE WEBSITE TO ACCESS COURT INFORMATION

Despite their communication preferences, almost two-thirds of respondents (61%) said they would be likely to use an online service which gave relevant personal case information.

A small proportion of users had difficulties with information at court

8% of respondents said they had difficulties getting information or assistance at court. Of these, a third (32%) said they experienced difficulties when seeking information about where to go, 29% when seeking legal advice/legal aid and 28% when seeking information about who they needed to see.

The majority found accessing court information easy

Respondents were asked to rate how easy or difficult they thought it was to obtain information about the services and facilities of the court. 63% said it was easy, 14% said it was neither easy nor difficult, 16% said it was difficult.

Most found navigation around the court easy

EASE OF NAVIGATING THROUGH THE COURT BUILDING

All respondents were asked how easy or difficult it was to find where to go in the courthouse. 86% found it easy, 6% said it was neither easy nor difficult, and 8% said it was difficult.

When asked how they found out where they needed to go within the court building the most common answer was that they were already familiar with the building (40%). About a quarter (28%) asked someone and another quarter (24%) looked at signs.

ACCESSIBILITY

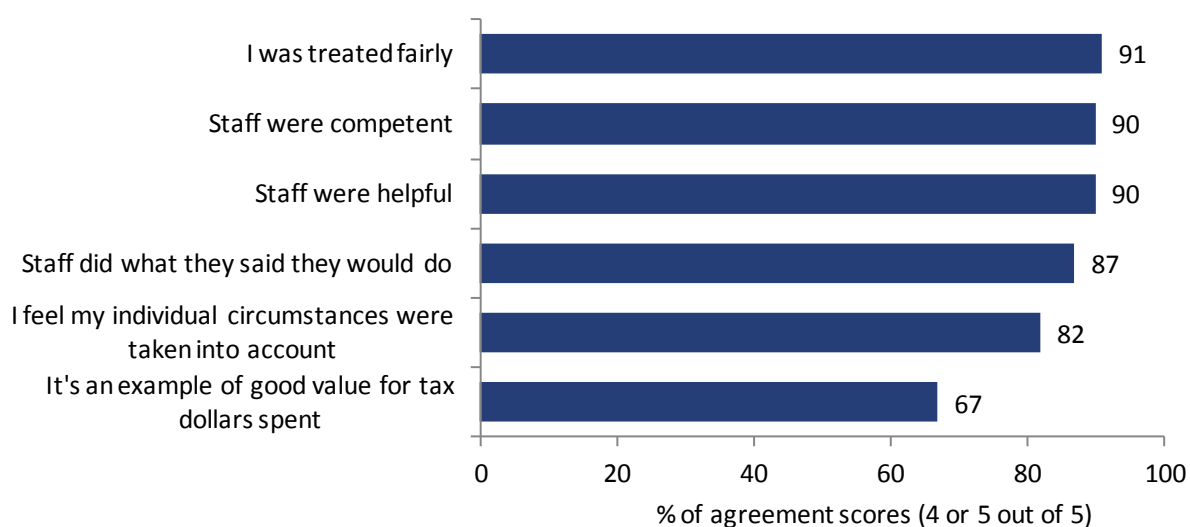
Most users were satisfied with the opening hours of court buildings (81%), just over half (55%) were satisfied with the convenience of the court hearings start and finish times and 72% were satisfied with easily identifiable staff being available to deal with queries.

Ratings of staff contact using the Common Measurement Tool questions¹ were positive

RATING OF STAFF CONTACT

63% of respondents had contact with court staff on their visit. Respondents rated staff very positively (a score of 4 or 5 out of 5) for most statements (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Ratings of court staff using Common Measurement Tool questions



Four out of five court users (80%) were satisfied (4 or 5 out of 5) when it came to the overall rating for the quality of service they received from court staff, 14% were neutral, and 6% were dissatisfied (1 or 2 out of 5).

EXPECTATIONS OF SERVICE

All court users who had contact with staff were asked what service they expected, and what service they received. Two-thirds (68%) expected good service (either 4 or 5 out of 5), 25% expected an average level of service (3 out of 5) and 7% expected poor service (either a 1 or 2 out of 5).

¹ The Common Measurement Tool (CMT) is a set of State Services Commission endorsed standardised questions used to measure satisfaction with public services.

Two-thirds (64%) said the service they received was better than expected (4 or 5 out of 5), 29% said the service was in line with their expectations (3 out of 5) and 7% said it was worse than they expected (1 or 2 out of 5).

The majority of users waited a short time at counters and less than an hour for their hearing

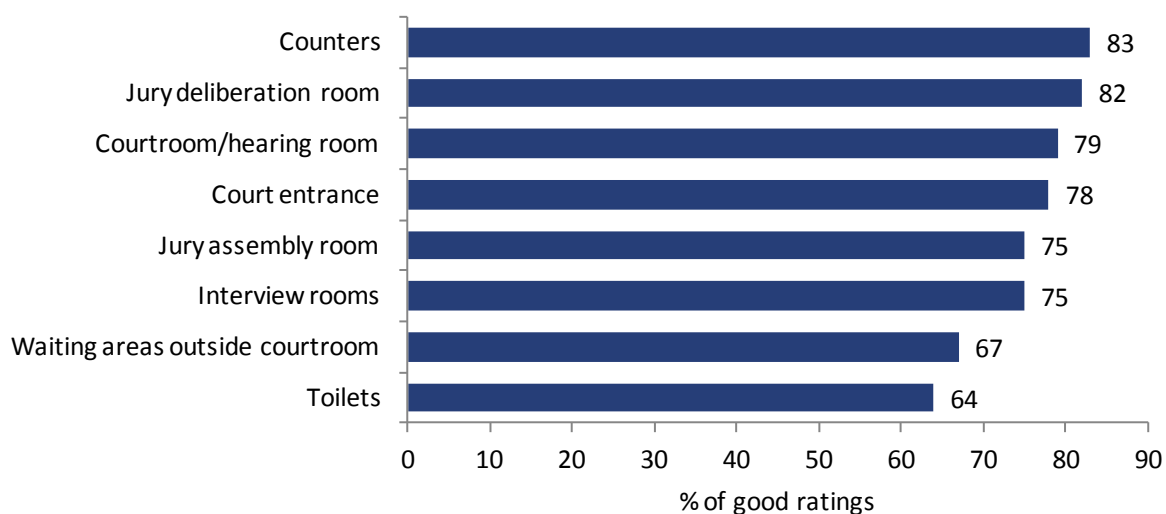
More than two-thirds (69%) of court users who approached a counter were served immediately. 18% waited up to 3 minutes, 6% waited between 3 - 6 minutes, 4% waited between 6 - 15 minutes, and 2% waited longer than 15 minutes.

Of those who had taken part in a hearing, 31% waited up to 10 minutes for their hearing, 36% waited between 10 minutes and an hour and 33% waited between 1 - 3 hours (a small minority, 1%, waited longer than 5 hours).

Ratings of court facilities varied

Respondents who used each facility were asked to rate them from very good to very poor. The proportions rating each facility as good varied (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Percentage of good ratings for each court facility



Court users were also asked to give an overall facility rating. 72% said the facilities were good, 23% said they were adequate, and 4% said the facilities were poor.

Most users felt safe at court

All respondents were asked how safe or unsafe they felt at court. In total, 91% said they felt safe, 6% said they felt neither safe nor unsafe, and 3% said they felt unsafe.

Respondents who felt unsafe were asked where it was that they felt unsafe. The majority (60%) found the waiting area/area outside the courtroom unsafe, followed by the court entrance (33%) and the area outside the court (31%). When asked why they felt unsafe the most common responses were the type of people around (46%) and not enough security staff (24%).

2012 ratings were generally positive when compared with the 2010 survey

The 2012 survey data was weighted in order to facilitate comparisons with the 2010 survey.^{2,3} Weighting ensures that the sample profiles across the two surveys are broadly comparable on variables that influence satisfaction (this means that differences between 2010 and 2012 should reflect underlying changes in satisfaction rather than being related to changes in the profile of respondents interviewed). Overall the results show an improvement in satisfaction among court users. Key changes between 2010 and 2012 are listed below.

Overall satisfaction increased and less users encountered difficulties

- Overall satisfaction with services and facilities increased significantly from 77% in 2010 to 80% in 2012.
- Significantly less users encountered difficulties getting information or assistance at court in 2012 (9%) compared to 2010 (12%).

Less users knew when to go to court

- Significantly less users agreed they knew what time to go to court in 2012 (86%) compared to 2010 (92%).

More users felt safe

- 89% said they felt safe in 2012 which is significantly higher than in 2010 (86%).

Ratings of some facilities improved

- The courtroom/hearing room – good ratings increased significantly from 75% to 80%.
- The court entrance – good ratings increased significantly from 72% to 76%.
- The waiting area outside the courtroom – good ratings increased significantly from 61% to 67%.
- Ratings did not differ significantly in 2012 for the other facilities.
- Overall ratings for facilities increased significantly from 68% to 72%.

Overall quality of service rating increased

- A significantly higher proportion of users agreed that staff were helpful in 2012 (89%) compared to 2010 (85%).
- A significantly higher proportion agreed that staff were competent (88% in 2012; 85% in 2010).
- Ratings did not differ significantly in 2012 for the other Core Measurement Tool questions.
- Ratings for the overall quality of service delivery (scoring either a 4 or 5 out of 5) were significantly higher in 2012 (79%) than in 2010 (74%).

² The weighted dataset only included the nine courts (Auckland High Court and North Shore, Waitakere, Auckland, Manukau, Hamilton, Tauranga, Wellington and Christchurch District/combined courts) included in both the 2010 and 2012 surveys. Data for the Whangarei, Rotorua, Hastings, Nelson and Dunedin courts are excluded from this analysis.

³ Because this dataset has been weighted and only contains 9 of the 14 courts, some values differ slightly from those reported in the earlier section of the report.

Information on the survey and participants

A copy of the research report, which includes the interview questionnaire, can be requested from research@justice.govt.nz.

Fieldwork and questionnaire

3,231 face-to-face interviews were conducted with court users (professionals and Ministry of Justice staff were not interviewed) at 14 court locations (Table 2) between 18 June and 19 July 2012. Interviews were 12 minutes long and took place as users exited the court building. The survey questions focused on reasons for attending, information provided and sought, navigation around the court building, staff contact, waiting time, court facilities, safety, overall satisfaction and demographics.

Table 2: Number of interviews conducted at each court location

Court location	Number of interviews
Whangarei*	218
Auckland High Court	157
Auckland District Court	243
Manukau	231
Waitakere	259
North Shore	283
Hamilton	250
Rotorua*	204
Tauranga	241
Hastings*	219
Wellington	279
Nelson*	220
Christchurch (including Aoraki House, Tower Building, Cambridge Terrace Courthouse and Nga Hau e Wha Marae)	230
Dunedin (including Dunedin Court building and John Wickliffe House)*	197
Total number of interviews	3,231

Note: * These five courts were not included in the 2010 survey. Therefore data from these courts is not included in the weighted data set which is compared with 2010 data.

In order to ensure minimum numbers of key groups, quotas were set to ensure at least 300 Family Court attendees, 300 people visiting for a fine or reparation, and 300 in total of Civil, Tenancy and Disputes Tribunal users were interviewed. In addition, quotas ensured that the sample included at least 150 Auckland High Court users, and at least 200 at each of the remaining courts.

Profile of survey respondents

REASON FOR USING COURT

Most people were in court either to take part in a hearing or court case (38%), or to support a friend or relative (28%). 11% were dealing with a fine or reparation and 5% were either bringing papers or forms to court for a case or getting information or forms from the court for a case.

The largest group (48%) of court users were attending court because of a criminal or traffic case (including those attending for jury service and those supporting someone attending, a criminal or traffic case). 10% of users were visiting because of a Family Court case, 7% because of a civil case, and 6% were visiting for a Tenancy or Disputes Tribunal case. Only small numbers of court users were attending because of Youth Court, Environment Court, Employment Court or other Tribunals.

A quarter of court users were visiting for matters not related to a case; including visiting for administrative matters not relating to a case, for a fine or reparation or as a spectator.

FREQUENCY OF VISIT

26% of users were visiting the court building for the first time. Most court users (74%) had been at the court building at least once before (17% of all court users had visited more than 12 times).

Limitations

It should be noted that findings represent survey respondents. This survey only represents a sample of court users (adjusted by interview targets that ensured minimum numbers of interviews for particular types of court user), conducted at particular courts during one month of fieldwork in 2012. The sample may not be representative of all users of New Zealand courts. This should be taken into account when interpreting the findings.