

Court User Survey 2014

A summary of findings

This paper summarises the results of the 2014 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 has not changed with 80% of survey respondents being satisfied in both 2014 and 2012.
- For most service-related questions, court users were positive about their experience of using courts. There were high ratings for staff helpfulness, staff competence, staff doing what they said they would and perceptions of being treated fairly by staff (almost nine in ten respondents rated these measures positively).
- Ratings for court facilities were also positive, but were generally lower (around seven in ten rated the facilities positively).
- Most respondents felt safe at court (90%).

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 less positive about other 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	%
Jurors	95	Taking part in a hearing or case	77
Administrative matters not related to a case	92	Court users (criminal jurisdiction)	76
Attending a Tenancy or Disputes Tribunal	86	Attending as a support person	76
Aged 50 years or more	86	Aged under 30 years	75
Household income over \$30K pa up to \$100K pa	84	Visiting the court for the 12 th time or more	75
Visiting the court for the first time	83	Unemployed	74
In paid employment	82	Students	74
		Accused in a criminal case	72
		Spectators	69

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 (40%) or court summons (17%). 9% said they received a phone call, 8% an email, 7% bail bond, 6% a jury summons and 5% a fines notice. Most court users found the information they received easy to understand (ranging between 87-96% depending on the type of information).

40% of court users actively sought information before coming to court (similar to 2012 when it was 37%). Of those, the most common way of finding information was to ask a professional (44%), followed by phoning a Ministry 0800 number (21%), asking a friend or family member (15%), looking at a Ministry website (14%), or enquiring at the court beforehand (13%).

PREPAREDNESS FOR VISIT TO COURT

Most people (88%) felt they knew what time to come, and 77% knew what to do when they got to court. These findings are very similar to the 2012 survey.

ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY AND PREFERRED WAY TO INTERACT WITH COURT

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they had easy access to several information and communication technologies, for their personal use. Overall, 89% of respondents had either a regular cell phone or a smart phone. In total 60% of respondents said they had easy access to the Internet via computer through broadband or dial-up (this has not changed significantly since the 2012 survey). In total 75% of respondents said they had an Internet accessible device. It should be noted that 52% of those with access to the Internet (either broadband or dial-up) also had access to computer printers and 43% had access to computer scanners.

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 (38%), by telephone (37%), face-to-face at the court (35%), and via email (31%).

LIKELIHOOD TO USE A SECURE WEBSITE TO ACCESS COURT INFORMATION

Despite their communication preferences, almost two-thirds of respondents (64%) said they would be likely to use an online service where they could check information about their case. This is higher than in 2012.

A small proportion of users had difficulties with information at court

9% of respondents said they had difficulties getting information or assistance at court. Of these, 33% said they experienced difficulties getting information about who they needed to see, and 31% when seeking information about where to go.

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. 59% said it was easy, 16% said it was neither easy nor difficult, 19% said it was difficult. The percentage saying it was easy decreased from 64% in 2012.

Most found navigation around the court easy

EASE OF NAVIGATING THROUGH THE COURT BUILDING

Respondents were asked how easy or difficult it was to find where to go in the courthouse. 88% found it easy, 5% said it was neither easy nor difficult, and 7% 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%). 28% asked someone and 21% looked at signs.

ACCESSIBILITY

Half of survey respondents (50%) were satisfied with the convenience of the court hearings start and finish times and 71% were satisfied with easily identifiable staff being available to deal with queries.

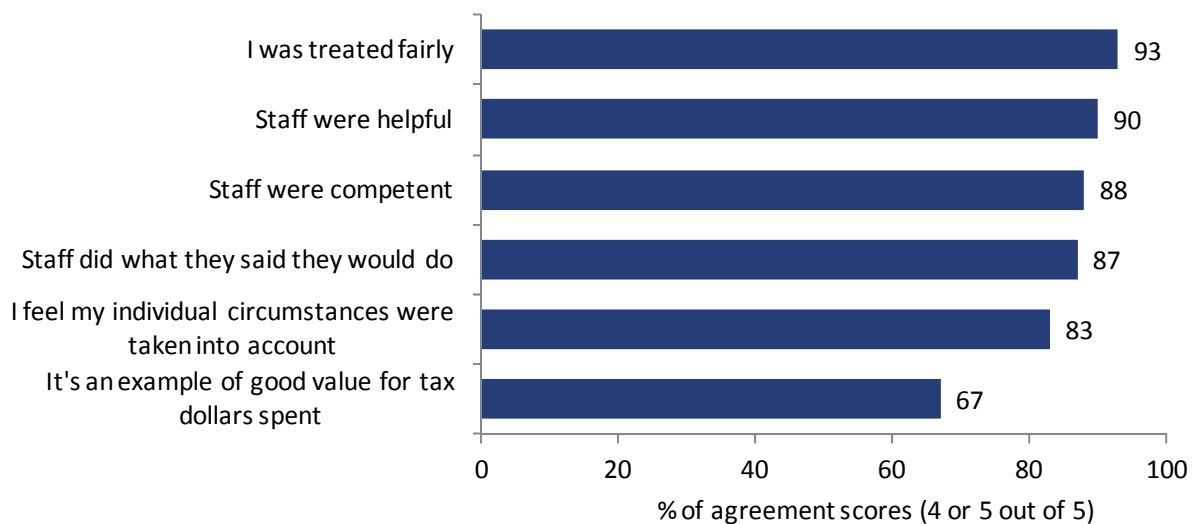
Respondents were asked about how convenient they would find evening hearing hearings, 40% said they would find it convenient and 41% said they would find it inconvenient.

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

RATING OF STAFF CONTACT

66% 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



78% were satisfied (a score of 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). The percentage satisfied has not changed significantly since 2012.

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

EXPECTATIONS OF SERVICE

All court users who had contact with staff were asked what service they expected, and what service they received. Two-thirds (65%) expected good service (either 4 or 5 out of 5), 27% expected an average level of service (3 out of 5) and 8% expected poor service (either a 1 or 2 out of 5).

61% said the service they received was better than expected (4 or 5 out of 5), 33% said the service was in line with their expectations (3 out of 5) and 6% 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

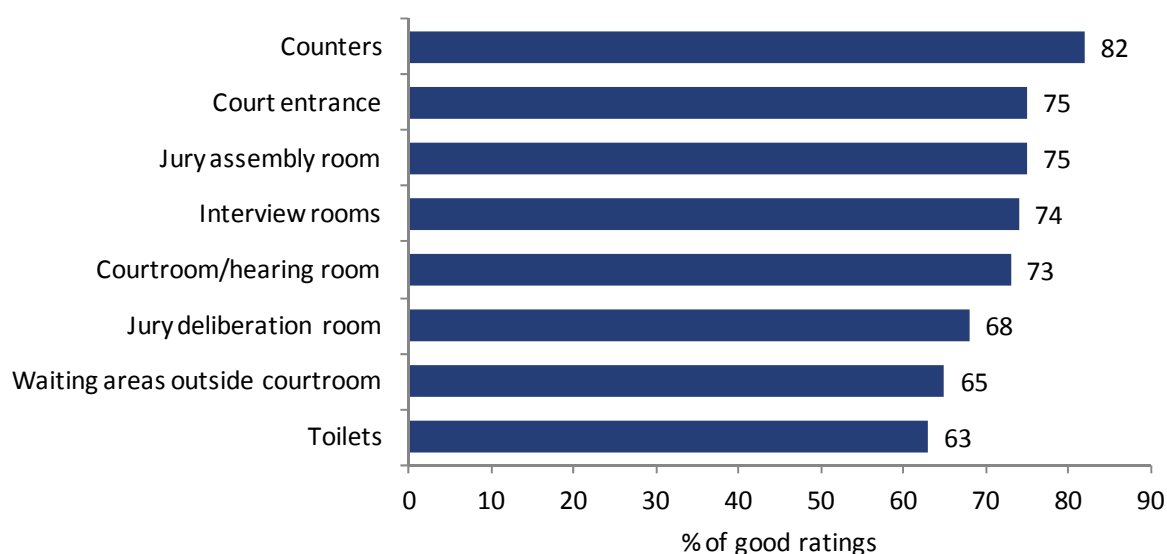
Nearly three-quarters (73%) of court users who approached a counter were served immediately (this is higher than in 2012). 16% waited up to 3 minutes, 6% waited between 3 - 6 minutes, 3% waited between 6 - 15 minutes, and 2% waited longer than 15 minutes.

Of those who had taken part in a hearing, 30% waited up to 10 minutes for their hearing, 40% waited between 10 minutes and an hour, 20% waited between 1 - 3 hours and 8% waited longer than 3 hours. Wait times are similar to the 2012 survey.

Ratings of court facilities varied

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

Figure 2: Percentage of good ratings for each court facility



Ratings for the court entrance and court/hearing room have declined since 2012.

Court users were also asked to give an overall facility rating. 73% said the facilities were good, 22% 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, 90% said they felt safe, 8% said they felt neither safe nor unsafe, and 2% said they felt unsafe.

Respondents mostly saw court security staff at the court entrance (67%) followed by in the waiting area (37%), and 79% indicated that security staff were approachable.

Information on the survey and participants

Fieldwork and questionnaire

3,508 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 16 June and 22 July 2014. Interviews were 12 minutes long and took place at 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.

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 approximately 150 Auckland High Court users, and at least 200 at each of the remaining courts.

Table 2: Number of interviews conducted at each court location

Court location	Number of interviews
Whangarei	216
Auckland High Court	127
Auckland District Court	340
Manukau	294
Waitakere	424
North Shore	235
Hamilton	206
Rotorua	201
Tauranga	227
Hastings	220
Wellington	247
Nelson	217
Christchurch	317
Dunedin	237
Total number of interviews	3,508

The 2014 survey profile was weighted so that it was similar to the 2012 profile (in terms of location, reason for visit to court and jurisdiction). This ensures that differences between the 2014 and 2012 survey results are likely to be the result of real changes rather than the result of the profile of survey respondents changing.

Profile of survey respondents

REASON FOR USING COURT

The majority of 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 (47%) 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 a Youth Court, Environment Court, Employment Court or other Tribunal case or hearing.

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

25% of users were visiting the court building for the first time. Three-quarters of court users (75%) had been at the court building at least once before; 18% 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 2014. The sample may not be representative of all users of New Zealand courts. This should be taken into account when interpreting the findings.