

# **HM Courts Service Court User Survey**

Technical note on survey design  
and statistical methodology for  
the 2009/10 results

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## **Introduction**

1. This technical note provides details of key methodological issues relating to the fourth year of the HMCS Court User Survey, 2009/10. It accompanies the main report presenting the year 4 Court User Survey results, which can be found on the Ministry of Justice website at:
  - <http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/hmcsusersurvey.htm>
2. Technical notes for previous years' surveys, covering the period 2006/07 to 2008/09, along with reports of the survey results for these years, can be found on the Ministry of Justice website at the following location:
  - <http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/hmcsusersurvey-archive.htm>
3. Much of the information included in the technical notes for the first three years remains relevant to the operation of the survey during year 4. This technical note covers the year 4 sample composition, the weighting of results to ensure comparability between years, and the survey methodology used for the Royal Courts of Justice.

## **Sample composition**

4. Courts were chosen for inclusion in the survey in year 4 using a systematic, stratified sampling mechanism that reconciled a number of different objectives, including:
  - maximising the number of achieved interviews by focusing on the larger courts where customer 'footfall' is greatest and interviews easiest to achieve;
  - ensuring that robust results were produced for each of the HMCS areas in each year of the survey;
  - ensuring 'representative' coverage – as far as it is possible to ascertain – across all courts and all user groups.
5. Fieldworkers attended court buildings housing all court jurisdictions, and interviewed users as they left the relevant building. Respondents were approached at random. The sampling methodology was based around allocating a specified number of 'interviewer days' to a selection of courts across England and Wales. Fieldworkers attempted to achieve as many interviews with court users as possible on each assigned interviewer day.
6. Excluding the Royal Courts of Justice (see the final section of this note for more information for information on interviewing at the RCJ), a total of 556 interviewer days were allocated in year 4. This is fewer than in years 2

and 3 of the survey where just under 900 interviewer days were allocated, but more than the 370 in the first year of the survey, which ran for a shorter period because there was less time available for fieldwork following the completion of work to develop and pilot the survey. The allocation of interviewer days, split by court type, over the four years of the survey is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Interviewer days by court type in each year of the survey**

<b>Court type</b>	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Year 3</b>	<b>Year 4</b>
Magistrates' court	166	326	331	243
County court	94	242	241	50
Crown Court	39	93	99	102
Combined Centre / other co-located courts	73	209	206	161
<b>Total days (excluding Royal Courts of Justice)</b>	<b>372</b>	<b>870</b>	<b>877</b>	<b>556</b>

7. In the first three years of the survey, a similar sampling approach was used, but the allocation of interviewer days to courts took into account a further objective of ensuring that all operating courts in England and Wales were included in the survey at least once during this initial three-year period. The year 4 survey did not incorporate an objective of this sort; the effect of no longer having such an objective was that interviewer days were generally more concentrated in the larger, busier courts than in previous years. As a result, the profile of interviewer days by court type differed compared to previous years of the survey: there were proportionally fewer interviewer days allocated to the (generally smaller) county courts, and, conversely, proportionally more to sites housing other types of court.
8. The weighting process used in producing the year 4 results (explained in more detail in the next section of this note) should adjust for any changes to the sample composition introduced by this methodological change. Note that county court users will also have been surveyed in the interview days assigned to combined / co-located courts where a county court operates in those locations.
9. Please see the year 2 and year 3 technical notes, which can be found on the Ministry of Justice website via the address at the start of this note, for more detail on the allocation of extra interviewer days to medium- and large-sized courts in years 2 and 3 compared to year 1.

### **Weighting of data to allow year-on-year comparisons**

10. The previous section has explained the reasons behind some differences in the allocation of interviewer days to courts in year 4 compared to previous years. As Table 1 shows, there were also further differences in the composition of courts in both annual samples in the other years.

11. Changes in the number of interviewer days allocated to different court types means that there will be differences in the proportions of their users in the sample. For example, the proportion of magistrates' courts users in year 4 was higher than in year 2 and 3 but lower than in year 1. Table 2 shows how court users themselves have defined which court they attended in the survey (unweighted data).

**Table 2: Answers to the question "What type of court did you attend today?" (unweighted)**

<b>COURT TYPE</b>	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Year 3</b>	<b>Year 4</b>
Magistrates'	40%	35%	35%	39%
Civil	18%	19%	20%	16%
Crown	17%	21%	19%	16%
Family	14%	13%	12%	13%
Administrative Court	1%	<1%	1%	1%
Court of Appeal – Civil <sup>1</sup>	<1%	<1%	1%	1%
Court of Appeal – Criminal <sup>2</sup>	1%	1%	1%	1%
Probate <sup>3</sup>	1%	<1%	n/a	n/a
Other	8%	6%	11%	10%
Don't know	1%	3%	1%	1%

12. The year 1 and year 2 results showed that the profile of court users interviewed could impact upon the user satisfaction results obtained. For example, the data showed that users of magistrates' courts tend to be less satisfied with the court experience than users attending other courts (although this may also, at least in part, reflect variations in the types of respondents at different court jurisdictions – for example, at magistrates' courts a greater proportion of defendants were interviewed than at other courts, who tend to have lower levels of satisfaction). Similarly, public users – those who are not attending the court in a professional capacity including defendants, victims and witnesses – tend to be less satisfied with the court experience than professional users – solicitors, barristers, police officers and other legal executives.

13. This means that, for example, an annual sample containing more interviews with magistrates' court users or public users is more likely to result in an overall lower level of satisfaction with the court experience, compared to a sample containing fewer interviewees of these types. Making no allowance for this in presenting the data could mean that observed changes between survey years could potentially reflect changes in the profile of the interviewees rather than any 'real' change in levels of satisfaction.

14. Despite the small change in the sampling mechanism in year 4 (as explained in paragraph 7), overall the survey design for the allocation of

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1 – In year 1 and 2 this option was called Civil Appeal.

2 – In year 1 and 2 this option was called Criminal Appeal.

3 – Probate users were not included in the year 3 and year 4 survey (in year 3 they were surveyed separately).

interviewers days to courts was designed to mean that the profiles of interviewed users should not change significantly from year to year. However, Table 2 demonstrates that there are some differences between the survey years. Therefore, 'weighting' has been applied to the data to account for the variations that have occurred.

15. The data are weighted in terms of three key aspects of the sample profile which previous years' results suggest have the greatest impact upon levels of satisfaction amongst court users. The weighting factors are:

- **Court attended:** Proportion of those attending magistrates' courts versus the proportion attending courts of all other jurisdictions.
- **Public or professional user:** Proportion of public court users versus that of professional court users.
- **Satisfaction with outcome of visit:** Proportion of court users who say that they are satisfied with the outcome of their visit, versus the proportion who say that they are dissatisfied, versus the proportion who say they don't know or are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

16. Results from years 1, 3 and 4 have been weighted to match the profiles of these factors in year 2, which was the first full year that survey fieldwork took place. Therefore, year 2 data have been used as the benchmark for weighting, and so its data remains 'unweighted'.

17. This weighting method means that the proportion of magistrates' court users, the proportion of public and professional court users, and the proportion of those who say that they were either satisfied or dissatisfied with the outcome of their visit, remains consistent within areas across survey years. Observed changes in levels of satisfaction of the court experience between survey years are therefore more likely to reflect genuine changes in perceptions, rather than (at least in part) reflecting changes in the sample composition.

## **Royal Courts of Justice**

18. The Royal Courts of Justice (RCJ) in London accommodates the High Court and the Court of Appeal. Given its distinctive role with the courts system, it has always been treated as a separate entity for sample design purposes. It was allocated 30, 50, 50 and 40 interviewer days, respectively, in each of the four years of the survey.

19. The RCJ contains a range of specialist court jurisdictions. In years 1 and 2, not all work areas of the RCJ were included in the survey, since it was felt that the smaller and more specialised jurisdictions would have a 'niche' user base that would not be appropriate for inclusion in a broad, general survey. Fieldworkers were asked to interview court users at the RCJ as they exited particular courts. These courts were:

- Court of Appeal
- Queen's Bench Division
- Chancery Chambers
- Supreme Court Cost Office
- Principal Registry of the Family Division

20. For years 3 and 4, this approach was changed, and fieldworkers were instead asked to interview at three main gates at the RCJ, and attempt to interview as many users as possible from any RCJ court, rather than attempting to find users who had attended particular courts. It was anticipated that this change would improve the survey response rate, which subsequently proved to be the case: for example fieldworkers achieved 17 interviews per day on average in year 3, compared to 10 interviews per day on average during year 2.

21. Due to these changes in survey methodology employed in the third and fourth years, data for the RCJ have been excluded from the weighting scheme described in the 'Weighting of data' section of this note.

### **Contact details and further information**

For queries, comments or further information on the issues set out in this note, please contact:

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