



HM Courts &
Tribunals Service

HMCTS Communications and Engagement Survey 2021

Summary of findings

Produced by:
HMCTS Communications Directorate

1. Introduction

In 2018 we published [Engaging with our external stakeholders - our approach and plans](#). As part of our commitment to audit, assess and track our engagement and communication activities, we sought the views of professional court and tribunal users in a [2019 evaluation survey](#) and again in 2021.

This report summarises our findings from the 2021 survey and will be used to develop the way we communicate and engage with stakeholders and professional users in the future.

From our use of social media and GOV.UK to running webinars and sending email bulletins, we use a variety of corporate communication channels to reach professionals who work in our courts and tribunals with timely information and updates. Through the survey, we wanted to find out:

- If we are using the right channels to reach the right people at the right time?
- If we are providing the right level of detail about the things those working in the justice system want and need to know about our organisation?
- What we could do better?

We have explored common themes from both 2019 and 2021 surveys to track changes in respondents' views – particularly about trust, knowledge, frequency and satisfaction with the way that we communicate.

1.1 Methodology

This report is based on the results of a quantitative online survey which consisted of 26 questions (see Annex, page13). The survey was live from 22 June 2021 to 23 July 2021 and was promoted and shared through:

- GOV.UK news items and our weekly operational update
- HMCTS email bulletins and stakeholder updates
- Social media
- HMCTS meetings

Our justice partners – such as the Crown Prosecution Service, Bar Council and The Law Society – also promoted the survey to their staff and members using their own channels.

We did not use qualitative research methods, but the report does include analysis of comments in the open text fields.

As in 2019, the focus of the survey was on our corporate communications (those about our organisation and how it works) rather than operational communications and interactions (such as those with parties about a specific case or hearing). The design and execution of the survey and analysis of the feedback has been carried out by an in-house team rather than an independent research agency.

In our 2018 stakeholder strategy, we described engagement as:

Communication: providing regular information and updates, some of it generic, some of it targeted at particular stakeholder groups. This work also seeks to encourage and invite feedback and opportunities to engage further with HMCTS.

Dialogue: sharing ideas, plans and proposals and exchanging views and knowledge, so that we can understand each other's perspectives on key issues.

Collaboration: collaborating with real users, giving them the opportunity to test and feedback on new services very early in their design. We also invite stakeholders with particular expertise and experience to work with us to design new and improved services.

1.2 Profile of respondents

The survey was completed by 688 respondents 45% of whom identified themselves as legal professionals.

In 2019, 903 professional court users completed the survey.

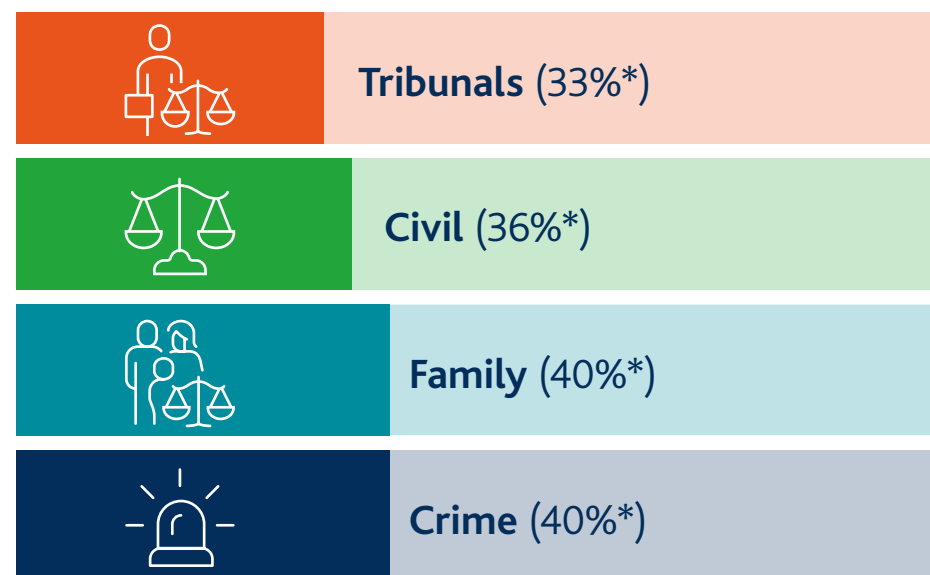
We received 215 fewer respondents to the 2021 survey.

Stakeholder type 2021

Answer Choice	Response
A legal professional	45.1%
A civil servant or public servant from another government department or local government	10.8%
Employed by a third sector organisation	7.8%
A judicial office holder	7.5%
A HMCTS or MoJ employee	7.4%
Employed by an organisation that represents people who use the justice system, such as victims, defendants or witnesses	6.2%
Other (please specify):	5.7%
A member of the public	3.8%
A professional who works in the wider justice system (such as a police officer)	3.1%
A supplier or contractor in the justice system	1.2%
An academic	0.7%
A member of the media, journalist or legal commentator	0.6%
A parliamentary or political figure	0.1%

Respondents were asked which jurisdiction they worked or had an interest in (they could select more than one option), and the split was evenly dispersed based on all responses received.

Respondents by jurisdiction



**Respondents could select more than one option.*

The sample size for the 2021 survey was smaller than in 2019 with 215 fewer responses compared to the 2019 survey. The number of legal professionals to respond was, however, almost identical (317 in 2019 and 306 in 2021).

2. Executive Summary

What professional court and tribunal users think of HMCTS communications

- Sixty-six percent of respondents said they **trusted** the communications they receive from HMCTS.
- Perceptions of **openness, transparency, timeliness and clarity** of communications and engagement have all increased since 2019.
- Professional court and tribunal users are **more satisfied as a percentage with our communications and engagement** than those who responded to our 2019 survey.
- Since 2019, **knowledge of HMCTS has increased** and respondents told us that the **frequency of engagement with HMCTS feels about right**.
- There is demand for continued engagement at the current level.

How professional court and tribunal users access and use HMCTS communications

- Respondents continue to want **communications and engagement** activities that are **operationally focused, specific to their role and/or jurisdiction**, rather than general updates.
- They are familiar with our corporate channels, particularly longstanding channels such as GOV.UK where they can search for information that is relevant to them.
- They often **follow or subscribe to all HMCTS corporate channels**, to ensure they are kept up to date with news, announcements and guidance. This can lead to respondents seeing similar content and messaging on multiple channels.
- Professional users seek updates from colleagues, representative bodies and justice-specific media outlets as trusted and unbiased sources of information.

HMCTS communication channels

- Aligned to findings from 2019, professional users still like to receive communications from us by email, followed by visiting GOV.UK and our monthly email bulletin.
- In 2021, respondents told us the most popular corporate communication channel for receiving information was the **weekly operational update**. This was introduced as part of our response to the pandemic and indicates that providing short, frequent, operational news and updates has been a success.
- Professional users say that they value engagement opportunities which help contribute to new projects, service delivery and policy implementation. They would like us to continue to provide opportunities such as our **engagement groups and online webinars**.

NB: It should be noted that the survey was promoted across the corporate channels identified as the most popular, which may have influenced results.

A woman with dark hair, wearing a white collared shirt and a red blazer, is looking down at her smartphone. She is wearing a gold watch on her left wrist and has a black bag slung over her shoulder. The background is a blurred city street at night with lights from buildings and a train.

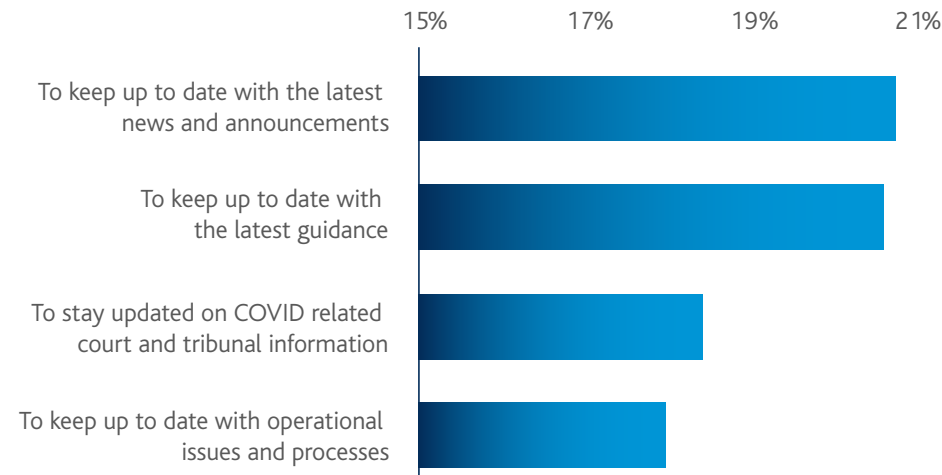
Perceptions of **openness, transparency, timeliness** and **clarity** of communications and engagement **have all increased** since 2019.

3. Findings

3.1 Reasons for receiving communications and engaging with HMCTS

Respondents said that **their top reasons for receiving HMCTS communications was to** provide them with information about news and announcements (21%) and guidance (18%) related to the administration of the courts and tribunals. This included COVID-related information (18%) and operational information (18%). Respondents trust the information that we provide and told us that they share our messages with colleagues and public users through their own channels.

What is your main reason for receiving, reading or listening to communications



Respondents value the opportunity to engage with HMCTS – their top three reasons include seeking guidance or advice related to their role (18%), representing their organisation (14%), asking questions about services, processes or projects (10%) and to clarify or ask for more information following receipt of initial communications (8.5%).

Survey comments show that **respondents continue to value HMCTS providing updates and sharing expertise related to justice and jurisdictional related issues.** They recognise the importance of and are willing to engage with HMCTS on operational matters. Respondents are keen to provide input that influences improvements to systems and process.

What is your main reason for engaging with HMCTS?



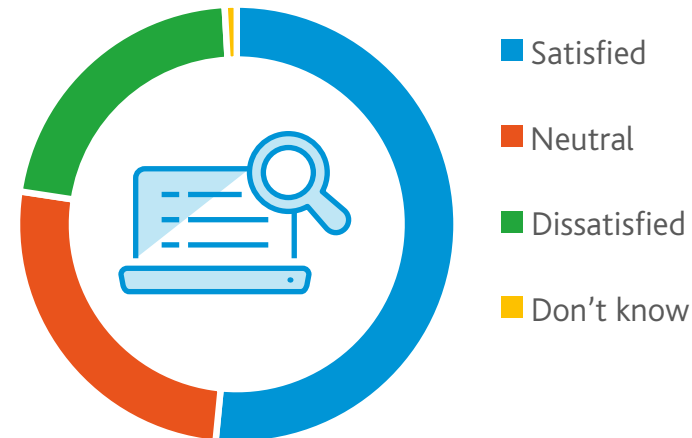
3.2 Satisfaction with communications and engagement

Fifty two percent of respondents are satisfied with the communications they receive from HMCTS, and 44% are satisfied with the opportunities to engage with us. While the sample size is smaller than 2019, this is an increase of 15 percentage points in relation to communications and 4 percentage points in relation to engagement.

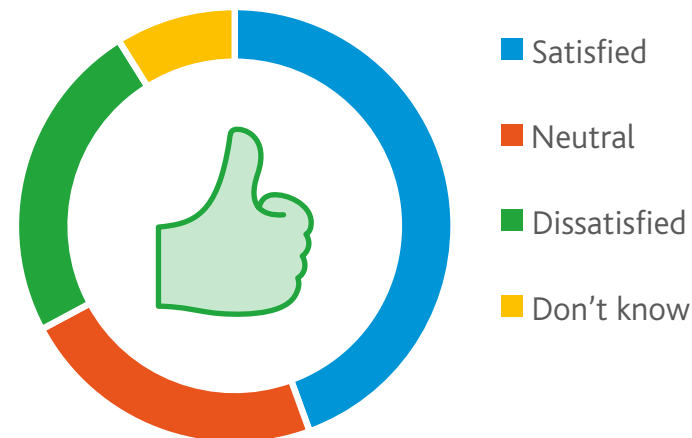
Based on respondents who said they had a **direct experience of our engagement activities** listed in the survey, one-to-one meetings, roundtables and working groups were the activities with which the highest percentage of respondents said they were very or fairly satisfied. Strategic forums, one-to-one meetings, and written consultations were the activities with which the highest percentage of respondents said they were fairly or very dissatisfied. This could indicate that verbal discussions between a smaller number of people were most valued by respondents. Given one-to-one meetings generated high scores for satisfaction and dissatisfaction, this may point to the varying quality of conversations that were being had.

Our 2021 survey focussed on corporate communications activities. Respondents also offered their views on HMCTS communications at regional and/or local level. They were sympathetic towards local court and tribunal staff and greatly value their contribution to the justice system but felt consistency and timeliness of local communications could sometimes be improved.

Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the level of information you receive from HMCTS communications?



How satisfied are you with the level of service you have received when engaging with HMCTS?



3.3 Openness, transparency and timeliness of communications

The table below shows the percentage of respondents who agree or disagree with statements regarding the effectiveness of HMCTS communication activities as measured in our 2021 survey.

2021

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?	Agree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree
HMCTS communications are open and transparent	▲ 43%	19%	38%
HMCTS communications keep me informed	▲ 59%	19%	22%
HMCTS communications share timely information through its activities	▲ 44%	24%	32%
HMCTS communications are clear and easy to understand	56%	17%	28%
HMCTS communications help me to understand the justice system	▲ 46%	20%	34%
HMCTS communications are useful for my work/role in the justice system	66%	13%	21%

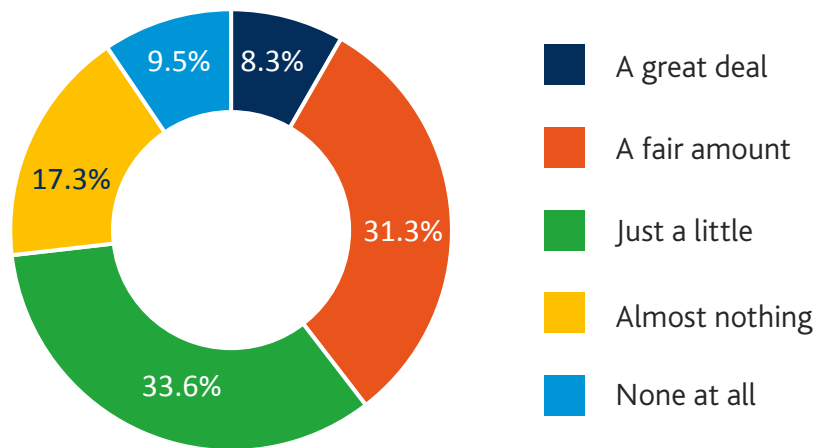
(▲ = Increase on 2019 where a [similar question was asked – page 20](#)).



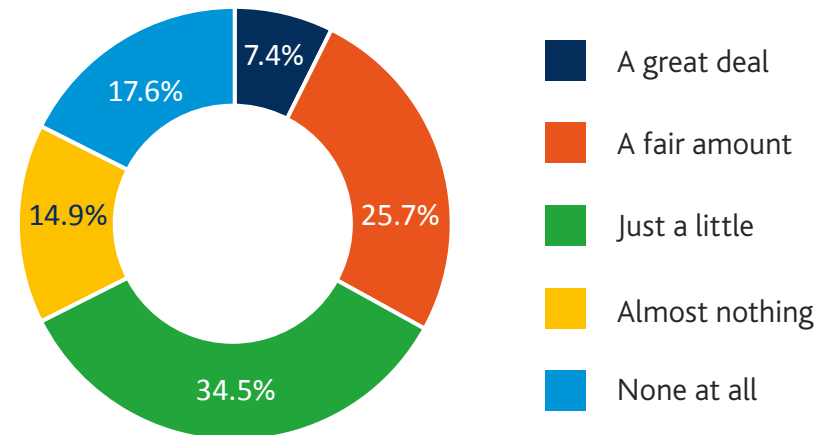
3.4 Knowledge of HMCTS and frequency of communications and engagement

Knowledge of HMCTS remains high, 73% of respondents believe that their knowledge of HMCTS has improved in the last 12 months as a result of the communications they have received from us. Sixty-eight percent of respondents believe that their knowledge of HMCTS has improved over the past 12 months as a result of engagement with us.

How has your knowledge of HMCTS improved over the past 12 months as a result of receiving communications from us?



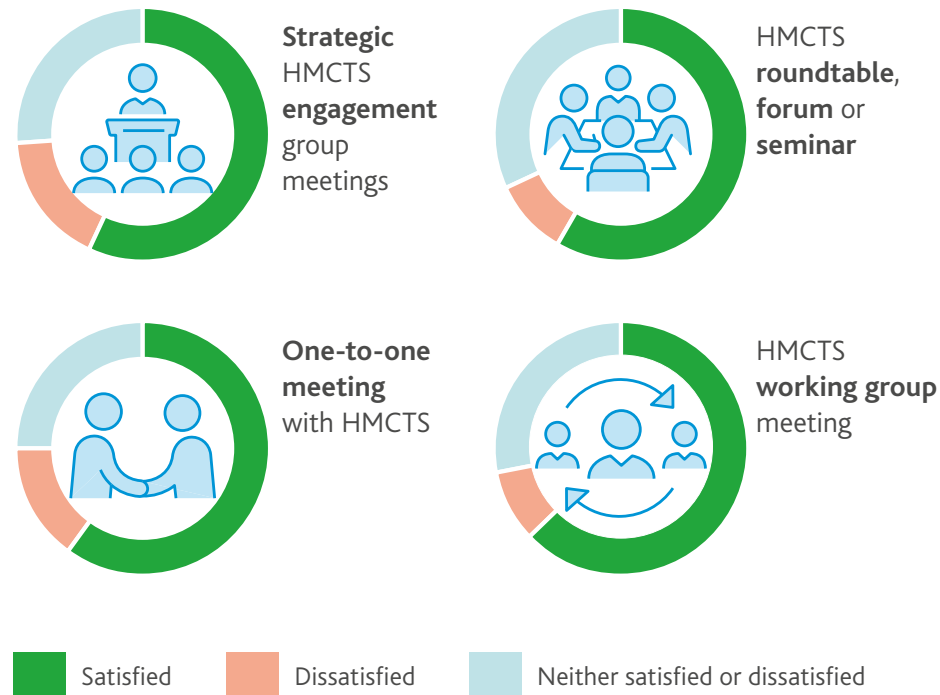
How has your knowledge of HMCTS improved over the past 12 months from your engagement?



Forty-five percent of respondents said the frequency of **communication from HMCTS is about right** (an increase of 11 percentage points from 2019), while 34% of respondents felt that the level of engagement was right. In terms of frequency of engagement, survey respondents said that they were likely to engage with us more than once a month at 26% or weekly at 19% in 2021.

Caveating the lower response rate for the 2021 survey, respondents engage through consultation response(s) or attending formal working group meetings¹. Engaging with HMCTS through our strategic engagement group meetings, formal meetings and roundtables had the highest satisfaction rate which indicates that **professional court and tribunal users value two-way dialogue** in small groups and the opportunity to meet programme and project teams.

Satisfaction by engagement method



3.5 Trust in HMCTS communications

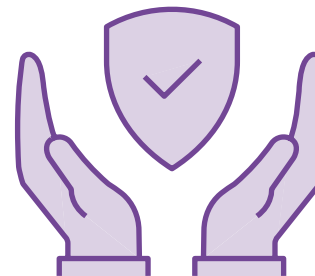
In 2019, in answer to a general question about trust and transparency, 41% of respondents said they trusted HMCTS and 42% did not believe HMCTS was transparent. We have worked hard to address this and to identify the role our communications and engagement activities play in building trust and increasing transparency.. We have seen notable improvements in satisfaction ratings for communications that are considered trusted and transparent.

In our 2021 survey:



66% of respondents said that they **trusted the communications** they receive from HMCTS.


⬆️ **Increase of 13% points** (53% in 2019).



43% of respondents agreed that HMCTS communications were **open and transparent**.

⬆️ **Increase of 21% points.** (22% in 2019)

¹ See further information about our [professional and public user group meetings](#)

A close-up photograph of a person's hands working at a desk. The person is wearing a dark blue long-sleeved shirt. Their right hand is holding a black smartphone, and their left hand is resting on the trackpad of a silver laptop. The laptop is open on a light-colored wooden desk. In the background, there is a white coffee cup and another laptop. The lighting is soft and natural, suggesting an indoor office or home workspace.

73% of respondents believe that their knowledge of HMCTS has improved in the last 12 months as a result of the communications they have received from us.

4. HMCTS communication channels

Throughout the pandemic and recovery, our communications shifted to providing more frequent operational updates than ever before. Sixty percent of respondents stated that they received information through the daily/weekly operational update (which was one of the main ways we promoted the survey), and consistent with the 2019 findings **respondents still value GOV.UK (56%) and the monthly email bulletin newsletter (44%)** in addition to direct emails regarding specific issues (44 %).

Respondents would like to continue receiving operational (68.6%), regional (55%), jurisdictional (49%) and reform (45%) news and updates. They are least interested in content written by external stakeholders (12%), human interest stories (18%) and blogs written by senior leaders (19%).

Aligned to the 2019 survey findings, respondents would like to receive information by email (79%), GOV.UK (51%) and online events/webinars (37%). Similarly, preferences for future engagement are by email (81%), virtual meetings (38%), workshops (28%) and roundtables, forums and seminars (27%).

Respondents told us that the three most trusted sources for information were their colleagues, representative or membership organisations and specialist news outlets.

Which, if any, of the following channels or sources do you trust to give you accurate and unbiased information?	2021	2019
My colleagues	65%	44%
Representative bodies (such as The Law Society, CILEx, Bar Council)	50%	57%
Specialist news outlets (eg The Law Society Gazette, The Justice Gap)	44%	41%

How respondents would like to receive information from HMCTS



79% would like information by **email**



51% via **GOV.UK**



37% via **online events/webinars**

5. Next steps

We will use the findings from the survey to keep improving how we communicate and engage with professional court and tribunal users.



Review the channels we use to make sure we can reach people effectively on platforms that are accessible and easy to use.



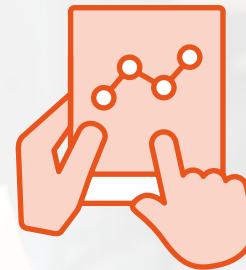
Continue to **create content that our partners can use and share**, so that information is readily available to the people who want and need it.



Consider the format of **engagement activities** in the context of hybrid working arrangements, keeping the best of what we have learned throughout the pandemic.



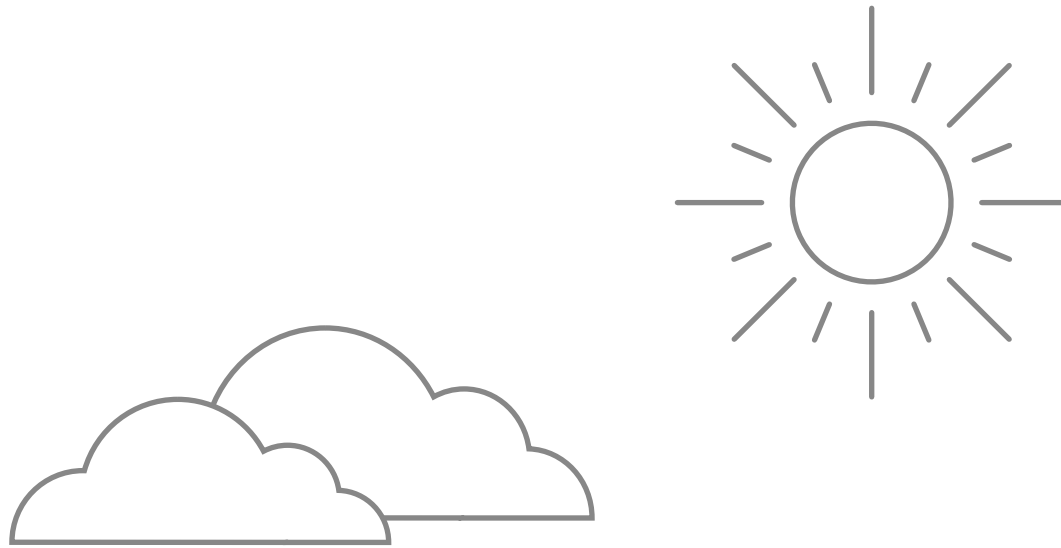
Collaborate with colleagues across the justice system to provide information and engagement opportunities that help us all to deliver change for the better.



Focus on **communicating about the topics that matter most** to professional court users, using analytics and seeking direct feedback to understand how people respond to our communications and engagement activities.

Annex - Questions asked in survey

- Q1: What is your role/job?
- Q2: Which jurisdiction do you work in or have an interest in?
- Q3: What channels have you received information through about HMCTS over the last year?
- Q4: How often have you received communications from HMCTS in the past year?
- Q5: What is your main reason for receiving, reading or listening to communications from HMCTS?
- Q6: Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the level of information you receive from HMCTS communications?
- Q7: How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the overall experience of the HMCTS communication activities listed below.
- Q8: If you answered, 'Fairly dissatisfied' or 'Very dissatisfied' to any activity in the question above, please could you explain your reasons why below.
- Q9: How has your knowledge of HMCTS improved over the past 12 months as a result of receiving communications from us?
- Q10: Over the past year, what engagement have you taken part in? Please select all that apply.
- Q11: How often have you engaged with HMCTS in the past year?
- Q12: What is your main reason for engaging with HMCTS?
- Q13: How satisfied are you with the level of service you have received when engaging with HMCTS?
- Q14: How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the overall experience of the engagement activities listed below.
- Q15: If you answered, 'Fairly dissatisfied' or 'Very dissatisfied' to any activity in the question above, please could you explain your reasons why below.
- Q16: How has your knowledge of HMCTS improved over the past 12 months from your engagement?
- Q17: How do you feel about the current frequency of communication with HMCTS?
- Q18: What type of information would you be interested in seeing more of from HMCTS in the future?
- Q19: How would you prefer to receive information from HMCTS in the future?
- Q20: Which of the following channels are you interested in using to engage with HMCTS in the future?
- Q21: How do you feel about the current frequency of engagement with HMCTS?
- Q22: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
- Q23: If you answered 'Tend to disagree' or 'Strongly disagree' to the previous question, please could you explain your reasons why below.
- Q24: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? "I trust the communications I receive from HMCTS?"
- Q25: If you answered 'Tend to disagree' or 'Strongly disagree' to the previous question, please could you explain your reasons why below.
- Q26: What other sources do you use to get accurate information about court and tribunal advice and guidance?





Justice matters