



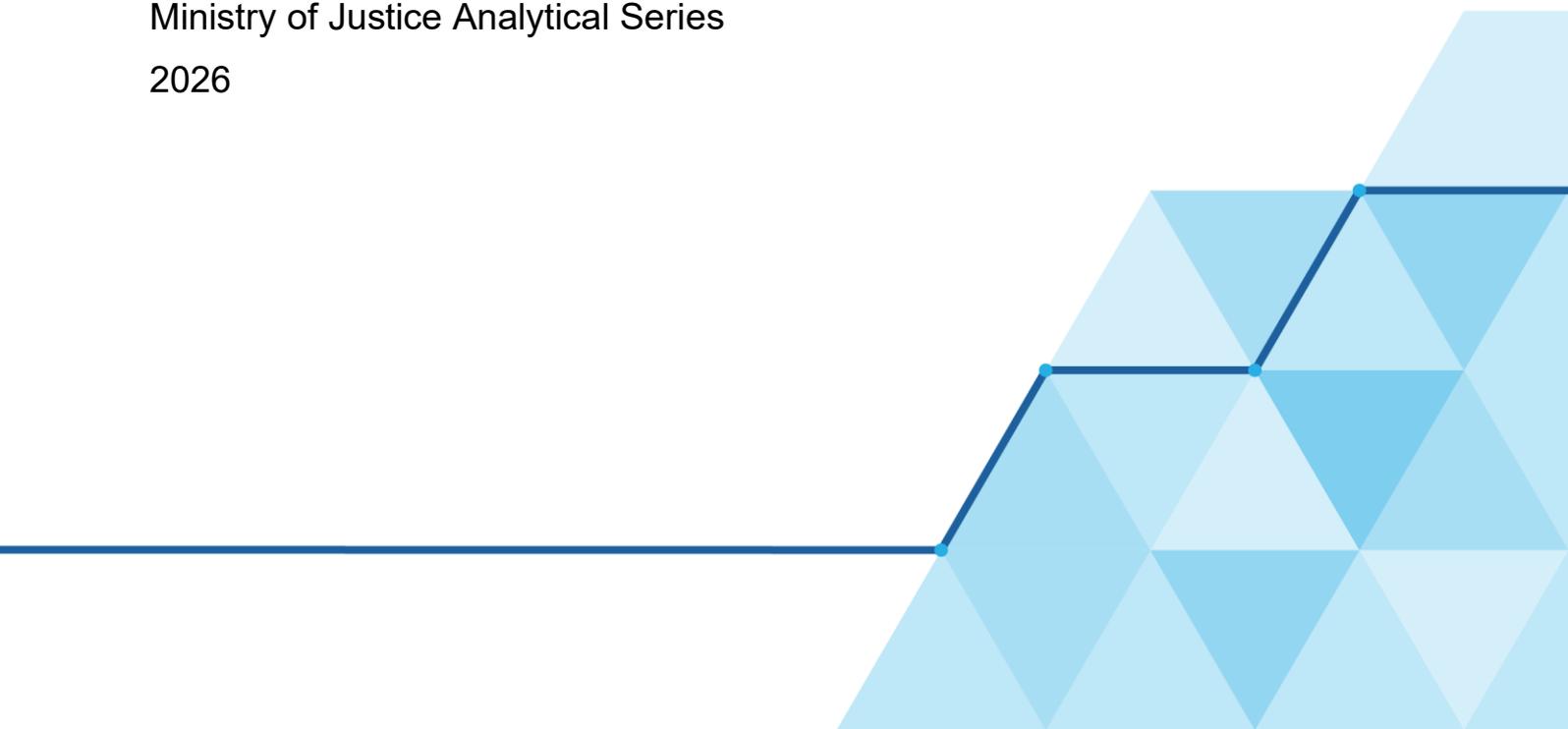
Ministry
of Justice

HMCTS Reform Evaluation

Digitalisation: Technical Appendix

Ministry of Justice Analytical Series

2026



The analysis function in the Ministry of Justice exists to improve policy making, decision taking and practice across the justice system. It does this by providing robust, timely and relevant data and advice drawn from research and analysis undertaken by the department's analysts and by the wider research community.

This research has been produced in accordance with the required standards for Government Social Research (GSR), as set out in the GSR Publications Protocol and GSR Code. Compliance with these standards assures the quality, rigour, integrity, relevance, and ethical conduct of research produced for government.

Disclaimer

The views expressed are those of the authors and are not necessarily shared by the Ministry of Justice (nor do they represent Government policy).

First published 2026



© Crown copyright 2026

This publication is licensed under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at researchsupport@justice.gov.uk

This publication is available for download at <http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/research-and-analysis/moj>

ISBN 978 1 911763 09 3

Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Digital Services Evaluation	2
3. Evaluation of the National Digital Support Service	4
4. Immigration and Asylum Appeals Reformed Service: Evaluation	6
5. Legal Problem and Resolution Survey	7
6. The Vulnerability Study	8
7. Analysis of Management Information Data	9
8. Implementation Evaluation	10
9. Process Tracing methodology	11
10. Process Tracing analysis summary	16
References	68

List of tables

Table 1: Summary of findings for causal pathway A	17
Table 2: Summary of findings for causal pathway B	26
Table 3: Summary of findings for causal pathway C	31
Table 4: Summary of findings for causal pathway D	39
Table 5: Summary of findings for causal pathway E	44
Table 6: Summary of findings for causal pathway F	52
Table 7: Summary of findings for causal pathway G	58
Table 8: Summary of findings for causal pathway H	63

1. Introduction

Launched in 2016, the HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) Reform Programme aimed to deliver a modern justice system using new technologies and ways of working to make the courts more accessible, simpler to manage, and more cost-effective to operate. The Reform Programme formally closed in March 2025.

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) was commissioned to conduct an evaluation of the HMCTS Reform Programme. The evaluation is identifying if the Reform Programme has achieved its intended objectives and what effects it has had, for whom and why. Using a robust theory-based approach, the evaluation is taking a long-term perspective on the combined effects of reform on access to justice, for both the general population and vulnerable groups. The overarching evaluation draws on multiple strands of research to evaluate the Reform Programme as a whole.

Published alongside the thematic report focusing on the digitalisation of reform: *adding new channels and redesigning existing channels around user needs*, this technical appendix provides further information on the methodological detail of the evidence sources used within the report. For projects with separately published reports, brief summaries of their methodologies are included, with links to the full details available at [HMCTS Reform Overarching Evaluation: Research - GOV.UK](#). The Implementation Evaluation and Theory-based Impact Evaluation will not be published individually and therefore methodologies are provided here. The supporting evidence for the Theory-based Impact Evaluation is also detailed in this appendix.

2. Digital Services Evaluation

Background

The Digital Services Evaluation is a process and impact evaluation of the digitalisation of the damages, divorce, family public law (FPL), financial remedy, Online Civil Money Claims (OCMC), probate, and Social Security and Child Support (SSCS) services. Supplementary reports have been published alongside an overarching report, detailing findings for individual services. The Thematic Report draws evidence from the overarching findings from across these services to draw wider conclusions about the implementation and effectiveness of digitalisation.

Methodology

The research took place between September 2022 to April 2023 and September 2023 to April 2024.

Impact evaluation

The impact evaluation took a theory-based approach, using Contribution Analysis, supplemented by analysis of protected characteristics questionnaires (PCQs)¹ where available. It assessed whether reform and/or other factors credibly contributed to any observed changes in outcomes.

The impact evaluation drew on information from:

- Management Information (MI) data and Protected Characteristics Questionnaire (PCQ) data
- Primary data collected via surveys and qualitative interviews
- Relevant literature.

Process evaluation

¹ Protected characteristics are those characteristics afforded special protection from discrimination and harassment under the Equality Act 2010.

The process evaluation drew on primary evidence to understand different user groups' experiences of reformed services and identify potential improvements.

The process evaluation drew information from:

- **Public user survey**

A total of 4,595 public users who had submitted their case themselves completed a survey covering the probate, divorce, OCMC and SSCS services. The survey explored users' experiences and perceptions of the service, whether their needs were met, and overall satisfaction. Public users of financial remedy, Private Family Law, and damages services were not included, as most cases in these services are submitted and managed by legal professionals and a digital service for public users was not available at the time of evaluation.

- **Legal professional survey**

A total of 2,297 legal professionals completed a survey that explored their experiences and perceptions of MyHMCTS and their overall satisfaction with the reformed service.

- **Qualitative interviews with public users, legal professionals, HMCTS staff, and the judiciary**

Qualitative interviews were conducted with 142 public users, legal professionals, judiciary, and staff from HMCTS and other agencies to explore experiences of the digital reform and the reformed services.

Publication

For further information on the Digital Services Evaluation including access to the individual service reports see [HM Courts & Tribunals Service Reform: Digital Services Evaluation - GOV.UK](#).

3. Evaluation of the National Digital Support Service

Background

The evaluation aimed to assess whether the National Digital Support Service (NDSS) was working well, and for whom, to help identify areas for improvement and inform decisions for the continuation of the NDSS.

Methodology

The fieldwork took place between January 2023 and February 2025.

Qualitative interviews with service users

A total of 50 interviews were conducted, split across two phases. Interviews covered the service user's background, awareness of NDSS, referrals, triage calls, appointments, any follow-up and satisfaction.

Quantitative survey of service users

A total of 500 SSCS service users and 34 non-SSCS² service users took part in a survey that focused on their experience of the NDSS.

Qualitative interviews with delivery partners, WA Group, Courts & Tribunals Service Centres (CTSC) and HMCTS staff

A total of 45 interviews were carried out with delivery partners, WA Group,³ Courts and Tribunal Service Centres (CTSCs) and HMCTS service staff. Individuals in both frontline staff and manager roles were interviewed. Interviews covered training and onboarding, referrals, triage, appointments and the end of support journey. Participants were also

² IFF Research was expecting to achieve 50 to 100 responses from non-SSCS service users, which would have allowed for more robust quantitative analysis of the non-SSCS group, but sample sizes were lower than expected due to the low take-up of the NDSS by these service users.

³ WA Group (previously known as We Are Digital) is the triage service provider for the NDSS.

asked to reflect on how the NDSS has been delivered so far, and how it could be improved.

Quantitative survey of the delivery partner and WA Group staff

An online survey was conducted with 36 staff members.

Appointment observations

A total of 5 appointment observations took place with SSCS service users.

Publication

For further information on the NDSS evaluation see [HMCTS Reform Overarching Evaluation: Research - GOV.UK](#)

4. Immigration and Asylum Appeals Reformed Service: Evaluation

Background

The objectives of the evaluation were to understand how the new processes for the reformed Appellant in Person and legally represented services are working, whether they are working well, and to identify areas for improvement. It also looked to understand the views and experiences of Appellants in Person, legal officers, the judiciary, CTSC staff, and Home Office staff, and explore early evidence of outcomes.

Methodology

Qualitative interviews with appellants

A total of 21 interviews with Appellants in Person (i.e., those who do not have legal representation) were completed between January and March 2023. Interviews explored appellants' views and experiences of each stage of the Appellant in Person service, focusing on what worked well and what could be improved.

Qualitative interviews with professionals

A total of 51 professionals completed interviews between December 2022 and March 2023. This included legal representatives, judges, legal officers, Home Office staff, and Courts and Tribunal Service Centre staff. The interviews explored professionals' views and experiences of using each stage of the Appellant in Person and legally represented services.

Quantitative analysis of management information

Publication

For further information on the IAC evaluation see [Immigration and Asylum Appeals Reformed Service: Evaluation Report - GOV.UK](#)

5. Legal Problem and Resolution Survey

Background

The Legal Problem and Resolution Survey (LPRS) 2023 is a nationally representative general population survey of adults aged 18 and over living in households in England and Wales. The LPRS measures people’s experiences of everyday problems that may have a legal solution through the courts and tribunal system.

Methodology

Fieldwork took place between March and August 2023.

Quantitative survey with the public

A total of 9,284 participants completed an online survey conducted via the UK Knowledge Panel, Ipsos’s online random probability panel that includes coverage of the digitally excluded population.

Qualitative interviews with the public

A total of 1,040 participants completed face-to-face interviews, using a Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) approach, taking place in respondents’ homes.

Publication

For further detail on the LPRS including a full technical report see [Legal Problem and Resolution Survey 2023 - GOV.UK](#)

6. The Vulnerability Study

Background

The Vulnerability Study 2023 is a qualitative study using in-depth semi-structured interviews. The research was designed to investigate the experiences of people who may be considered vulnerable. This included both those who addressed a legal issue through the formal justice system and those with a legal problem who sought to resolve it by other means. Among both groups, the research explored different routes to addressing their legal issue, the motivations behind decision making, use of available support mechanisms and services, and barriers and enablers for vulnerable people seeking access to justice.

Methodology

Fieldwork took place from April to October 2023.

Qualitative interviews with the public

A total of 120 participants were recruited based on having experienced a legal issue in the 12 months before interview. Recruitment was not linked to whether they had encountered a reformed HMCTS service; instead, participants were selected on the basis of their vulnerability rather than through random sampling.

Publication

For further details on the Vulnerability Study see [HMCTS Reform Evaluation: Vulnerability Study - GOV.UK](#)

7. Analysis of Management Information Data

Background

Analysis of MI data provides insight into HMCTS services that have undergone reform. Where possible, the analysis considers data over an extended timescale, including pre-reform data, and interprets this alongside relevant contextual factors.

Methodology

Quantitative analysis of MI information

MI analysis combines data from different sources (where available) to provide insight into services of interest. In this report, these sources include:

- Case-management data
- Protected characteristics questionnaire data

Analysis includes cohort and bivariate analysis, covering themes such as changes in caseloads over time, case timeliness, case outcomes and digital uptake.

MI analysis reports will be published as they complete and will be available here: [HMCTS Reform Overarching Evaluation: Research - GOV.UK](#)

8. Implementation Evaluation

Background

The Implementation Evaluation explored how HMCTS implemented the digital reforms. The evaluation comprised interviews with HMCTS staff and members of the judiciary, and document analysis. Insights from both strands were used to understand the implementation process and its influences.

Methodology

Qualitative interviews with HMCTS staff and the judiciary

A total of 68 semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams in February and March 2025. Five groups of participants took part in the interviews:

- 10 overarching senior staff: senior staff members with oversight across the programme.
- 16 service staff: staff members who designed the reforms, had implementation and communication oversight, and managed stakeholder engagement.
- 11 operational staff: staff members who delivered the reformed services.
- 22 digital staff: those responsible for designing and developing the digital infrastructure and system.
- 9 members of the judiciary: magistrates and district, salaried, and circuit judges.

Document analysis

Document analysis was conducted to systematically review materials relevant to the Reform Programme. Over 140 documents were analysed, including internal policy documents, business cases, meeting minutes, and external reports.

Documents were reviewed against the evaluation's research questions. A structured thematic framework was used to identify key themes.

9. Process Tracing methodology

Background

Process tracing (PT) is a ‘theory-based’ approach to evaluation, which examines whether a hypothesised causal mechanism (set out in a theory of change) explains an outcome. Theory-based approaches are particularly useful where interventions are complex, there is no available comparison or control group, and where estimates of the size of an effect are less important (HM Treasury, 2020a). PT applies a set of logical tests (see step 2.2 below) to determine whether the evidence supports or refutes these hypothesised mechanisms, or causal claims, or alternative explanations (HM Treasury, 2020b).

Rationale for selection of methodology

There is no single, commonly accepted, definitive procedure for undertaking PT. Most are more suited to more narrowly focussed interventions (Ricks & Liu, 2018). HMCTS Reform is a complex set of interventions with an extensive theory of change set out in the published Evaluation Framework (Ministry of Justice, 2021), and updated in the subsequent Progress Report (Ministry of Justice, 2023).

We have adapted our approach to PT, drawing on the more flexible procedure for Contribution Analysis⁴ set out by Delahais and Toulemonde (2017) as a starting point. This is a relatively straightforward approach and is better suited to a large and complex intervention such as HMCTS Reform. It consists of four main steps: delineating the causal issue, eliciting the theory of change, gathering evidence, and drafting the contribution story. We have then applied the principles of PT in the development and testing of the causal logic through logical tests, drawing on Collier (2011), Bennett (2010), and Ricks and Liu (2018). To support the synthesis of multiple sources of evidence within this approach, we have adapted the criteria used by the then Department of Business, Energy,

⁴ Contribution Analysis is a similar theory-based approach to Process Tracing but focusses more on generating a causal narrative of how an intervention contributes to change. Process tracing applies more explicit logical tests to the steps that an intervention is thought to take to achieve change.

and Industrial Strategy (2022) and Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (2023) to categorise the outcomes of multiple logical tests for each causal claim.

The approach to applying PT in our evaluation of HMCTS reform is set out below.

Protocol

1. Step 1 – develop testable claims

- 1.1. Disaggregate and record the Input, Activity, Output, Outcome, and Impact components of the causal pathways from the theory of change.
- 1.2. Expand and define the causal pathways, detailing component concepts, core assumptions, user groups etc.
- 1.3. Check for common a) activities, b) outputs, c) outcomes, or d) concepts, to ensure definitions are consistent.
- 1.4. Break down each causal pathway into testable hypotheses of how change might occur, that are: operationalisable, falsifiable, and measurable.
- 1.5. Develop alternative hypotheses as for step 1.4, deriving from: existing documented assumptions within the theory of change, wider evidence, emerging findings, logical deduction.

2. Step 2 – determine required evidence

- 2.1. For each hypothesis, consider evidence that would be expected if the hypothesis were true, and if the hypothesis were not true (e.g. Ricks & Liu, 2018).
- 2.2. Assess each piece of required evidence to determine which of the below tests it will be assessed against once collected:
 - 2.2.1. The **Double Decisive (DD)** test: if an expected outcome is observed, this confirms the hypothesis and weakens alternatives. If an expected outcome is not observed this disconfirms the hypothesis.

2.2.2. The **Smoking Gun (SG)** test: if an expected outcome is observed, this confirms the hypothesis and weakens alternatives. If an expected outcome is not observed this neither confirms nor disconfirms the hypothesis.

2.2.3. The **Hoop** test: if a particular outcome is observed, this neither confirms nor disconfirms the hypothesis. If a particular outcome is not observed, disconfirms the hypothesis.

2.2.4. The **Straw in the Wind (SitW)** test: if a particular outcome is observed, this may strengthen but not confirm the hypothesis. If a particular outcome is not observed may weaken, but not disconfirm, the hypothesis.⁵

2.3. For each hypothesis, consider whether the identified evidence is likely to be sufficient to allow a conclusion to be drawn. If not, return to step 2.1. If no further evidence is identified, proceed to step 3.

3. Step 3 – collect evidence

3.1. Extract relevant findings/outputs from evidence identified in 2.1.

3.2. Assess each piece of evidence collected against the test identified in 2.2.

3.3. For each hypothesis, assess the evidence against the strength of evidence framework (see below). If necessary, where evidence diverges for different populations, consider the hypothesis for each group separately. If the evidence is not sufficient to support a conclusion, consider what further evidence might be required.

3.4. Does the evidence confirm, strengthen, weaken, or disconfirm the hypothesis? Is it inconclusive? The assessment of support for each hypothesis considers the combination of passes and fails across all the evidence:⁶

⁵ DD, SG, and Hoop tests rely solely on direct evidence to conclusively confirm or reject the hypothesis. If only indirect evidence is available this may still meet the support/not support threshold and pass the SitW test.

⁶ Based on the approach taken by the Department for Energy and Net Zero (2023), and the Department for Business, Energy, & Industrial Strategy (2022). Additionally, where evidence covers all the expectations set but is ambiguous, or not consistent across at least half of services being considered and/or for which

- Hypotheses with evidence passing the DD or SG tests, without any failing the DD or Hoop tests, are considered to have **strong** support. It can be concluded with some confidence that the hypothesis is true.
- Hypotheses with evidence that passes the Hoop test but without any DD or SG passes, or where more evidence passes than fails the SitW test, are considered to have **moderate** support. The balance of evidence may support the hypothesis or is unable to definitively reject it.
- Hypotheses with some evidence that passes the DD or SG tests, and other evidence that fails the Hoop or DD tests, are considered to have **mixed** support. The evidence is contradictory.
- Where at least as much evidence fails than passes the SitW test this is considered to have **limited** support. There is some support, but on balance the evidence is not supportive of the hypothesis.
- Hypotheses with evidence that fails the Hoop or DD tests, and with no evidence passing the DD or SG tests, are **not supported**. It can be concluded with some confidence that the hypothesis is not true.

3.5. If further evidence is required to draw a conclusion, repeat step 2.

3.6. Consider evidence for all hypotheses across each Causal Pathway. Does the evidence support one or more hypothesis as true? Does the evidence and conclusion differ between public users (Litigants/Appellants in Person) and professional users? Take the most common conclusions across all the hypotheses in each causal pathway as the overall level of support for that causal pathway, and report this separately for public and professional users where these differ. Does the Theory of Change need to be updated or reformulated to considering the evidence and conclusions?

evidence is available it is considered **inconclusive**. Where evidence is available for fewer than 3 services only, or it is completely absent (e.g. has not been conducted), it is considered **insufficient**.

4. Step 4 – submit causal claim to challenge

- 4.1. Submit evidence and conclusions for challenge to test the internal validity of the conclusions and robustness of evidence. As good practice, regularly submit the analysis to quality assurance within the wider team.
- 4.2. Test conclusions and proposed revisions to the Theory of Change with subject matter experts to verify they reflect reality
- 4.3. Revise Theory of Change and/or return to step 2 if further evidence is required.

Limitations, challenges, and adaptations

Limitations

As with all methodologies, PT has limitations. It is heavily reliant on rigorous analysis of alternative explanations to avoid drawing incorrect inferences (HM Treasury, 2020b). The evidence available may support competing and mutually exclusive hypotheses or not be straightforward in its relationship to the outcomes under consideration (Bennett, 2010). As such, it may not always be possible to definitively conclude the evidence supports the theory of change, or to exclude all other explanations. Like other theory-based approaches that do not rely on control or comparison groups, it does not provide estimates of the size of an intervention's effect, although it can indicate the direction of that effect. Nevertheless, PT provides a useful and logically rigorous account of whether and how HMCTS reform has achieved its objectives.

Adaptations and development

In developing our approach, we consulted with the evaluation programme's Academic Advisory Panel (see Ministry of Justice, 2021) and theory-based evaluation experts at CECAN.⁷ The final methodology and analysis were also peer reviewed by an expert in theory-based evaluation.

⁷ The Centre for Complexity Across the Nexus, a centre of expertise in evaluating complexity.
<https://www.cecan.ac.uk/>

10. Process Tracing analysis summary

As described above, ‘causal pathways’ are the chain of mechanisms within the theory of change through which Reform was intended to achieve its objectives. Process Tracing considers whether Reform achieved its objectives as intended, by assessing the evidence for each causal pathway and any alternatives.

This chapter summarises the supporting evidence for the individual mechanisms within each causal pathway. It summarises alternative explanations which were supported by the balance of evidence. Further detail, including the consideration of alternative explanations where the balance of evidence was contradictory or not supported, can be found in the accompanying process tracing analysis annex.⁸ Unless otherwise explicitly stated, this analysis covers only digitalisation of civil, family, and tribunals services as part of Reform.

Causal Pathway A - Multiple channel options⁹ have enabled people to 'self-serve' and reduce effort

Digitalisation was intended to support a system that is just, built with and around the needs of those who use it. One way in which it was intended to do this was by adding new digital channels, or redesigning existing digital channels, to meet user needs while retaining offline options for those who need them. By making multiple options available, users should be able to choose the channel that is easiest for them to use and otherwise best meets their needs. This should reduce the effort required to access services and reduce the need for third party support or representation. By removing barriers and making it easier for users to access courts and tribunals services directly, digitalisation should therefore better support a system that is just.

Table 1 summarises the process tracing findings for causal pathway A.

⁸ The process tracing analysis annex has been published separately and can be found here: [HMCTS Reform Overarching Evaluation: Research - GOV.UK](#)

⁹ Multiple channel options’ means people can choose to access services through new or existing online channels, or through offline channels such as paper.

Table 1: Summary of findings for causal pathway A

Description of pathway	Number of hypotheses and outcome of tests	Overall conclusion
Multiple channel options have enabled people to 'self-serve' and reduce effort	<p>5 hypotheses tested.</p> <p>For public users: 3 with strong support, 1 with moderate support, and 1 with moderate or limited support.</p> <p>For professional representatives: 2 with strong support, 1 with moderate or limited support, 1 with mixed support, and 1 not supported.</p>	<p>Strong support for the causal pathway overall in relation to public users.</p> <p>Mixed support for the causal pathway overall in relation to legal professionals</p>
Alternative claims	<p>7 alternative claims tested</p> <p>For public users: 1 with strong support, 1 with moderate or limited support, 2 with limited support, 1 with mixed support, and 2 not supported.</p> <p>For professional representatives: 1 with moderate or limited support, 2 with limited support, 2 with mixed support and 2 not supported.</p>	<p>Overall, limited evidence that other explanations also contributed to outcomes</p>

Supporting evidence

- Hypothesis AS1: Adding new digital channels that allow cases to be started/managed online, are user friendly and accessible, and allow information to be accessed in one place, reduces user effort.*

There is **strong** support for this hypothesis in relation to **public users**. Evidence from MI data and fieldwork confirms users can start cases online (Ministry of Justice, 2025a; 2025b; 2025c; Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025; HM Courts and Tribunals Service, 2025b). Survey data¹⁰ shows an average satisfaction overall

¹⁰ Weighted public user survey data aggregated across services evaluated as part of MoJ and HMCTS' evaluations of digitalisation of probate, divorce, Online Civil Money Claims, and Social Security and Child

of 78% among public users of reformed services (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025), with significantly higher satisfaction for digital channels compared to paper (80% v 61%). Public users were also more likely to report finding it easy to start their case online than on paper (89% v 56%) and to keep track of their case (72% v 49%). Overall, public users also reported the service to be easy to use across most stages of the process (74% on average). There is some evidence however that cases may be moved offline when they become too complex or the process is not digitalised end-to-end (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025; Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025e).

There is **mixed** support for this hypothesis regarding **professional representative users**. Evidence from MI data and fieldwork confirms that professional users are able to start cases online (Ministry of Justice, 2025a; 2025b; 2025c; Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025; HM Courts and Tribunals Service, 2025b). Overall, professionals were marginally more satisfied than dissatisfied with the reformed service (39% satisfied v 37% not satisfied). Professionals are also more likely to find it easy to use MyHMCTS than not for all stages of casework, case management, and communication except editing case information (34% found this difficult v 30% easy), communicating with the courts (54% difficult v 13% easy), and communication with HMCTS/CTSCs (59% difficult v 12% easy).¹¹ However, this survey data also shows that 20% of professional representatives report that cases drop out of the digital service at some point because they have themselves decided to proceed offline.

2. Hypothesis AS2: Redesigning existing channels, that allow cases to be started/managed online, are user friendly and accessible, and allow information to be stored in one place, reduces user effort.

There is **strong** support for this hypothesis. Evidence from MI and primary fieldwork confirms that users can start and manage cases online, and store information in one place.

Support services. These evaluations are available at: [HM Courts & Tribunals Service Reform: Digital Services Evaluation - GOV.UK](#)

¹¹ Weighted professional representative user survey data aggregated across services evaluated as part of MoJ and HMCTS' evaluations of digitalisation of probate, divorce, financial remedy, family public law, Online Civil Money Claims, and damages claims services. These evaluations are available at: [HM Courts & Tribunals Service Reform: Digital Services Evaluation - GOV.UK](#)

Public users were significantly more likely to find it easy to start cases online than through existing paper channels (89% vs 56%) and to keep track of their case (72% vs 49%). Survey evidence also confirms that professional representatives are more likely than not to find it easy to use most aspects of the MyHMCTS service, other than communicating with the courts and editing case information.⁷⁰

Overall satisfaction with digital services is high (78%) among public users (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025). Professional representatives were slightly more likely to be satisfied than dissatisfied (39% v 37%). This has shown improvements over time, with those starting to use MyHMCTS in 2022 more likely to be satisfied than those starting in earlier years (46%, v 34% among those starting between 2016 and 2019).¹² This hypothesis is particularly relevant to OCMC, which made a redesigned service available in addition to the existing Money Claims Online service, rather than introducing a digital channel to an entirely paper process. Satisfaction with OCMC was relatively high among public users (71%), although legal professionals were evenly split (37% satisfied v 36% dissatisfied). Forty per cent of professional representatives in OCMC also reported choosing to take cases offline. HMCTS staff also reported confusion among public users when cases dropped out of this service (Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025d).

3. Hypothesis AS3: Adding new digital channels reduces user effort by allowing users to choose the channel that is easiest for them.

There is **strong** support for this hypothesis. Evidence from MI and fieldwork confirms that alternative channels continue to be available. For professional representatives, lower than 100% uptake and reports of offline workarounds, even where use of reformed services is mandatory, suggests alternative channels persist. This would however be considered an **unintended effect** (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025; Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025a; HM Courts and Tribunals Service, 2025b).

¹² Weighted professional representative user survey data aggregated across services evaluated as part of MoJ and HMCTS' evaluations of digitalisation of probate, divorce, financial remedy, family public law, Online Civil Money Claims, and damages claims services. These evaluations are available at: [HM Courts & Tribunals Service Reform: Digital Services Evaluation - GOV.UK](#)

No major existing or new barriers to accessing new digital channels were identified that prevented users from accessing the new service. Ease of use was identified as a key enabler of uptake for public users (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025), and uptake of digital services has been high across services. By Q3 2023 for public users it ranged from 70% in probate to 90% in divorce and has continued to remain high since then (Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025b; Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025e; Keeton, Lovering, Jones, & Hepner, 2025). Similarly, uptake has been high for professional representatives, reaching around 100% in financial remedy, although this is primarily driven by mandatory use requirements (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025; Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025c). However, even in the damages service where users experienced difficulties and sought workarounds, uptake was moderately strong at 68% (Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025a).

Paper also remains a viable channel for those for whom this is an easier option. Of those public users who started their case on paper, 16% did so because the online channel felt too complicated and two per cent said they preferred paper. For future cases, digital users remain significantly more likely than non-digital users to prefer the online service (83% v 43%), while unsurprisingly, non-digital users remain significantly more likely than digital users to prefer the paper service (19% v 2%).¹³

4. Hypothesis AS4: Adding new, and redesigning existing, channels reduces the need for legal representation by allowing customers to self-serve.

There is **moderate or limited support** for this hypothesis. Evidence shows that services are available for, and used by, unrepresented public users for OCMC, divorce, probate, SSCS, and immigration appeals (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025; HM Courts and Tribunals Service, 2025b). There is little direct evidence available on whether the proportion of unrepresented service users increased post reform compared to pre-reform. In divorce, where this was available, the increase in proportion of

¹³ Weighted public user survey data aggregated across services evaluated as part of MoJ and HMCTS' evaluations of digitalisation of probate, divorce, Online Civil Money Claims, and Social Security and Child Support services. These evaluations are available at: [HM Courts & Tribunals Service Reform: Digital Services Evaluation - GOV.UK](#)

applicants in person predated reform. A further marked increase from April 2022 was more likely attributable to the introduction of no-fault divorce at this time (Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025b). There was no similar trend apparent in other services where this data was available post reform (Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025d; 2025e). There was however some moderate qualitative evidence that the reformed service reduced probate users' need for representation:

“It was just the ease of it which was brilliant ... it was easy and you are not waiting months and needing a solicitor may not be required” **Public user (probate)**
(Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025f, p. 19).

However, there is no clear evidence that this has driven a reduction in overall reliance on legal representation. Use of legal representatives has seen some decline in relation to reform relevant legal problems pre and post reform: in 2014-15 12% of people with a legal problem obtained legal advice, declining only slightly to nine per cent in 2023. In relation to specific legal problems relevant to reformed services, use of legal representation remained stable for family/relationship legal problems (45% in 2014-15 and 43% in 2023) and personal debt (4% in 2014-15 and 2% in 2023). It did decrease for other money problems (12% in 2014-15 and 7% in 2023) but increased for state benefits (2% in 2014-15 and 10% in 2023) (Franklyn, Budd, Verrill, & Willoughby, 2017; Ames, Gallop, Baumont de Oliveira, Pace, & Walker, 2024).

There is also little evidence that ease of use is the key driver for not using legal representation. The proportion of people citing cost as a reason for not using legal representation almost doubled between 2014-15 and 2023 (from 16% to 30%). In contrast, there was no substantive increase in measures that would be expected if resolving problems without legal advice had been made easier ('Didn't need help/knew enough', 28% to 20%; 'problem resolved without the need for advice', 20% to 18%) (Ibid.). Qualitative research also suggests that the emotional and practical benefits of legal representation remain key drivers of this choice. In some cases, there is also evidence that users will seek legal advice in order to understand how to complete their applications online (Harrison, Lemmon, Ramanathan, & Clay, 2024).

5. *Hypothesis AS5: The reduced effort required of users to access the system is associated with the perception that system is just, by removing barriers to directly access the justice system.*

For **public users**, there is **moderate support** for this hypothesis. As set out for hypotheses AS1 and AS2 above, there is good evidence that reform has increased accessibility to the justice system by reducing the effort required. Although the precise patterns in case volumes were complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic and differences remain between services, the general increase in digital uptake after services were reformed is consistent with what would be expected to support this hypothesis. For most services reform was also found to contribute to a reduction in case duration which would support an inference that some barriers to processing a case had been removed. Users identified no major barriers to accessing services in qualitative fieldwork, although further analysis does suggest that incomplete digitalisation of case journeys could be a barrier (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025). Evidence from non-users is more limited. While qualitative research with vulnerable non-users identified generally positive perceptions of digitalisation, where alternative channels are retained, it did not identify the removal of any specific barriers to access for this group (Harrison, Lemmon, Ramanathan, & Clay, 2024).

Evidence is however indirect for an association between this and perceptions that the system is just. For example, public users were more likely to agree than disagree that HMCTS processed their case fairly (69% v 20%), and that they had confidence in how the court or tribunal handled their case (64% v 22%).¹⁴ In immigration appeals, appellants in person generally perceived the system as fair:

“I had trust and faith in the system. There was information that the judge was independent from the government, so I believed they... would review the decision... without any prejudice.” **Public user (IAC)** (HM Courts and Tribunals Service, 2025b, p. 52)

¹⁴ Weighted public user survey data aggregated across services evaluated as part of MoJ and HMCTS’ evaluations of digitalisation of probate, divorce, Online Civil Money Claims, and Social Security and Child Support services. These evaluations are available at: [HM Courts & Tribunals Service Reform: Digital Services Evaluation - GOV.UK](#)

For **professional representatives**, this hypothesis is **not supported**. As set out for hypotheses AS1 and AS2 above, while there is strong support that redesigned channels (where existing online channels have been modernised) have reduced user effort required, the evidence is mixed for new channels (where no previous online option existed). Although the precise pattern of case volumes is complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic and there is variation between services, uptake of digital services was generally delayed until they were made mandatory, suggesting that ease of use was not the main driver for professional users to move online (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025).

As with public users, timeliness did generally improve across most, but not all, services which would support a general reduction in barriers to use (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025; HM Courts and Tribunals Service, 2025b). However, while professional representatives identified the removal of some barriers, notably reduced reliance on paper and improved access to documents, they also explicitly identified the introduction of new barriers. Specifically, the lack of end-to-end digital journeys in some services, and limitations in digital channels' capability to handle complex or non-standard cases. Overall, professional representatives are more likely to distrust than to trust the MyHMCTS service to handle complex or more sensitive cases (39% v 28%):¹⁵

“Any form of larger or more complex litigation that’s never going to stay in the [system], why start it there?...All that’s going to happen is it’s going to get kicked off ..., I’m going to put a defence saying this is a complicated case...and it gets kicked out into the legacy system. Why go through all that rigmarole?” **Legal professional (damages)** (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025, p. 42).

The balance of evidence also does not support a perception among professional representatives that the removal of barriers better supports a system that is just. Just over

¹⁵ Weighted professional representative user survey data aggregated across services evaluated as part of MoJ and HMCTS' evaluations of digitalisation of probate, divorce, financial remedy, family public law, Online Civil Money Claims, and damages claims services. These evaluations are available at: [HM Courts & Tribunals Service Reform: Digital Services Evaluation - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/100000/hmcts-digital-services-evaluation-report-2025.pdf)

a third (36%) of representatives agree that cases handled through MyHMCTS are processed fairly (v 16% who disagree and 34% who neither agree nor disagree). However, they are more likely to disagree than agree that MyHMCTS has improved access to the formal justice system (32% v 10%) or to a hearing or decision (32% v 6%), and most likely to think there had been no change (37% and 40% respectively).¹⁶

Alternative explanations

This section summarises the evidence for alternative claims that were found to meet the threshold for moderate or strong support as logically plausible contributors to change. See the accompanying process tracing analysis annex for further detail, including on those that did not meet this threshold.

1. Hypothesis AA1: Improved digital confidence during the COVID-19 pandemic better enables people to use new or existing channels

There is **strong support** for this hypothesis in relation to **public users**. Between Q1 2020 and Q3 2022, during the height of the pandemic, the proportion of digital cases increased by 26 percentage points for probate, 17 percentage points for divorce, and 30 percentage points for Universal Credit (UC) appellants and 33 percentage points for Personal Independence Payment (PIP) appellants in SSCS (Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025b; 2025e; 2025f). This is consistent with evidence of an increasing trend in the prevalence of people accessing government services through the internet among the wider population, from 41% in 2020 to 52% in 2022 (OFCOM, 2020; 2023). An evidence review conducted by the Department for Work and Pensions (2024, pp. 64-65) also concluded that:

“Evidence indicates not only that the pandemic accelerated the creation and uptake of digital services, some of which would not have been created otherwise, but also that most users will continue to use digital services with the same frequency in the future.”

¹⁶ Ibid.

There is also evidence that digital capability has continued to increase in the general population, with the proportion scoring high or very high on Lloyd’s Digital Skills Index rising from 54% in 2020 to 67% in 2024 (Lloyds Bank, 2025).

2. Hypothesis AA7: Improved information on GOV.UK reduces effort by placing more information in one place and therefore increasing perception that the system is transparent

There is some **moderate support** for this hypothesis. The evidence of an increasing trend in the prevalence of people accessing government services through the internet among the wider population, from 41% in 2020 to 52% in 2022 (OFCOM, 2020; 2023) would support this. However, there is insufficient evidence of perceptions of transparency or the extent of information available on GOV.UK to draw stronger conclusions supporting or refuting this claim.

Causal Pathway B - Multiple channel options have increased the speed of case progression

Digitalisation was intended to support a system that is just, proportionate and segmented with the ‘majesty of the court’ where needed but with low burden channels where appropriate. One way it was intended to do this was by adding new digital channels, or redesigning existing digital channels, to increase the speed of case progression. Making multiple options available was intended to reduce the effort required of citizens and users by having shorter case lengths, less time taken to complete applications and have fewer outstanding cases. Public users should be able to choose the channel that is quicker for them to use themselves, while the digital channel should allow for automated case flow and digitisation of backend processes. This should logically reduce the effort required to access services. By making it faster (and therefore easier) for citizens and users to access courts and tribunals services, digitalisation should therefore better support a system that is proportionate and just.

Table 2 summarises the process tracing findings for causal pathway B.

Table 2: Summary of findings for causal pathway B

Description of pathway	Number of hypotheses and outcome of tests	Overall conclusion
Multiple channel options have increased the speed of case progression	6 hypotheses tested. 4 with moderate support, and 2 with mixed or limited support.	Moderate support for the causal pathway overall
Alternative claims	8 alternative claims tested 3 with moderate support, 3 with mixed or limited support, and 1 not supported. One had insufficient evidence from which to draw a conclusion.	Overall, moderate evidence that other explanations also contributed to outcomes

Supporting evidence

Hypothesis BS1: Addition of digital channels that automate processes by reducing the time spent on manual processing, speeds up cases and therefore reduces the overall effort required.

There is **moderate** support for this hypothesis. Evidence suggests that, for most services, overall case duration has decreased. For example, 12% reduction in case durations in divorce (case received to decree nisi), 44% reduction in probate case durations submitted by legal professionals (from application submitted to order granted), and 57% reduction for OCMC cases from case issued to first full hearing (Frontier Economics, IFF Research and Ministry of Justice, 2025). There were also observed reductions in case durations in financial remedy (consent applications), SSCS and family public law. However, case durations in damages have increased in comparison to paper cases (Frontier Economics, IFF Research and Ministry of Justice, 2025; Ministry of Justice, 2025). Service users whose main language is not English or Welsh and from ethnic minority groups also had longer case durations than other groups (Frontier Economics, IFF Research and Ministry of Justice, 2025).

In addition, for public users, there is some evidence of a reduction of manual steps in the case journey, due to no longer needing to print and post physical documents (Frontier Economics, IFF Research and Ministry of Justice, 2025). Probate applications submitted by public users were an exception: paper documents such as a photocopy of the death certificate and the original copy of the will were still required (Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025f). However, there is no statistical or survey data that measures the number of manual steps. Judges also reported that there are additional stages of work required, especially for damages.

Hypothesis BS2: Addition of digital channels that automate processes by reducing the scope for errors (which require time to correct) speeds up cases and therefore reduces the overall effort required.

There is **mixed** support for this hypothesis. Evidence suggests that the data on whether there are more errors in reformed systems to legacy systems is inconclusive (Frontier Economics, IFF Research and Ministry of Justice, 2025), as are legal professionals' perceptions of whether errors are more common (across services, 25% reported them being more common and 25% less common than in legacy services).¹⁷ As reported in hypothesis BS1 above, for most services, overall case duration has decreased. In addition, for most services, the time for completing various stages of cases improved following an increase in use of the digital service. This is especially true for divorce, family public law, OCMC and SSCS, with damages being the only exception (cases taking longer on average to be transferred to hearing centres).

However, across all services, there was some evidence of professionals, staff, and judges deliberately working around elements of reformed services. This usually involved either bypassing the system using e-mail (particularly with urgent deadlines) or moving complex cases from the reformed digital service to paper. Furthermore, evidence from interviews with legal professionals suggests that the total administrative burden required for fixing errors increased. Across services, the online portal (MyHMCTS) did not allow for errors to

¹⁷ Weighted professional representative user survey data aggregated across services evaluated as part of MoJ and HMCTS' evaluations of digitalisation of probate, divorce, financial remedy, family public law, Online Civil Money Claims, and damages claims services. These evaluations are available at: [HM Courts & Tribunals Service Reform: Digital Services Evaluation - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/research-data-and-analysis/publications/hm-courts-and-tribunals-service-reform-digital-services-evaluation)

be corrected easily, if at all. This resulted in more time communicating with HMCTS staff to get errors rectified and/or cases being processed on the legacy system.

Hypothesis BS3: Redesigning existing channels to automate processes by reducing the scope for errors requiring time to correct, speeds up cases and therefore reduces the overall effort required.

There is **moderate** support for this hypothesis. As reported in hypothesis BS1 above, for most services, overall case duration has decreased. However, as also reported in hypothesis BS1 above, while there is little statistical or survey data relating to errors or the reduction of manual processing through automation, there is some qualitative evidence. This evidence is however inconclusive on whether there was a general improvement.

Hypothesis BS4: Redesigning existing channels to automate processes by reducing the time spent on manual processing, speeds up cases, therefore reducing the overall effort required.

There is **mixed or limited** support for this hypothesis. First, as for hypothesis BS1, for most services, overall case duration has decreased. Second, as reported in hypothesis BS2, the time for completing various stages of cases improved following an increase in use of the digital service. This was true for divorce, family public law, OCMC and SSCS, with damages being the only exception (cases taking longer on average to be transferred to hearing centres). In addition, primary evidence from interviews was that the implementation of bulk scanning ensured that paper documents only need to be sent in and scanned once, before continuing as digital documents. This enabled digitalisation to reduce time/effort spent on manual processing. However, across all services, there was some evidence of professionals, staff, and judges deliberately working around elements of reformed services. This usually involved either communication outside of the system over e-mail (particularly with urgent deadlines) or moving complex cases from the reformed digital service to paper.

Hypothesis BS5: Features of digital channels that increase the speed of these cases have a knock-on effect, speeding up progression of paper cases by resolving more quickly.

There is **moderate** support for this hypothesis. The timeliness data presents a mixed picture. Case duration for paper cases increased for probate during the initial reform period (for both public users and legal professionals) and divorce (also for both public users and legal professionals) but has decreased for family public law and has remained steady for damages. It is also a mixed picture for IAC (increase for cases submitted by legal professionals but a decrease for cases submitted by public users), and SSCS. For PIP there was a slight increase following the introduction of bulk scan, followed by a decrease, but for UC there was a decrease in time to hearing (with a slight spike following bulk scan), but a much more volatile pattern in duration of lapsed cases.¹⁸

Hypothesis BS6: Redesigning existing channels to automate processes by reducing the time spent on manual processing, speeds up cases, therefore reducing the overall effort required.

There is **moderate** support for this hypothesis. As reported in hypothesis BS1, overall case duration has decreased for most services. In addition, feedback from users suggested generally positive experiences with reformed services among public users. This evidence, while not direct measures of effort, included that services were easy to use and clear to follow, and users reported they would recommend services and use them again in the future. These positive perceptions were relatively consistent across services, although public users of the divorce and OCMC services were more likely to be satisfied with the digital service than users of other services. These perceptions therefore suggest that levels of effort for reformed channels meet user expectations.

Alternative explanations

This section summarises the evidence for alternative claims that were found to meet the threshold for moderate or strong support as logically plausible contributors to change. See the accompanying process tracing analysis annex for further detail, including on those that did not meet this threshold.

¹⁸ where the decision making authority (normally DWP or HMRC) decide to revise the decision to the appellant's advantage, and the appeal lapses (comes to an end) after acceptance by the appellant

Hypothesis BA2: Increased judicial sitting days, in response to the pandemic backlog, allows cases to progress at a higher rate.

This hypothesis has **moderate** support. As reported in hypothesis BS1, overall case duration has decreased for most services. Furthermore, data demonstrates that sitting days in the Crown Court (criminal cases only) have increased in response to the Covid-19 pandemic backlog (National Audit Office, 2025). However, there are currently no published statistics on judicial sitting days for reformed services in the civil, family and tribunal jurisdictions, meaning there is insufficient evidence to suggest whether there has been an increase in judicial sitting days across these jurisdictions.

Hypothesis BA4: Reduced complexity in cases means cases are resolved more quickly.

This hypothesis has **moderate** support. As reported in hypothesis BS1, overall case duration has improved for most services. Furthermore, for damages, interviews indicated that there was no evidence of an increase in the prevalence of the most complex cases, multi-party cases, (Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025a). However, there was no interview evidence on case complexity reported for the other services, meaning there is insufficient evidence to evaluate whether overall case complexity has increased, reduced or remained the same across the digitalised services.

Hypothesis BA7: Changes in workforce capability and operations mean cases are processed more efficiently

This hypothesis has **moderate** support. The evidence suggests that improvements in timeliness occur after reform reaches steady state, although it does not draw a direct link with changes in workforce capability (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025). There was also a consensus from interviews that service reliability and stability have improved over time, leading to improved effectiveness. This implies that improvements in staff or administrative error measures may have occurred after reform reached a steady state. However, evidence from MI on whether there are more errors in reformed systems to legacy systems is inconclusive (Ibid.), as are the views of legal professionals concerning whether errors are more common.

Causal Pathway C - Multiple channel options have increased access to justice through a wider range of channels which are consistently available across all services

Digitalisation was intended to improve the accessibility of the justice system by ensuring access to justice was ensured consistently across channels and services. Access to the formal justice system would be increased by ensuring that people are able to access services by the channel that best suits them. Access to the formal justice system would also be increased by making it easy to submit correct information from the start of a case and subsequently improve access to a decision by reducing the rate of user and administrative errors. Digitalisation would improve access to a hearing by improving the timeliness of processing in pre-hearing stages. This would also contribute to the speed of access to a hearing for non-digital cases by improving the overall timeliness of case progression. Likewise, for digital and non-digital cases, it would increase the speed of access to a decision by increasing the time required to complete a case, both in the digital channel and overall.

Table 3 summarises the process tracing findings for causal pathway C.

Table 3: Summary of findings for causal pathway C

Description of pathway	Number of hypotheses and outcome of tests	Overall conclusion
<p>Multiple channel options have increased access to justice through a wider range of channels which are consistently available across all services.</p>	<p>7 hypotheses tested.</p> <p>For public users: 2 with strong support, 4 with moderate support, 1 with limited support.</p> <p>For professional representatives: 1 with strong support, 1 with moderate support, 4 with limited support, 1 inconclusive</p>	<p>For public users, moderate support for the causal pathway overall.</p> <p>For professional representatives, limited support for the causal pathway overall.</p>

Alternative claims	6 alternative claims tested 1 with moderate or limited support, 2 with mixed or limited support, 2 with limited support, 2 not supported, and 1 with insufficient evidence	Limited evidence other explanations also contributed to outcomes
---------------------------	---	---

Supporting evidence

Hypothesis CS1: Multiple channels increase access to the formal system by ensuring people can access services by whichever channel best suits them.

There is **strong** support for this hypothesis. Evidence from MI and fieldwork shows that paper applications continued in all services after services were digitalised. This included for professional representatives, although where digital services were mandatory for this group, this was facilitated through workarounds and should be considered an **unintended outcome** (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025; Ministry of Justice, 2025a; 2025b; 2025c). For future cases, preference for online channels remains higher than for non-digital channels among service users overall (78% v 4%),¹⁹ and higher than among the general population where 24% stated a preference for offline routes (Ames, Gallop, Baumont de Oliveira, Pace, & Walker, 2024). However, preference for online channels was highest among digital users compared to non-digital users (83% v 43%), while preference for paper channels remains highest among non-digital users compared to digital users (19% v 2%).²⁰ This suggests that the services users experienced broadly aligned with their preferences.

The evidence suggests that online channels do provide ease of access to the formal justice system. Across digitalised services, 86% of public users felt they made starting their case easy or very easy, and 77% felt they made their initial response to a case started by another party easy or very easy (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and

¹⁹ Weighted public user survey data aggregated across services evaluated as part of MoJ and HMCTS' evaluations of digitalisation of probate, divorce, Online Civil Money Claims, and Social Security and Child Support services. These evaluations are available at: [HM Courts & Tribunals Service Reform: Digital Services Evaluation - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hm-courts-and-tribunals-service-reform-digital-services-evaluation)

²⁰ Ibid.

Ministry of Justice, 2025). Professional representatives were also more likely to find it easy than not to create cases (58% v 9%), manage multiple cases (39% v 21%), and navigate around MyHMCTS (42% v 32%).²¹ Although representatives were less likely to agree than disagree that their client had better access to the formal justice system since the roll out of MyHMCTS (10% v 32%) they were most likely to neither agree nor disagree (37%).²² There was more limited direct evidence of whether paper channels provide ease of access to the formal justice system, or on their ease of use. Qualitative research with **vulnerable individuals** does however suggest that the existence of offline channels alongside online options provides reassurance and a sense of security, as well as the ability to interact with support services more easily (Harrison, Lemmon, Ramanathan, & Clay, 2024). As such, maintaining these channels, regardless of how easy they might be to use in comparison to digital alternatives, provides ongoing access to the formal justice system.

Hypothesis CS2: Multiple channels improve time to first hearing for digital cases by improving timeliness of pre-hearing digital stages.

There is **moderate** support for this hypothesis. Across most services, time to hearing improved concurrently with, or shortly after, the introduction of digital reforms, although not all services routinely involved a hearing. In OCMC, the time cases took to get to the first full hearing decreased by 57%. There was a slight decrease time to get to the first procedural hearing in family public law (FPL), and a decrease in the time to get to a hearing in SSCS. There were however no observed improvements in time to get to a hearing in damages, and additional administrative burdens from reform in FPL may have hindered more substantive improvements in timeliness. Analysis of MI and fieldwork suggested that where there were improvements, the consolidation of services onto single digital platforms, and especially the integration with back-office processes, contributed to improved timeliness through more efficient processing (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025; HM Courts and Tribunals Service, 2025b).

²¹ Weighted professional user survey data aggregated across services evaluated as part of MoJ and HMCTS' evaluations of digitalisation of probate, divorce, financial remedy, family public law, Online Civil Money Claims, and damages claims. These evaluations are available at: [HM Courts & Tribunals Service Reform: Digital Services Evaluation - GOV.UK](#)

²² Ibid.

Hypothesis CS3: Multiple channels increase speed of access to hearings for paper cases by speeding up overall rates of case progression.

There is **limited** support for this hypothesis. Following digitalisation, most services saw improvements in time to hearing for paper cases and overall rates of case duration for public users. In SSCS, mean time to first hearing fell from circa 270 days to 125 days with little difference between channels. In OCMC, although it was not possible to distinguish between paper and digital, mean overall time to first hearing decreased from 338 to 147 days, with improvements in timeliness of settlement pre-judgment from 42 to 33 days. In IAC, offline case median overall timeliness improved from 239 to 220 days. For professional representatives, overall, most services improved or saw no change. Paper cases in FPL, the only service with a hearing stage for which a split by channel was available, showed early indications that paper cases were taking longer overall and longer than digital cases. However, in most services post reform, paper cases represented a small number of cases leading to high levels of volatility in timeliness. They were also more likely to be complex or otherwise different from digital cases, making firm conclusions difficult (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025; HM Courts and Tribunals Service, 2025b). Furthermore, these changes do not account for variations in staffing levels or sitting days.

Professional representatives' experience of the impact of reform on overall case progression and the speed hearings were listed was similarly unclear. Forty-seven per cent of professionals thought cases processed through MyHMCTS were faster (v 24% slower) (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025). In financial remedy, for example, 40% of representatives thought cases were processed faster, but in interviews they cautioned that because of backlogs and waiting times this did not mean that hearings were necessarily listed sooner. The experience of the judiciary was similarly mixed, with some noting that overall processing was quicker but others feeling that timeliness for paper was still poor (Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025d):

“The turnaround time of the paper system is unacceptable ... a lot of that delay can be cut out by the portal” **Judge (financial remedy)**

Hypothesis CS4: Multiple channels increase speed of access to a decision in accordance with the law for digital cases by shortening the time required to complete the case.

The evidence for this hypothesis is **moderate**. Overall, time for cases to complete generally decreased across services (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025). For public users, time to receive a disposal (decree nisi) for digital cases in divorce reduced by 40% during 2021. In OCMC, time to receive a default judgment also decreased following digitalisation. Time to grant of probate for digital applications fell slightly immediately following reform, and was slightly quicker than for paper cases, but varied thereafter until the onset of the pandemic. As noted above, paper cases are more likely to be complex cases ineligible for digital channels.

The rate of withdrawals did decrease following digitalisation meaning an increase in the proportion of applications receiving a decision. For SSCS, while time to reach a hearing decreased, the proportion of cases disposed at hearing was volatile following reform. Early analysis of IAC data concluded that the high proportion of appellants in person dropping out of the system prevented an accurate determination of waiting times. (Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025b; 2025e; 2025f; 2025g; HM Courts and Tribunals Service, 2025b).

For professional representatives, the evidence for this hypothesis is **inconclusive**. Across all user types and channels, OCMC saw a steady downward trend in time to receive a default judgment following reform. Time to receive a decree nisi in divorce also declined by 44% for digital cases following digitalisation until early 2022. However, in financial remedy an initial decline was followed by an increase in time to disposal when the reform data system was introduced and was volatile for the rest of the period being analysed (until late 2022). Probate also saw a decrease in time to disposal immediately following reform, followed by an increase from late 2022. FPL by contrast saw time to disposal increase following the national rollout, peaking in 2021 and subsequently returning to pre-reform levels. In damages there was no reliable data on disposals. (Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025a; 2025b; 2025c; 2025d; 2025e; 2025f). The evaluation of IAC found there was no reliable evidence that average waiting times for legally represented cases decreased as intended (HM Courts and Tribunals Service, 2025b, p. 58).

Hypothesis CS5: Multiple channels increase speed of access to a decision in accordance with the law for paper cases by speeding up overall rates of case progression.

For public users, there is **moderate support** for this hypothesis. Across most services, overall speed of progression did increase (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025). Time to reach a disposal did decrease for paper cases in most services following reform. In IAC, offline case duration decreased from a median 211 to 189 days. In probate and SSCS there was a slight improvement similar to digital cases until 2021, after which, for SSCS in particular, trends became increasingly volatile due to the low numbers of paper cases. In divorce, time to decree nisi did apparently increase for paper cases after the end-to-end service was rolled out. Across all user types and channels, OCMC saw a steady downward trend in time to receive a default judgment following reform, but it is not possible to determine this for paper specifically (Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025b; 2025e; 2025f; 2025g; HM Courts and Tribunals Service, 2025b).

For professional representatives, there is **limited** support for this hypothesis, with more services seeing a deterioration or no change than an improvement. As set out above, across most services, overall speed of progression did increase (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025). However, this pattern is less positive for professional representatives and paper cases. For IAC and probate, time to disposal for paper cases increased following reform: median case duration for IAC increased from 232 to 252 days, and for probate from 34 days to 70 days. By contrast, following national roll-out, time to disposal for paper cases in FPL started to decline from circa 275 days to circa 175 days by early 2022. It was not possible to isolate the paper specific time to disposal for financial remedy consent cases, OCMC, or damages claims cases immediately following reform, and time to disposal data was not available for damages (Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025a; 2025b; 2025c; 2025d; 2025e; 2025f; HM Courts and Tribunals Service, 2025b).

Paper cases represented a small proportion of caseload for most services following reform, especially where use of the digital service was mandatory for professionals. In some, this is a sufficiently low proportion for small numbers of cases to have a disproportionate impact on measures of timeliness, making trends volatile. Furthermore,

not all case types are eligible for digital routes. The case mix for paper cases is therefore different to digital cases and caution should be taken when making direct comparisons.

Hypothesis CS6: Multiple channels increase access to the formal system by making it easier to submit correct information.

For public users, there is **strong** support for this hypothesis. While there was no consistent pattern in overall error rates across services, there is clear evidence that users found submitting information at the initial stage easy. Primary evidence shows that 74% of users across all services found submitting documents through the reformed service easy, and 86% found starting their case easy (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025). Among the 8% who did report making an error, this was most commonly due to misunderstanding what was required of them (44% in OCMC and probate, 69% in SSCS). Mis-entering information was the most commonly reported source of error in divorce only (49%).²³ Similarly, for IAC, appellants in person were positive about the design and ease of navigation of the system, although some expressed difficulty understanding what documentation would be required at times (HM Courts and Tribunals Service, 2025b).

For professional representatives, there is **limited** support for this hypothesis. As noted above, there was no consistent pattern in overall error rates across services. Professionals generally found the initial stages of using MyHMCTS easy: creating cases (58% v 8% difficult), entering case details (62% v 9%) and uploading documents (61% v 15%). However, the vast majority (70%) reported that they themselves made errors when using the system and were more likely to report correcting errors to be difficult than easy (34% v 30%).²⁴ In qualitative interviews, representatives, judges and staff reported inconsistencies and errors in the way documents were uploaded that they did not experience for paper processes, and representatives commonly felt frustrated at the lack of functionality to

²³ Weighted public user survey data aggregated across services evaluated as part of MoJ and HMCTS' evaluations of digitalisation of probate, divorce, Online Civil Money Claims, and Social Security and Child Support services. These evaluations are available at: [HM Courts & Tribunals Service Reform: Digital Services Evaluation - GOV.UK](#)

²⁴ Weighted professional user survey data aggregated across services evaluated as part of MoJ and HMCTS' evaluations of digitalisation of probate, divorce, financial remedy, family public law, Online Civil Money Claims, and damages claims. These evaluations are available at: [HM Courts & Tribunals Service Reform: Digital Services Evaluation - GOV.UK](#)

correct errors (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025; HM Courts and Tribunals Service, 2025b).

Hypothesis CS7: Multiple channels increase access to a decision by reducing user and administrative errors.

For public users, there is **moderate** support for this hypothesis. There was no consistent overall pattern in MI data on error rates across services, or the proportion of cases closed through disposals (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025). There is however some primary evidence indicating that users are less likely to make errors in reformed systems compared with legacy systems. Some 90% of digital users reported making no mistakes or omissions in the information that they provided, compared with 86% of non-digital users (a small but statistically significant difference).

For professional representatives, there is **limited** support for this hypothesis. As with public users, there was no consistent overall pattern in the proportion of cases closed through disposals. MI data on error rates across services was unavailable or inconsistent. Professional representatives felt errors were more rather than less frequent in reformed services compared to legacy services in OCMC (37% v 20%), financial remedy (24% v 18%), damages (41% v 17%), and FPL (28% v 19%). However, they felt errors were less rather than more frequent in reformed compared to legacy services in probate (27% v 19%) and divorce (40% v 17%).

Alternative explanations

This section summarises the evidence for alternative claims that were found to meet the threshold for moderate or strong support as logically plausible contributors to change. See the accompanying processing tracing analysis annex for further detail, including on those that did not meet this threshold.

Hypothesis CA4: Changes in legislation/policy remove barriers to accessing the courts.

There is **moderate** support for this hypothesis. Two relevant significant policy changes were identified during periods covered by analysis. These were the Divorce, Dissolution, and Separation Act 2020, which introduced ‘no fault’ divorce and came into force in 2022, and changes in the DWP treatment of benefit applications during 2020-21 as a response

to the COVID-19 pandemic. The introduction of ‘no fault’ divorce did coincide with an increase in volumes of applications, suggesting that the ‘Facts’ (or reasons for divorce) component did remove a barrier. By contrast however, volumes of cases in SSCS fell during the pandemic. The likely explanation for this is that the DWP response removed barriers to accessing benefits, thereby reducing demand for tribunal services, rather than adding or removing barriers to accessing the tribunals system. (Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025b; 2025g). Primary evidence did not explicitly identify further relevant policy changes that might have removed barriers to accessing the courts or tribunals (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025; HM Courts and Tribunals Service, 2025b; Harrison, Lemmon, Ramanathan, & Clay, 2024)

Causal Pathway D - Multiple channel options and user-designed services have increased perceptions that the system is Just, Accessible, Proportionate

Digitalisation was intended to increase the accessibility of the justice system by improving perceptions of the system’s accessibility, proportionality, and fairness. It was intended to achieve this by implementing both new or updated online and offline channels that were designed around user needs. In doing so, they were assumed to be more easily understood by a variety of users, appear consistent in delivery between channels, and designed in a way that means the resources used for any case seem appropriate to its needs and complexity. Transparency and consistency in how services are provided are closely related to perceptions of fairness and accessibility (e.g. Tyler, 2007; Denvir, Balmer, Pleasence, & Hagland, 2025). Therefore, by designing services to feel more transparent and consistent to use, the intention was to foster a perception of the system as accessible.

Table 4 summarises the process tracing findings for causal pathway D.

Table 4: Summary of findings for causal pathway D

Description of pathway	Number of hypotheses and outcome of tests	Overall conclusion
Multiple channel options and user-designed services increased perceptions that the	5 hypotheses tested.	Moderate support for the causal pathway overall.

system is Just, Accessible, Proportionate.	1 with strong support, 3 with moderate support, 1 with mixed support.	
Alternative claims	8 alternative claims tested 3 with moderate support, 3 with mixed or limited support, 1 not supported, and 1 with insufficient evidence	Moderate evidence other explanations also contributed to outcomes

Supporting evidence

Hypothesis DS1: Redesign of services to improve the availability of information increases transparency around the process/service and therefore increases perceptions that the system is just.

There is **moderate**, but mainly indirect, supporting evidence of perceptions that the system is just. Survey evidence shows 69% of public users felt their case was handled fairly, and 88% felt the information they received gave them a good understanding of what would happen.²⁵ Legal practitioners were more likely to agree than not that cases handled through the reformed system were handled fairly (36% agree vs 16% disagree), and that it is easy to keep their clients informed about their case (33% agree vs 27% disagree).²⁶

Hypothesis DS2: Consistent design and information across all channels and for all case types, increases consistency of service and therefore perceptions that the system is just.

There was **moderate**, but mainly indirect, evidence on the consistency of services. Survey evidence showed that 69% of public users felt their case was handled fairly, and 88% felt the information provided gave them a good understanding of what to expect, suggesting

²⁵ Weighted public user survey data aggregated across services evaluated as part of MoJ and HMCTS' evaluations of digitalisation of probate, divorce, Online Civil Money Claims, and Social Security and Child Support services. These evaluations are available at: [HM Courts & Tribunals Service Reform: Digital Services Evaluation - GOV.UK](#)

²⁶ Weighted professional user survey data aggregated across services evaluated as part of MoJ and HMCTS' evaluations of digitalisation of probate, divorce, financial remedy, family public law, Online Civil Money Claims, and damages claims. These evaluations are available at: [HM Courts & Tribunals Service Reform: Digital Services Evaluation - GOV.UK](#)

services are perceived as fair and transparent.²⁷ Professional representatives were more likely to agree than disagree (42% vs 25%) that their clients received a consistent service, regardless of whether they used MyHMCTS or the legacy service.²⁸ Although overall there were improvements in timeliness and other case management measures, these improvements varied between groups or services (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025; HM Courts and Tribunals Service, 2025b).

Hypothesis DS3: Redesigned services that allow the required time, cost, and resource to reflect the complexity of individual cases increase perceptions that the service is proportionate.

Cases eligible to use reformed services were the most simple or common cases by design, with the most complex cases still needing to be processed on legacy systems in several services (at the time of analysis). As such, there is **limited** direct evidence on their proportionality. MI data, survey, and interviews do suggest that reformed services led to more efficient case management processes “through reducing the time it takes to reach a justice outcome and associated efficiencies in usage of resources in the justice system.” (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025, p. 32). There is no clear direct evidence on difference in perceived proportionality between reformed and legacy services for public or legal professional users. However, the judiciary did report that reformed services placed a disproportionate burden on them compared to legacy services (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025, p. 42), an **unintended consequence of digitalisation**. Further evidence is required to draw conclusions on cost and resource in this respect.

Hypothesis DS4: Redesigned services include information that is understandable to non-legally trained users, increasing perceptions that the system is accessible.

²⁷ Weighted public user survey data aggregated across services evaluated as part of MoJ and HMCTS’ evaluations of digitalisation of probate, divorce, Online Civil Money Claims, and Social Security and Child Support services. These evaluations are available at: [HM Courts & Tribunals Service Reform: Digital Services Evaluation - GOV.UK](#)

²⁸ Weighted professional user survey data aggregated across services evaluated as part of MoJ and HMCTS’ evaluations of digitalisation of probate, divorce, financial remedy, family public law, Online Civil Money Claims, and damages claims. These evaluations are available at: [HM Courts & Tribunals Service Reform: Digital Services Evaluation - GOV.UK](#)

More transparent services were assumed to improve the perception that services are accessible by ensuring information is understandable to those without legal training. Evidence for this is **mixed**. While public users generally felt able to understand the reformed services and felt they were clear and easy to follow (HM Courts and Tribunals Service, 2025b; Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025), this was not accompanied by an overall increase in self-representation across reformed services as might be expected (Ministry of Justice, 2025a; 2025b; 2025c).

Hypothesis DS5: Redesigned services make the system more accessible by reducing attitudinal/perceived barriers to access.

There is **strong** evidence that the redesign of services, including the retention of paper channels, has reduced perceived barriers to access. Although for some services or features there were specific reservations, most public users of reformed services found the early steps of using them easy. For example, 85% reported finding online forms was easy, and 86% reported starting their case was easy (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025). Professionals also generally believed reforms had led to some improvements to access to justice (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025). **Among vulnerable individuals** with legal problems, participants also generally saw digital reforms as important ways of increasing access to justice, especially when a choice of paper and offline channels is retained (Harrison, Lemmon, Ramanathan, & Clay, 2024).

Alternative explanations

This section summarises the evidence for alternative claims that were found to meet the threshold for moderate or strong support as logically plausible contributors to change. See the accompanying process tracing analysis annex for further detail, including on those that did not meet this threshold.

Hypothesis DA4: Experiences with other government departments and public bodies related to reform cases drives perceptions that the system is just.

There is **moderate** support for public users' experiences with other government departments or public bodies involved in their case driving their perception that the system is just. There is some indication that IAC users' experience of the Home Office review

stage affects their perception of the process overall (HM Courts and Tribunals Service, 2025b). Some users of SSCS and probate also compared their experiences of those services favourably to other departments involved in their case. However, they did not make any explicit connections between their experiences of HMCTS, and of these other agencies (Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025e; 2025f).

Hypothesis DA7: Wider changes in digital capability and confidence means public and professional users are more comfortable accessing services digitally, leading to increased perceptions that the system is accessible.

There is **moderate** support for increases in digital capability and confidence among the general population leading to a reduction in the perceived barriers to accessing existing digital channels and therefore increasing perceptions of the accessibility of the system. Measures of digital capability in the general population show improvements over the reform period (Lloyds Bank, 2025; OFCOM, 2025; 2020). However, although there is no direct evidence on the perceived accessibility of the system, the proportion of people resolving their legal problems through the formal justice system has remained stable at five per cent in both 2014-15 and 2023. Reasons for not resolving legal problems through courts or tribunals that relate to the process, such as cost or stress, have also generally increased (Ames, Gallop, Baumont de Oliveira, Pace, & Walker, 2024; Franklyn, Budd, Verrill, & Willoughby, 2017).

Hypothesis DA8: Wider policy/legislative changes to justice processes increase perceptions that the system is accessible.

There is **moderate** support for wider policy/legislative changes leading to an increase in perceptions that the system is accessible. Significant legislative changes did occur in some areas relevant to reform, principally related to immigration and divorce. However, available evidence does not identify these as having affected wider perceptions on the accessibility of the system (HM Courts and Tribunals Service, 2025b; Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025b; Harrison, Lemmon, Ramanathan, & Clay, 2024). As discussed above, there is little evidence to support a more general increase in the perceived accessibility of the justice system overall.

Causal Pathway E - Multiple channel options and user-designed services have enhanced the quality and consistency of peoples' experiences

Digitalisation was intended to support a system that is just, accessible and transparent, by ensuring that the processes that people use to access courts and tribunals are transparent and consistent. One way in which it was intended to do this was by adding new digital channels or redesigning existing digital channels in response to user feedback. It was also intended to do this by improving the timeliness of information sharing and, independent of physical constraints, by providing users with a consistent experience across channels and services. By making multiple options available, users (specifically public users) should be able to choose the channel that is easier for them and otherwise best meets their needs with no difference in the service they receive. This should logically increase user satisfaction. By enhancing the quality and consistency of people's experiences, digitalisation should therefore better support a system that is just, accessible and transparent.

Table 5 summarises the process tracing findings for causal pathway E.

Table 5: Summary of findings for causal pathway E

Description of pathway	Number of hypotheses and outcome of tests	Overall conclusion
Multiple channel options and user-designed services have enhanced the quality and consistency of peoples' experiences.	6 hypotheses tested. For public users, 1 with strong support and 5 with moderate support. For legal professionals, 5 with moderate support and 1 that is not supported.	Moderate support for the causal pathway overall.
Alternative claims	7 alternative claims tested For public users, 4 with moderate support and 3 with mixed or limited support. For legal professionals, 4 with moderate support, 2 with	Moderate evidence other explanations also contributed to outcomes

	mixed or limited support, and 1 that is not supported.	
--	--	--

Supporting evidence

Hypothesis ES1: Multiple channel options improve the quality of users' experience by being designed in response to user needs.

This hypothesis has **moderate** support. Firstly, there is a consensus from interviews that, across services, the reformed services improved considerably over time and became far more reliable, due to new releases and/or small technical updates in response to feedback (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025). There is however no robust quantitative data available measuring this change over time, and no documentation of changes in response to specific feedback has been identified. There is therefore insufficient evidence to ascertain whether specific feedback from pilots / beta testing / or continuous feedback was actioned and recorded in change logs.

Nevertheless, this consensus implies, although indirectly, that the new releases and technical updates were in response to feedback. In addition, changes in response to feedback is referred to, particularly in the context of increasing uptake for legal professionals, for the probate service specifically (Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025e).

Hypothesis ES2: Multiple channel options improve the consistency of users' experience by designing services appropriate to their needs across all channels and services.

This hypothesis has **moderate** support. Aside from a concern expressed in interviews that Litigants in Person may not have the same access to documents as professionals in some cases, the evidence across services suggests that professionals received a consistent service across reformed and legacy services (42% agree vs 25% disagree). For public users, reformed services clearly meet their user needs, as demonstrated by consistently very high overall satisfaction rates across services (across all services, 78% of respondents were satisfied compared with 12% dissatisfied) (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025). Legal professional users do not have their needs

met to the same extent, although there is a consensus amongst this group that less work is involved for the reformed services for the straightforward majority of cases. However, reformed services have largely not met the needs of judges, due to an increased administrative burden (e.g. writing their own decisions into the systems). All user groups also felt notifications were insufficient and unclear, resulting in more time logging into systems (Ibid.).

There is a consistent pattern in case duration across services between channels compared to pre-reform. Initially, the variation in timeliness between paper and digital / legacy and reform increases, likely due to more complex cases continuing to be processed on paper. However, towards the end of the analysis period, this variation does reduce for three of the five services where this is measured (divorce, probate, SSCS). For the other two services where this was measured (damages, family public law), variation in some timeliness measures reduces while some increase. (Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025a; 2025b; 2025c; 2025f; 2025g).

Hypothesis ES3: Multiple channel options, by improving the quality of users' experience of using the system, increase the extent to which people are able and willing to use it.

This hypothesis has **moderate** support. There is an increase in total case volumes post reform in a majority of the seven services evaluated in the Digital Services Evaluation (divorce, financial remedy, OCMC, probate and universal credit cases for SSCS) (Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025a; 2025b; 2025c; 2025d; 2025e; 2025f; 2025g). Additionally, the LPRS indicates a considerable increase in the proportion of respondents experiencing a legal problem between 2014/15 and 2023 (32% to 50%), while the proportion of people resolving their issues through courts or tribunals remained at around five per cent (Franklyn, Budd, Verrill, & Willoughby, 2017; Ames, Gallop, Baumont de Oliveira, Pace, & Walker, 2024). However, due to a change in the survey mode and in how responses were categorised in 2023, it is not possible to be certain whether there has been a change in the proportion of people with legal problems accessing the formal justice system in the same period.

There is insufficient evidence to determine whether the satisfaction of public users has improved. Nevertheless, for four services where public users were surveyed (divorce, OCMC, probate and SSCS), most users would reuse the service.²⁹

Interview evidence identified that satisfaction with reformed services among legal professionals has improved over time. Most of the initial frustration they experienced concerned the rushed implementation of reformed services (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025). Subsequently, for four of the six services where they were surveyed, if it was not mandatory to use the reformed service, legal professionals would nevertheless prefer to use the reformed service (family public law, financial remedy, divorce and probate). Damages and OCMC were the two exceptions.³⁰

Hypothesis ES4: Multiple channel options, by improving the consistency of users' experience, make the system as a whole more accessible both within and across user journeys.

This hypothesis has **moderate** support. First, the evidence across services suggests that professionals received a consistent service across reformed and legacy services (42% agree vs 25% disagree) (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025). For public users, reformed services generally meet their user needs, as demonstrated by consistently very high overall satisfaction rates across services (across all services, 78% of respondents were satisfied compared with 12% dissatisfied). This is aside from a concern in interviews with professionals that litigants in person may not have the same access to documents as professionals in some cases.

Legal professional users do not have their needs met to the same extent, although there is a consensus amongst this group that less work is involved for the reformed services for the straightforward majority of cases. However, reformed services have largely not met the needs of judges, due to an increased administrative burden (e.g. writing their own

²⁹ Weighted public user survey data aggregated across services evaluated as part of MoJ and HMCTS' evaluations of digitalisation of probate, divorce, Online Civil Money Claims, and Social Security and Child Support services. These evaluations are available at: [HM Courts & Tribunals Service Reform: Digital Services Evaluation - GOV.UK](#)

³⁰ Weighted professional user survey data aggregated across services evaluated as part of MoJ and HMCTS' evaluations of digitalisation of probate, divorce, financial remedy, family public law, Online Civil Money Claims, and damages claims. These evaluations are available at: [HM Courts & Tribunals Service Reform: Digital Services Evaluation - GOV.UK](#)

decisions into the systems) and unsatisfactory (insufficient and unclear) notifications resulting in more time logging into systems (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025).

Second, the evidence shows that, for public users, the reformed service was consistently accessible throughout their journey (notwithstanding where services were not end-to-end). This included that technical problems were rare, they had access to documents instantly and they did not report any barriers that were preventing them from accessing the services. For legal professionals, services were largely consistently accessible throughout their journey, although technical issues sometimes delayed accessibility. For judges, the interview evidence is inconclusive. The reformed services allowed them to work more flexibly. However, they reported that there was an increase in their administrative work, including taking longer to search through digital documents, which were often hard to find or mislabelled (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025).

Third, surveys showed considerable variation in difficulty among different stages of the journey for both public users and legal professionals. For example, 71% of divorce legal professionals found entering case details easy but only 34% found editing case information easy. Survey evidence also showed considerable variation in difficulty among services. For example, 85% of public users across all services found it easy to find the form to make an application but this decreases to 66% for SSCS public users (Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025b; 2025g).³¹

Hypothesis ES5: Multiple channel options, by improving the quality of users' experience, increases their confidence that the service supports the delivery of a just process.

This hypothesis has **moderate support for public users** but is **not supported for legal professionals**. In each of the four services where public users were surveyed, most public users agreed that their application was processed fairly, (divorce 72%; OCMC 73%; probate 81%; and SSCS 57%). Similarly, the majority of users in these four services were satisfied with the service, would reuse it again, and had confidence in how their application

³¹ Weighted professional user survey data aggregated across services evaluated as part of MoJ and HMCTS' evaluations of digitalisation of probate, divorce, financial remedy, family public law, Online Civil Money Claims, and damages claims. These evaluations are available at: [HM Courts & Tribunals Service Reform: Digital Services Evaluation - GOV.UK](#)

was handled (divorce 70%; OCMC 62%; probate 72%; and SSCS 54%). However, there was insufficient evidence concerning whether fairness / confidence / satisfaction measures had improved over time for public users (Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025b; 2025e; 2025f; 2025g).

Around only 10-15% of legal professionals across services reported that MyHMCTS cases processed more fairly than legacy cases.³² Approximately 70% reported either no difference or were unable to comment. For four of the six services in which they were surveyed (probate, divorce, FR, and public law)³³, most expressed a preference for the reformed service over the legacy system.³⁴ While legal professionals have referred to reformed services working well and being faster and more efficient than legacy services for straightforward cases, this is the opposite for complex cases. Where explicit reference to improved quality is made, it is not linked with concepts of justice or fairness in the qualitative evidence (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025). There was insufficient evidence concerning whether fairness and confidence measures had improved over time for professional users.

Hypothesis ES6: Multiple channel options, by improving the consistency of users' experiences, improve the transparency of how decisions are made.

This hypothesis has **moderate** support for legal professionals but **strong** support for public users. For legal professionals, while ES2 was supported for this group, the evidence suggests that attitudes on flow of information are mainly negative. The majority found communication with courts difficult for four out of six³⁵ services where these attitudes were measured and the majority found communication with HMCTS / CTSCs difficult in all six services where this was measured (Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025a; 2025b; 2025c; 2025d; 2025e; 2025f).

For public users, ES2 was also supported. The balance of evidence suggests that attitudinal measures of information flow for public users are mainly positive. This includes that 87% of divorce users reported that HMCTS keep them fully informed of the progress

³² Ibid.

³³ Damages and OCMC being the remaining two services

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ FR, FPL, divorce and damages

of their case, while 37% and 33% of probate users felt HMCTS keep them fully or partially informed respectively. In SSCS, 82% of public users reported being kept full or partially informed, with 85% in OCMC. Similarly, 94% of divorce users, 65% of OCMC users, and 59% of SSCS users, but only 38% of probate users, recalled receiving notifications / updates.

Alternative explanations

This section summarises the evidence for alternative claims that were found to meet the threshold for moderate or strong support as logically plausible contributors to change. See the accompanying process tracing analysis annex for further detail, including on those that did not meet this threshold.

Hypothesis EA4: Improved staff capability means staff are able to process cases more consistently, leading to improved consistency of experience.

This hypothesis has **moderate** support for both public users and legal professionals. For public users, evidence from interviews suggests that public users receive a consistent experience between paper and digital channels, except that the digital channels are generally faster and public users do not have to deal with printing and postage. Furthermore, aside from an increased administrative burden, especially for judges, there appears to be no difference or only minor differences for professional users when cases are straightforward and there are no technical problems. Conversely, complex cases often lead to delays, workarounds or using the paper / legacy channel (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025).

Staff reported using workarounds in most services, particularly where there are barriers in the digital system (usually for the most complex cases). Common workarounds including communicating outside of the MyHMCTS portal and asking for / ensuring cases ‘drop out’ of the reformed service. This allowed cases to be processed more consistently within services, although not always more consistently between channels, if the digital channel was not always able to deal with more complex cases.

Hypothesis EA5: Other elements of reform, including centralisation of processes and introduction of CTSCs, lead to improvements in consistency of experience.

This hypothesis has **moderate** support for both public users and legal professionals. As stated in EA4, evidence from interviews suggests that public users receive a consistent experience using paper or digital channels, except that the digital channels are generally faster and public users do not have to deal with printing and postage. Furthermore, aside from the increased administrative burden reported primarily for judges, there appears to be no difference or only minor differences for professional users when cases are straightforward and there are no technical problems. Conversely, complex cases often lead to delays, workarounds or using the paper / legacy channel (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025)

Evidence from the Implementation Evaluation for this thematic area is inconclusive on whether centralisation and standardised operating procedures (SOPs) are available for all services and channels. It is not possible to say how consistently used across services SOPs were, given the extensive and frequent changes to how reformed services were implemented and developed.

Hypothesis EA6: Having the opportunity for a hearing leads to improved quality of experience.

This hypothesis has **moderate** support. While, as reported elsewhere, satisfaction among public users is generally high, it is only measured on a single occasion. Therefore, there is insufficient evidence to identify any change in satisfaction over time. Surveys did not collect satisfaction data separately for those who did or did not attend a hearing. Furthermore, a large proportion of digital cases conclude before they reach a hearing, or in some services (such as no-fault divorce and probate), public users do not attend a hearing at all.

Hypothesis EA7: Among judiciary and professionals, internal business/workplace improvements lead to more positive experience of using the service.

This hypothesis has **moderate** support. As stated above, user satisfaction, while generally high, is only measured on a single occasion, and therefore there is insufficient evidence to identify any change over time. However, there is a general consensus among professional users (legal professionals, judges, HMCTS staff) in interviews that, while the implementation of reformed services was rushed, the quality has improved over time (e.g.

fewer technical issues), thereby increasing satisfaction (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025). In addition, there was insufficient evidence to identify whether internal business/workplace improvements have occurred, although no explicit evidence that they have not occurred was identified.

Causal Pathway F - Multiple channel options and user-designed services have enabled a flexible infrastructure

Digitalisation was intended to support a system that is proportionate, flexible and have a smarter workforce, to ensure that multiple channel options and user-designed services will enable a flexible infrastructure. One way in which it was intended to do this was by adding new digital channels, or redesigning existing digital channels, to create an interactive digital system where cases can be tracked and all evidence can be uploaded and stored. By making multiple options available, redesigned digital channels can be updated and improved continuously, where information is not stored in a single physical space and cases can be started and managed online as well as by paper. This should logically increase quality and consistency of experience for professionals and citizens, by ensuring that continuous improvement of services mirrors user feedback, that information sharing is timelier and independent of physical constraints, and that staff can actively manage workloads across sites and services to achieve a system that is proportionate, flexible and have a smarter workforce.

Table 6 summarises the process tracing findings for causal pathway F.

Table 6: Summary of findings for causal pathway F

Description of pathway	Number of hypotheses and outcome of tests	Overall conclusion
Multiple channel options and user-designed services have enabled a flexible infrastructure.	8 hypotheses tested. 1 with strong support, 4 with moderate support, 1 with mixed or limited support, and 2 which are not supported.	Moderate support for the causal pathway overall.

Alternative claims	4 alternative claims tested All 4 have mixed or limited support	Mixed or limited evidence other explanations also contributed to outcomes.
---------------------------	--	---

Supporting evidence

Hypothesis FS1: Redesigned services improve quality of experience by responding to user feedback in a timely way.

This hypothesis has **moderate** support. Qualitative evidence did not identify consistent use across services of a specific feedback mechanism among users (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025; HM Courts and Tribunals Service, 2025b). However, interviews did identify some responsiveness to feedback, especially for probate (Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025e), which suggests that at least one feedback mechanism existed, either formally or informally. In addition, there is some mention of feedback being acted upon, especially for probate (Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025e). Furthermore, there was a strong consensus identified in the interviews that the reformed services improved considerably over time and became far more reliable, owing to new releases and/or small technical updates in response to feedback. These resulted in the volume and frequency of technical issues and system crashes reducing, as well as systems becoming more user friendly. Although explicit change documentation was not identified in the Digital Services Evaluation or Implementation Evaluation, this implies feedback was acted upon.

Hypothesis FS3:³⁶ Multiple channel options improve consistency of experience by ensuring cases follow the same process independent of initial or chosen channel.

This hypothesis has **moderate** support. There is reduced variation across services in measures of case management outcomes between paper and digital cases compared to pre/non reform (where this data is available). Outcomes typically stabilise over time from

³⁶ FS2 originally considered the effects of multiple channel options on the speed of case progression. Following an update to the Reform Theory of Change as published in the evaluation progress report (Ministry of Justice, 2023), available at [HMCTS Reform MOJ Evaluation: Progress Report - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/118442/HMCTS_Reform_MOJ_Evaluation_Progress_Report_-_GOV.UK.pdf), hypothesis FS2 was no longer considered relevant to this Causal Pathway.

when reform is implemented and becomes business as usual. In addition, there is a consensus across services from interviews with legal professionals and judges that user journeys follow the same process post reform for paper and digital cases. Implementation of bulk scanning contributed towards this consistent process. The exception is the damages service, where the system is not end-to-end digital (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025; Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025a).

Hypothesis FS4: Multiple channel options improve the quality of experience by allowing staff to actively manage cases independent of user location.

This hypothesis has **strong** support. Primary evidence explicitly associates positive experiences with centralised handling across services. Benefits of centralised handling identified for staff included: all documents for a case being in one safe place; easier communications through the portal; improved access to their work at places other than their office or court; the option to work from home allowing greater flexibility and the opportunity to work hours that suited them; and not needing to carry paper bundles of evidence. Case duration data also showed a general improvement in time to allocation / transfer out measures (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025).

Although the evidence demonstrates generally positive experience with centralised handling, some legal professionals and judges, especially in damages and probate, associated negative experience with non-local handling (Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025a; 2025e). Some financial remedy legal professionals relied on old telephone numbers for courts to resolve problems (Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025c), suggesting some dissatisfaction with CTSCs.

Hypothesis FS5: Multiple channel options improve the quality of experience by allowing staff to be flexible with resourcing and ways of working.

This hypothesis has **limited** support. Overall public user satisfaction with reformed services is relatively high, and there is some qualitative evidence that staff (especially judges) are able to work flexibly to a certain extent (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025). However, there was no direct evidence identified of resources or ways of working themselves being flexible, for example across service areas.

Hypothesis FS6: Redesigned services improve quality of experience by responding to user feedback in a timely way.

This hypothesis is **not supported**. Complex cases were initially ineligible for reformed services, particularly in probate, divorce and OCMC (multi-party) cases (Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025b; 2025e; 2025f). Such cases either had to start on the legacy (paper) system or were diverted to paper at later points in the process. Furthermore, across all services covered by the Digital Services Evaluation, some legal professionals and judges did not use the reformed service for complex cases, even after its use was made mandatory, as they did not trust the reformed service to be able to manage them (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025). In addition, across services, only 27% of legal professionals trusted the MyHMCTS service for handling complex or more sensitive cases, with 45% did not trust it.³⁷ The absence of a consistent definition, and accompanying measures, of what constitutes a complex case meant it was not possible to assess any variation in case management outcomes by case complexity through MI analysis.

Hypothesis FS7: Flexible infrastructure enables a proportionate system by allowing allocation of resources to reflect the varying complexity and needs of individual cases.

This hypothesis is **not supported**. As set out for FS5, the balance of evidence does not support there being flexibility in use of resources or ways of working. There is no direct primary evidence of whether case processing is perceived as requiring appropriate effort, burden, cost, and/or time. There is also no primary evidence which explicitly states cases are or are not handled in a proportionate manner. In addition, there is insufficient evidence to identify whether timeliness or case management measures reflect complexity of cases.

Hypothesis FS8: Flexible infrastructure builds flexibility into the system by being designed for continuous improvement.

³⁷ Weighted professional user survey data aggregated across services evaluated as part of MoJ and HMCTS' evaluations of digitalisation of probate, divorce, financial remedy, family public law, Online Civil Money Claims, and damages Claims. These evaluations are available at: [HM Courts & Tribunals Service Reform: Digital Services Evaluation - GOV.UK](#)

This hypothesis has **moderate** support. Evidence from qualitative interviews refers to a cycle of continuous upgrades and improvements, leading to fewer technical problems and an improved user experience for legal professionals and judges (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025). This suggests there are minimal financial and technical barriers to update, and that ad hoc and planned updates were implemented. However, this evidence is indirect only as relevant release logs have not been identified for this thematic area.

Hypothesis FS9: Flexible infrastructure supports a smarter workforce by removing physical and work allocation constraints.

This hypothesis has **moderate** support. There is primary evidence that cases can be more easily worked on independent of location, for example because large volumes of documents can be bulk scanned and accessed digitally.

"It used to be that you'd get a massive two-inch paper bundle per case...The fact it's digital means it's much more secure, safer and easier." **Tribunal judge/member (SSCS)** (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025, p. 43)

There is also evidence of generally improved case timeliness, facilitated by bulk scanning when the front-end route is via paper for the user, as it has enabled all documents to be kept in one place.

"The fact that a team of 12 can take a far greater capacity of work is a great benefit". **HMCTS staff member (FR)** (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025, p. 33)

However, while as of March 2025, ListAssist³⁸ is now live in all civil and family courts and reformed tribunals in England and Wales (HM Courts and Tribunals Service, 2025c), it was not available for most services, during most of the periods under analysis.

³⁸ ListAssist is HMCTS' digital tool for scheduling and listing hearings across civil, family, and tribunals jurisdictions.

Alternative explanations

No alternative claims were found to meet the threshold for moderate or strong support as logically plausible contributors to change. See the accompanying process tracing analysis annex for further detail on those that did not meet this threshold.

Causal Pathway G - ‘Self-service’ has ensured the best use of judicial time

Digitalisation was intended to support a system that is proportionate, retains the ‘majesty of the court’, and strengthens our justice heritage through ‘self-service’ ensuring the best use of judicial time. One way in which it was intended to do this was by adding new digital channels, or redesigning existing digital channels, to create a digital system where cases can be tracked and all evidence can be uploaded and stored. The intention for redesigned services was that digital bundles allow evidence to be available and kept up to date, accessible digitally, and to utilise accessible user-friendly systems which reduce the scope for error and overlooking/missing information. This should improve information flow and quality of information, thereby reducing the time required by the judiciary in case preparation. Additionally, self-service for HMCTS staff should reduce the time required for the judiciary to spend on minor case administration by providing high quality support, to achieve a system that is proportionate through low burden channels, segmented when needed³⁹ to uphold the ‘majesty of the court’.

Table 7 summarises the process tracing findings for causal pathway G.

Table 7: Summary of findings for causal pathway G

Description of pathway	Number of hypotheses and outcome of tests	Overall conclusion
‘Self-service’ has ensured the best use of judicial time.	6 hypotheses tested. 5 with limited support, and 1 which is not supported.	Limited support for the causal pathway overall.
Alternative claims	7 alternative claims tested	Mixed or limited evidence that other explanations also contributed to outcomes.

³⁹ That is, appropriate to the requirements of the case and needs of the people involved

	3 with moderate support, 3 with mixed or limited support, and 1 which is not supported.	
--	---	--

Supporting evidence

Hypothesis GS1: Redesigned services that enable 'self-service' bring information together in one place improve information flow and therefore reduce judicial time required for case management.

This hypothesis is **not supported**. Firstly, as discussed in Causal Pathway B (see BS1), for most services, reform was found to contribute to an improvement in overall timeliness to varying extents (with damages the exception). However, whether the time for completing various stages of cases has improved varies across services. For example, OCMC had a reduction in time from case issue to first full hearing, but damages had an increase in time to a hearing. Other services either had no hearings (divorce and probate) or did not have timeliness broken down into different stages (e.g. IAC). It is therefore inconclusive whether there is a general reduction or increase in time from the case being received to the case decision/listing (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025; Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025a; 2025e; HM Courts and Tribunals Service, 2025b).

Secondly, it is also inconclusive whether self-serve improves information flow or just does not make it worse. For example, across services, judges reported sometimes not receiving reliable notifications and documents being mislabelled or not uploaded to the correct place, leading to matters sometimes having to be followed up offline, especially for serious or urgent cases.

However, while the evidence for improvements in information flow for the judiciary is somewhat inconclusive, there is a strong consensus across services that judges are spending more time working on the administrative side of cases (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025):

“Horrendous [impact] ... it adds an hour a day of admin to the judiciary, which should be on the staff.” **Judge (FR)** (p. 43)

Consequently, the experience of the judiciary is that self-service has increased the time required on a case.

Hypothesis GS2: Redesigned services that support better quality information input reduce judicial time required for case management and process interruptions.

This hypothesis has **limited** support. Firstly, as discussed in Causal Pathway B (see BS2), evidence is inconclusive on how error rates in reformed systems compare to legacy systems (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025). In addition, there appears to be a consensus among the judiciary across services, aside from in OCMC, that error rates between reformed and legacy systems were relatively similar, although more difficult to address in reformed systems (Ibid.). There was a general perception in qualitative interviews among the judiciary and professionals that insufficient guidance for public users gave rise to errors, and that these are more difficult to correct in the reformed service (Ibid).

“The public haven’t been told enough that they need to complete their forms in a formal way, or they’ll be rejected by the judge.” **HMCTS staff member (FR)** (Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025d, p. 39)

Hypothesis GS3: Redesigned services that enable HMCTS staff to 'self-serve' reduces the time required by the judiciary for minor case administration.

This hypothesis has **limited** support. Evidence identified a widespread consensus across services that judges spend more time on minor administration (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025). This includes:

- writing their decisions themselves,
- extra time logging on to the system to check progress in the absence of appropriate notifications,
- taking longer to find documents on the portal due to inconsistent labelling,

- taking longer to navigate and highlight documents in comparison to paper files,
- communicating with parties outside the portal for urgent matters,
- having less help and being less able to delegate administration to fewer administrative court staff meaning administration takes longer,
- technical issues with reformed systems,
- poorer IT support.

Hypothesis GS4: 'Self-service' supports proportionate use of judicial time by maximising time available for the exercise of judicial functions.

This hypothesis has **limited** support. Evidence from qualitative interviews with judges identified a widespread consensus across services that judges spend too much time on administration (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025). Consequently, there is a widespread perception that spending extra time on administration is preventing judges spending appropriate time on judicial functions.

Hypothesis GS5: 'Self-service' supports proportionate use of judicial time by reducing time lost to addressing errors/missing information.

This hypothesis has **limited** support. Evidence on from MI error rates and therefore time lost due to error rates was inconclusive (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025). However, the widespread perception identified through qualitative interviews (ibid.) was that errors were more common and/or harder to rectify in reformed systems compared to legacy systems, and that this sometimes led to adjournments and/or workarounds.

“It’s known to happen in January... that someone types in 2023 in when they mean 2024. You can’t pull it back, that order, you can’t discard it...and you can’t correct it... it can’t be fixed online.” **Judge (damages)** (Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025a, p. 42)

Hypothesis GS6: 'Self-service' strengthens our justice heritage by supporting the most efficient use of judicial time.

This hypothesis has **limited** support. As demonstrated for GS4 and GS5, there is limited support that digitalisation maximised the time available for the exercise of judicial functions and reduced time lost to addressing errors/missing information respectively.

Alternative explanations

This section summarises the evidence for alternative claims that were found to meet the threshold for moderate or strong support as logically plausible contributors to change. See the accompanying process tracing analysis annex for further detail, including on those that did not meet this threshold.

Hypothesis GA4: Increase in judicial headcount following recruitment drives means more judicial time available.

This hypothesis has **moderate** support. Judicial headcount has increased by approximately 500 between 2019/2020 and 2023/2024 (House of Commons Library, 2024). This overall increased headcount coincides with improvement in timeliness measures and throughput measures discussed in Causal Pathway B. However, data which breaks down the increased judicial headcount at a service level was not available.

Hypothesis GA5: Changes in policy/legislation reduce the demand for judicial involvement in particular types of cases.

This hypothesis has **moderate** support. There is no direct measure available for demand for judicial involvement. However, ‘no-fault’ divorce has reduced the scope for judicial involvement in divorce cases by removal of the ‘facts’ component, further evidenced by a reduction in demand for representation in divorce cases (Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025b). Furthermore, with the slight increase in the proportion of consented (in comparison to contested) financial remedy cases (Ministry of Justice, 2025b), this also likely reduced the time for judicial involvement (as consented cases do not require the judge to decide the outcome). These two changes have coincided with general improvements in timeliness measures (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025). However, no primary evidence was identified that supports or opposes a reduction in demand for judicial involvement arising from policy change.

Causal Pathway H - Multiple channel options and user-designed services have ensured that no one is left behind by the addition of new channels

Digitalisation was intended to support a system that is accessible by ensuring that no one is left behind by the addition of new channels. One way in which it was intended to do this was by adding new digital channels, or redesigning existing digital channels, to create a system where cases can be tracked and all evidence can be uploaded and stored.

Services would be available through multiple channels, with common components (such as bulk scan and print) incorporating paper channels into a single process for HMCTS while maintaining availability of paper channel for public users. By collecting data on protected characteristics through both paper and digital channels and live service design, services would reflect user needs as identified in user research and feedback loops. This should logically ensure that all services consistently meet the public sector equality duty, as services are designed inclusively and data are used to understand inclusion. This should also ensure there is no disparity in case management or justice outcomes either between channels or within channels, thereby achieving an accessible system which is easy to use, and services are accessible for non-digital users.

Table 8 summarises the process tracing findings for causal pathway H.

Table 8: Summary of findings for causal pathway H

Description of pathway	Number of hypotheses and outcome of tests	Overall conclusion
Multiple channel options and user-designed services have ensured that no one is left behind by the addition of new channels.	5 hypotheses tested. 1 with strong support, 3 with moderate support, and 1 which is not supported.	Moderate support for the causal pathway overall.
Alternative claims	8 alternative claims tested 3 with moderate support, 4 with mixed or limited support, and 1 which is not supported.	Mixed or limited evidence that other explanations also contributed to outcomes.

Supporting evidence

Hypothesis HS1: The availability of multiple channel options does not disadvantage those unable or unwilling to use a particular channel.

This hypothesis has **moderate** support. Overall, there appear to be minimal differences in outcome or case management measures by channel of application, aside from the overall timeliness and timeliness of reaching certain outcomes is generally faster for reformed cases. There are some isolated examples. For example, the monthly proportion of cases with at least one stoppage for probate professionals was much higher for paper cases than digital cases (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025; Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025f). However, the design of services was such that most of the complex cases (likely to take longer) were ineligible for the digital channel. In addition, for some services (e.g. financial remedy and OCMC), virtually all cases in the data collection period were digital. As such, it is not possible to distinguish between the design effect of paper cases being more likely to be complex and the effect of any barriers or disadvantages for users of the paper channel.

There was however no evidence identified through the Digital Services Evaluation, IAC Evaluation, or Vulnerability study that suggests members of the public want to use non-digital channels but do not feel able to do so.

Hypothesis HS2: Differences between channels do not introduce or exacerbate disadvantage because all channels are designed inclusively to reflect the needs of multiple user groups.

This hypothesis has **moderate** support. There is insufficient evidence to support or reject the claim that differences in outcome and management measures between groups in digital reform cases are not greater than for legacy cases. Analysis of reform cases has identified at times meaningful differences in timeliness and other case management outcome measures between groups (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025). However, due to limitations in the PCQ data collected for reformed services combined with there being very limited or no PCQ data for paper cases or legacy services, it is not possible to identify whether differences in outcome and management measures between groups in digital reform cases are greater or not than for legacy cases.

Evidence from the Digital Services Evaluation suggests that there are no observable differences between most groups. However, there appears to be a language barrier for people/groups whose main language is not English or Welsh, as digital services only being provided in those languages acts as a barrier. Users who do not have English/Welsh as their main language may need additional time to obtain support; there are sometimes delays related to the need to identify and source interpreters; and hearings may be postponed if interpreters do not attend the hearing (ibid). These factors would likely all contribute to a consistent pattern across services that timeliness for cases on reformed services are on average longer for people who do not have English/Welsh as their main language and/or are from an ethnic minority background, given the potential overlap between the two groups.

Hypothesis HS3: Collection of data on personal characteristics supports effective monitoring of PSED across multiple channels and therefore informs user centred design.

This hypothesis has **strong** support. Protected characteristics questionnaire (PCQ) data is collected with an average completion rate of 45%. PCQ data was not always available for cases submitted by legal professionals, and PCQ data for paper cases was very limited. PCQ data is incorporated into management dashboards and other monitoring data, and actions have been taken / will continue to be taken where PCQ data indicates barriers for particular groups (HM Courts and Tribunals Service, 2024).

Access to Justice assessments conducted by HMCTS explicitly describe design activity taken or planned, in response to barriers identified from the collection and analysis of PCQ data (ibid), for example how information on names of the deceased account for variations that disproportionately affected ethnic minority applicants.

Hypothesis HS4: HMCTS processes do not introduce or exacerbate disadvantage in the way cases are handled as a result of the channel used.

This hypothesis has **moderate** support. Firstly, as discussed above in HS1, the evidence on whether there is no material difference in outcome or case management measures by channel of application is inconclusive (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025). Secondly, across several services, primarily damages, family public law, OCMC and SSCS, evidence from HMCTS staff is that applications in different channels

are processed in the same way (Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025a; 2025c; 2025e; 2025g). However, in other services, such as IAC and financial remedy, there were some differences identified in the journey for offline or litigants in person (Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025d; HM Courts and Tribunals Service, 2025b). Furthermore, the introduction of bulk scanning has ensured that cases are now processed in the same way, as paper documents only have to be scanned once and then become digital documents (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025; Frontier Economics and IFF Research, 2025b; 2025e; 2025f).

Hypothesis HS5: Multiple channel options support an accessible system for all user groups by not introducing or exacerbating disadvantage for different users within or between channels.

This hypothesis is **not supported**. As shown above, the balance of evidence does support a conclusion that multiple channels do not generally introduce or exacerbate disadvantages across most characteristics. However, this was not the case for all user groups. Notwithstanding the progress identified in HMCTS's Access to Justice Assessments (HM Courts and Tribunals Service, 2024), some barriers to access posed by reformed systems were identified for some specific groups. These were namely service provision in English and Welsh only affecting those for whom these were not a main language, and to a lesser extent those from ethnic minorities. Concerns were also identified about litigants-in-person (LIPs) not always having the same access as litigants with legal representation for services made available only to professional users (Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice, 2025; HM Courts and Tribunals Service, 2024; Harrison, Lemmon, Ramanathan, & Clay, 2024).

Alternative explanations

This section summarises the evidence for alternative claims that were found to meet the threshold for moderate or strong support as logically plausible contributors to change. See the accompanying process tracing analysis annex for further detail, including on those that did not meet this threshold.

Hypothesis HA5: Improved access to digital technology more widely removes barriers for disadvantaged groups.

This hypothesis has **moderate** support. The survey evidence shows an overall increase in people using government websites from 41% in 2020 Q1 to 52% in 2022 (OFCOM, 2020; 2023). However, this data is not broken down in a way that allows for a comparison of the key disadvantaged groups (ethnicity, disability, not having English or Welsh as a main language).

Hypothesis HA8: Wider policy and operational changes aimed at reducing disparity account for reductions in differences between groups.

This hypothesis has **moderate** support. HMCTS's Access to Justice assessments identified potential barriers that were contributing to the differences between groups (HM Courts and Tribunals Service, 2024). HMCTS are either conducting further research on these barriers, or they have implemented or are in the process of implementing changes to reduce the disparities (ibid.). For example, HMCTS have updated guidance to address disparities in ethnicity for probate stoppages, with early indications suggesting that the proportion of ethnic minority users experiencing a stop to their case is reducing compared to white users (ibid). In addition, HMCTS Vulnerability Action Plans are published every six months and detail actions taken to improve the experience of vulnerable users to help address barriers they have previously identified (HM Courts and Tribunals Service, 2025a).

The Access to Justice assessments have not currently concluded that other measures account for reductions in disparity in using reformed services. However, this is primarily because of insufficient evidence. HMCTS are conducting further analyses and are still in the process of implementing changes / monitoring the impact of these changes (HM Courts and Tribunals Service, 2024). Updated Access to Justice assessments may offer more definitive conclusions.

References

- Ames, A., Gallop, K., Baumont de Oliveira, A., Pace, J., & Walker, E. (2024). *Legal Problem and Resolution Survey 2023: Supplementary Findings Volume*. London: Ministry of Justice. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/legal-problem-and-resolution-survey-2023>
- Bennett, A. (2010). Process Tracing and Causal Inference. In H. Brady, & D. Collier (Eds.), *Rethinking Social Inquiry* (2nd ed.). Rowman and Littlefield. Retrieved from <https://philsci-archive.pitt.edu/8872/>
- Collier, D. (2011). Understanding Process Tracing. *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 44(4), 823-30. doi:10.1017/S1049096511001429
- Delahais, T., & Toulemonde, J. (2017). Making rigorous causal claims in a real-life context: Has research contributed to sustainable forest management? *Evaluation*, 23(4), 870-388. doi:10.1177/1356389017733211
- Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy. (2022). *Evaluation of the TA - phase 4: Final report - appendices*. Retrieved March 2024, from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evaluation-of-the-transitional-arrangements-for-demand-side-response-phase-4>
- Department for Energy Security & Net Zero. (2023). *Hy4Heat Evaluation Annex A: Evaluation Plan and Methods*. London: Department for Energy Security & Net Zero. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evaluation-of-hy4heat-programme>
- Department for Work and Pensions. (2024). *Review of international and private sector evidence on the effectiveness of digitising services*. London: Department for Work and Pensions. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-international-and-private-sector-evidence-on-the-effectiveness-of-digitising-services>.
- Franklyn, R., Budd, T., Verrill, R., & Willoughby, M. (2017). *Legal problem and resolution survey 2014 to 2015*. London: Ministry of Justice. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/legal-problem-and-resolution-survey-2014-to-2015>
- Frontier Economics and IFF Research. (2025a). *HMCTS Reform Digital Services Evaluation Supplementary Report: Damages Claims*. London: Ministry of Justice.

- Frontier Economics and IFF Research. (2025b). *HMCTS Reform Digital Services Evaluation Supplementary Report: Divorce*. London: Ministry of Justice. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hm-courts-tribunals-service-reform-digital-services-evaluation>
- Frontier Economics and IFF Research. (2025c). *HMCTS Reform Digital Services Evaluation Supplementary Report: Family Public Law*. London: Ministry of Justice. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hm-courts-tribunals-service-reform-digital-services-evaluation>
- Frontier Economics and IFF Research. (2025d). *HMCTS Reform Digital Services Evaluation Supplementary Report: Financial Remedy*. London: Ministry of Justice. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hm-courts-tribunals-service-reform-digital-services-evaluation>
- Frontier Economics and IFF Research. (2025e). *HMCTS Reform Digital Services Evaluation Supplementary Report: Online Civil Money Claims*. London: Ministry of Justice. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hm-courts-tribunals-service-reform-digital-services-evaluation>
- Frontier Economics and IFF Research. (2025f). *HMCTS Reform Digital Services Evaluation Supplementary Report: Probate*. London: Ministry of Justice. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hm-courts-tribunals-service-reform-digital-services-evaluation>
- Frontier Economics and IFF Research. (2025g). *HMCTS Reform Digital Services Evaluation Supplementary Report: Social Security and Child Support*. London: Ministry of Justice. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hm-courts-tribunals-service-reform-digital-services-evaluation>
- Frontier Economics, IFF Research, and Ministry of Justice. (2025). *HMCTS Reform Digital Services Evaluation: Overarching Report*. London: Ministry of Justice. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hm-courts-tribunals-service-reform-digital-services-evaluation>
- Harrison, E., Lemmon, D., Ramanathan, D., & Clay, D. (2024). *HMCTS Reform Evaluation - Vulnerability Study: A qualitative study of vulnerable individuals accessing justice and the impact of HMCTS Reform on their experiences*. Basis Social. London: Ministry of Justice. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hmcts-reform-evaluation-vulnerability-study>
- HM Courts and Tribunals Service. (2021). *Reflections of working in courts and tribunals during the COVID pandemic*. Retrieved from GOV.UK:

<https://insidehmcts.blog.gov.uk/2021/03/24/reflections-of-working-during-covid-pandemic/>

- HM Courts and Tribunals Service. (2024). *Assessing Access to Justice in HMCTS Services - December 2024*. London: HM Courts & Tribunals Service. Retrieved from GOV.UK: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/assessing-access-to-justice-in-hmcts-services>
- HM Courts and Tribunals Service. (2025a). *HMCTS Vulnerability Action Plan*. Retrieved from GOV.UK: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hmcts-vulnerability-action-plan>
- HM Courts and Tribunals Service. (2025b). *Immigration and Asylum Appeals Reformed Service: Evaluation Report*. London: HM Courts and Tribunals Service. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/immigration-and-asylum-appeals-reformed-service-evaluation-report>
- HM Courts and Tribunals Service. (2025c). *Scheduling and listing: using technology to co-ordinate resources more effectively*. Retrieved from GOV.UK: <https://www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/scheduling-and-listing-using-technology-to-co-ordinate-resources-more-effectively>
- HM Treasury. (2020a). *Magenta Book: Central Government guidance on evaluation*. HM Treasury. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-magenta-book>
- HM Treasury. (2020b). *Magenta Book Annex A: Analytical Methods for use within an evaluation*. HM Treasury. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-magenta-book>
- House of Commons Library. (2024). *Research Briefing Court statistics for England and Wales*. Retrieved from House of Commons Library: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8372/CBP-8372.pdf>
- Legal Futures. (2025). *Legal market's strong growth in 2024 set to continue this year*. Retrieved from Legal Futures: <https://www.legalfutures.co.uk/latest-news/legal-markets-strong-growth-in-2024-set-to-continue-this-year>
- Lloyd's Bank. (2025). *UK Consumer Digital Index*. London: Lloyd's Bank. Retrieved from: <https://www.lloydsbank.com/consumer-digital-index.html>. Retrieved from LI.
- Mayne, J. (2008). *Contribution analysis: An Approach to exploring cause and effect*. The Institutional Learning and Change (ILAC) initiative. Retrieved from <https://www.betterevaluation.org/tools-resources/contribution-analysis-approach-exploring-cause-effect>

- Ministry of Justice. (2021). *HMCTS Reform Evaluation Framework*. London: Ministry of Justice. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hm-courts-tribunals-service-reform-evaluation-framework>
- Ministry of Justice. (2023). *HMCTS Reform MoJ Evaluation: Technical Appendix*. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hmcts-reform-moj-evaluation-progress-report>
- Ministry of Justice. (2025a). *Civil Justice Statistics Quarterly: January to March 2025*. London: Ministry of Justice. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/family-court-statistics-quarterly-january-to-march-2025>
- Ministry of Justice. (2025b). *Family Court Statistics Quarterly: January to March 2025*. London: Ministry of Justice. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/family-court-statistics-quarterly-october-to-december-2024>
- Ministry of Justice. (2025c). *Tribunals Statistics Quarterly: January to March 2025*. London: Ministry of Justice. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/tribunals-statistics-quarterly-january-to-march-2025>
- Ministry of Justice and Legal Aid Agency. (2025). *Legal aid statistics England and Wales bulletin Oct to Dec 2024*. London: Ministry of Justice. Retrieved from <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoimGQwNzY5MjQtYTUyZS00NWUzLWE4NzItYWVhN2U3ZDJiMzE1IiwidCI6ImM2ODc0NzI4LTcxZTYtNDZmZS1hOWUxLTJiOGZmZjNjMmFkOCIsImMiOjh9&chromeless=1&filter=true/ecf&pageName=ReportSectiond021bd808b805700d6a0>
- National Audit Office. (2023). *Progress on the courts and tribunals reform programme*. Retrieved from National Audit Office: <https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/progress-on-the-courts-and-tribunals-reform-programme/>
- National Audit Office. (2025). *Reducing the backlog in the Crown Court*.
- Ofcom. (2020). *Technology Tracker 2020*. London: Ofcom. Retrieved from: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/our-research/stats20>.
- Ofcom. (2023). *Technology Tracker 2023*. London: Ofcom. Retrieved from: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/our-research/stats23>.
- Ofcom. (2024). *Annual monitoring report on the postal market*. London: Ofcom. Retrieved from: https://www.ofcom.org.uk/post/market-performance/monitoring_reports.

- Ofcom. (2025). *Technology Tracker 2025*. London: Ofcom. Retrieved from:
<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/our-research/statistical-release-calendar-2025>.
- Office for National Statistics. (2022). *Homeworking in the UK – regional patterns: 2019 to 2022*. Retrieved from Office for National Statistics:
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/homeworkingintheukregionalpatterns/2019to2022>
- Ricks, J. I., & Liu, A. H. (2018). Process Tracing Research Designs: A Practical Guide. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 51(4), 842-846. doi:10.1017/s11049096518000975