



Ministry
of Justice

Reform Evaluation Data Summary: Probate

HMCTS Reform Evaluation

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1. Executive summary

The HMCTS Reform programme was a varied and complex set of projects, centred on delivering the shared vision between the executive and the judiciary for a courts and tribunals system that is just, proportionate, and accessible (Lord Chancellor et al., 2016). The programme aimed to deliver a modern justice system by using new technologies and ways of working to create a more effective justice system for everyone who uses it.

This report forms part of the overarching evaluation of the HMCTS Reform programme being conducted by the Ministry of Justice. Further details on the MoJ's evaluation approach and associated publications can be found at: [HMCTS Reform Overarching Evaluation: Research - GOV.UK](#).

Probate is the legal right to deal with a person's estate when they die. Prior to the reform of the probate service, the application process was paper based only. The Reform programme introduced a digital probate service, allowing applicants to complete, submit and view their applications online. It was initially rolled out for some cases from unrepresented applicants in July 2018. In October 2019, legal professionals were able to use the online service and, from November 2020, they were mandated to do so for a majority of cases. The underlying objective of the digital reform of the probate service was to "create a more accessible, user-friendly service that works for everyone, whether they choose to apply online or use paper forms" (HM Courts & Tribunals Service, 2025d).

This report presents descriptive statistics based on a range of data sources, including administrative management information, protected characteristics questionnaires, complaints, Google Analytics and exit surveys completed by probate applicants.

1.1 Key findings



Time to apply: Approximately 70% of probate applications are made within six months of the deceased's death date, but this varies by case type, application channel or level of representation. More research is needed to understand why some applicants take a long time to apply for probate, which represents a potential access-to-justice issue.



Digital uptake: There has been swift adoption of the digital application channel introduced as part of Reform. Between April and June 2025, 81% of all probate applications from unrepresented applicants and almost all “grant of probate” applications submitted by legal representatives (95%) were submitted digitally. This suggests unrepresented applicants are choosing to use the new digital service and legal representatives are adhering to the mandate to use the digital service.



Paper applications: The paper application channel is still used by those who choose not to apply digitally and those with cases not eligible for digital applications. The latter usually have more complex cases, which are more likely to encounter processing issues or have fewer staff with the necessary experience to handle them. These factors may negatively impact the user experience in a cumulative way and represent another potential access-to-justice issue.



Open caseload: From late 2023, newer cases were dealt with more quickly than older open cases. Between January 2024 and January 2025, the proportion of open cases that had been open for a year or more nearly doubled, from 5% to 9%. Although the number of these older, open cases decreased in the second half of 2024, they did so at a slower rate than the reduction in newer open cases.



Average case length: For cases received between July 2019 and September 2023 the average time taken for a case to complete increased from 67 days to 104 days. This increase in case length was larger for cases submitted via the paper channel. Average case lengths have since decreased to 22 days for all applications submitted between January and March 2025. Changes in the open caseload since late 2023 suggests this reduction has been driven by newer, simpler cases being processed more quickly. Additionally, applicants from ethnic minority backgrounds consistently have longer case durations than white applicants.



Stops: Approximately a third of probate cases experience a ‘stop’, where an issue with the application means it cannot progress without action from the applicant. For example, they may need to confirm they are eligible to apply or need to supply original supporting documents. Stopped cases generally take far longer to complete than unstopped cases. The proportion of cases with at least one stop is higher for those submitted by ethnic minority applicants. A higher proportion of white applicants experience a stop relating to the will, whereas a higher proportion of ethnic minority applicants experience stops relating to the death certificate.



Application outcomes: Whilst the vast majority of probate applications result in a grant of probate being issued (96%), a small proportion of applications end up in a “dormant” case state, after the applicant effectively disengages from the application process. Further research into the drivers of cases becoming dormant could help lead to better outcomes for users, reduce the open caseload and improve access-to-justice.



Complaints: Recorded probate complaint volumes have increased from 2019 levels, peaking at 1,681 complaints received between July and September 2023 when the open caseload was at its highest. By mid-2025, recorded probate complaints had reduced by 60% as average case durations and the open caseload have reduced. Around 80% of probate complaints relate to applicants experiencing delays. Complaints are disproportionately associated with paper applications, as well as with applications that have become dormant or are withdrawn.

Since the start of Reform, the probate service initially saw a decline in performance, followed by a sustained recovery. This was exacerbated by external factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The digital channel, introduced by the Reform programme, has seen increasing use, and is now associated with shorter case durations than in 2019. However, paper cases take longer on average to complete than digital cases. Applicants from ethnic minority backgrounds have consistently longer case durations than white applicants. This is likely driven by factors such as case complexity.

2. Introduction

HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) is an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), responsible for the courts and tribunal system in England and Wales and non-devolved tribunals in Scotland and Northern Ireland. The HMCTS Reform programme was a large, complex and ambitious programme of court modernisation. It was centred on delivering a courts and tribunals service that is just, proportionate, and accessible (Lord Chancellor et al., 2016). It aimed to transform the courts and tribunals system through greater use of remote technology, modernising the physical estate and IT infrastructure, adding new support services, and introducing new online channels and digital services.

Probate is the legal right to deal with a person's estate (possessions, money, and property) when they die. Prior to the reform of the probate service, the process of applying for probate was paper based only. Probate applicants had to visit a probate registry in person to swear an oath to confirm their right to administer the estate of the deceased.

- In July 2018, HMCTS released the digital probate service. It was initially only available to unrepresented applicants with cases where there was a will.
- In March 2019, the management of all digital and some paper probate cases moved to Birmingham Courts and Tribunals Service Centre (CTSC).¹
- In July 2019, the service expanded to become available for unrepresented applicants without a will.
- In October 2019, legal professionals were able to use the digital probate service.
- From November 2020, a mandate meant that legal professionals had to use the digital service (with some exceptions).² Unrepresented applicants can still choose to apply via a paper form instead of the new digital service.

¹ Before March 2019, cases were managed by staff in Probate Registries spread across England and Wales.

² Exceptions for completing the digital form are detailed at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-probate-on-paper-as-a-practitioner>

The main features of the new digital service allow both unrepresented applicants and those applying through a legal professional to:

- complete and submit their application digitally³ (with exceptions),
- pay for their application digitally,
- view their case online,
- receive support from the CTSC to complete applications,⁴
- undertake a 'Statement of Truth' digitally, rather than swearing an oath in person.

The anticipated key outcomes of the digital reformed service were:



- A simplified probate process for service users,



- Reduced administrative time taken to input and progress cases,



- Reduced cost to HMCTS of delivering the service.

Other factors may have affected these outcomes. These include wider policy changes, changes in staffing levels and levels of staff experience following the movement of staff roles to the CTSC, and external factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic. These factors could potentially affect the volume of applications, disposals, and service timeliness.

More information about the digitalisation of HMCTS services can be found in the Digital Services Evaluation (Frontier Economics et al., 2025), conducted as part of the overarching evaluation of HMCTS Reform.⁵

2.1 Aim of analysis

This analysis presents key trends in the probate service and how each of these vary for different groups of applications and service users.

³ All application types legally require original documents, such as wills and death certificates, to be sent in by post.

⁴ Public users can also receive digital support through the National Digital Support service if eligible.

⁵ Further details on the MoJ's evaluation approach and associated publications can be found at: [HMCTS Reform Overarching Evaluation: Research - GOV.UK](#).

2.2 Context

This section describes a range of factors, which occurred since the beginning of probate reform, which provide additional contextual information for the results of the data analysis.

A. The digital mandate for legal professionals



Since November 2020, solicitors were mandated to use the digital probate service, with exceptions for some cases. Eligibility criteria for making applications digitally may mean that more complex cases, especially those submitted by legal professionals, are more likely to be made on paper.

B. HMCTS staffing levels



HMCTS centralised the management of probate services, which moved to Birmingham CTSC in March 2019. This resulted in a decrease in the number of experienced staff working in district probate registries. The number of staff in the CTSC has increased over time to help meet demand (Appendix A). Initially, experienced staff were used to train newer staff, reducing the number of experienced staff processing probate applications, but increasing the capability of the newer staff members.

C. External factors



Demand on the probate service, and the capacity to meet that demand, was impacted by external factors, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Demand for the probate service is subject to seasonal variation. As death rates are generally higher in the winter months, this results in an increased number of probate applications in late winter or early spring each year.

D. The new excepted estate regulations



HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) used to require extensive information about probate applications, even when the applicant was not required to pay inheritance tax.

New regulations came into effect in January 2022,⁶ which reduced the number of probate cases which need to pay inheritance tax. For these cases, the value of the estate does not require reporting to HMRC. The new rules aim to make estate administration easier for the applicant, HMRC and HMCTS, therefore making it easier to apply for probate.

E. Changes to working between HMCTS and HMRC



Before January 2024, HMRC required unrepresented probate applicants to complete and submit two different forms, and then wait for them to be processed and relevant information shared with HMCTS, before they could apply for probate. However, many applications were being submitted prematurely to HMCTS, resulting in issues as cases progressed.

In January 2024, changes were introduced requiring all probate applicants to initially submit inheritance tax details to HMRC. They then receive a unique code from HMRC which is required to submit with their probate application. Doing so ensures that all relevant information has been shared with HMCTS.

These changes mean there is one less form for unrepresented applicants to complete. It also reduces the number of applications submitted prematurely, as the unique code ensures that all forms have been received and approved by HMRC, and therefore also reduces the likelihood of those applications encountering issues. The technical validation of these codes between HMCTS and HMRC should also have reduced the chance of errors occurring.

F. Increases in the probate application fee



In January 2022 the probate fee increased from £155 for applications submitted by legal professionals and £215 for those from unrepresented applicants to a flat fee of £273, whether the applicant has legal representation or not. From May 2024 this increased to £300.

⁶ [The Inheritance Tax \(Delivery of Accounts\) \(Excepted Estates\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2021](#) applies to all estates where the deceased died on or after 1 January 2022.

3. Methodology

This report presents descriptive statistics based on a range of data sources.

3.1 Management information

This analysis looked at case-level management information from HMCTS's Core Case Data⁷ (CCD) case management system, for 1.7 million probate applications made between July 2019⁸ and June 2025. This data includes information on case type, application channel, legal representation, case outcomes, case duration, and details around stops, where cases experience issues requiring action to be taken by the applicant.

3.2 Protected characteristics

HMCTS asks Protected Characteristics Questions (PCQs) of users of a range of reformed court and tribunal services, including the probate service. PCQs were introduced as part of the Reform programme to allow HMCTS to better understand who is using different services (HM Courts & Tribunals Service, 2022). Probate PCQ responses were first received for digital applications in June 2020 and for paper applications in December 2020.

Probate PCQs are only made available to unrepresented applicants and are completed voluntarily. This means results from PCQs will not be representative of all service users as PCQs are not offered to applicants with legal representation, whose characteristics are likely to be different from unrepresented applicants. Additionally, further bias can be introduced into PCQ data if people with specific characteristics are less likely to respond than those with other characteristics. Findings should therefore be interpreted with caution.

To be counted as providing a PCQ response, applicants need to provide an informative answer to at least one question. Someone who responds "Prefer not to say" for every

⁷ CCD is the case management system for the probate service introduced as part of the HMCTS Reform programme.

⁸ The digital rollout of the service started in July 2018. However, reform cases were not fully or consistently recorded on CCD, and some cases were processed on the legacy system until HMCTS fully migrated the probate service to CTSCs during March 2019. Official statistics refer to quality issues with data from applications received between April to June 2019, due to the transition between legacy and Reform data systems (Ministry of Justice, 2025) so the earliest data used for this analysis correspond to applications received in July 2019.

question is counted as a non-respondent. More information on PCQ response rates can be found in Appendix B.

3.3 Complaints data

HMCTS service users can submit a formal complaint about their experience or the level of service they feel they have received.⁹ HMCTS complaints received since February 2019 are recorded and processed on the Opinions, Praise, Treatment, Incidents and Complaints (OPTIC) case management system. Data recorded on OPTIC includes the details of the complaint itself, a broad category the complaint fits into, and an associated case reference number which can be used to link it with case data stored on CCD. However, this case reference number is not always filled in accurately or completely. This means it is not possible to link every complaint with its corresponding case data.

3.4 Google Analytics

Google Analytics data is used to track an applicants' interactions with the online service, if the applicant accepts tracking cookies. This data makes it possible to measure metrics such as the digital completion rate or the drop-out rate between different pages online, which can be used to diagnose issues with the online service and improve it for users.

3.5 User Satisfaction Surveys

HMCTS asks users to rate the online service after they have completed their digital application.¹⁰ This is used internally, alongside other measures, to understand and monitor service performance. The survey has a relatively low response rate but remains at a level in line with industry standards. This means the data from the survey should be treated as a snapshot, and not necessarily wholly representative of the views of all service users.

3.6 Family Courts Statistics Quarterly

Throughout the report, reference has been made to published official statistics which provide an overarching view of the family courts in England and Wales. Family Court

⁹ Formal complaints can be submitted directly to HMCTS via an [online complaint form](#), as well as over the phone, by letter or via email.

¹⁰ For user satisfaction, service users are asked: "How would you rate the online service you used today?" Users are able to answer, "Very good", "Good", "Neither good nor poor", "Poor" and "Very poor". Those who answered "Very good" or "Good" were viewed as satisfied.

Statistics Quarterly (Ministry of Justice, 2014) provide regular updates on the probate service, which have been cited in this report as useful context, and provide high level statistics on the probate service based on aggregated case-level management information from CCD.

3.7 Key metrics

Key metrics provide a high-level overview of the reform of the probate service. Breaking down these metrics by different case characteristics - such as levels of legal representation, application channel, or the protected characteristics of the applicant - indicate how the digital reform is working for different groups of service users.

Table 1: Examples of key metrics

Metric	Indicator/Proxy for:
Volume of applications	The demand for the probate service
Volume of grants issued	Service delivery for probate users
Open caseload	How well the service is managing its caseload
Proportion of cases with legal representation	Perceptions around the necessity for legal representation in the service, which has implications for access to justice
Digital uptake	How well people can access and use the digital service
Case duration¹¹	How long a case takes to be completed
Proportion of cases stopped at least once	The user's propensity to encounter effective barriers to accessing justice

Throughout this report, when considering changes over time, quarterly figures for key metrics are used. These refer to quarters of the calendar year. As such, for a given year, Q1 refers to January to March, Q2 refers to April to June, Q3 refers to July to September and Q4 refers to October to December.

3.8 Caveats and limitations

1. Administrative data is primarily collected for the purposes of the ongoing operation and monitoring of HMCTS services rather than research. This means it may not

¹¹ Case length measures should be treated with caution given the impacts of COVID-19 on services. Reduced capacity during lockdowns, increased caseloads and backlogs are likely to have had an impact.

always include the required data, or be in the necessary format, to fully answer specific research questions.

2. Pre-Reform probate service data is of insufficient quality to be used for analysis. This means a full comparison of the service before and after Reform is not possible.
3. Detailed breakdowns of cases are not possible where the type of application is not specified or missing.
4. At the point of data extraction (16 July 2025), many cases were still ongoing. Cases received more recently are more likely to be ongoing, which means timeliness statistics for recent time periods are likely to be biased, representative only of those cases which completed quickly. Mean case duration metrics for more recent quarters need to be interpreted with caution, as these will increase as more cases complete. See Appendix C for detail on how timeliness measures used in this report are defined and calculated.
5. The analysis did not include standing search cases, where users search for probate records, or caveat cases, where users challenge an existing probate application.
6. Responses from PCQs are subject to response bias, so all findings presenting differences by protected characteristics should be interpreted with caution. Changes by PCQ response over time could reflect changes in PCQ response rates, rather than a change within the wider service. Data from PCQs should be regarded as representative only of applicants who completed the PCQ form.
7. PCQs in the probate service are only available to unrepresented applicants, so responses may not be representative of applicants with legal representation. However, it is also possible for a probate applicant to gain representation after initially submitting an application themselves.
8. Data from Google Analytics is dependent on users choosing to accept online cookies for their data to be collected. As not all online service users accept cookies, data from Google Analytics may not be representative of the experiences of all service users using the digital service.

4. Main findings

4.1 Receipts, disposals and open case volumes

Summary of key findings:

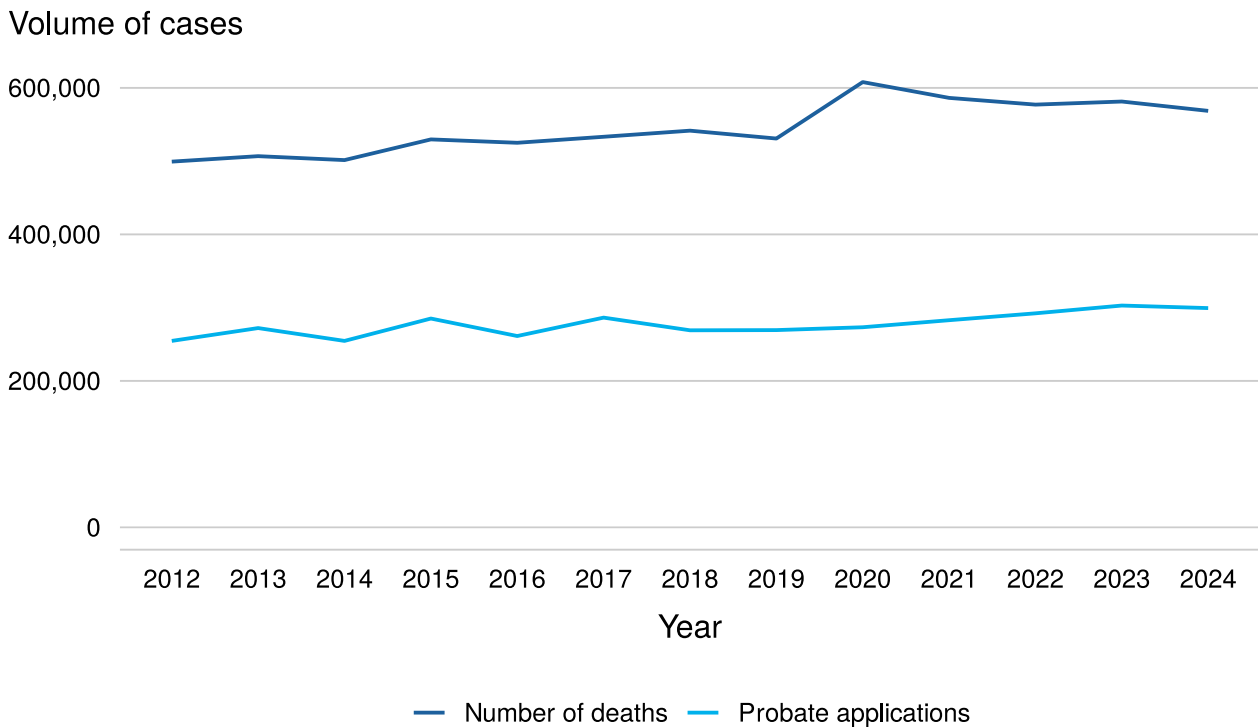
- Approximately 70% of probate applications are made within six months of the deceased's death date, but this varies substantially by case type, application channel or level of representation.
- Probate service users who take longer to initially apply are generally those who apply via the paper channel, apply with legal representation, or come from an ethnic minority background.
- Between Q1 2020 and Q3 2023, there were higher quarterly volumes of applications than disposals, resulting in a growing number of open cases. The volume of disposals was higher than the volume of applications between Q4 2023 and Q1 2025, reducing the open caseload. This coincided with a programme of operational changes introduced by HMCTS to improve service performance.
- The increase in disposals from late 2023 has been dominated by cases received more recently. Between January 2024 and January 2025, while the open caseload reduced, the proportion of open cases that had not been closed more than a year after starting nearly doubled (from 5% to 9%).
- The proportion of cases from unrepresented applicants has increased over time, especially where the estate of the deceased has a monetary value under £10k.
- PCQs show probate applicants tend to be older, wealthier and less ethnically diverse than the UK population overall.

Probate applications

The number of deaths per year was markedly higher in 2020 than in any year in the previous decade, as shown in Appendix D. This coincides with the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, probate case level management information does not show a corresponding increase in probate applications received following the sharp increase in recorded deaths in 2020, see Figure 1.

The annual number of deaths has decreased slightly since 2020 but remains higher than historic levels. In 2023, over 300,000 recorded probate applications were received for the first time (Ministry of Justice, 2024). This increased demand may have affected the efficiency of the probate service.

Figure 1: Volume of deaths and probate applications (2012 to 2024)



Source: *Death registration summary statistics, England and Wales, Office for National Statistics* (Office for National Statistics, 2025a) and *Family Court Statistics Quarterly, Ministry of Justice* (Ministry of Justice, 2025)

There are four broad types of probate cases, which are detailed in

Table 2 The type of case defines which type of grant of representation – the document that gives the applicant the legal right to deal with the deceased’s estate – is applied for and usually depends on whether a will exists and whether executors have been appointed.

Table 2: Types of grants of representation and their definition

Case type	Definition
Grant of probate	There is a valid will, the executor of the will applies for the legal right to manage the estate.
Grant of letters of administration (intestacy)	There is no will, the next of kin applies for the legal right to manage the estate.
Grant of letters of administration with the will annexed	There is a will, but no appointed executor, or the appointed executor is unable or unwilling to act.
Ad Colligenda Bona	This urgent application type, introduced in 2025, allows a representative to deal with the deceased's estate to prevent a loss occurring, most commonly around the sale of the deceased's house or other property (HM Revenue & Customs, 2016).

Time taken to apply for probate

A probate application can be made as soon as the person whose estate it concerns has died. However, a grant of representation cannot be issued within a statutory wait period, which depends on the type of grant applied for,¹² without the leave of a district judge or registrar. Whilst approximately 70% of all probate applications are made within 180 days (approximately 6 months) of the associated death, this varies for different types of cases, as detailed in Table 3.

Table 3: Proportion of probate applications made within specific timeframes after the recorded death date, by case type, application channel, and representation, for probate applications received between Q3 2019 and Q2 2025

¹² [Rule 6.2 of the Non-Contentious Probate Rules](#) states that an application for a grant of letters of administration cannot be issued within 14 days of the associated death. An application for a grant of probate or a grant of letters of administration with the will annexed cannot be issued within 7 days of the associated death.

Case characteristic	Breakdown	Time between deceased death date and probate application submission				
		Up to 90 days	Between 91 and 180 days	Between 181 and 365 days	366 days or more	Total volume (=100%)
All applications		41%	28%	19%	12%	1,726,112
Application case type	Grant of probate	43%	29%	18%	9%	1,379,345
	Grant of letters of administration (intestacy)	34%	23%	19%	24%	277,144
	Grant of letters of administration with the will annexed	21%	29%	26%	25%	68,486
Application channel	Digital application	46%	27%	18%	9%	1,136,096
	Paper application	31%	30%	21%	18%	588,213
Applicant representation	Represented applicant	27%	34%	24%	15%	1,000,190
	Unrepresented applicant	60%	20%	11%	9%	725,922

Source: Probate case-level management information, HMCTS

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

While generally fewer probate applications are made as time after the related death increases, there are exceptions to this trend. Around a quarter of grant of letters of administration cases are made over a year after the associated death, compared with less than a tenth of grant of probate applications. Additionally, unrepresented applicants are more than twice as likely to apply for probate within 90 days of the associated death, compared with applicants with legal representation (60% vs 27%).

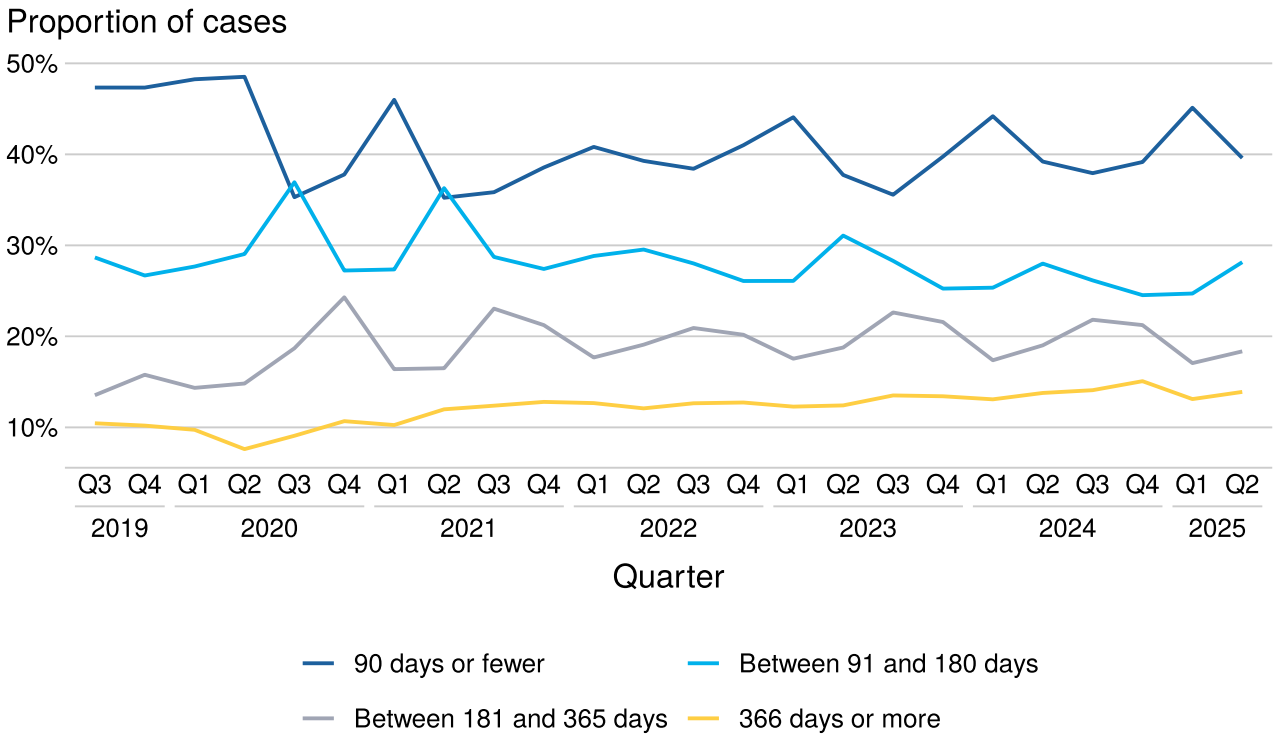
The drivers of short or long times to initially apply for probate are not currently understood. The differences by application representation could be affected by:

1. The time taken to instruct a legal representative to act on behalf of the applicant,
2. The time taken to collect all the case's required documentation, especially for more complex cases where applicants may be more likely to instruct legal representation,
3. The time taken to ensure everything with the application is correct, to reduce the likelihood of encountering issues, based on advice from legal representatives.

No clear pattern was identified between time to apply and net estate value. This implies that the need to pay inheritance tax is unlikely to be the main driver of longer times taken to apply for probate.

Figure 2 shows how the time taken to initially apply for probate has changed over time. In Q3 2019, just under half of all probate applications were made within 90 days of the associated death, and over a quarter were made within 91-180 days post-death. Around Q2 2020, coinciding with the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the proportion of applications made within 90 days of the associated death decreased. Since then, the proportion of applications made in different time periods after the associated death have remained fairly stable, but there have been steady increases in the proportion of applicants taking both less than 90 days and more than a year to initially submit their applications. The drivers for these changes over time are unclear from the data used for this report.

Figure 2: Proportion of probate applications by time taken to submit the application after the associated death (Q3 2019 to Q2 2025)



Source: Probate case-level management information, HMCTS

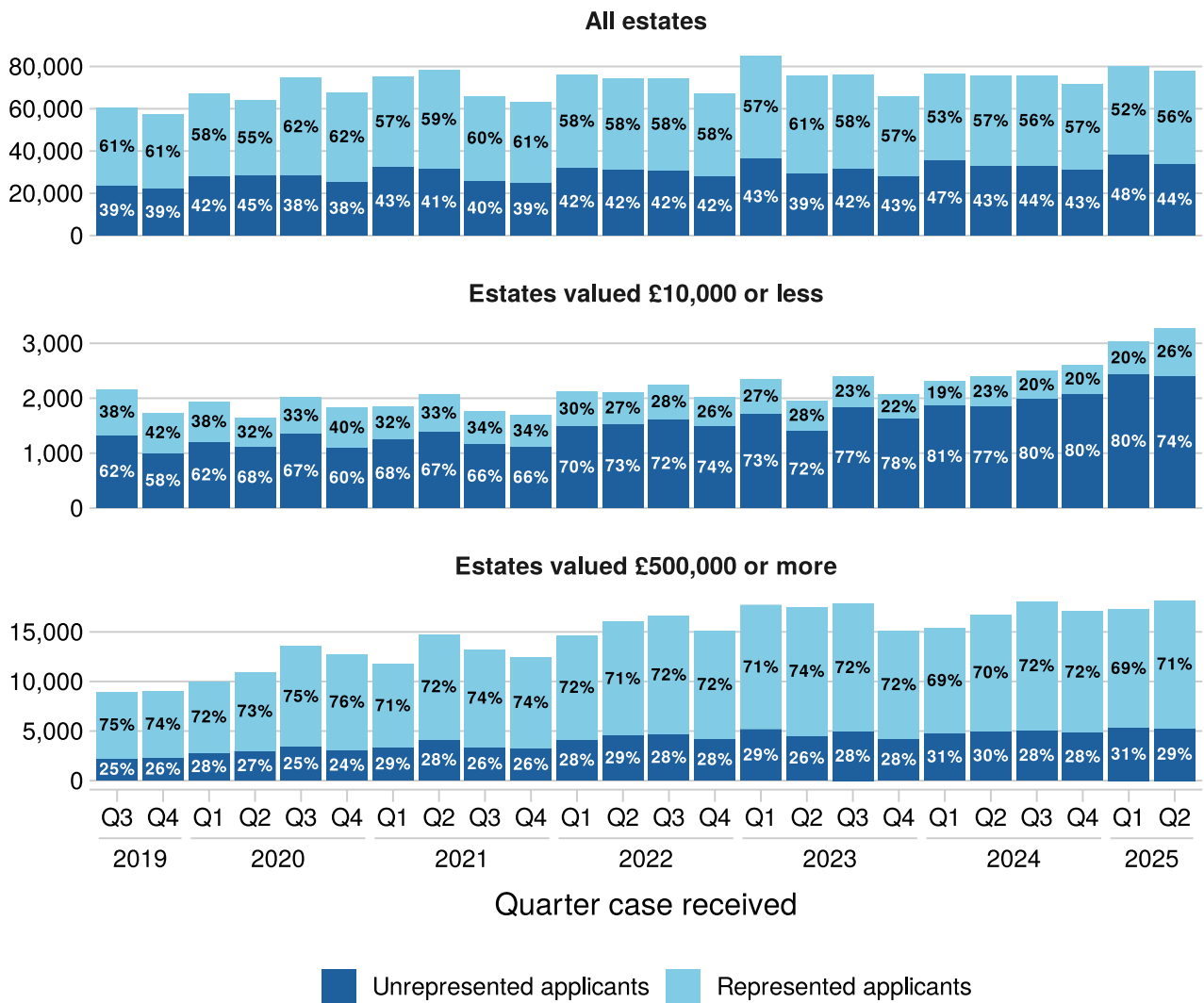
Applications by level of representation and estate size

Probate applicants can choose to apply for probate with or without legal representation. For all cases, there has been a small increase in the proportion of users applying without legal representation over time, as shown in Figure 3. Applications from unrepresented applicants increased from 39% of applications in Q3 2019 to 44% of applications in Q2 2025.

For cases with small estate values, taken to be where the net value of the assets of the deceased is less than £10,000, the increase in applications without representation is larger, from 62% of applications in Q3 2019 to 74% of applications in Q2 2025. For cases with larger estate values, defined as where the net value of assets is greater than £500,000, levels of representation have been more stable, with a smaller increase from 25% of applications being unrepresented in Q3 2019 to 29% of applications in Q2 2025.

Figure 3: Volume of probate applications by representation and gross value of the deceased’s estate per quarter (Q3 2019 to Q2 2025)

Volume of cases



Source: Probate case-level management information, HMCTS

The new digital service introduced as part of HMCTS Reform was designed to be user-friendly, such that those with simple probate cases with low estate values would feel comfortable making their application without potentially expensive legal representation (HM Courts & Tribunals Service, 2024a). This may help explain the trends seen in Figure 3, but other factors may also have contributed to the decrease in use of legal representation, including:

- changes made by HMRC to simplify inheritance tax, defining “excepted estates”, which came into effect from 1st January 2022 (HM Government, 2022b),

- the change in the probate application fee in 2024 to a flat fee for both represented and unrepresented applications,
- the wider UK socio-economic landscape and increased cost-of-living.

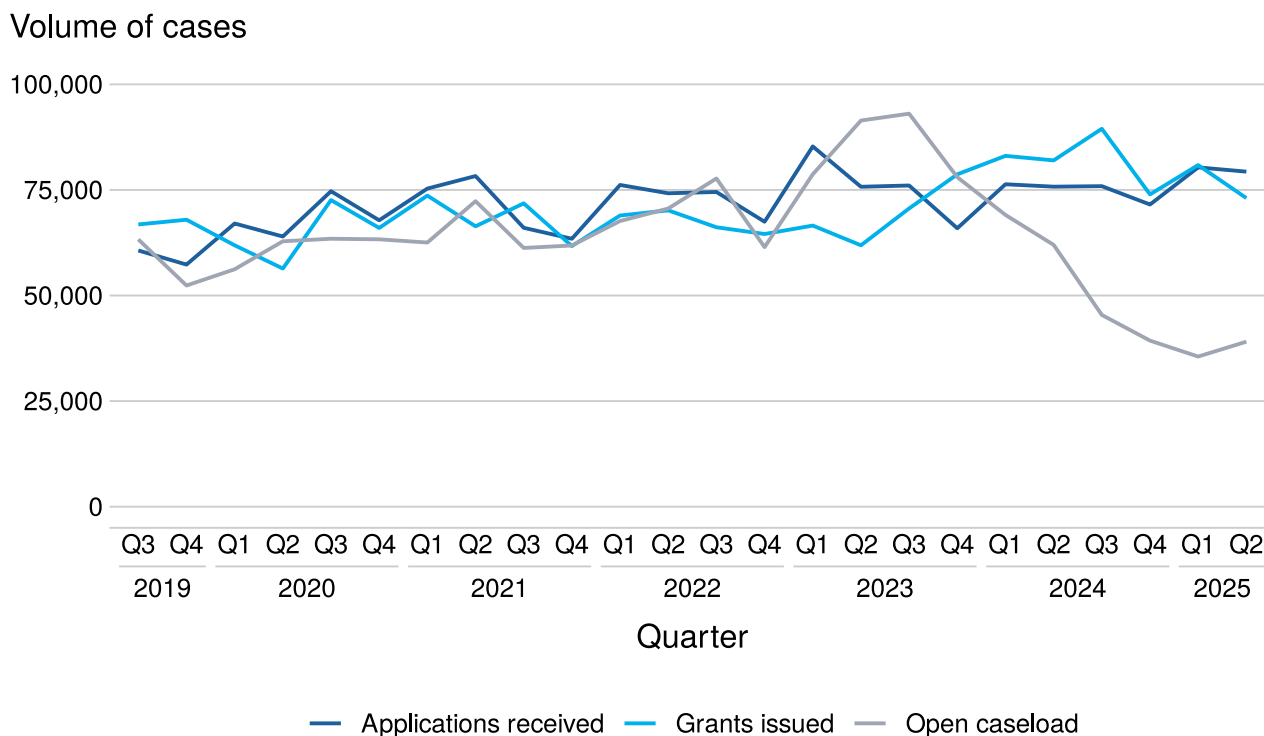
The level of legal representation varies for different types of cases. For example, 75% of applications for letters of administration with the will annexed were made with legal representation compared with 51% of applications for letters of administration (intestacy) and 59% of Grant of Probate applications. The exact reasons for this are unclear, but may relate to the availability of digital application channels for these case types,¹³ or the perceived complexity of some case types necessitating legal representation.

Open cases

Figure 4 shows that from Q1 2020, coinciding with the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the volume of probate applications rose slightly but remained fairly steady. Between Q1 2020 and Q3 2023, the volume of applications was higher than the volume of disposals in all but one quarter (Q3 2021). This created a growing number of open cases, which peaked in Q3 2023, and increased the likelihood of cases experiencing a delay.

¹³ If the applicant applies for a grant of probate or letters of administration with the will annexed but does not have access to the original will, a court sealed copy or notarial copy, they must apply by paper.

Figure 4: Volume of probate applications received, grants of probate issued, and number of open probate cases by quarter (Q3 2019 to Q2 2025)



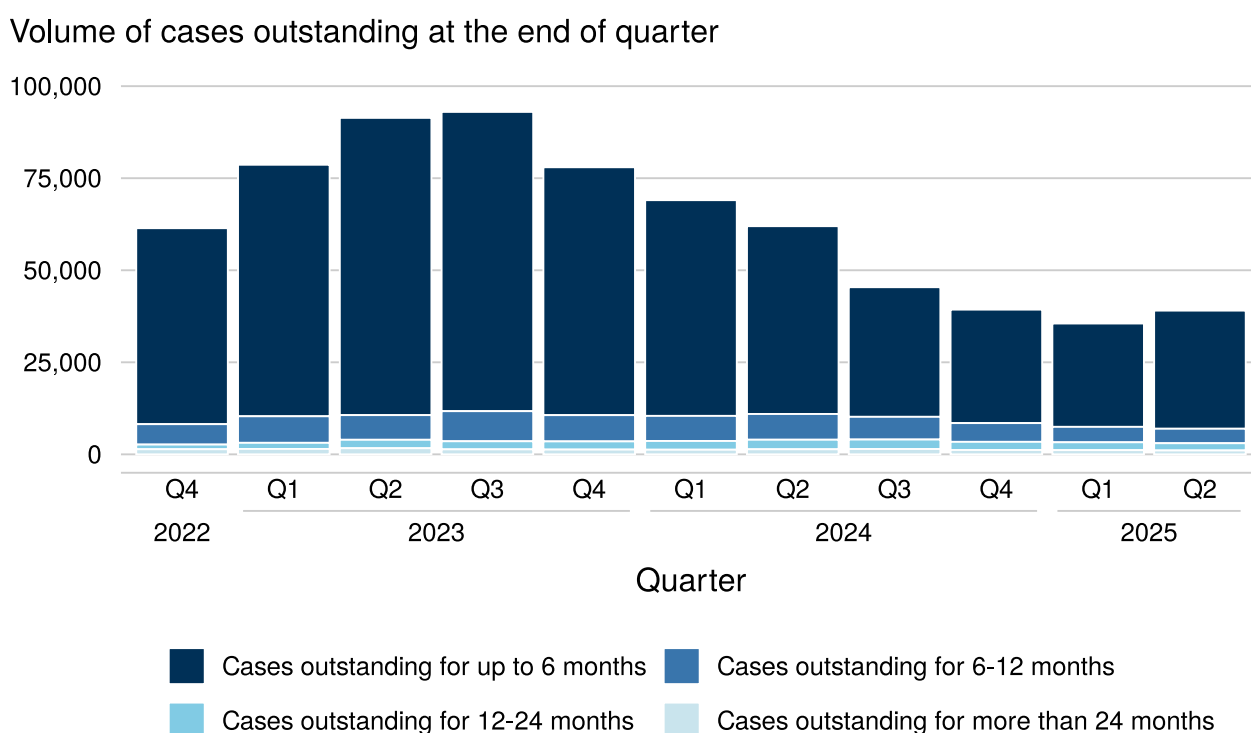
Source: Probate case-level management information, HMCTS

In the second half of 2023, the volume of disposals increased. With the exception of Q2 2025, disposals have been markedly higher than applications since Q4 2023. The volume of open cases has decreased from its highest level of 97,670 in August 2023 (HM Courts & Tribunals Service, 2024b) to 39,043 in June 2025 (HM Courts & Tribunals Service, 2025c), a reduction of 60%. This coincides with the launch of the Probate Service Performance Recovery programme in August 2023, which aimed to reduce the number of open probate cases and reduce case durations by introducing changes to operational procedures. This programme: increased staff training, increasing the number of staff able to handle cases and issue grants of probate for more complex applications; increased the number of HMCTS probate staff, to clear the volume of open cases that had built up over time; and reduced the hours each day that applicants could phone the CTSC, increasing the time available each day for staff to examine cases and issue grants of probate.

This reduction in the open caseload has not happened uniformly across all cases (see Figure 5). Between January and July 2024, the total open caseload reduced by over 25%, but the total number of open cases that were at least a year old had increased by approximately 10% over the same period. This means that the reduction in the open

caseload was primarily driven by newer cases, increasing the average age of the open caseload. This may be because these newer cases were less likely to have issues that might stop them being processed by the probate service. Although the number of older, open cases decreased in the second half of 2024, they did so at a slower rate than the reduction in newer cases. In January 2024, these cases made up less than 5% of the total open caseload, but by January 2025 this had nearly doubled to around 9% of the total open caseload (HM Courts & Tribunals Service, 2025b).

Figure 5: Volume and age profile of open probate cases by quarter (Q4 2022 to Q2 2025)



Source: Probate case-level management information, HMCTS

4.1.1 Supplementary data

Analysis of PCQ responses shows that probate applicants are generally older and less ethnically diverse than the adult population of England and Wales as a whole. Similar results have been found in historical analyses of PCQ responses from probate applicants conducted by HMCTS (HM Courts & Tribunals Service, 2022). A breakdown of the age and ethnicity PCQ responses from probate applicants can be found in Table 4. Further breakdowns of probate applicant PCQ responses can be found in Appendix E.

Table 4: Breakdown of age and ethnicity PCQ responses from probate applications received between June 2020 and June 2025

Measure	Breakdown	Proportion of cases with PCQ answers
Age	Under 35	3%
	35 - 54	26%
	55 - 74	62%
	Over 75	9%
Ethnicity	Ethnic minority	4%
	White	95%
	Prefer not to say	1%

Probate case-level management information, HMCTS

Similarly, geodemographic analysis of postcode data shows that probate applicants live in areas of the UK which are generally more affluent, less ethnically diverse, and have a greater proportion of older people living in them, relative to the UK population as a whole (see Appendix F). Individuals with these characteristics are more likely to be eligible for or need to apply for probate, given historical analyses of the variation of wealth by age (Office for National Statistics, 2025c) and ethnicity (Office for National Statistics, 2020).

4.2 Digital uptake

Summary of key findings:

- Digital uptake has increased since the probate service was reformed. Only 16% of applications were submitted digitally in Q3 2019 compared with 80% in Q2 2025.
- There was a steep increase in digital uptake after legal professionals were mandated to use the digital probate service in November 2020. The increase in digital uptake for unrepresented applicants has been more gradual over time.
- Around 90% of applicants were able to complete their application online, and over 90% of applicants responding to the online satisfaction survey said the online application process was “Good” or “Very good”.
- A higher proportion of applicants across all age groups use the digital application channel. Use of the paper application channel was highest among those aged under 25 years old or more than 75 years old. The proportion of ethnic minority applicants submitting paper applications was higher than that for white applicants.

A key element of the reform of the probate service was to digitalise the application process. However, not all probate applications can be made digitally, especially where they are more complex or atypical, and these need to be submitted via the paper channel instead.

Unrepresented applicants have the option to apply digitally or via a paper form, the latter being the only option for applications pre-Reform. The ability for unrepresented users to still apply via the paper channel is important from an access-to-justice perspective, to ensure digitally excluded applicants can still effectively engage with the probate service (HM Courts & Tribunals Service, 2024a).

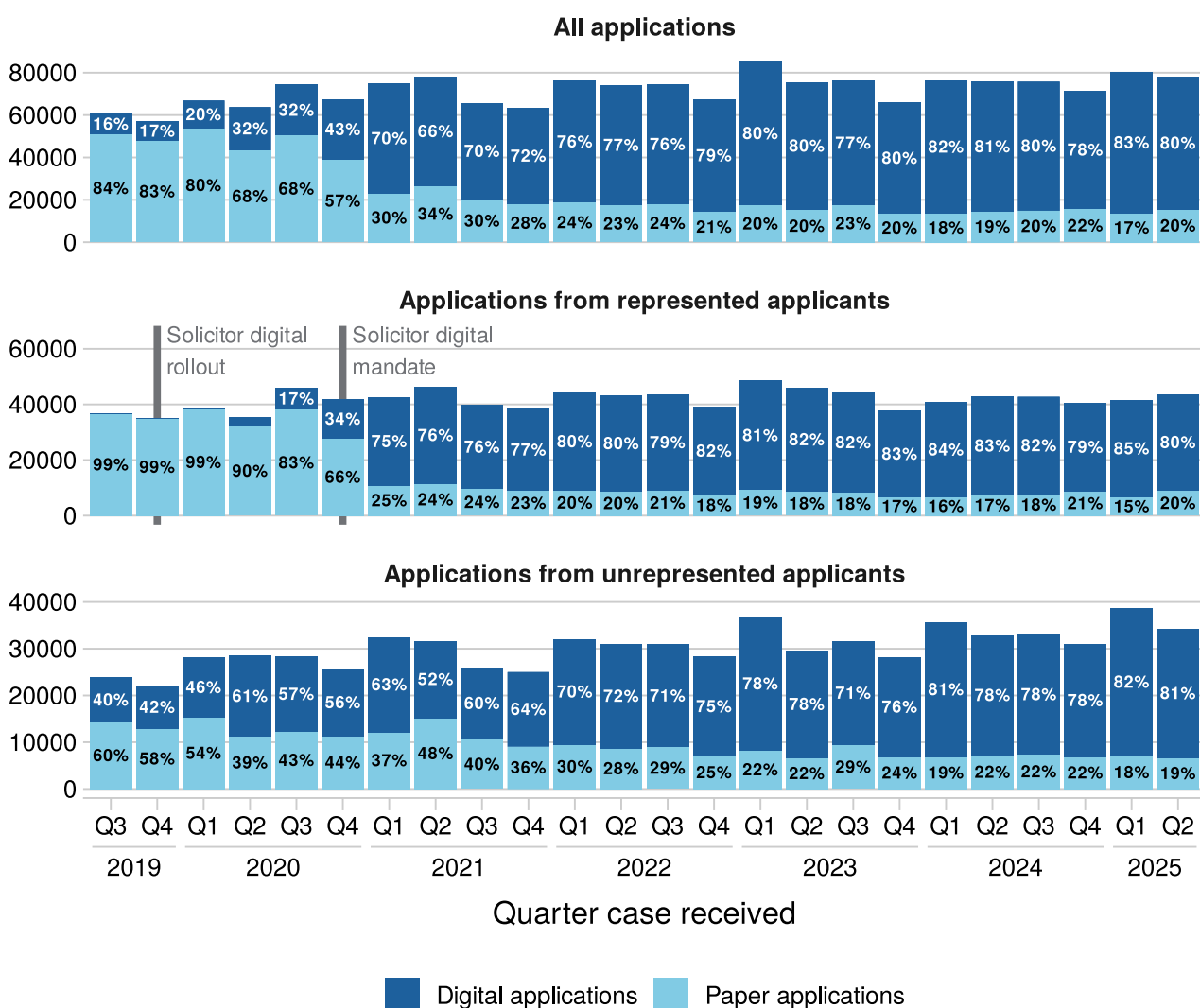
Following the mandate to use the digital service in November 2020, legal representatives submitting applications for Grant of Probate cases can only do so via the digital channel,

apart from cases listed as exceptions.¹⁴ Legal representatives can choose to apply digitally or via a paper form for other types of probate cases which have been digitalised.

The new digital application channel has been increasingly used by probate applicants since it was introduced. The proportion of all applications submitted digitally increased from 16% in Q3 2019 to 80% in Q2 2025. Figure 6 shows how the use of the digital application channel has changed over time, for applicants with and without legal representation.

Figure 6: Volume of probate applications per quarter (Q3 2019 to Q2 2025) by application channel and applicant representation

Volume of cases



Source: Probate case-level management information, HMCTS

¹⁴ Exceptions for completing the digital form are detailed at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-probate-on-paper-as-a-practitioner>

The proportion of applications submitted digitally, also known as digital uptake, increased relatively slowly at first, driven primarily by unrepresented applicants. This is likely driven by several factors, including increased familiarity with and use of digital channels in public services and wider society, and increasing digital capability and confidence, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Frontier Economics & IFF Research, 2025). In Q1 2021, there was a steeper rise in the proportion of applications made digitally, coinciding with the introduction of the mandate for legal professionals to use the digital service for Grant of Probate applications. The effect of this mandate is clear when comparing digital uptake for different levels of applicant representation. Figure 6 shows that unrepresented applicants are increasingly choosing to use the new digital service and probate professionals are adhering to the mandate to use it.

However, for grants of letters of administration, digital uptake has not been as large as for Grant of Probate applications. A greater proportion of applications made under intestacy law from unrepresented applicants were submitted digitally, compared with those submitted by legal professionals. This is potentially due to many intestacy cases submitted by legal professionals not currently being eligible for the digital application channel.

One of the main factors limiting further increases to digital uptake is the availability of the digital channel for specific types of probate applications. As the number of cases that can be applied for digitally, as well as applicant digital capability and confidence, increases, digital uptake may increase further.

4.2.1 Supplementary data

Google Analytics data shows that the digital completion rate for probate applications made in Q2 2025 was around 57%. This represents the proportion of users who, within a single browsing session,¹⁵ submitted a digital probate application out of those who started one (who can be definitively linked through accepting online tracking cookies). This figure is monitored by HMCTS on a monthly basis and has been generally increasing over time. This suggests that the digital service is increasingly easy for unrepresented applicants to navigate and complete in a single browsing session. User satisfaction data from December 2024 (HM Courts & Tribunals Service, 2025a) shows that over 90% of unrepresented digital

¹⁵ A browsing session is defined as the period during which someone actively interacts with a website, starting when they arrive and ending after 30 minutes of inactivity or when they leave. If an applicant saves a partially completed application and returns to it later, Google Analytics treats this as a new session.

applicants who successfully completed their application and responded to the satisfaction survey rated the online application process as “Good” or “Very good”.

The data in Table 5 below shows that, while the majority of applicants choose the digital channel irrespective of their age, there are differences between the use of digital and paper application channels for different applicant age groups. Overall, 13% of 25-64 year olds who provided PCQ data use the paper channel, compared to 19% of 65-74 year olds and 27% of those aged 75 and above. This suggests that use of the paper channel may still be driven by factors such as the applicant’s digital capability, which may decrease with applicant age. Interestingly, applicants aged under 25 are generally more likely to use the paper channel than applicants aged 25-64, despite likely having greater levels of digital capability and confidence. This is potentially due to younger applicants being more likely to have atypical cases, which may not yet be eligible for a digital application.

Table 5: Probate applications split by application channel and applicant PCQ age band between June 2020 to June 2025

Age band	Digital applications	Paper applications	All probate applications
Under 25	78%	22%	997
25 to 34	86%	14%	5,995
35 to 44	87%	13%	16,566
45 to 54	88%	12%	45,816
55 to 64	86%	14%	93,041
65 to 74	81%	19%	56,094
75 to 84	74%	26%	16,880
85+	70%	30%	3,502
All age bands	84%	16%	238,891

Source: Probate case-level management information, HMCTS

Note: “All probate applications” denotes the number of applications where the applicant’s age is known.

When considering the applicant’s ethnicity, white PCQ respondents were more likely to apply digitally compared with PCQ respondents from an ethnic minority background (84% vs 79%).

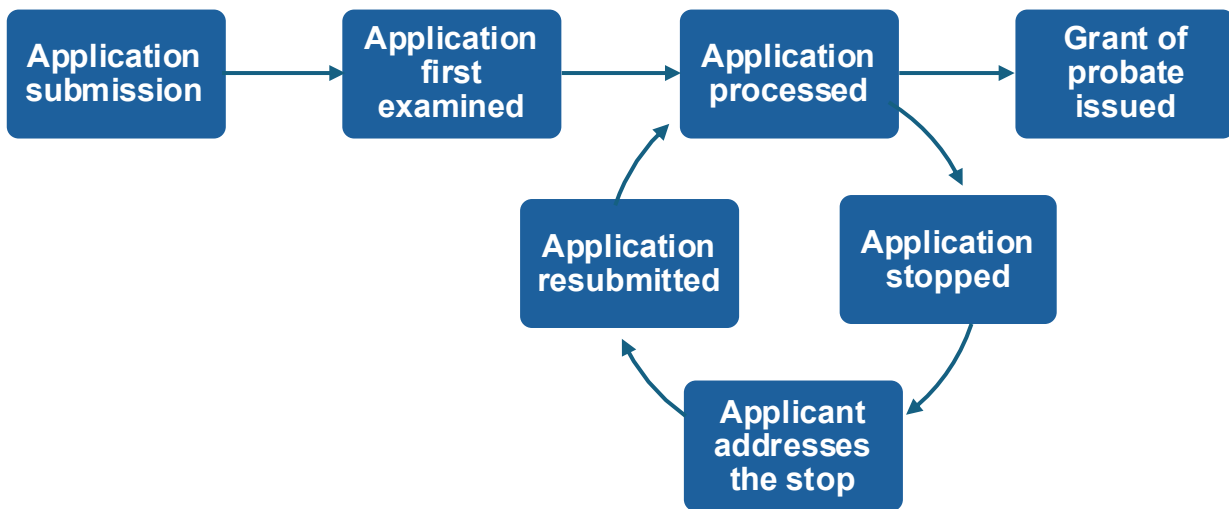
4.3 Case durations

Summary of key findings:

- The average total case duration increased from 67 days for cases received in Q3 2019 to 104 days for cases received in Q3 2023. By Q2 2024, average durations for cases submitted digitally have since returned to 2019 levels. Represented cases submitted via the paper channel had longer durations in 2024 than in 2019.
- The time taken for 90% of all applications to be completed is about the same for those received in Q1 2025 compared with those received in Q3 2019 (126 days vs 125 days).
- Older cases form a larger proportion of the open caseload in Q2 2025 compared to Q3 2023. This suggests that the reduction in average case duration has been driven by newer, simpler cases being processed more quickly.
- By mid-2023, the length of time between case submission and the case being first examined had increased for all channels and levels of representation, relative to 2019 levels. Since then, with the exception of paper cases submitted by legal professionals, this time has decreased to levels comparable with 2019 levels.

This section discusses case duration in relation to the two stages of the probate application process: the time between application submission and the grant of probate being issued, and the time between application submission and the application being examined for the first time. Figure 7 illustrates a simplified view of the different stages of a probate application. Differences in timeliness at each stage can be as a result of different factors. Consequently, measures of case duration over time should be interpreted with caution. See Appendix C for how the timeliness measures used in this section are defined and calculated.

Figure 7: Simplified process diagram for a probate application



Some examples of factors that could affect timeliness are:

- The COVID-19 pandemic likely had a direct effect on total case durations, given potential reductions in operational capacity during lockdowns and subsequent increases in open caseloads.
- If the applicant is delayed in providing supporting documentation this can result in longer case durations, as HMCTS cannot start to process the application without all necessary supporting documentation.
- If the case is atypical or complex then this can have a large impact on timeliness. More complex cases may need to be dealt with by more experienced probate operational staff or require an order or directions from a Registrar. This can lead to longer case durations overall if the workload of probate operational teams is high.

Time from application submission to grant of probate being issued

Published statistics produced by HMCTS and MoJ calculate two measures of total probate case duration:

1. Application submission to grant of probate being issued, the number of calendar days between the applicant submitting their application and the grant of probate being issued by HMCTS. This effectively represents the total case duration from the perspective of the applicant.

2. Document receipt to grant of probate being issued, the number of calendar days between HMCTS receiving all original documents supporting the application and the grant of probate being issued by HMCTS. HMCTS cannot start to process an application before all the supporting documentation has been received via post.

For paper applications both of these metrics are the same, as the application is submitted alongside all the supporting documentation.

Note: the 90th percentile of timeliness is not shown in charts in this section for quarters where fewer than 90% of cases had completed by the point of data extraction (July 2025). Similarly, for more recent quarters, the mean should be interpreted with caution, as it will increase as more open cases complete.

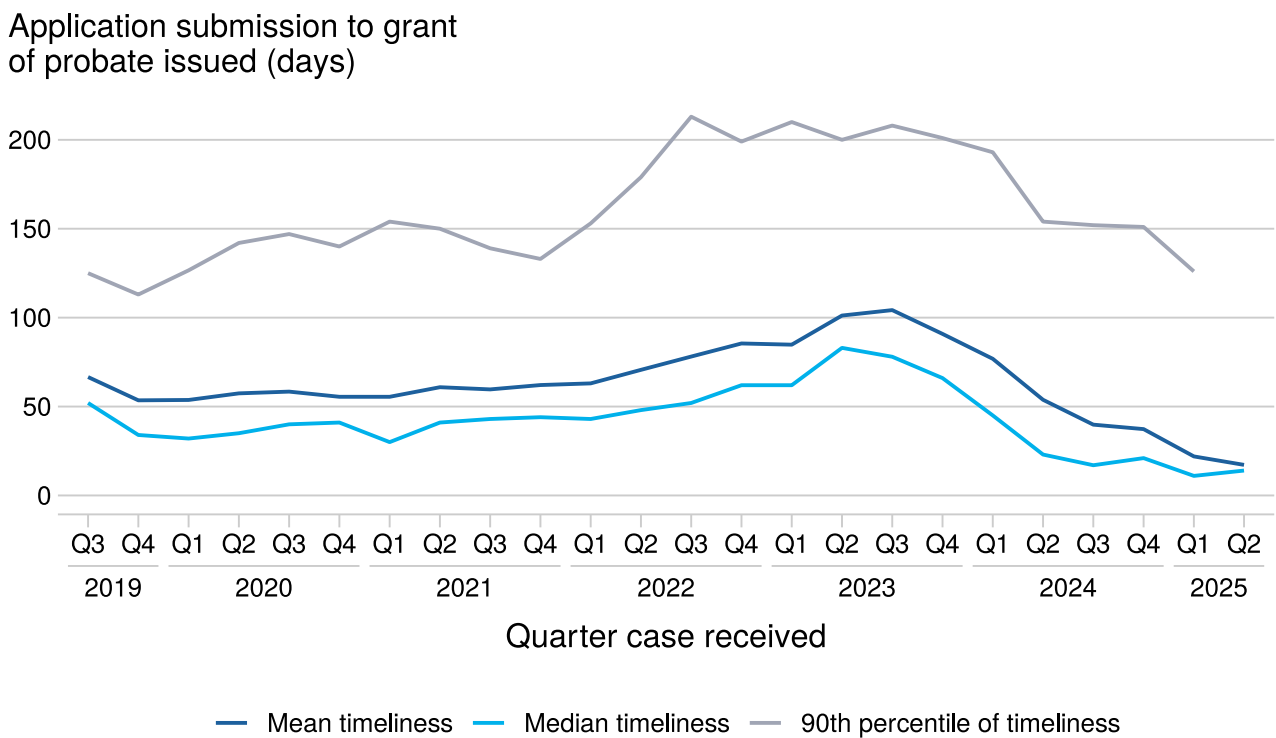
Figure 8 also shows that case durations for the longest 10% of cases, represented by the 90th percentile of timeliness, increased steeply in the first half of 2022. The duration of these longest cases increased from around 125 days in Q3 2019 to over 208 days in Q3 2023, an increase of over 66%. Case timeliness for these longest 10% of cases remained relatively high until Q2 2024 but has since reduced. The time taken for 90% of all applications received in Q1 2025 to be completed was about the same as the equivalent measure in Q3 2019. These cases are more likely to have been stopped, which may be due to complexity. More complex cases take more time to be properly processed and need to be handled by one of the smaller number of staff with specialist training, which further increases their overall case duration.

Figure 8 shows, for all cases, an initial decrease in the total case duration for probate applications received between Q3 2019 and Q1 2020. Average case durations increased slightly between Q2 2020 and Q3 2020, coinciding with the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, mean case durations increased by roughly 10 days each year, from around 67 days for cases received in Q3 2019 to around 104 days for cases received in Q3 2023. In December 2023, the increase in the mean case duration recorded in published statistics was attributed to an emphasis on processing and issuing grants of probate for the oldest cases (Ministry of Justice, 2023). From Q4 2023, average case durations started to decrease, and by Q1 2024 had returned to levels comparable with those in 2019.

Figure 8 also shows that case durations for the longest 10% of cases, represented by the 90th percentile of timeliness, increased steeply in the first half of 2022. The duration of these

longest cases increased from around 125 days in Q3 2019 to over 208 days in Q3 2023, an increase of over 66%. Case timeliness for these longest 10% of cases remained relatively high until Q2 2024 but has since reduced. The time taken for 90% of all applications received in Q1 2025 to be completed was about the same as the equivalent measure in Q3 2019. These cases are more likely to have been stopped, which may be due to complexity. More complex cases take more time to be properly processed and need to be handled by one of the smaller number of staff with specialist training, which further increases their overall case duration.

Figure 8: Case length (case submission to grant issued), per quarter (Q3 2019 to Q2 2025)

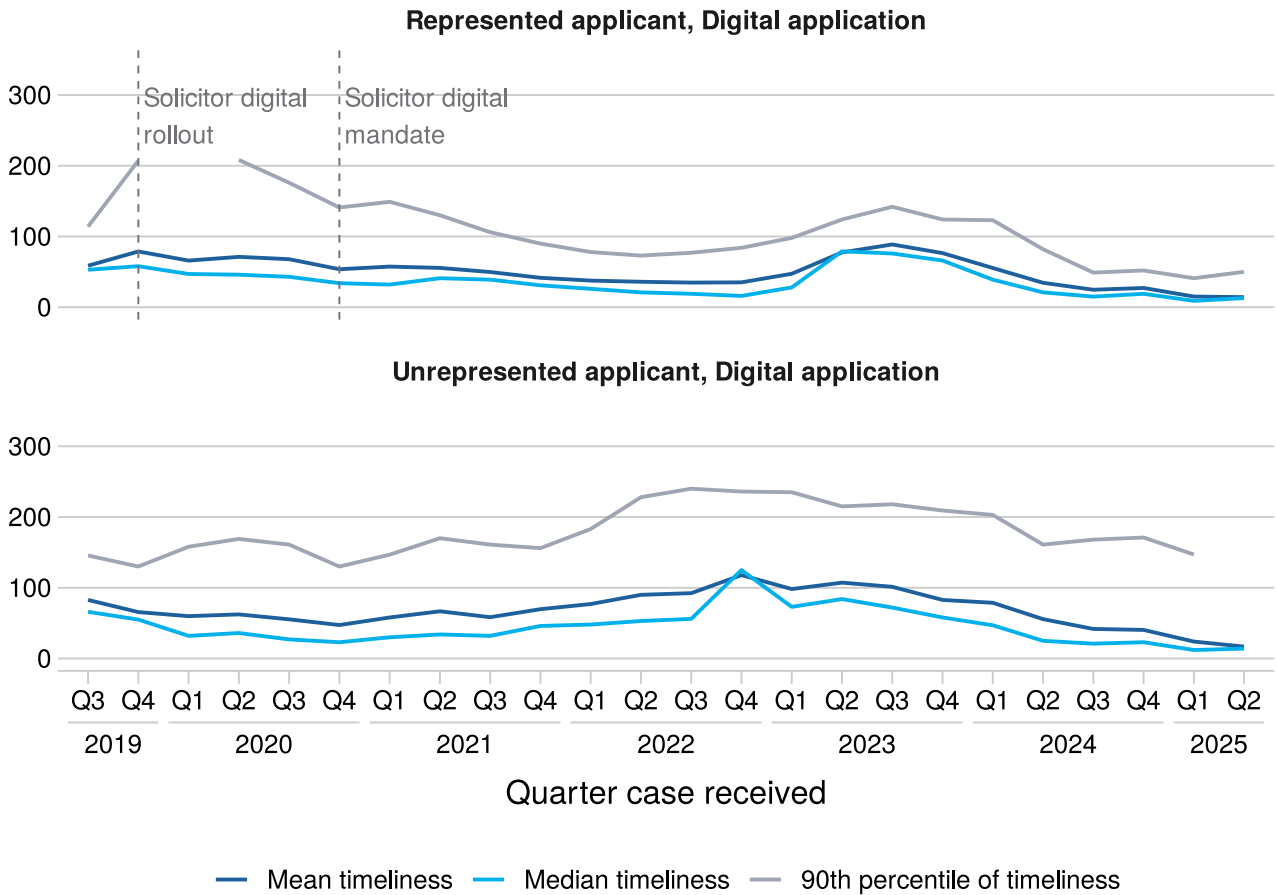


Source: Probate case-level management information, HMCTS

Figure 9 shows the total case duration for digital applications, split by whether the applicant had representation. Figure 10 shows this for paper applications. With the exception of digital cases submitted by legal representatives, average case durations increased between Q3 2019 and Q3 2022, remaining relatively high before decreasing from Q3 2023. For digital cases submitted by legal representatives, the average case duration decreased until early 2023, when it started to substantially increase, before decreasing again from later that year.

Figure 9: Case length (case submission to grants issued) for digital applications, per quarter (Q3 2019 to Q2 2025) by applicant representation

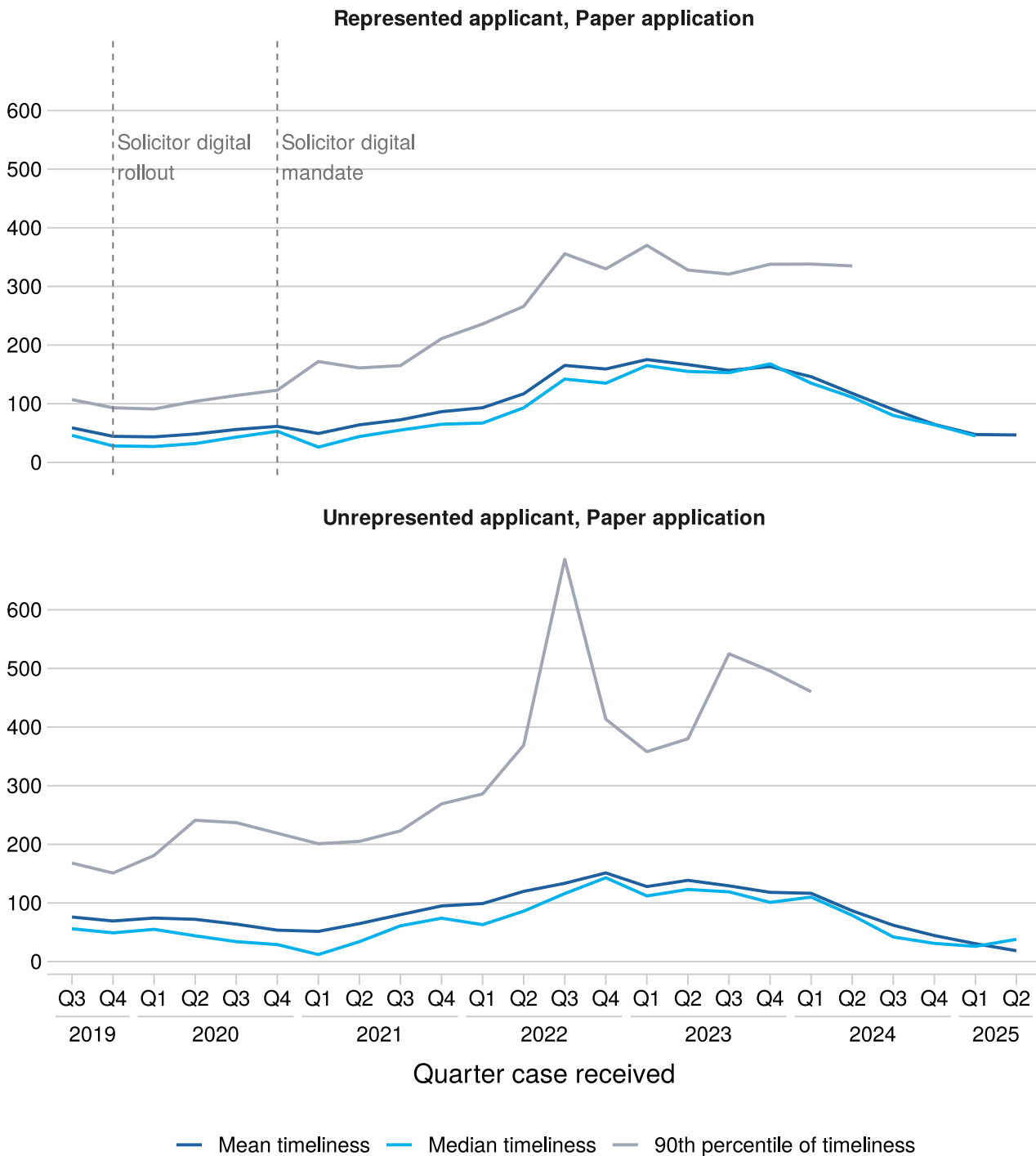
Application submission to grant of probate issued (days)



Source: Probate case-level management information, HMCTS

Figure 10: Case length (case submission to grants issued) for paper applications, per quarter (Q3 2019 to Q2 2025) by applicant representation

Application submission to grant of probate issued (days)



Source: Probate case-level management information, HMCTS

Note: The 90th percentile of timeliness in Figure 10 is only shown to early 2024. This is because, in subsequent quarters, fewer than 90% of cases had a grant of probate issued at the time of the analysis.

Digital cases submitted by legal representatives and received in 2022 and 2023 generally had slightly shorter case lengths than similar applications submitted in 2019 and 2020.

There are at least two potential reasons for this. Firstly, the mandate for using the digital service for legal professionals ensured that only the most complex cases are submitted via the paper channel by legal representatives. This means cases submitted digitally are more likely to be simple and therefore take less time to be fully processed by HMCTS. Secondly, legal professionals are more likely to have used the digital service multiple times and be more familiar with service requirements than an unrepresented applicant. This would likely result in applications with fewer mistakes or complications, minimising possible delays.

The improvement in average case durations since late 2023 across both digital and paper applications coincides with the introduction of changes introduced as part of the Probate Service Performance Recovery programme, detailed in Section 4.1. For example, CTSCs increased the number of probate staff, and the level of training staff were receiving. This additional capacity and capability is likely related to the increase in disposals from Q2 2023, and the reduction of the mean case duration from mid-2023. However, as more experienced staff were temporarily released to act as subject matter experts and support the progression of cases, this reduced their capacity to work on more complex cases.

The reduction in the mean case duration since late 2022 also coincides with the proportion of open cases over a year old increasing (HM Courts & Tribunals Service, 2024c). This suggests that the cases being disposed of more quickly were primarily newer, generally simpler, applications, instead of the older and more complex cases which then made up an increasing proportion of the open caseload. Both this and the diversion of experienced staff to help with case progression could help to explain why case lengths for the longest 10% of cases did not decrease in the same way the mean case duration did.

Time from application submission to first examination

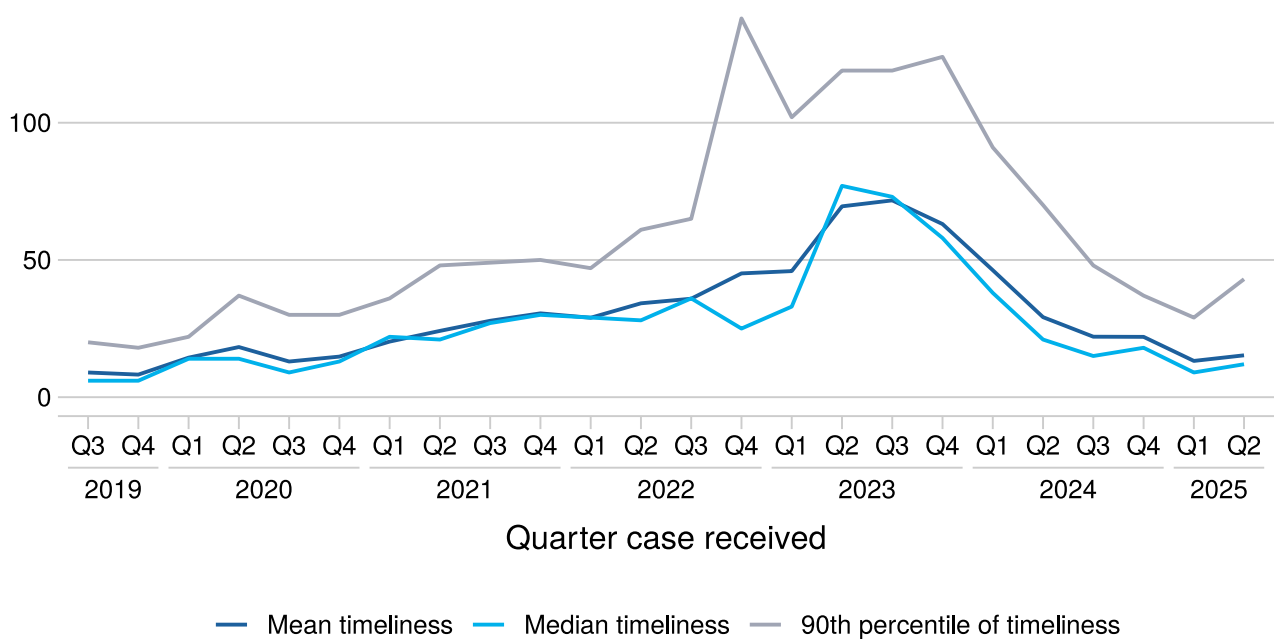
Prior to Reform, when a probate application was submitted, staff would initially examine the case as it was being logged on legacy HMCTS IT systems. This meant that the time between application submission and first examination of the case was negligible. Following the introduction of Reform, cases are now logged automatically onto Reform IT systems when a digital application is submitted or when a paper application is scanned into the digital system, rather than staff doing it. This means that the time between application

submission and first examination of the case can now be longer as cases are examined when they are digitally allocated to HMCTS staff.

In addition to this, between Q3 2019 and Q2 2023, there was a substantial increase in the length of time between a case being submitted and it being first examined by HMCTS staff, as shown in Figure 11. In Q3 2019, the mean duration for first examination was less than 9 days and the duration for the 10% of applications that took the longest to be examined was 20 days. By Q2 2023 the mean duration had increased to nearly 70 days and the duration for the 10% of applications that took the longest to be examined had increased to 119 days. This coincided with a change in operational procedure which placed a greater emphasis on processing the existing volume of open cases, meaning there were fewer staff to process new applications. In 2023, this operational procedure was reviewed and staff resource was more evenly distributed against the caseload at the time, which coincides with the time taken for cases to be initially examined by staff reducing. By Q2 2025 the mean duration and the duration for the 10% of applications that took longest to be examined had decreased to 15 days and 43 days, respectively.

Figure 11: Case duration (case submission to case first examined) per quarter (Q3 2019 to Q2 2025)

Application submission to case first examined (days)

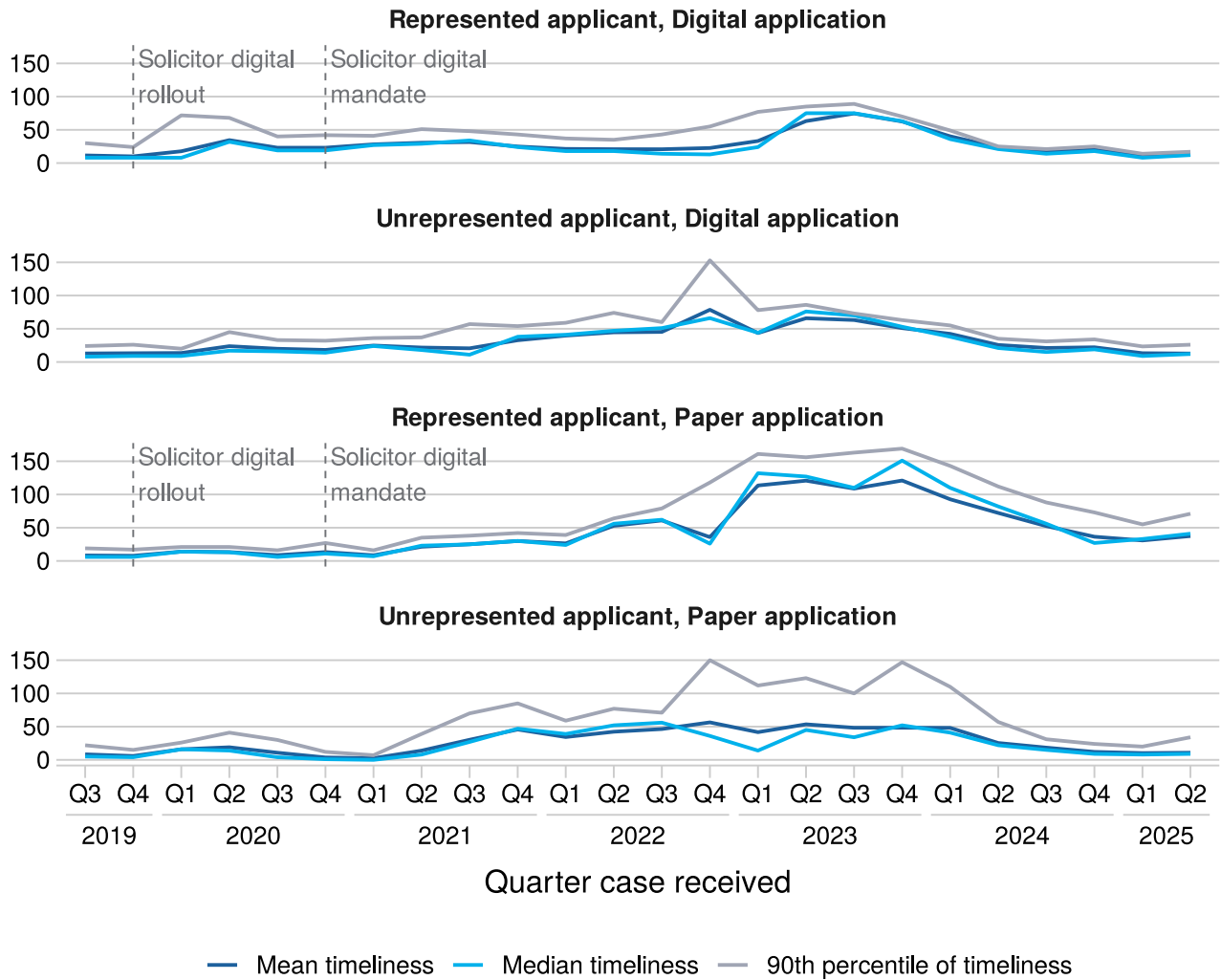


Source: Probate case-level management information, HMCTS

Figure 12 shows the duration from application submission to first examination broken down by both application channel and level of representation. Since 2019, increases have been observed across all levels of representation and application channel. This is particularly clear for applications submitted by represented applicants, which increased substantially around early 2023. As cases where a represented applicant applies via the paper channel are the most likely to be complex, this may suggest that there were fewer experienced staff available to handle these types of applications at that time, which meant they took longer to be examined. It is unclear why the time taken to initially examine digital cases from represented applicants increased in 2023. This could be evidence that the changes in operational procedure at this time, mentioned above, disproportionately affected these cases. In recent quarters, reductions have been seen for all applications except those submitted via the paper channel by represented applicants where the duration to first examination is still higher than it was in mid- to late-2019.

Figure 12: Case duration (case submission to first examined) per quarter (Q3 2019 to Q2 2025) by application type and channel

Application submission to case first examined (days)



Source: Probate case-level management information, HMCTS

4.4 Case outcomes

Summary of key findings:

- The vast majority of probate cases (96%) have the same outcome: the issuing of a grant of probate.
- Since late 2022, there has been a steep increase in the number of cases becoming dormant (where there is no activity on the case for at least six months), when this case outcome started to be used within the service.
- The proportion of probate applications that are withdrawn after being submitted has not changed substantially over time. The average time for cases to be withdrawn has decreased substantially, but the reasons for this are unclear.
- The fraction of cases which end up as dormant or are withdrawn is higher for those received via the paper channel, relative to those received digitally, although this is changing over time.

The final outcome for the vast majority of probate applications (96%) is the issuing of a grant of probate by HMCTS, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Proportion of case outcomes for all probate applications received between Q3 2019 and Q2 2025

Case outcome	Proportion of total cases
Grant of probate issued	96%
Application withdrawn	2%
Application dormant	1%
Application ongoing with no outcome yet	2%

Source: Probate case-level management information, HMCTS

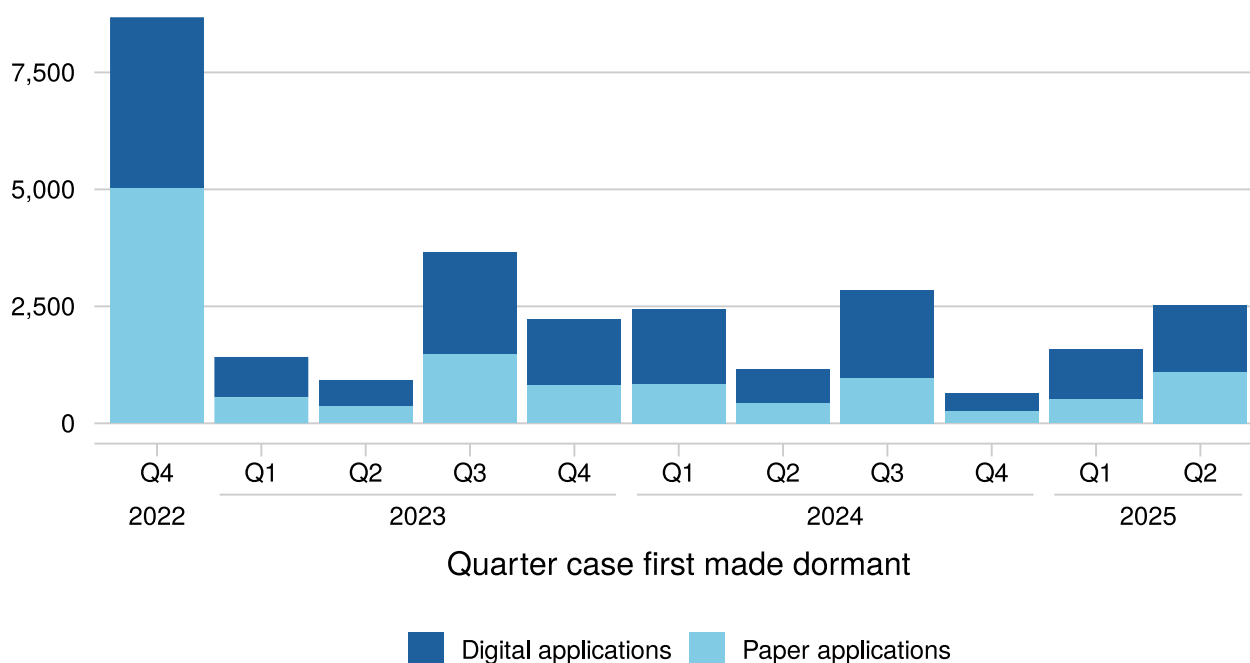
Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

When an open probate application is unable to progress, the applicant is contacted by HMCTS with details on any actions they need to take. When the applicant fails to take this

action or respond to HMCTS for six months or more the application is classified as “dormant” (HM Courts & Tribunals Service, 2024d). HMCTS started actively using this classification in Q4 2022, to ensure case data better reflected the state of applications. The volume of dormant cases in Q4 2022 in Figure 13 includes all cases which were categorised as dormant up until that point. The subsequent quarters show the number of additional applications made dormant by the end of that quarter. Since the start of 2023, between 1000 to 3500 cases have become dormant each quarter.

Figure 13: Volume of dormant cases by application channel per quarter (Q4 2022 to Q2 2025)

Volume of cases made dormant



Source: Probate case-level management information, HMCTS

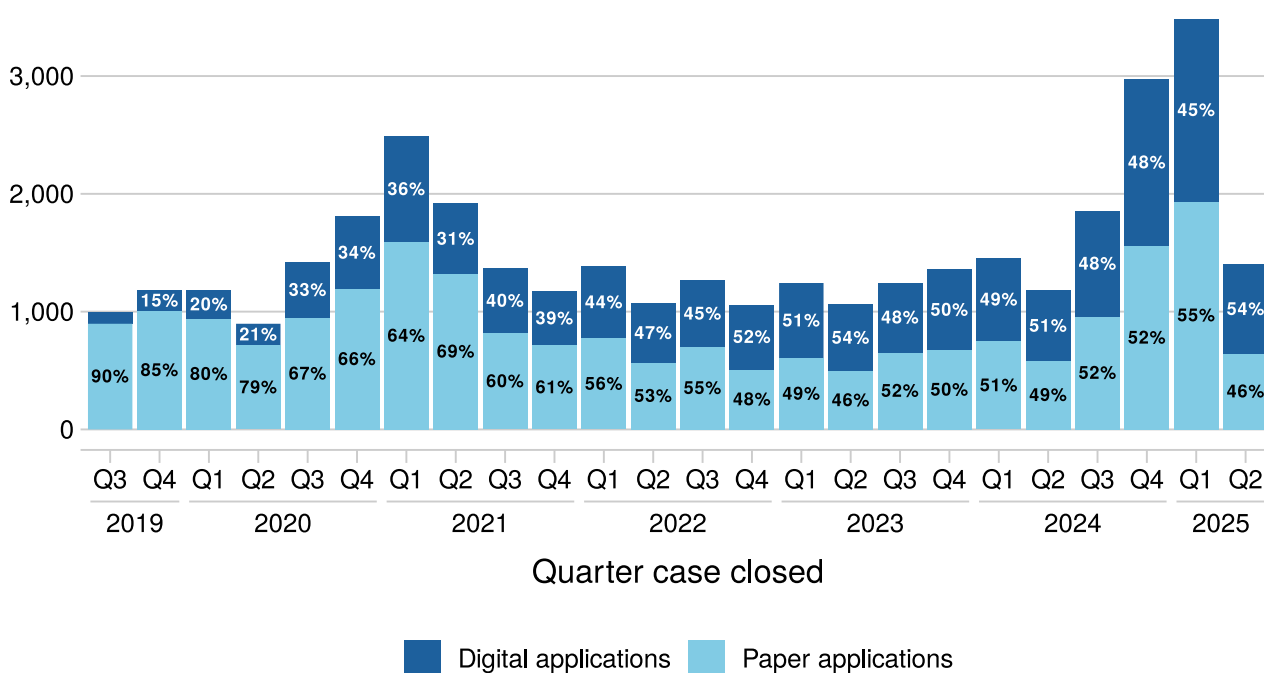
Paper cases are slightly more likely to become dormant. For cases received in 2023, around a third (33%) of cases that ended up becoming dormant were submitted via the paper channel, despite only a fifth (21%) of all probate applications being submitted on paper over the same time period. The reasons for this are unclear.

In addition to grants of probate being issued and applications being made dormant, probate applications can be withdrawn by the applicant. Pre-reform data on withdrawals was not available for analysis and so it is not possible to comment on whether the reformed system has affected withdrawal rates. However, available data suggests that the withdrawal rate

has remained stable at 1-2% since Q3 2019. This is despite large variations in the number of cases closed or completed each quarter over the same time period. Whilst data on withdrawal reasons are not consistently entered on HMCTS data systems, potential causes for withdrawn applications include an applicant realising they are not entitled to apply or that they have made an error on their application.¹⁶

Figure 14: Volume of withdrawn probate cases by channel per quarter (Q3 2019 to Q2 2025)

Volume of withdrawn cases



Source: Probate case-level management information, HMCTS

As shown in Figure 14, paper cases are typically more likely to be withdrawn than digital cases. However, following the implementation of the mandate for legal professionals to use the digital service in November 2020, there was an increase in the proportion of digital cases which were withdrawn. These findings may suggest that more complex cases, which are more likely associated with applications made via the paper channel, are more likely to be withdrawn. Conversely, it may suggest that the digital application channel introduced as part of Reform is more effective at deterring errors.

¹⁶ For more information on case withdrawals see the Probate element of the Digital Service Evaluation: [HM Courts & Tribunals Service Reform: Digital Services Evaluation - GOV.UK](#).

The mean duration from application submission to withdrawal has varied over time but has broadly decreased from over 265 days in Q3 2019 to approximately 67 days in Q4 2024. Although the reasons for this change remain unclear, it may be because changes made as part of Reform have made it quicker and easier to record withdrawn cases.

4.5 Differences by demographic groups

Summary of key findings:

- Ethnic minority applicants generally have longer average case durations than white applicants. Ethnic minority applicants are also more likely to have their case stopped by HMCTS compared with white applicants, due to an issue with the application which needs to be addressed by the applicant.
- The time taken for a case to initially be stopped is similar for ethnic minority and white applicants. However, the time taken for a grant of probate to be issued after a stop is consistently longer for ethnic minority applicants.
- There are differences in the reasons why applications from white and ethnic minority applicants are stopped. The most common stop reasons for white and ethnic minority applicants are also changing over time, as HMCTS takes action to improve the service for users by addressing the causes of cases being stopped.

Data from PCQs makes it possible to examine the demographic profile of probate applicants, and understand whether there are any differences in case outcomes or case durations for different groups of applicants. PCQs are voluntary and only made available to unrepresented applicants at the time of application. The PCQ response rate during the period of analysis for eligible probate applicants was 40%. Therefore, the following findings do not include applicants with legal representation or applicants who did not submit PCQ data, and should be interpreted with caution.

The probate population is typically older than the adult population of England and Wales. The median age of probate applicants who responded to PCQs was 60, whereas the median age of adults in England and Wales was 48 in mid-2024 (Office for National Statistics, 2025b). Conversely, the proportion of males and females in the probate applicant population who responded to PCQs, 49% and 51% respectively, matches that seen in the 2021 UK census. Further breakdowns of the probate applicant population by selected PCQ responses can be found in Appendix E.

There was no evidence of substantial differences in case durations or case outcomes when comparing cases based on the applicant's age, sex or disability status.¹⁷ However, there were differences when comparing cases based on the applicant's ethnicity.

Almost all (96%) probate applicants who completed an ethnicity PCQ identified as "White", with 4% reporting they were from an ethnic minority background. The 2021 UK census showed that "82% of usual residents in England and Wales identified their ethnic group within the high-level "White" category" (Office for National Statistics, 2022). This may suggest that ethnic minority applicants may be less willing to respond to PCQs or that probate applicants are more likely to be white compared to the general population.¹⁸ The ONS Wealth and Assets Survey shows that wealth varies substantially by ethnicity (Office for National Statistics, 2020). As smaller estates do not require probate, this may explain why only a small proportion of probate applicants are from an ethnic minority background.

Since Q3 2020, the first full quarter where probate PCQs started being collected, overall trends in timeliness have followed a similar pattern for white and ethnic minority applicants. However, there is a difference between mean average case lengths by applicant ethnicity, with ethnic minority applicants having longer average case durations than white applicants. Figure 15 shows how case lengths have varied over time by applicant ethnicity.

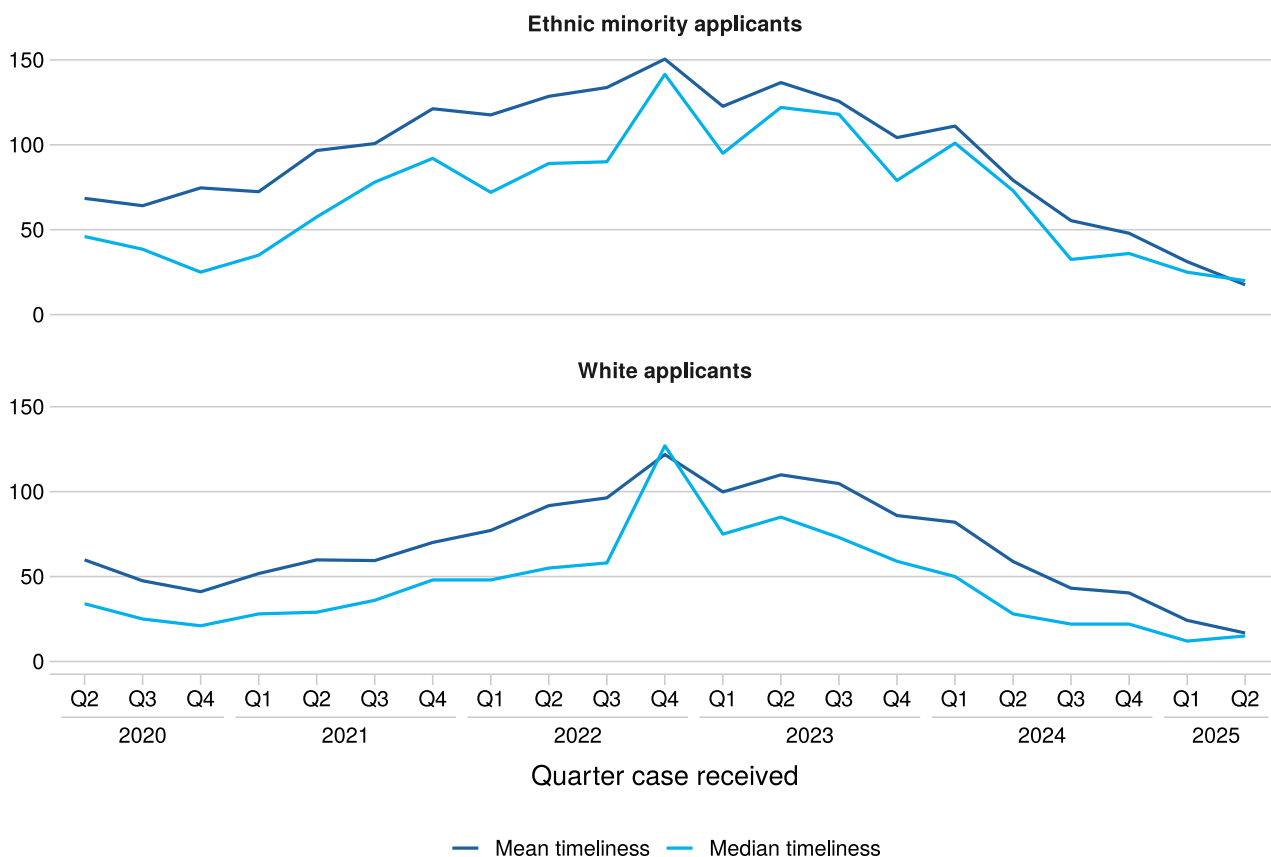
Between Q3 2020 and Q4 2022 the mean case duration increased for all applicants, from 48 days to 122 days for white applicants and from 64 days to 150 days for ethnic minority applicants. Average case durations have decreased for both groups of applicants since Q1 2023, although cases from ethnic minority applicants still have higher average case durations than those from white applicants. For example, 50% of applications submitted in Q1 2025 by white applicants were completed within 12 days, whereas 50% of applications submitted by ethnic minority applicants in the same quarter were completed within 25 days.

¹⁷ This is consistent with the Access to Justice assessment of the probate service conducted by HMCTS in 2020, details of which can be found at [Assessing Access to Justice in HMCTS Services - November 2023 - GOV.UK](#).

¹⁸ PCQ data indicated that probate applicants were generally older than the general population. Data from the 2021 Census shows that, on average, the White ethnic group is older than those who come from minority ethnic backgrounds (Office for National Statistics, 2023).

Figure 15: Case length (case submission to grants issued)¹⁹ per quarter (Q2 2020 to Q2 2025) by PCQ ethnicity

Application submission to grant of probate issued (days)



Source: Probate case-level management information, HMCTS

4.5.1 Stops

When HMCTS staff process probate applications, they may encounter issues with the application which need to be resolved before the case can progress. For example, the applicant may need to confirm they are eligible to apply or need to supply original supporting documents. When this happens, the case is “stopped” until action has been taken to resolve the issue, either by the applicant or another external party.

Approximately a third of probate applications (34%) are stopped at least once, as shown in Table 7, with little difference in the rate of stops between digital and paper application channels. The proportion of cases from unrepresented applicants which are stopped is higher than that for represented cases (46% vs 26%). This may be because legal

¹⁹ The 90th percentile of timeliness is not shown in this chart as fewer than 90% of cases received in quarters from Q3 2022 onward had completed for ethnic minority applicants, at the point of data extraction.

representatives better understand how to complete a full and correct probate application, which is less likely to be stopped, whereas unrepresented applicants are less likely to be as familiar with the probate service.

Table 7: Proportion of applications with at least one stop (Q3 2019 – Q2 2025)²⁰

Category	Breakdown	Proportion of applications with at least one stop
Total		34%
Channel	Digital	32%
	Paper	38%
Representation	Unrepresented	46%
	Represented	26%
PCQ Ethnicity	Ethnic Minority	56%
	White	44%
	Not answered	32%

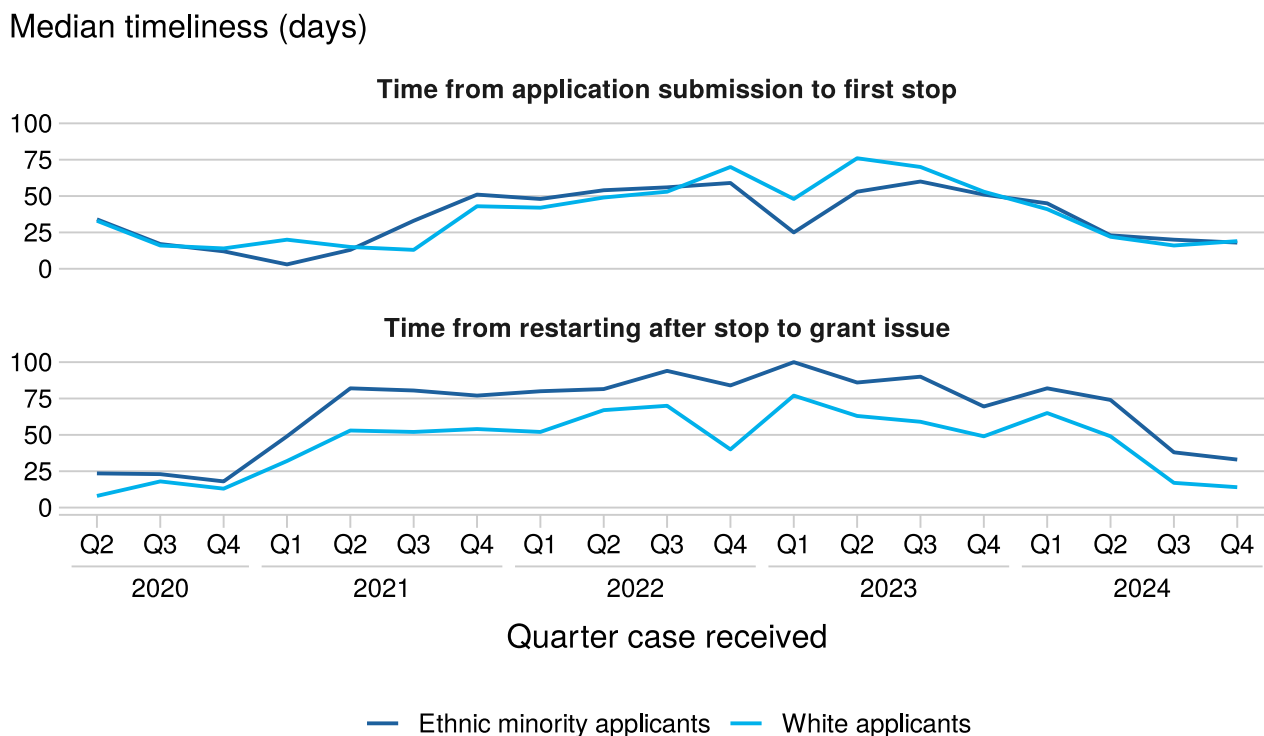
Source: Probate case-level management information, HMCTS

The proportion of cases with at least one stop for ethnic minority applicants is higher (56%) than for cases submitted by white applicants (44%). The proportion of cases being stopped is lower where the respondent chose not to disclose their ethnicity (32%), suggesting there may be a connection between the propensity for applications being stopped and the associated applicant choosing to respond to the PCQ.

Since Q2 2020, there is not a substantial difference in the time from case submission to the first case stop for white and ethnic minority applicants who provided PCQ data, as shown in Figure 16. Half of applications from both white and ethnic minority applicants submitted in Q4 2024, which were stopped at least once, were stopped for the first time within approximately 20 days.

²⁰ PCQ Ethnicity data is from Q3 2020, when PCQs started to be offered to probate applicants.

Figure 16: Median duration of case submitted to first stop (top) and work restart to grant issue (bottom), per quarter (Q2 2020 to Q4 2024) by PCQ ethnicity²¹



Source: Probate case-level management information, HMCTS

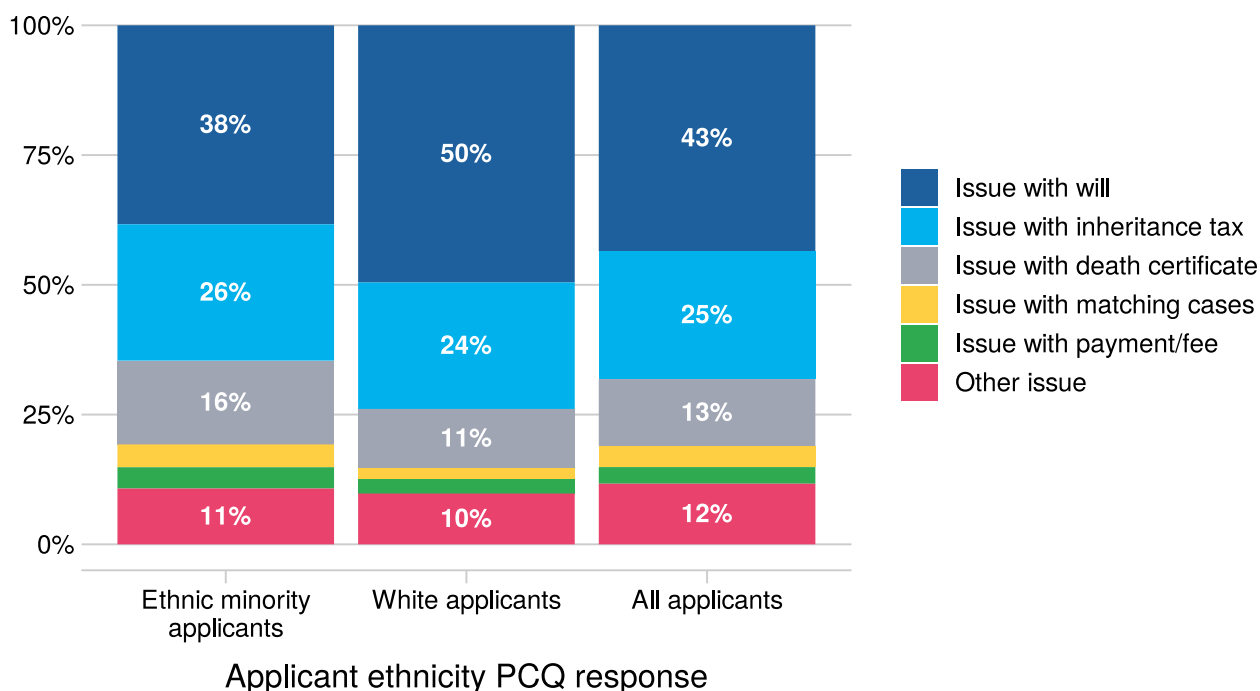
However, the time taken between work restarting on an application after a stop and the grant of probate being issued is consistently higher for applications submitted by ethnic minority applicants. Since Q2 2021, it has taken approximately 25 fewer days for half of stopped applications from white applicants to receive a grant of probate than half of stopped applications from ethnic minority applicants each quarter. This difference may be at least partly related to the types of stops that occurred for these cases, and any differences in how cases progress after they have been stopped for particular reasons.

The ethnicity PCQ data can also be used to identify differences in the proportion of applications from white and ethnic minority applicants which were stopped for different reasons, as shown in Figure 17.

²¹ The median case duration is shown in Figure 16, instead of the mean case duration. This is because, for more recent quarters, the mean time from restarting after a stop to grant issue will continue to increase as more grants of probate are issued on previously stopped probate cases. For these more recent quarters, the median is a more robust measure of timeliness.

Figure 17: Stop reasons by ethnicity (June 2020 to June 2025)

Proportion of stopped cases



Source: Probate case-level management information, HMCTS

Note: The “All applicants” figures include all probate cases, including those from represented applicants who are not eligible for PCQs and unrepresented applicants who did not respond to the ethnicity PCQ question.

Around a quarter of stopped applications are stopped for reasons relating to inheritance tax, irrespective of the ethnicity of the applicant. However, there are differences in the reasons why applications are stopped for different applicant ethnicities:

- A lower proportion of ethnic minority applicants have their application stopped due to an issue with the will, relative to applications from white applicants (38% vs 50%).
- Conversely, a higher proportion of ethnic minority applicants have their application stopped due to an issue with the death certificate, relative to applications from white applicants (16% vs 11%).
- Over 13% of applications from ethnic minority applicants were stopped due to ‘Caveat Match’, ‘Death Certificate Issue’, ‘Deceased Name’ or ‘Matching Application’ reasons, compared with less than 7% of applications from white applicants.

Further research was conducted by HMCTS in 2023 to explore why ethnic minority cases are more likely to experience a stop. This followed an Access to Justice Assessment

conducted by HMCTS in 2020 which found that probate applications from ethnic minority users are often more difficult for HMCTS to process, due to cases being more likely to be complex or atypical (HM Courts & Tribunals Service, 2024a). This includes applications where some of the deceased's assets are abroad or where the condition of the original will varies. Ethnic minority applicants were more likely to have inconsistent use of names in different key documents, such as the application form, the will, and the death certificate, where a 'westernised' version of the full name of the deceased was sometimes used. Additionally, some applications from ethnic minority applicants were found to be stopped due to documents not being translated appropriately (HM Courts & Tribunals Service, 2024a).

Significant work has been undertaken by HMCTS to address and reduce the number of applications being stopped for reasons that disproportionately affect ethnic minority applicants, by redesigning aspects of the digital service and producing improved guidance to help users avoid making mistakes on their application. As a result, the reasons associated with stopped applications from white and ethnic minority users have changed over time, as summarised in Appendix G.

4.6 Complaints

Summary of key findings:

- Quarterly recorded probate complaint volumes have increased from 2019 levels, peaking at 1,681 in Q3 2023 when the open caseload was at its highest. Since then, recorded probate complaints have reduced as average case durations and the open caseload have reduced.
- Around 8 in 10 recorded complaints about the probate service are associated with applicants experiencing delays. The majority of non-delay complaints relate to issues with the level of service the complainant felt they received.
- Increasingly complaints are disproportionately associated with paper applications. The proportion of probate cases that are withdrawn or that become dormant that are associated with a complaint is nearly double that for applications in general.
- As of Q1 2025, approximately 1 in 4 recorded probate complaints are either fully or partially upheld. Complaints specifically about the level of service the applicant has received were upheld more often than complaints about delays.

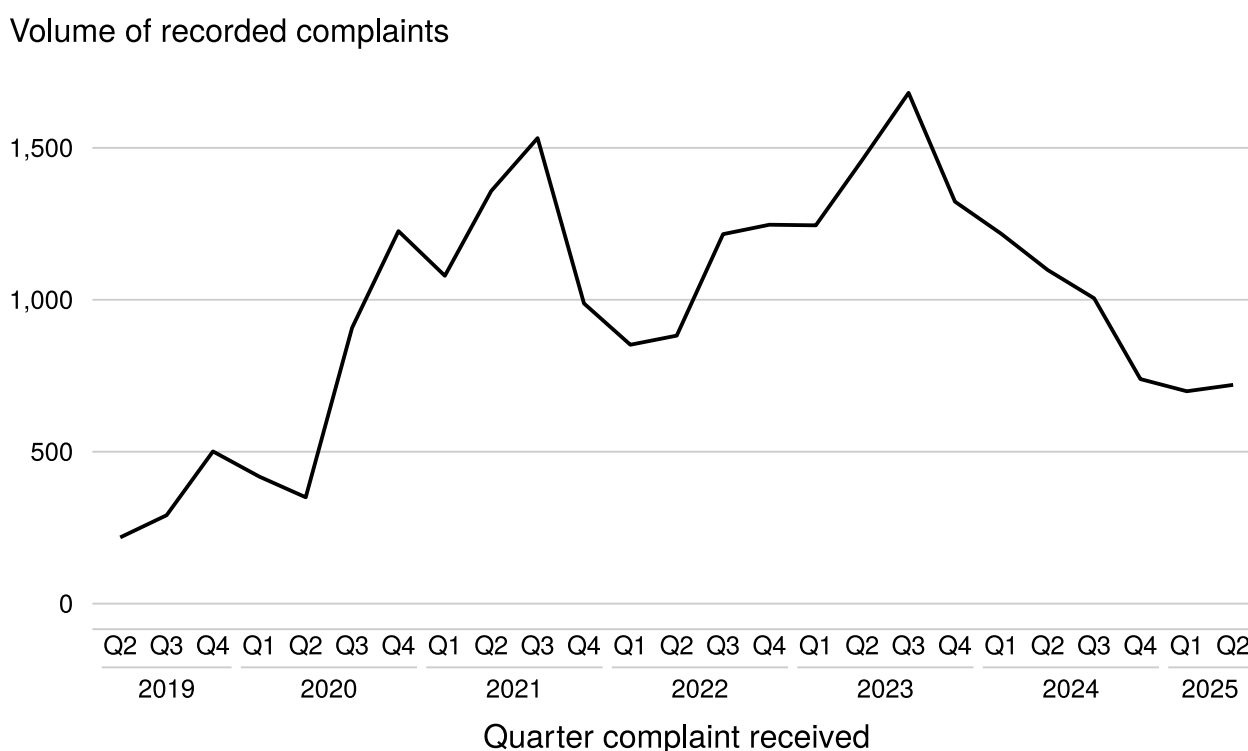
Since Reform was introduced, the number of complaints received each quarter associated with the probate service has varied but has broadly increased from levels recorded in 2019, as shown in Figure 18. Between Q3 2019 and Q2 2025, 1% of probate applications overall could be linked to an associated recorded complaint.²²

The highest quarterly volume of recorded complaints was in Q3 2023, in which 1,681 recorded complaints were received. This coincided with the highest recorded level of open cases in the probate service. There was also an increase in recorded complaints receipts in Q3 2021, which coincided with the end of the temporary reduced rate in Stamp Duty Land Tax (HM Revenue & Customs, 2021). The rise in probate-related complaints may have reflected a growing urgency among applicants to resolve their cases as quickly as possible,

²² Not all complaints could be associated with a probate application. 79% of complaints associated with the probate service had a recorded associated case number. Of these, 95% matched with a record in the probate case data used in this analysis.

potentially to finalise property sales before anticipated tax changes. Official guidance online states that prospective probate applicants “should not make any financial plans or put property on the market” (HM Government, 2022a) until they have had a grant of probate issued.

Figure 18: Volume of recorded probate complaints received per quarter (Q2 2019 to Q2 2025)²³



Source: OPTIC, HMCTS

Increasing average case durations between Q1 2020 and Q3 2023 likely contributed to an increase in the volume of complaints received by the probate service. Probate complaints were most commonly classified as relating to a “Delay”, whether the application was submitted digitally or via the paper channel, as set out in Table 8. Delay complaints made up approximately 4 in every 5 complaints received between Q3 2019 and Q2 2025 that could be linked to a probate application. As the average case duration and the volume of open probate cases have decreased, the number of recorded complaints has also reduced, demonstrated in a 60% reduction in quarterly complaint receipts between the peak in Q3 2023 and Q2 2025.

²³ Figure 18 includes all complaints associated with the probate service, including those which could not be linked to the MI data for this analysis.

Table 8: Complaint type by associated application channel (Q3 2019 to Q2 2025)

Classification category	Examples of complaint classifications in this category	Digital cases	Paper cases	All cases
Delay	“My case took too long” “Too long for my letters/emails to be answered” “Long wait for HMCTS to do something for me”	79%	84%	82%
Service	“Information given was wrong, not clear or not detailed enough” “No one replied to email/letter/phone call” “I was ignored or dismissed”	14%	10%	13%
Other	“Procedures weren't followed properly” “Documents or information went missing” “Not satisfied with the handling of my case”	6%	5%	6%
Total volume (=100%)		9,809	8,496	18,305

Source: Probate case-level management information, HMCTS and OPTIC, HMCTS

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

The next most common group of complaints relate to issues with the “Service” the complainant felt they received. A higher proportion of complaints in this category were received in 2020, which coincides with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

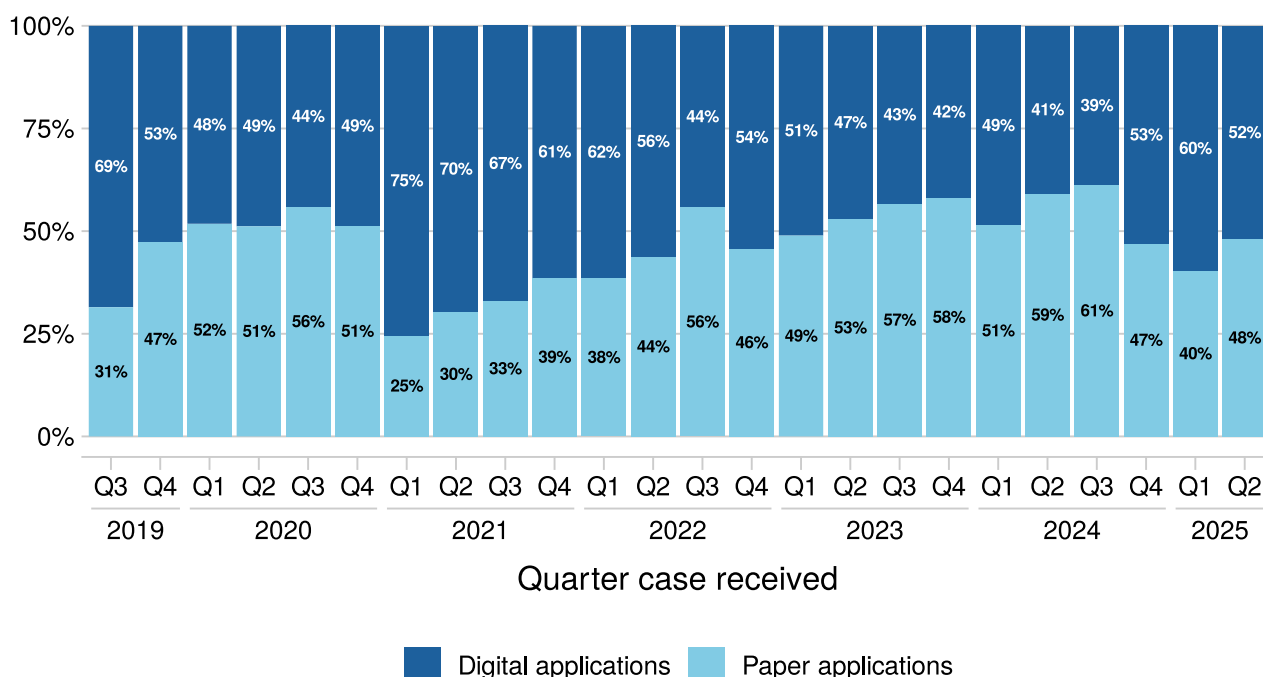
After the digital service was mandated for legal professionals in November 2020, there was initially a higher proportion of complaints associated with digital probate applications. This proportion started to decrease during 2021, as shown in Figure 19. In 2021, probate complaints categorised as “Unhappy with the online service” were more common and mainly associated with cases from unrepresented applicants applying digitally. There was a slight increase in these complaints from represented applicants applying digitally

immediately after the digital mandate was introduced, but these types of complaints made up less than 1% of all complaints from 2022 onwards.

More recently, complaints are disproportionately associated with paper probate applications. In Q2 2025, paper applications made up 20% of all probate applications received overall but accounted for nearly half of applications associated with complaints.

Figure 19: Proportion of recorded complaints received per quarter (Q3 2019 to Q2 2025) by associated application channel

Proportion of complaints by associated application channel



Source: Probate case-level management information, HMCTS and OPTIC, HMCTS

Complaints data shows that applications that become dormant or are withdrawn are more likely to be associated with a formal complaint, as shown in Table 9. Around 3 in 5 complaints associated with a withdrawn case were received before the application was withdrawn. A possible reason for this is that the response to the complaint highlights an issue with the application, which necessitates its withdrawal. Conversely, possible reasons why a complaint could be made after the application has been withdrawn relate to issues with the applications. For example, an applicant may have applied when they are not entitled to do so, resulting in the application being withdrawn, and the applicant may then complain about the rules around eligibility to apply. Alternatively, there may be multiple applications submitted for the same estate, neither of which can progress until all but one of

them are withdrawn by the applicant, which may prompt complaints from the applicant who chooses to withdraw their application but feels they should not have had to.

Table 9: Proportion of cases with a complaint by disposal type (Q3 2019 – Q1 2024)

Type of outcome	Proportion of cases with complaint
All outcomes	1.3%
Application withdrawn	2.6%
Application dormant	2.6%

Source: Probate case-level management information, HMCTS and OPTIC, HMCTS

Since April 2019, roughly a third of formal complaints about the probate service (33%) were either fully or partially upheld. This means that HMCTS agreed that the substance of the complaint has at least some merit. However, not all types of complaints are as likely to be upheld. Complaints specifically about the level of service the applicant has received were upheld more often (41%) than complaints about delays (18%).

The proportion of fully or partially upheld complaints has decreased over time, with around 26% of probate complaints fully or partially upheld in Q1 2025. The reasons for this are not fully clear but may reflect a change in the subject matter of the complaints or a change in operational procedure around how certain types of complaints are handled. See Appendix H for a yearly breakdown of the high-level categories associated with probate complaints.

5. Conclusions and implications

The Reform programme aimed to deliver a modern probate service, which is just, proportionate, and accessible. Key changes included the introduction of a digital application channel, and changes to operational structures and processes for staff handling probate applications.

For most applications, the probate service is generally more straightforward than other HMCTS services. Most probate applications involve fewer parties that interact with HMCTS and only require a hearing for a very small number of cases²⁴, and almost all probate applications result in a grant of probate being issued (96%). However, it should be stressed that probate cases can still be highly complex, even when they do not result in a hearing.

An indication of increasing access to justice following Reform within the probate service is the increase in the proportion of applications with relatively low estate values being submitted by unrepresented applicants. This suggests that these people feel able to apply without necessarily needing help or support from potentially expensive legal representation, making the post-Reform probate service more accessible. An alternative reason for this change in behaviour could be due to changes within HMRC regarding excepted estates, which reduced the number of probate cases which need to pay inheritance tax.

Digital uptake increased for unrepresented applicants after the online application channel was introduced. However, the largest increase in digital uptake was prompted by the mandate for legal professionals to use the digital application form for all but the most complex Grant of Probate applications in late 2020. Without this mandate, it is possible that digital uptake would be lower than it is now.

Whilst robust pre-Reform data for the probate service was unavailable for this analysis, making direct comparisons of pre- and post-Reform unfeasible, it is possible to draw conclusions based on metrics used to analyse the users' journey through the service since probate reform was rolled out nationally in 2019. Initially, the open caseload and case durations increased, and user satisfaction decreased. This resulted in a growing open

²⁴ In 2024, only 125 cases were contested, resulting in a hearing in the High Court, compared with 299,421 applications received in total.

caseload, longer average case durations, worsening dissatisfaction, and increasing public scrutiny on the service as a whole – exemplified by the Justice Select Committee launching an enquiry into the probate service in November 2023. Concerted effort by HMCTS staff to improve performance has resulted in a much-reduced open caseload, a reduction in the average case length, and a reduction in the number of complaints being received about the service.

As of this analysis, average case durations for digital applications received in the first half of 2025 were better than 2019 levels, although the mean timeliness may still increase as more of these cases complete. Despite digital applications being more likely to be submitted by users with relatively simple cases, this still reflects a positive change to these users. However, this has coincided with an increase in the proportion of the open caseload which has been open for more than a year. These cases may not be able to progress if HMCTS are waiting on action to be taken by the applicant. Long case timeliness is not necessarily solely associated with HMCTS operational performance as delays can be exacerbated by applicants taking a long time to respond to HMCTS, especially when cases are stopped.

In contrast, applications made via the paper channel have a more negative user experience. Paper channel applicants tend to experience longer case durations and a higher volume of complaints. There are broadly two groups of people who apply via the paper channel, the first of which are people who actively choose not to apply for probate digitally. Reasons for this could include the applicant lacking trust in the online system, lacking the digital capability or confidence to use an online service, or simply preferring to use a paper channel for legal processes. Some of these have been explored in the HMCTS Reform Evaluation Vulnerability Study (Harrison et al., 2024).

The second group of people applying via the paper channel are those who have an application which at the time of analysis (August 2025) was ineligible for the digital service. These cases are far more likely to be complex and subject to additional factors which negatively impact the user experience in a cumulative way. People who are more likely to apply via paper and have complex cases initially take longer to apply for probate. Once they have applied, their case is more likely to be stopped. These cases may also take a longer time to be initially examined, due to a limited number of staff having had the necessary training to handle those types of complex cases. Paper cases are also more likely to become dormant, which could signify a possible access-to-justice issue leading to these

applicants disengaging from the application process entirely. All these additional factors likely contribute to longer case durations for paper applications. This is a potential access-to-justice issue, especially given the potential vulnerability of the users. To remedy this, cases that are ineligible for the digital service should remain the focus of continuous improvement activity, to make them eligible for the digital service as soon as practically possible. HMCTS currently plan to introduce further digitalisation of applications made under intestacy law by the end of 2026.

Data from probate PCQ responses highlight a clear disparity in the experience of white and ethnic minority applicants, with the latter more likely to have their application stopped and take longer to have their grant of probate issued. The reasons why applicants of different ethnicities are having their cases stopped is changing over time, which underlines the impact of work done by HMCTS to address common stop reasons for different applicant groups. These results highlight the importance of being able to understand the HMCTS service user experience by protected characteristics, following the introduction of PCQs for reformed services as part of the Reform programme.

5.1 Considerations for further research

- Research into drivers of long waiting times between the deceased death date and initially applying for probate. With differences existing between various groups, understanding the specific motivators behind waiting times could help to improve access to justice if any of them can be addressed by HMCTS.
- Research into what prompts probate users to disengage from the application process, so their cases become dormant. If case inactivity is driven by specific factors, ensuring that they are addressed and any obstacles to users are tackled is crucial to improving case outcomes as well as reducing the open caseload.
- Research into which of the non-digitised aspects of the probate service should be prioritised for digitalisation, to maximise the impact on applicants.
- Additional research into the differences in the experiences of white and ethnic minority probate applicants, to better understand if more can be done to reduce the apparent inconsistency between these two groups.

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Appendix A

Staffing levels in the probate service

The number of HMCTS staff working on probate cases has changed over time, including as part of the Probate Service Performance Recovery programme. Table A1 shows the number of probate staff in HMCTS each March from 2014 to 2025. These figures include staff working in the district probate registries up to 2018 and people working in both district probate registries and the Courts and Tribunal Service Centre from 2019 onwards.

Table A1: Volume of HMCTS staff working in the probate service from March 2014 to March 2025

Date	Number of probate staff
March 2014	156
March 2015	143
March 2016	144
March 2017	153
March 2018	153
March 2019	152
March 2020	153
March 2021	250
March 2022	246
March 2023	295
March 2024	280
March 2025	276

Source: Internal HMCTS operational data

Appendix B

Protected Characteristic Questionnaire response rates

The response rate for PCQs provides helpful context for interpreting the results of PCQ data analysis. The PCQ response rate is calculated as the proportion of all eligible probate applications²⁵ with a substantive PCQ response, where at least one response is not “Prefer not to say”, in the time period of interest.

Table B1 shows the number of substantial probate PCQ responses received for both digital and paper applications and the estimated PCQ response rate. This has been inferred from linking the probate case data and PCQ data together and is different from the method used in PCQ summaries published by HMCTS (HM Courts & Tribunals Service, 2022).

Consequently, these figures may differ.

Table B1: Number of PCQ responses from unrepresented probate applicants for digital (June 2020 to June 2025) and paper (December 2020 to June 2025) cases

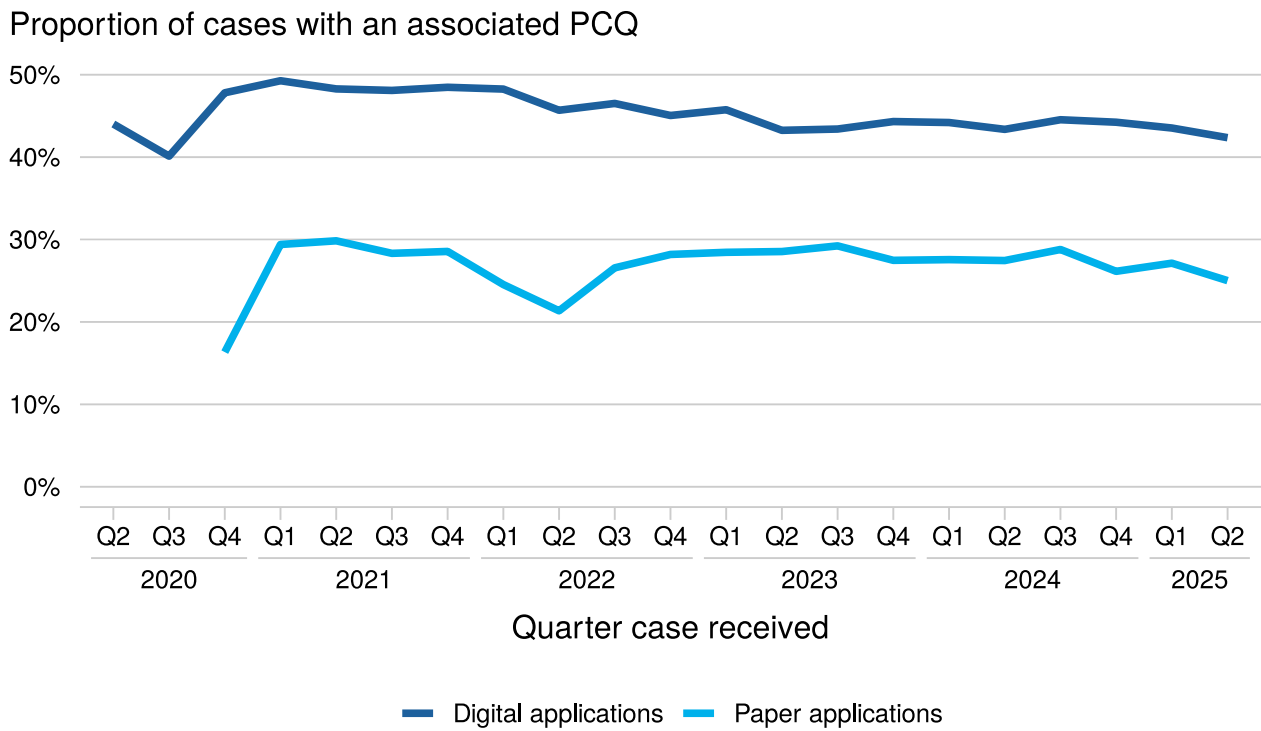
Application channel	Number of PCQ responses	Number of applications	PCQ response rate
Digital applications	204,385	453,299	45.1%
Paper applications	42,634	156,051	27.3%
Total	247,019	609,350	40.5%

Source: Probate case-level management information, HMCTS

Figure B2 shows how the PCQ response rate has varied over time, by application channel, for cases with substantial PCQ responses. The PCQ response rate for digital applications is consistently higher than it is for paper applications. The PCQ response rate is broadly consistent over time, with slight reductions in the response rates seen over time for both the digital and paper application channels.

²⁵ Probate cases submitted by applicants with legal representation are not able to submit a response to PCQs.

Figure B2: PCQ response rate by application channel and quarter case received (Q2 2020 to Q2 2025)



Source: Probate case-level management information, HMCTS

See Appendix E for the number of probate applications broken down by individual PCQ responses.

Appendix C

Definitions of case duration metrics

This report uses three different metrics to describe the duration of a probate case:

1. Mean timeliness – this is the average case duration calculated by summing the case durations for all cases in a given time period and dividing by the number of cases.
2. Median timeliness – this is the middle value of case durations in a given time period. It represents the midpoint in the distribution of case lengths, with half of cases being shorter and half being longer. It represents the time within which 50% of cases completed.
3. 90th percentile of timeliness – this is the value of case duration in a given time period where 90% of case lengths are shorter and 10% of case lengths are longer. It represents the time within which 90% of cases completed.

Whilst the mean and median timeliness metrics are generally used to describe the typical or average case length, the 90th percentile of timeliness is used to help understand the range of case durations in a given time period.

Calculations of quarterly case durations in this report are based on cases received in that quarter (receipt cohorts). As such, quarterly timeliness figures in this report may differ from those in MoJ Family Court Statistics Quarterly, where timeliness calculations are based on cases being closed in a given quarter (disposal cohorts).

Calculations of the median and 90th percentile of timeliness are based on all cases received, not just completed cases. As such, where fewer than 50% or 90% of received cases have completed in a given quarter, quarterly values of the median and 90th percentile of timeliness cannot be calculated and have therefore not been presented in this report.

Mean timeliness is calculated using cases that have completed, and does not include open cases. It will therefore increase as more cases complete in a given time period. As such, mean timeliness for more recent quarters, where there are generally a greater number of open cases, may be biased and should be interpreted with caution.

Appendix D

Annual death statistics (2010 to 2024)

The Office for National Statistics regularly reports on the number of registered deaths in England and Wales. Table D1 shows the annual number of registered deaths from 2010 to 2024.

Table D1: Number of registered deaths per year in England and Wales since 2010

Year	Number of deaths
2010	493,242
2011	484,367
2012	499,331
2013	506,790
2014	501,424
2015	529,655
2016	525,048
2017	533,253
2018	541,589
2019	530,841
2020	607,922
2021	586,334
2022	577,160
2023	581,363
2024	563,732

Source: Death registration summary statistics, England and Wales, Office for National Statistics (Office for National Statistics, 2025a)

The increase in registered deaths in 2020 coincides with the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2020, the annual number of registered deaths has reduced, but remains substantially higher than pre-2020 levels.

Appendix E

Summary of probate applications by case characteristics

Table E1 shows a breakdown of probate cases received between July 2019 and June 2025 by legal representation, application channel and selected PCQ responses, namely age, disability status, high-level ethnicity, the applicant's main language and sex.

Table E1: Breakdown of probate applications received between Q3 2019 and Q2 2025 by level of representation, application channel and selected PCQ responses

Measure	Breakdown	Volume of applications	Proportion of all cases	Proportion of cases with PCQ answers
Total applications		1,726,572		
Representation	Unrepresented	725,930	42%	
Representation	Represented	1,000,642	58%	
Channel	Digital	1,136,356	66%	
Channel	Paper	588,412	34%	
Channel	Unknown	1,804	<1%	
Age	Under 35	6,999	<1%	3%
Age	35 - 54	62,429	4%	26%
Age	55 - 74	149,231	9%	62%
Age	Over 75	20,387	1%	9%
Age	Unknown	1,487,526	86%	
Disability	No	201,098	12%	82%
Disability	Yes	31,028	2%	13%
Disability	Prefer not to say	12,383	1%	5%
Disability	Unknown	1,482,063	86%	

Ethnicity	Ethnic minority	9,828	1%	4%
Ethnicity	White	231,438	13%	95%
Ethnicity	Prefer not to say	2,981	<1%	1%
Ethnicity	Unknown	1,482,325	86%	
Main Language	English or Welsh	184,574	11%	99%
Main Language	Other	1,905	<1%	1%
Main Language	Prefer not to say	393	<1%	<1%
Main Language	Unknown	1,539,700	89%	
Sex	Female	124,490	7%	51%
Sex	Male	119,789	7%	49%
Sex	Prefer not to say	965	<1%	<1%
Sex	Unknown	1,481,328	86%	

Source: Probate case-level management information, HMCTS

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

For the selected PCQ responses, “Unknown” refers both to applicants who had an opportunity to fill in a PCQ and chose not to, and those who were not eligible to complete PCQs when their application was submitted. This includes applicants with legal representation, as PCQs are only made available to unrepresented applicants, and paper cases prior to December 2020, when PCQs are made available to users applying through the paper channel.

Appendix F

Geodemographic analysis of probate applications

The vast majority of probate cases include the applicant's postcode. The wide availability of probate applicant postcode data means geodemographic analysis²⁶ can be used to give indirect information about the characteristics of nearly all probate applicants. This contrasts with PCQ data which provides direct information from probate applicants but for a sub-group of applicants.

A neighbourhood-level geodemographic classification was developed for England and Wales following the 2021 Census (Wyszomierski et al., 2024), referred to as OAC21, and is similar to other classifications developed after previous UK censuses. Geodemographic analysis assumes that individuals living in the same neighbourhood are broadly similar and that demographic changes happen relatively slowly. Consequently, the OAC21 classification scheme is taken as the most applicable for analysing probate applications received between 2019 and 2025.

Geodemographic analysis of postcode data shows that probate applicants live in areas of the UK which are generally more affluent, less ethnically diverse, and have a greater proportion of older people living in them, relative to the UK population as a whole. This is shown in Table F1, which shows over half of probate applicants are associated with OAC21 supergroups 1 (retired professionals) and 2 (suburbanites and peri-urbanites). These findings are consistent with the analysis of PCQ responses, which showed that probate applicants are generally older and less ethnically diverse than the adult population of England and Wales.

²⁶ Geodemographics is the study of population characteristics and their distribution across geographic areas. It aims to understand the relationship between the neighbourhoods where people live and their demographic, socioeconomic, and lifestyle traits. Geodemographics is underpinned by an assumption that all people living with a neighbourhood are broadly similar.

Table F1: Proportions of the England and Wales population and probate applicants in different geodemographic groups, by representation, for probate applications received between Q3 2019 and Q2 2025

OAC21 supergroup	Proportion of the England and Wales population	Proportion of all probate applicants	Proportion of unrepresented applicants	Proportion of represented applicants
1 – Retired Professionals	15.5%	25.9%	28.1%	24.0%
2 – Suburbanites and Peri-Urbanites	21.4%	28.0%	28.9%	27.3%
3 – Multicultural and Educated Urbanites	8.0%	5.8%	3.4%	7.8%
4 – Low Skilled Migrant and Student Communities	13.6%	5.3%	5.1%	5.4%
5 – Ethnically Diverse Suburban Professionals	11.6%	13.5%	14.8%	12.4%
6 – Baseline UK	16.7%	12.5%	11.4%	13.3%
7 – Semi and Unskilled Workforce	11.2%	7.2%	7.1%	7.4%
8 – Legacy Communities	1.9%	1.8%	1.2%	2.3%
Total volume (=100%)	59,597,747	1,573,609	710,690	862,919

Source: Probate case-level management information, HMCTS and Output Area Classification (2021) data, Geographic Data Service

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Table F2 shows the amount of time between the death of the deceased and the associated probate application, and how this varies for different geodemographic groups. Applicants from OAC21 supergroups 1 (retired professionals) and 2 (suburbanites and peri-urbanites), who make up approximately 54% of all probate applicants in the data since Q3 2019, generally apply sooner than applicants from other supergroups. Conversely, applicants who generally take longer to initially apply for probate tend to be from supergroups 3 (multicultural and educated urbanites) or 4 (low skilled migrant and student communities). These two supergroups have generally lower numbers of probate applicants associated with them and represent neighbourhoods with younger and more ethnically diverse populations.

Table F2: Proportion and volume of probate applications made in time bands after the death of the deceased, by geodemographic group, for probate applications received between Q3 2019 and Q2 2025

OAC21 supergroup	Up to 90 days after death	Between 91 and 180 days after death	Between 181 and 365 days after death	366 days or more after death	Total volume (=100%)
1 – Retired Professionals	46.9%	27.4%	16.4%	9.3%	407,422
2 – Suburbanites and Peri-Urbanites	44.6%	27.9%	17.4%	10.0%	440,889
3 – Multicultural and Educated Urbanites	24.7%	29.9%	26.9%	18.5%	91,311
4 – Low Skilled Migrant and Student Communities	31.2%	25.9%	21.4%	21.5%	83,535
5 – Ethnically Diverse Suburban Professionals	40.4%	28.6%	19.5%	11.5%	212,041
6 – Baseline UK	38.8%	28.8%	19.5%	12.9%	196,092

7 – Semi and Unskilled Workforce	46.7%	25.3%	15.1%	12.9%	114,044
8 – Legacy Communities	39.2%	30.0%	18.5%	12.4%	28,272

Source: Probate case-level management information, HMCTS and Output Area Classification (2021) data, Geographic Data Service

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Appendix G

Reasons for “stopped” cases by applicant ethnicity

Since PCQs were made available for probate applicants, HMCTS has conducted research and analysis into why probate applications from different groups of users are stopped. As a result, in 2021 and 2022 HMCTS made changes to the probate service to reduce stops occurring. Table G1 shows the proportion of cases stopped for different reasons for cases submitted by white and ethnic minority applicants over two time periods:

1. Q3 2020 to Q1 2021 – This period represents the first full quarter PCQs were available for probate applicants to respond to up to the last full quarter before service improvement activity started to address the underlying reasons for stops.
2. Q4 2023 to Q3 2024 – This period represents the first four full quarters following the service improvement activity to address the underlying reasons for stops.

Table G1: Stop reasons split by the ethnicity of the applicant over two periods (Q3 2020 to Q1 2021 and Q4 2023 to Q3 2024)

Stop reason	White applicants		Ethnic minority applicants	
	Q3 2020 to Q1 2021	Q4 2023 to Q3 2024	Q3 2020 to Q1 2021	Q4 2023 to Q3 2024
Affidavit	0%	1%	-	1%
Any other wills	1%	2%	1%	2%
Applicant name issue	5%	2%	4%	1%
Awaiting unique IHT code	-	-	-	0%
Caveat match	1%	1%	2%	2%
Dates differ	3%	1%	2%	1%
Death certificate issue	2%	4%	5%	6%
Deceased address missing	0%	0%	0%	0%
Deceased name	3%	1%	7%	2%

Documents required	8%	6%	12%	8%
Duplicate email addresses	1%	0%	0%	0%
Exec not accounted for	9%	13%	5%	6%
Fee	2%	4%	3%	5%
Foreign domicile	-	0%	-	1%
IHT421 awaiting	9%	4%	6%	4%
IHT figures incorrect	-	14%	0%	12%
IHT issue	9%	3%	14%	3%
Lost will	-	1%	-	1%
Matching application	1%	1%	2%	3%
No minority life	0%	0%	0%	0%
Not eligible	1%	1%	2%	0%
Not entitled	4%	4%	5%	4%
Not specified	2%	3%	1%	4%
Original documents required	3%	5%	2%	4%
Other	9%	6%	8%	5%
Probate figures incorrect	0%	5%	0%	8%
Redeclare title clearing	0%	0%	-	0%
Solicitors legal statement not signed	-	0%	-	0%
Trust corporation	-	0%	-	-
Welsh translation required	0%	0%	-	-
Will condition	9%	7%	6%	5%
Will content	6%	4%	4%	3%
Will not enclosed	11%	8%	7%	6%

Source: Probate case-level management information, HMCTS

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Note: '-' in the table above signifies that no cases were stopped for that reason in the given time period.

Appendix H

Annual probate complaint volumes

Formal complaints about the probate service are recorded on the OPTIC (Opinions, Praise, Treatment, Incidents and Complaints) case management system, which was introduced in February 2019. Recorded complaints received before February 2019 were not available for analysis in this report.

When a formal complaint is submitted, HMCTS staff classify it based on the details of the complaint. Similar types of classifications associated with complaints are then grouped together. Table H1 shows the proportion of recorded complaints associated with the probate service in the high-level “Delay” and “Service” complaint classification groups each year. Note that the data from 2019 and 2025 are incomplete years, due to the availability of data from OPTIC.

Table H1: Complaint classifications per year between Q2 2019 and Q2 2025

Year received	2019 (Q2 - Q4)	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025 (Q1 - Q2)
Delays	82%	58%	77%	76%	90%	85%	83%
Service	10%	30%	18%	16%	6%	8%	8%
Other	8%	12%	6%	8%	4%	6%	9%
Total (= 100%)	1,051	2,748	4,775	4,290	5,838	4,091	1,379

Source: OPTIC, HMCTS

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.