



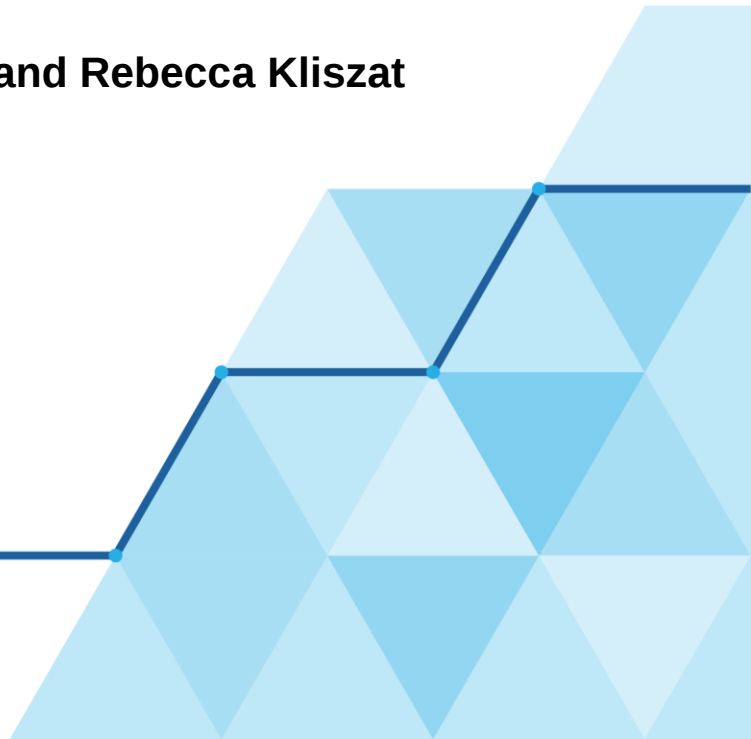
Ministry
of Justice

Specialist Sexual Violence Support Measures

**A qualitative assessment in Leeds, Newcastle
and Snaresbrook Crown Courts**

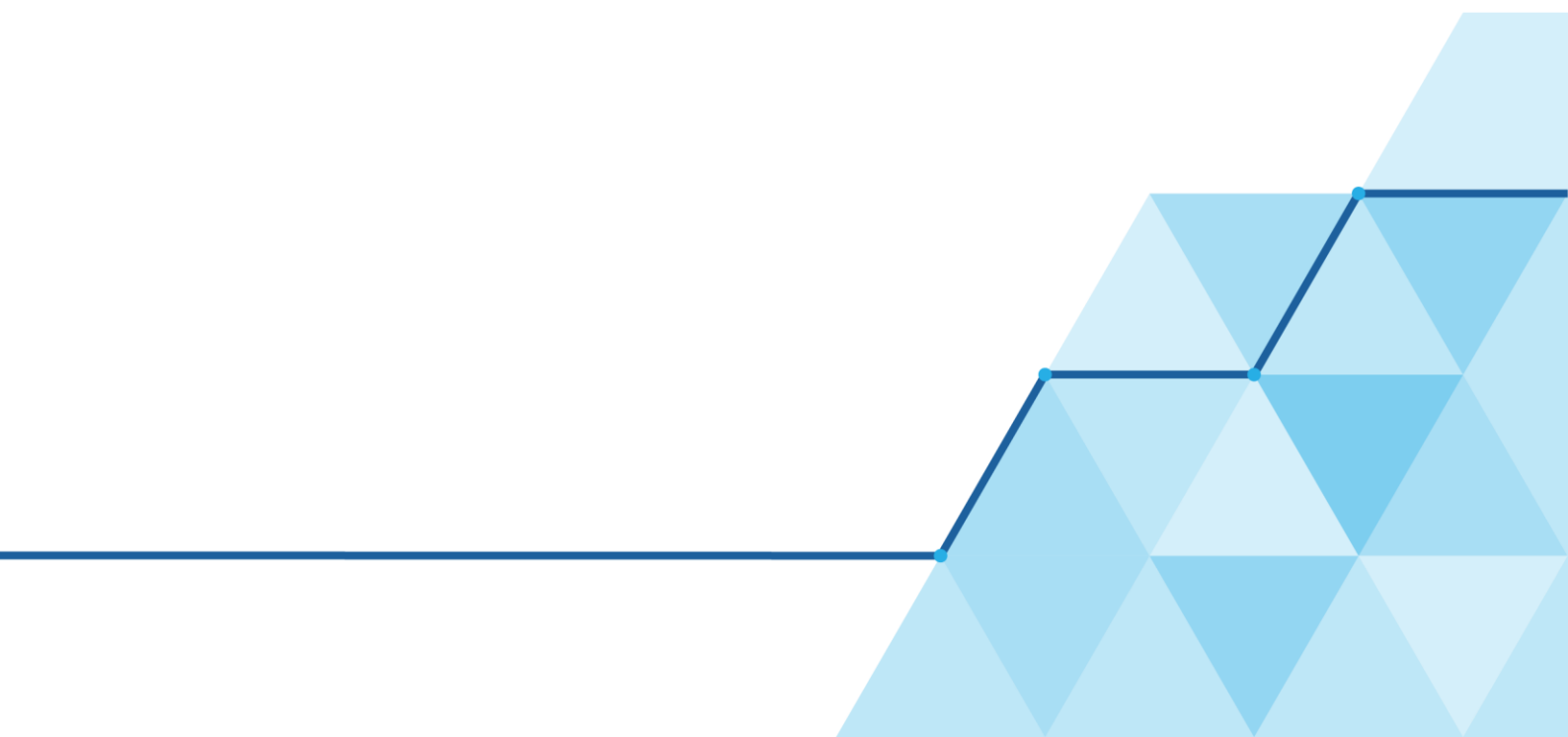
Imogen Parkin, Dr Elena Sharratt and Rebecca Kliszat
Ministry of Justice

Ministry of Justice Analytical Series
2026





Ministry
of Justice





Ministry
of Justice

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the practitioners and Judges who took part in this research, for generously giving their time and sharing their experiences with us.

Thank you also to the two external peer-reviewers for their valuable comments on this report.



Contents

Specialist Sexual Violence Support Measures	1
A qualitative assessment in Leeds, Newcastle and Snaresbrook Crown Courts	1
Contents	1
Glossary	3
Executive Summary	4
Background	4
Methods and limitations	4
Key findings	5
Considerations	6
1. Introduction	8
1.1 Background	8
1.2 Research aims	10
2. Methodology	11
2.1 Research design and limitations	11
2.2 Interviews	12
2.3 Analysis	13
2.4 Ethics	14
2.5 Limitations	15
3. Findings	16
3.1 Technology	16
3.2 Facilities upgrades	21
3.3 Trauma-informed training	25
4. Summary and considerations	34
4.1 Summary	34
4.2 Considerations	34

Bibliography	36
Annex A: Sample of interview questions for practitioners	37

Glossary

ABE – Achieving Best Evidence

CJS – Criminal Justice System

CPS – Crown Prosecution Service

DAVE – Digital Audio Visual Evolution

DSO – Digital Support Officer

ISVA – Independent Sexual Violence Advisor

MoJ – Ministry of Justice

RASSO – Rape and Serious Sexual Offences

SOIT – Sexual Offences Investigation Trained

SSVS – Specialist Sexual Violence Support

WCU – Witness Care Unit

WS – Witness Services

Executive Summary

Background

Attending Crown Court as a rape and serious sexual offence (RASSO) victim-survivor can be a stressful experience. A 2021 Government report identified several challenges faced by victims at court, including possible retraumatisation, inadequate technology and issues with facilities (George & Ferguson, 2021).

In June 2022, the Government announced a series of specialist sexual violence support measures to be implemented in three Crown Courts. These measures were designed to improve the Crown Court experience for victim-survivors of rape and serious sexual offences. The measures included technology and facilities upgrades, and the delivery of trauma informed training to practitioners working on rape and serious sexual offence cases. Leeds, Newcastle and Snaresbrook Crown Courts were used as test sites, due to their high volume of rape and serious sexual offence cases.

This report provides findings from a qualitative research project undertaken in 2024/25. The aim of the research was to understand practitioner and victim-survivors' views and experiences of the measures. It also aimed to identify which aspects of the measures were perceived to be working well, whether any improvements could be made and which measure - if any - showed the most promise in terms of impacting victim-survivor experience at court.

Methods and limitations

The research was initially designed to include two strands:

1. Interviews with practitioners working on rape and serious sexual offences cases.
2. Interviews with victim-survivors of rape and serious sexual offences.

Victim-survivor interviews did not take place due to recruitment difficulties. While practitioners were asked about victim-survivor experiences as a proxy, the lack of direct victim-survivor views is a limitation of the research.

A total of 42 interviews were conducted across the three Crown Courts, comprising: nine Court Staff, nine Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVA), six Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) Staff, nine Witness Care Unit (WCU) officers, three Witness Services (WS) staff and six Judges. This equated to roughly one to four interviews per group, per court.

The research was designed to provide in-depth insight about SSVS measures from a small number of practitioners and Judges working on trials held at the three Crown Courts. Due to this small-scale qualitative design, findings cannot be generalised to Crown Courts beyond Leeds, Newcastle and Snaresbrook.

Key findings

Technology upgrades

- Technology upgrades were seen as positive, but only when they were working. Their benefits were limited by technology issues.
- Microphone upgrades were seen as broadly positive, with reports of clearer sound and fewer issues. A few interviewees reported that microphones were too sensitive and picked up on background noise.
- The installation of one screen for every two jurors was regarded as a positive upgrade. However, this was perceived to be of benefit to jurors more than to victim-survivors.

Facilities upgrades

- Facilities upgrades to witness suites in Leeds and Newcastle Crown Court were positively received. Practitioners felt that creating a welcoming and comfortable environment was important for victim-survivors.
- Upgrades to improve accessibility were viewed positively. However, overall accessibility at Crown Courts was described as limited. This was attributed to older buildings not being designed with accessibility in mind.
- While facilities upgrades could make victim-survivors more comfortable, interviewees questioned the extent to which they could impact victim-survivor experience, as they did not detract from the stress of giving evidence.

Awareness of upgrades

- Awareness of technology and facilities upgrades was mixed. In some cases, practitioners were unaware of the upgrades having taken place, which may have limited use of upgrades where appropriate.

Trauma-informed training

- The trauma-informed training and awareness sessions were positively received. Interviewees praised the delivery and content of the sessions and reported a greater understanding of trauma as a result.
- Practitioners reported that the trauma-informed training sessions resulted in behavioural changes. Some practitioners were able to provide examples where they had implemented their learning when interacting with victim-survivors.
- Practitioners demonstrated an understanding of the importance of taking a trauma-informed approach when interacting with victim-survivors, but explained that there were barriers to fully embedding this at Crown Court. Lack of time was thought to be the biggest barrier.
- Practitioners felt that refresher training would help to remind them of trauma-informed principles, allowing them to take this into their practice.

Victim-survivor experience

- As victim-survivor interviews were not conducted, conclusions on how SSVS measures impacted victim-survivors are limited to feedback from practitioners.

Considerations

1. For existing SSVS courts, practitioners and Judges should be made aware of the technology and facilities upgrades. This will allow RASSO cases to benefit from the upgraded technology and will mean that victim-survivors with accessibility needs can utilise facilities such as accessibility ramps and fold down seats in witness boxes.
2. In future, all government initiatives should be clearly communicated to relevant practitioners and stakeholders to maximise their use and impact.
3. Given that the measure with the largest described impact was the trauma-informed training, this measure (or equivalent) should be prioritised for roll-out across all Crown Courts.
4. Court staff, Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) staff, Witness Care Unit (WCU) officers, Witness Services (WS) staff and volunteers across all Crown Courts would benefit from this training as it could help to improve understanding of trauma and provide improved support to RASSO victim-survivors. If possible, prosecution and defence barristers, and security staff should receive the training too.

5. When designing future RASSO support initiatives, or evaluating future, alternative policies research teams should prioritise the recruitment of victim-survivors for participation in research.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Attending Crown Court as a rape and serious sexual offence (RASSO¹) victim-survivor² can be a “stressful and often unpleasant” experience (George & Ferguson, 2021, p. 59). A 2021 Government report identified several challenges faced by victims at court, including possible retraumatisation, inadequate technology and issues with facilities (George & Ferguson, 2021).

In response to these findings, a package of upgrades known as Specialist Sexual Violence Support (SSVS) measures was announced in June 2022 (Ministry of Justice, 2022). The measures were designed to improve the victim-survivor experience at Crown Court, by updating technology and facilities, and providing trauma-informed training to practitioners.

The high-level objectives of the measures were:

- To provide smoother and better-quality technology for all;
- For victim-survivors to be less distressed when giving evidence;
- For practitioners to give improved support to victim-survivors and feel more comfortable doing so;
- To minimise the potential for victim-survivor retraumatisation at court.

SSVS measures were implemented in Leeds, Newcastle and Snaresbrook Crown Courts. These courts were chosen as, at the time, they received a higher-than-average number of RASSO cases and had a higher backlog of these cases³.

Technology

The technology upgrades were part of the Digital Audio Visual Evolution project (DAVE). This is national initiative where technology in court rooms is being replaced or upgraded to

¹ The term RASSO refers to Rape and Serious Sexual Offences. It is used in this report as these are the types of sexual offences which are heard at the Crown Court (wherein this research took place).

² Throughout the research, practitioners referred to RASSO victim-survivors through many terms, depending on the practitioner’s role and what stage of the criminal justice system (CJS) they worked in. For ease, the term ‘victim-survivor’ is used throughout this report to refer to the individual who had made a criminal allegation. The report acknowledges that, in the formal CJS, the term ‘complainant’ or ‘witness’ would be used until a defendant had been found guilty, at which point ‘victim-survivor’ would be used.

³ This remains true in 2024/2025 (Ministry of Justice, 2025).

enable presentation of high-definition evidence, pre-recorded evidence and evidence delivered via live or remote links.

Ten courtrooms across the three Crown Courts were upgraded: three in Leeds, three in Newcastle and four in Snaresbrook.

Upgrades included improved audio facilities through new microphones and speakers. Additional evidence display screens were added to jury benches, ensuring one screen in place for every two jurors. Jurors could view evidence on these at closer range, supplementing the larger screens mounted on courtroom walls.

Upgrades were funded with SSVS funding and completed by July 2023.

Facilities upgrades

Each court had a different baseline in terms of its existing facilities. Court staff at each site identified the improvements that would be most useful to their court, meaning specific facilities upgrades varied across Leeds, Newcastle and Snaresbrook Crown Courts. Upgrades aimed to improve accessibility and increase victim-survivor comfort and security. Upgrades took place in witness care suite waiting rooms, witness care suite private rooms and court rooms.

At Leeds Crown Court, the SSVS funding was used to refurbish existing witness suite rooms, including the provision of extra furniture, new blinds and new carpets.

At Newcastle Crown Court, four witness suite rooms and live link rooms were refurbished with new carpets, new chairs and coffee tables. The main witness suite waiting area was also redecorated and supplied with new furniture. One witness suite room was converted into an accessible toilet, and a wheelchair ramp was installed at the entrance to the witness suite. Fold down seats were installed in witness boxes, in replacement of existing seating.

At Snaresbrook Crown Court, fold down seats were installed in witness boxes, replacing existing seating, and new curtains were added to shield victim-survivors from the defendant when giving evidence. Blinds were fitted on doors leading into the court to prevent victim-survivors being seen by defendants when waiting. A temporary ramp was installed to provide wheelchair access to the entrance of the witness suite.

Trauma-informed training and awareness sessions

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) contracted an external provider, ICENA, to design and deliver a trauma-informed (TI) training programme to a range of practitioners. A one-day trauma-informed training session was delivered to court staff, Witness Care Unit (WCU) officers/police, Crown Prosecution Services (CPS) staff, and Witness Services (WS) staff and volunteers.

The training was held in-person, and covered victim-survivor experience, trauma presentation, trauma-informed behaviour and communication, rape myths and stereotypes, trauma-responsive skills in practice and staff wellbeing.

Judges were invited to attend an optional one-hour trauma-awareness session. This provided an overview of the broader practitioner training, victim-survivor experience, impact of judicial conduct and leading a trauma-informed court environment.

Fourteen sessions per Crown Court were delivered to practitioners. Sessions took place from April to June 2024 and were delivered by Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVAs).

1.2 Research aims

This exploratory research was conducted to help understand whether the SSVS upgrades had worked as intended, including what was effective and what required further improvement.

The primary research questions were:

- To what extent did SSVS improve victim-survivors' self-reported experience at court?
- To what extent did SSVS improve victim-survivors' ability to give evidence?
- How did practitioners and Judges perceive and experience SSVS?
- To what extent did SSVS improve practitioners' and Judges ability to support victim-survivors?
- What were the key strengths and benefits of SSVS from the perspective of practitioners and Judges?
- Were there any barriers to delivering SSVS, and what were the key weaknesses of SSVS?
- What improvements could be made to SSVS upgrades going forward?

2. Methodology

2.1 Research design and limitations

The research was initially designed to have two strands:

1. Interviews with criminal justice practitioners and Judges;
2. Interviews with RASSO victim-survivors.

For strand one, MoJ Government Social Researchers conducted interviews with practitioners and Judges who interacted with RASSO victim-survivors leading up to, and during, their attendance at Crown Court. Practitioners included court staff (administrative officers, court clerks and ushers), ISVAs, CPS staff (Senior Crown Prosecutors and Paralegal Officers), WCU Officers and WS staff.

For strand two, external researchers at Sheffield Hallam University were commissioned to carry out victim-survivor interviews. Due to recruitment difficulties (see section 2.4 Ethics), interviews were not carried out. As a result, the research does not contain direct victim-survivor perceptions of the upgrades, although practitioners were asked to reflect on the experiences of victim-survivors they had worked with. An evidence gap regarding victim-survivor perceptions remains, and future research should seek to address this.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with practitioners using Microsoft Teams technology. See Annex A for an example of topic guides used.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen to allow flexibility, as researchers could interact with the interviewee and ask relevant follow-up questions to gain further understanding.

The insights gathered through this research are not statistically representative of the wider population of practitioners working at the three SSVS courts. Instead, they represent the views of a cross-section of practitioners who volunteered to be interviewed. It is important not to use comments or observations out of context as they may not be representative of the wider group, or generalisable to other sites.

While the research was not undertaken in-person at the three Crown Courts, policy and analytical team members carried out court visits to understand the changes implemented at each site.

2.2 Interviews

Interviewees

Forty-two interviews were conducted between November 2024 and March 2025. The breakdown of interviewees across profession and Crown Court is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of interviewees by profession and Crown Court

Practitioner	Leeds	Newcastle	Snaresbrook	Total
Court staff	3	3	3	9
ISVA	2	3	4	9
Judge	2	2	2	6
CPS	1	2	3	6
Witness Care Unit (WCU) Officer	2	3	4	9
Witness Services	1	1	1	3
Total	11	14	17	42

The group 'WCU' is used as a general term to encompass different titles for similar roles across police forces in the Crown Court areas covered in this research. All Snaresbrook WCU interviewees worked as Sexual Offences Investigation Trained (SOIT) officers, all Leeds interviewees worked as Victim and Witness Care Officers, and all Newcastle interviewees worked as Victim and Witness Support Officers.

CPS interviewees were Paralegal Officers and Senior Crown Prosecutors. The research aimed to include Crown Prosecution Advocates but was unable to recruit these interviewees. All CPS interviewees in Leeds and Newcastle were Paralegal Officers. For Snaresbrook, there was a mix of Paralegal Officers and Senior Crown Prosecutors.

Sampling

A volunteer sample was recruited via gatekeepers at Court and profession level. Gatekeepers for court staff, ISVAs, CPS, WS and WCU were recruited through contacts provided by MoJ policy leads. Judges were recruited through contacts provided by Judicial Office.

Gatekeepers for court staff, ISVAs, CPS, WS and WCU were asked to publicise the research among eligible colleagues and were provided with information sheets and privacy notices to circulate. Those interested in taking part were instructed to complete a screening survey. They were then contacted by MoJ social researchers to schedule an interview.

The screening survey was used to identify practitioners who fit the research criteria. Practitioners and Judges needed to have worked on cases tried at Leeds, Newcastle or Snaresbrook Crown Courts for at least one year. Information was also gathered on whether practitioners and Judges had or had not attended the TI training. Attendee and non-attendee practitioners were interviewed.

The Resident Judge at each Crown Court provided contact details for Judges willing to take part in the research. These Judges were directly contacted with the participant information sheet and privacy notice, and asked whether they had or had not attended the TI awareness session. Attendee and non-attendee Judges were interviewed.

A recruitment target of two to three practitioners in each practitioner group for each Crown Court was set; This recruitment target also applied to Judges. In some cases, recruitment did not meet this target and, in others, exceeded it (see Table 1). Lower recruitment numbers were due to difficulty in engaging gatekeepers and in identifying potential volunteers.

2.3 Analysis

All interviews were recorded and auto-transcribed using MS Teams transcription. Transcripts were manually corrected where necessary, using the interview recording as a guide.

A team of five researchers worked on developing a thematic coding framework. Transcripts were coded into themes using a combination of deductive and inductive coding. Before analysis, a basic thematic structure was created using the research questions and topic guide. Further themes and subthemes were then created after an initial review of a sample of transcripts, and iterated, deleted, or added throughout analysis.

The qualitative findings have been presented as follows to avoid assigning specific proportions or prevalence to the findings. The terms 'many' and 'most' are used to mean that a view was widespread, 'some' or 'several' are used to indicate a middle ground, and 'a few' indicates that a finding applied to a small handful. This should, however, be considered indicative.

2.4 Ethics

Researchers produced an ethics checklist to assess the ethical sensitivity of the research and identify appropriate mitigations.

Issues of researcher bias and confirmation bias were considered. To minimise these risks, Government Social Research guidelines were followed, including independent quality assurance of thematic coding by a second researcher, and the use of non-leading interview questions.

Another ethical risk identified was the potential of vicarious trauma among interviewees and researchers, due to the sensitivity of RASSO research. To address this, interviewees were signposted to support services, and emotional support was offered to researchers.

The inclusion of victim-survivor voices was considered important from an ethical perspective, as amplifying victim-survivor voices is a key component of trauma-informed research. Nevertheless, the research was subject to set timelines which, at times, made it difficult for the commissioned research team to build relationships with gatekeepers, who were key to the recruitment of victim-survivors. If looking to recruit victim-survivors, future research should, where possible, allow sufficient time for partnership building with gatekeepers. By doing so, researchers and gatekeepers could be better positioned to build trust and develop a collective understanding of the research.

To prevent interviewees being identified in research outputs, mitigations were built into the project. These included the use of pseudonyms, exclusion of case-specific information and ensuring that findings did not report on combined characteristics that could unintentionally identify individuals. These mitigations were communicated to interviewees prior to interviews.

Interviewees were given a participant information sheet and privacy notice by researchers. The participant information sheet provided background to the research, explained that participation was voluntary and how to withdraw from the research. The privacy notice explained that personal data would be processed in accordance with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Informed consent forms were sent to interviewees and were completed before interview. In cases where these were not returned, verbal consent was gathered on recording at the beginning of the interview.

The final research report was subject to peer review prior to publication, ensuring external ethical scrutiny.

2.5 Limitations

The research originally intended to interview RASSO victim-survivors to understand whether the upgrades had impacted their experience while at Crown Court. As research contractors were unable to recruit victim-survivors, no direct victim-survivor feedback was gathered. While some practitioners provide anecdotal evidence from conversations with victim-survivors, this research is unable to draw conclusions on whether upgrades impacted victim-survivors' experiences.

A non-random sampling method, which relied on gatekeepers for recruitment, was used. This may have resulted in a sample which is not representative of the target population.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out online, over Microsoft Teams. The benefits of this type of interview may have been more effective in an in-person setting. However, the operational nature of courts meant that this was not practical for this research.

The practitioners recruited demonstrated a range of familiarity with upgrades. Some upgrades were more well known than others, resulting in mixed depth of feedback across the changes. For some upgrades no feedback, or very little feedback, was gathered.

Some practitioner and Crown Court samples were smaller than others. For WS interviewees, only one staff member was interviewed per Crown Court.

3. Findings

3.1 Technology

Summary of upgrades

Court rooms in all three SSVS courts received technology upgrades under the Digital Audio-Visual Evolution (DAVE) project. The DAVE project aims to modernise the audio-visual equipment in courtrooms. DAVE was established in 2021 and aims to upgrade equipment in 80 court rooms per year, with priority for Crown Courts.

DAVE upgrades made in the SSVS courts included improved audio facilities through new microphones and speakers. Additional display screens were added to jury benches, ensuring one screen in place for every two-jurors. These screens are used to present evidence.

These changes were made to three courtrooms in Leeds Crown Court, three in Newcastle Crown Court, and four in Snaresbrook Crown Court.

Pre-upgrade quality of court technology

Interviewees were asked about the baseline quality of court technology (e.g., before upgrades had taken place).

Interviewees from all three Crown Courts reported that the previous technology available at court was unreliable. Issues included technology stopping unpredictably, inconsistency in quality between court rooms and issues with playback for Achieving Best Evidence interviews (ABE) and Section 28 recordings (pre-recorded cross-examination).

“Hit and miss is probably the best way to put it. It’s just completely dependent on whether the equipment wants to work that day or not.” – Court Staff, Leeds

A few interviewees reported that the previous court technology worked most of the time, although these opinions tended to come from practitioners who were less regularly in court, such as ISVAs and WCU Officers.

Judges reported higher levels of frustration with technology failures. One Snaresbrook Judge described the provision as “awful”. A Newcastle Judge reported issues with technology in all RASSO cases they worked on, and a Leeds Judge described technology as “a constant battle”.

Many interviewees described delays to trials caused by previous technological issues and outlined how this caused unnecessary distress to victim-survivors. Delays could range

from a few hours to having to re-list a trial at a later date. Issues could also result in disturbing other courts to obtain technology support.

A few interviewees were concerned that issues with technology could make evidence disjointed, and would “put [victim-survivors] off” when giving evidence.

“My concern is that the technology that we have lets people down” – Judge, Leeds

Some court staff and WCU officers were more forgiving of technology issues, suggesting that they didn’t expect technology to work all the time, and ‘crashes’ and ‘glitches’ were part of using technology.

Communication and awareness of technology upgrades

Interviewees were asked whether they were aware of the upgrades and, if so, how that had been communicated with them. Ideally, increased awareness in practitioners should result in more frequent use of the measures, making the process of giving evidence via technology smoother and less stressful for victims.

Awareness of the technology upgrades varied between practitioner groups. All court staff and the majority of Judges were familiar with the upgrades. The Judges who were less familiar were those who had not had the upgrades installed in their courtrooms.

Interviewees who were in court less frequently (WCU and WS) were less familiar with the upgrades. This was primarily because they didn’t regularly interact with court technology.

Overall, interviewees had a greater awareness of the additional juror screens and the DAVE system, and lesser awareness of microphone upgrades.

Interviewees became aware of the upgrades through different routes, including through LET/LIT meetings (Local Implementation Teams), MoJ facilitated meetings, information cascades from operations managers/line managers, discussion with colleagues and observation of changes while at court.

Perceived benefits of technology upgrades

Interviewees were asked about the perceived benefits of technology upgrades. Where interviewees were not aware of, or who had not seen the upgrades, researchers described the changes that had taken place and asked interviewees to reflect on hypothetical benefits. Hypothetical benefits are indicated where discussed.

Juror screens

Many interviewees felt the addition of one screen between two jurors at the jury bench was a positive improvement (previously jurors viewed evidence on a large screen mounted on the court wall). Court staff praised the high quality of the screens, noting how they made

evidence clearer to see. Some explained how the screens avoided having to move jurors when displaying evidence to ensure all had a good view.

"They'll have a much better view of the complainant as they're either giving their initial account to the police or they're being questioned by a live link or having a recording of the cross examination played back to them. So, they get a much clearer picture of what's been shown." - Court Staff, Newcastle

A few interviewees felt that screens also increased juror comfort, reducing the need for them to strain to see evidence displayed on screens high up in court rooms.

One Judge felt that jurors were less likely to be distracted when screens were closer, reducing the risk of missing evidence. A further Judge felt the screens would minimise distractions and make it easier to identify non-attentive jurors. These were hypothetical benefits as this Judge had not worked with the upgrades at time of interview.

Two other practitioners with no previous experience of the screens felt evidence delivered on closer screens would be more engaging, helping juries to stay focused.

Described benefits of the additional screens were primarily focused on the jury's experience. Interviewees suggested the additional screens were less relevant to victim-survivors. This was because victim-survivors may be giving evidence via live link so not aware of the presence of screens, or may be primarily concerned with their own experience rather than how well they are being seen and heard.

Only one interviewee linked the screens to victim-survivor experience; one ISVA suggested giving evidence may be less intimidating for their clients if they were made aware that evidence would be shown on smaller screens only, rather than the larger screens visible to the whole courtroom.

Audio improvements

Overall, interviewees were less aware of audio improvements. One Leeds ISVA reported improvements in microphone quality of the feed from the court room to the live link room. Two ISVAs reported the same in Snaresbrook. One Newcastle Judge felt the sound quality was better, provided the system was working, and one Newcastle WS practitioner reflected that they had received fewer reports of sound issues.

As with the additional jury screens, those who were not aware of the audio upgrades had them described by the interviewer. Again, reactions were in line with other feedback and felt that improvements to audio would be a positive change.

DAVE interface

The DAVE interface can be used, by court staff, to control the live video feed of the court received by a victim-survivor when giving evidence via live link. This can involve choosing which camera angle of the court room the victim-survivor is shown.

In Newcastle, one interviewee felt that the interface moved quicker between different camera angles available and that the camera quality was better, giving an overall better view for the victim-survivor.

The DAVE interface can also be used, by court staff and Judges, to control the display of evidence to the court room (e.g., what pieces of evidence are shown, when, and upon which screens). This is done via the DAVE control screen.

In Snaresbrook, court staff reported that the DAVE control screen was more visible and easier to use than the previous system, as the upgraded control panel was larger and replaced multiple panels with one. Another member of court staff felt that counsel sharing content now worked more reliably and attributed this to the DAVE interface.

One Judge reported the control of screens to be positive, as they could restrict which screens in court were displaying evidence. The Judge reported that this was beneficial as a victim-survivor's pre-recorded interview or cross-examination could now be shown only on juror's screens and not the large screens visible to the entire courtroom. Prior to this function, Judges would have to request that large screens displaying victim-survivor evidence were 'screened' so that defendants could not view them.

Perceived weaknesses of technology upgrades

As with positives of the upgrades, views on weaknesses were primarily provided by at-court practitioners as they were more likely to have interacted with or observed the upgrades.

Unreliable technology and staff training

Across all three Crown Courts, practitioners and Judges reported that the technology was temperamental, including the system crashing and restarting without warning. As with non-upgraded court technology, some rationalised these 'glitches' as part of using any technology, however the primary reaction was frustration at the issues. Some felt that the issues were unacceptable and happened too often, concluding that the upgrades were not meeting their expectations.

"I don't know if it's the software, the interaction between particularly counsel's computers [or] whether different computers have problems with linking into the system or whatever. But it is a frustration, I'm afraid to say." Judge, Newcastle

As with non-DAVE related technology issues, the main consequence of DAVE technology issues was the delay to trials which, in turn, caused distress to victim-survivors. Again, this

ranged from short delays to having to relocate the trial to an alternative court room. One Judge also spoke of the impact of delays on jurors, after having to send them on breaks multiple times to allow time for technology troubleshooting.

Another similarity in consequences of standard technology issues and DAVE technology issues was concern around disruption of evidence. Delays were thought to reduce the impact of evidence and, in some cases, require evidence to be repeated, which increased victim-survivors' distress. One interviewee expressed concern that these issues may reduce victim-survivors' confidence in proceedings.

"It doesn't give [them] a lot of confidence that we know what we're doing and that they are in safe hands." Usher, Newcastle

Some interviewees noted that their colleagues could lack confidence when using the DAVE system, linking this back to the training provision. In Leeds and Newcastle, court staff explained that one staff member was trained and cascaded this information further. In Snaresbrook, court staff reported having the system demonstrated to them. Regardless of training approach, most court staff felt that learning how to use DAVE was a 'trial and error' approach.

Digital Support Officer (DSO) staffing was raised as an issue when attempting to troubleshoot DAVE 'glitches'. One Judge spoke of high turnover in DSOs as a difficulty. Others brought up the high demand for DSOs, and the difficulty of DSOs covering dual roles (in some cases, as a clerk and a DSO).

Microphone sensitivity

Many interviewees were unaware of or had not noticed any changes in microphones. Of those who were aware, some reported that microphones were initially overly sensitive, picking up smaller sounds such as noise from counsel's gowns, and of witnesses moving on the stand. One ISVA reported that their client found this off-putting.

A few interviewees reported they had not noticed a difference in sound quality, and a few felt that microphone improvements would have little impact on victim-survivors.

Juror screens

Negative feedback on the juror monitors was limited to one interviewee working in Snaresbrook Crown Court. They felt that the screens took up too much space on the juror bench, obscuring views of witnesses and potentially causing injury by jurors accidentally knocking the arms the monitors are attached to. Court room layouts vary in Snaresbrook, and it was unclear whether these comments were related to one specific court room.

Technology improvements suggested by interviewees

Interviewees were asked whether they would like to see any further technology improvements for RASSO cases. A few responded that, as a baseline, the technology

available needed to work reliably. A few interviewees suggested audio improvements needed to be made across all courts, with one suggesting that backup lapel microphones should be available when other microphones fail. A few ISVAs suggested that facilitating remote observation would be beneficial to witnesses who had given evidence via live link but who wanted to observe the remainder of the trial. A few WCU officers suggested that technology that could facilitate giving evidence from home would be beneficial, especially for victim-survivors with high anxiety or mobility issues.

3.2 Facilities upgrades

Each SSVS Crown Court received different upgrades, completed by April 2023. Upgrades were determined by MoJ and Operations Managers based on each Court's requirements. As such, each Crown Court will be addressed in turn. Some time had elapsed between the upgrades and interviews, and other facilities upgrades had taken place in the interim. This meant that feedback on facilities upgrades was limited due to interviewees often being unable to discern which upgrades were part of SSVS.

Facilities upgrades at Leeds Crown Court

SSVS funding was used to refurbish existing witness suite rooms, including the provision of extra furniture, new blinds and new carpets. Leeds Crown Court received a second wave of funding which was used to relocate the witness suites to a new area of the building, creating brand new facilities. This second wave is out of scope for this research. These changes were taking place and were completed (although not open for use) during the interview period. As such, limited feedback on the smaller-scale refurbishment was gathered.

Perception of facilities upgrades at Leeds Crown Court

Only one interviewee offered feedback directly referencing new furniture, blinds and carpets. They described the new chairs as "nice" but expressed that the impact of changes to furnishings was limited by the surrounding space.

A few interviewees commented on the overall atmosphere of the witness suites. A member of court staff noted that they looked nicer following the upgrades. An ISVA reported they had had "no complaints or issues" from victim-survivors and found the waiting rooms to be "quite comfy".

Other interviewees explained that the witness suite environment was limited by the constraints of the building; capacity was restricted by small rooms, and rooms felt dark due to lack of natural light.

Facilities upgrades at Newcastle Crown Court

Newcastle Crown Court received a range of upgrades relating to accessibility and comfort. Four witness suite rooms and live link rooms were refurbished with new carpets, new chairs and coffee tables. The main witness suite waiting area was also redecorated and supplied with new furniture. One witness suite room was converted into an accessible toilet, and a wheelchair ramp was installed at the witness entrance to the witness suite. Fold down seats were installed in witness boxes, in replacement of existing seating.

Perceptions of facilities upgrades in Newcastle Crown Court

Many interviewees across professions (court staff, ISVAs, Judges, CPS and Witness Services) provided positive feedback on the changes to witness suite areas, describing how the area now felt cleaner, brighter, and more comfortable. One ISVA described the changes as “completely fresh” and that the space “felt so different”.

“It’s an inviting room that you’re happy to wait in whilst you’re waiting to give evidence” – ISVA, Newcastle

A small number of interviewees commented favourably on the addition of the accessible toilet. The conversion of a witness suite room to an accessible toilet was described as having impacted space and capacity but was seen as beneficial overall.

As with Leeds Crown Court, limitations to witness suite capacity were often described as a result of the age and layout of the building.

Awareness of the fold down seat in the witness box was limited. No interviewees were aware of the installation of a ramp at the witness’s entrance to the witness suite.

While discussing the ramp, many interviewees brought up broader difficulties with accessibility regarding the witness suite. Interviewees explained how the cobbled street outside the witness entrance created difficulties for those with walking aids or wheelchairs. Interviewees detailed how the lift from street level to the witness suite had been out of order for an extended period of time, resulting in victim-survivors having to use the ramp at the main entrance. The witness entrance is separate to the main entrance of the court building, in order to minimise the possibility of victim-survivors encountering the defendant when entering the building. By re-routing victim-survivors to the main entrance, the possibility of encountering the defendant significantly increases.

Facilities upgrades at Snaresbrook Crown Court

Snaresbrook Crown Court received a range of upgrades relating to witness privacy and accessibility. Fold down seats were installed in witness boxes, replacing existing seating, and new curtains were added to shield witnesses from the defendant when giving evidence. Blinds were fitted on doors leading into the court to prevent witnesses being

seen by defendants when waiting. A temporary ramp was installed to provide wheelchair access to the witness's entrance of the witness suite.

Perception of facilities upgrades at Snaresbrook Crown Court

Awareness of upgrades was mixed, with greatest awareness being of the curtains designed to shield witnesses in the court room. Interviewees were overall positive about this addition, explaining that the curtain was “easy to readjust”, and an improvement on previous screens that had to be “wheeled in”. A few interviewees felt that the curtains would help to reassure witnesses and make them feel safe when giving evidence.

“With a curtain, it's just so much easier, you just pull it back and forth. If a survivor changes their mind and decides they no longer want one or do want one, it's not a big deal – it's already there... I really think it makes a huge difference of just feeling safe, like someone's not accidentally going to see you if they move to the right” – WCU, Snaresbrook

Only a small number of interviewees were aware of blinds being installed on doors. One WCU officer had noticed them and felt they were “really good” as they prevented others from looking into the courtroom. Another WCU officer had seen them but had to ask for them to be lowered, describing them as “pointless” if they were not used as intended. One Judge was familiar with the blinds and had used them but was unsure whether witnesses would be aware of them, especially when giving evidence behind a screen.

Awareness of a folding chair in the witness box was limited. Only one member of court staff offered feedback and explained how the folding chair made it easier for witnesses to sit when they wanted to take a quick break.

No interviewees were aware of the ramp installed at the witness entrance to the witness suite. When discussing accessibility more broadly, interviewees explained there was a ramp at the main entrance to the court but that accessibility within the building was incredibly limited, with only ground floor courtrooms being potentially wheelchair accessible.

Possible impacts of upgrades on victim experience

As interviews with victim-survivors were not completed, it is not possible to draw direct conclusions on how any upgrades may have impacted a victim-survivor's experience. Practitioners who worked closely with victim-survivors were asked whether they felt upgrades would have affected victim-survivors, although this was limited further by practitioners themselves being unaware of changes.

Across all three Crown Courts, interviewees reflected that, while the upgrades were positive, they were unsure how much they influenced the victim-survivor experience. A common reason for this was that victim-survivors were inevitably nervous and, while

facilities upgrades can make environments more comfortable, this did not detract from the stress of giving evidence.

One interviewee described court as a “retraumatising setting.” Given this, victim-survivors were “so preoccupied with the evidence they’re there to give”, they are unlikely to notice the environment.

“Even in the best witness suite that you have in the world, when a witness is waiting to come to court and give her evidence, the anxiousness just goes through the roof” – Judge, Snaresbrook

Interviewees were not totally dismissive of the changes, suggesting that better environments may have subconscious impacts and that any improvement is worth making. One ISVA noted that increased comfort may mean victim-survivors are calmer and “able to take things in”. A member of court staff explained how rooms that look uncared for may make victim-survivors feel that their comfort isn’t being taken into consideration.

“I think probably subconsciously, if you're walking into a more inviting environment to give evidence, it's going to put you in a better mood than if you walk into some scabby old room that where everything's fallen to pieces and it's grim and dark and cold” – WCU, Newcastle

A few interviewees explained that how practitioners interacted with victim-survivors had a greater impact on a victim-survivor’s experience than facilities changes.

“It’s the people who deal with and help and support these witnesses and victims, rather than what’s around them that makes the real difference.” – Court staff, Leeds

Views on the impact of accessibility upgrades were limited, as many interviewees were unaware of the changes or felt that wider accessibility issues at court were creating a greater negative impact to victim-survivor’s experience.

Suggested facilities improvements

All interviewees were asked what further upgrades would improve the experience of attending Crown Court. Improvements to accessibility was mentioned by interviewees in all Crown Courts, as was the need for more room to increase capacity in witness suite waiting areas. These were acknowledged to be limited by building design.

Interviewees in all Crown Courts suggested providing distractions for victim-survivors to help manage anxiety, including magazines or books, fidget toys and a television.

Interviewees at Snaresbrook Crown Court recommended refurbishing the witness suite, describing issues with décor, heating and atmosphere. No witness suite upgrades were undertaken using SSVS funding at Snaresbrook.

3.3 Trauma-informed training

Background

The MoJ contracted the external provider ICENA to design a trauma-informed (TI) training programme to a range of practitioners. A one-day TI training session was delivered to court staff, WCU officers, CPS staff and WS staff and volunteers. Topics covered included survivor experience, trauma presentation, TI behaviour and communication, rape myths and stereotypes, trauma-responsive skills in practice and staff wellbeing.

Judges received a one-hour trauma-awareness session. This provided a shorter overview of the wider staff training, alongside impact of judicial conduct and leading a TI court environment.

Both types of sessions were delivered by ISVAs. The MoJ did not set specific guidelines for training attendance. Instead, practitioner group gatekeepers informed eligible staff that the training was available. Some interviewees reported that they opted to attend the training, while others received the training as a mandatory initiative.

The majority of interviewees had attended the TI training. Of those who had not, this was either because they did not recall receiving communication about the training, had previously received similar training so did not feel they would benefit further from attending, or who signed up to attend but could not due to difficulties with timing and staffing.

The majority of Judges attended the one-hour trauma awareness session. Both Newcastle Judges had not attended, as they had not received communication informing them of the session. Of these, one would have attended if they had known about the training, and the other would not on the basis that they felt the TI training they received regularly was thorough and up-to-date.

Table 2: Number of interviewees that took part in TI-Training by profession

	Court Staff	CPS	Witness Care Unit Officer	Witness Services	Judges*	Total
Yes	8	5	7	3	4	27
No	1	1	2	0	2	6
Total	9	6	9	3	6	33

**Judges were offered a 1-hour awareness session, whereas practitioners were offered a 1-day training course*

The majority of attendees felt that the training was relevant to their role, including Judges. Reasons for this included a desire to better support victims-survivors and a recognition that any learning relevant to victim-survivors' experience would be valuable.

In cases where the training was perceived as less relevant, this was often attributed to lower proximity to victim-survivors. For example, the majority of clerks interviewed felt that the training was not as relevant to them, due to their limited interactions with victim-survivors.

Training strengths

Training attendees were, overall, very positive about the training, reporting the day as being valuable and effective.

Facilitator delivery

Attendees were positive about the delivery of the training, praising facilitators for being engaging and informative. The training and the Judges' awareness session was delivered by ISVAs, who were able to speak from experience of closely supporting victims. This was described as a key reason why the sessions were so informative.

Interactive nature of training

Training attendees felt the 1-day training sessions benefitted from being interactive as this enabled sharing of experiences and perspectives, widening understanding across practitioner groups. For one interviewee, this reinforced that the training was not just theory-based.

The interactive design of the training also meant attendees could learn about other practitioners' jobs, and how they interact with victim-survivors. This allowed practitioners to

talk about different aspects of the victim-survivor journey and understand how actions by one organisation could affect workload and outcomes for other practitioners in later stages.

"I think it was really helpful because obviously we all have slightly different perspectives...I see it through a CPS employees' eyes, court staff see it through [their eyes]...we're all working towards the same aim of trying to make that process of giving evidence as comfortable as possible, but we all sort of see different hurdles to it, I suppose" – CPS, Leeds

Key Learning Points

Many attendees of the TI training highlighted an exercise where they listened to victims' testimonies of their experiences at court. These testimonies had been created by the training provider, in collaboration with victim-survivors. This exercise was identified as a particularly interesting section of the day, as it allowed attendees to understand a victim-survivor's journey.

"The victim's journey bit was good because those scenarios were real accounts given by people that had experienced the court process. Reading those, I could identify familiar things that I'd seen in people...So, I think that just highlighted a pattern in terms of people's' experience and what they feel [about] the criminal justice system as survivors." - CPS, Leeds

Attendees also reported that the testimonials helped reinforce that each victim-survivor is an individual, with unique experiences and requirements. Attendees noted that this can be easy to forget, especially when working in roles where sexual assault and rape cases are a common part of the workload.

A few attendees also described how they had learnt to choose their language more carefully when interacting with victim-survivors. For example, one WCU officer noted that they were now more aware of avoiding "police jargon and CPS terms".

There was also recognition of how the "bigger picture" could impact victim-survivors. The testimonials and interaction with other practitioners were attributed to helping attendees gain a deeper understanding of the whole Criminal Justice System (CJS), as well as reinforcing how important their individual roles were in the overarching process. A few noted how they now understood the importance of communicating across services to ensure the correct support is in place for victim-survivors.

The training also featured a section on rape myths and stereotypes⁴. This was identified as particularly interesting, especially regarding myth pervasiveness and generational

⁴ Rape myths and stereotypes are false beliefs about rape, the nature of rape, and the circumstances surrounding rape (Temkin et al., 2016). They include "prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists" (Burt, 1980).

differences in belief. In one case, an interviewee was surprised that other attendees were unaware of the myths and stereotypes, having expected this to be understood by all practitioners working on RASSO cases.

Some attendees felt they already held good knowledge of trauma and how it related to their work. This was because of previous training and/or experience from previous roles. Those who felt the training didn't offer any new information were still positive about the experience and reported feeling reassured that they were taking the right approach when interacting with victim-survivors.

"It reassured me that a lot of the things that we're doing are absolutely trauma, informed" – WS, Leeds

As part of the one-hour training, Judges were also played the victim-survivor testimonials. These were equally well received, with Judges finding value in hearing lived experience of victim-survivors.

"I found it really helpful in the training to hear what victims had actually said and why something hadn't been a good experience for them, because then you can get behind that and realise that, OK, I completely understand that. I would never have thought of that. But yeah, I can see now." – Judge, Leeds

Judges also appreciated how the training emphasised the importance of individual choice for victim-survivors. One Judge reflected the value of not assuming what would be best for one victim-survivor based on the experience of another.

"What I learnt was always make sure the witness has a choice at every stage... because...[choice] gives them power and authority back which the crime took away from them" – Judge, Snaresbrook

Half of the Judges who attended felt that the awareness session included information they had already known. However, they still had positive views overall and one acknowledged the benefit of having learning repeated.

Training weaknesses

While the majority of feedback for the TI training and TI awareness session was positive, interviewees reflected on some weaker aspects.

A few attendees of the one-day TI training fed back how they felt that the victim testimony was critical of their roles or actions. For example, one interviewee felt that negative aspects of victim-survivor experiences were being incorrectly attributed to their service. A member of court staff reflected that they, and other court staff on the training, felt "they were being almost accused or attacked".

There were concerns about how this influenced the learning from the training, with one interviewee reflecting that the key messages may be overlooked, with the attribution of negative experiences becoming the more memorable aspect. Another interviewee thought that fellow attendees feeling criticised prevented them from absorbing the learning. These insights could help shape future training. Those leading TI training should be made aware of the potential risks to engagement, and a dedicated session could be incorporated to prepare practitioners for such statements and reduce the likelihood of disengagement.

A few interviewees felt the booklet sent in advance of the training and used throughout was not needed, with one feeling that it created too much to do within their limited capacity. Another described how filling in the booklet disrupted engaging, useful discussions taking place during training.

A small number of full-day TI training attendees had reflections on the length of the training. A minority of clerks felt that training did not need to be a full day, with one commenting a half-day would have sufficed. It is worth noting these clerks also felt the training was not entirely relevant to them.

No Judges raised any concerns regarding their one-hour trauma awareness session.

Suggested training improvements

Interviewees were offered the chance to suggest any improvements they would make to the training. While most interviewees did not recommend changes, some suggested providing a refresher session after the initial training. Interviewees felt that this would remind them of the learning, helping them to embed it in their work.

At time of interview, an eLearning refresher session had been made available for HMCTS staff (from February 2025), although this was not explicitly asked about during interview and was not raised spontaneously by any interviewees.

A few interviewees also suggested additional training material they thought could be beneficial. A few felt that content covering vicarious trauma would be useful, in recognition of practitioners' exposure to traumatic events throughout their work.

"We have to deal with these awful cases every day and... nothing's put in place for us, and the horrible things we have to hear and how we have to cope with it and be neutral" – Court staff, Snaresbrook

Two Judges offered feedback regarding refresher training. One Judge felt it would be beneficial for practitioners who were more passive in their learning, and who needed to be encouraged to learn, but recognised practitioners' time constraints could limit success. Another Judge felt that the awareness-session they received should be repeated because of the value of hearing the experiences of victims-survivors/witnesses.

"I certainly think it's something you shouldn't just have once. It should be repeated, whether annually or biannually because you can't hear enough how what you do affects people in your courtroom." Judge, Snaresbrook

While Judges received a workbook for the training, one Judge suggested a written resource that acted like a "cheat sheet" of tips would be beneficial. This could be referred to when helping support witnesses during trial, especially when balancing the many competing demands of the court room.

As part of suggested improvements, many interviewees offered ideas on other suitable training attendees. The most frequently mentioned group was barristers, both prosecution and defence. This was based on interviewees' own observations of barristers' interactions with victim-survivors both outside of the trial and during questioning.

One Judge felt that prosecution barristers would benefit more than defence, as prosecution barristers interacted with victim-survivors before and after the trial. Ultimately, they thought that if all barristers had the training, it would "improve the way they ask the questions, which can only be a good thing for everybody".

RASSO CPS staff also felt that barristers would benefit from the training. One CPS employee felt that reviewing lawyers making charging decisions would benefit from a deeper understanding of trauma. They offered the hypothetical example of reviewing lawyers using incorrect stereotypes regarding victim trauma responses⁵ to inform their decisions on whether to charge a case or not; it was hypothesised that potentially ill-informed decisions could be avoided through education on the reality of trauma responses.

A few attendees of the full-day training were unaware Judges had been offered an hour-long awareness session, and suggested the training would be beneficial for the judiciary. In some cases, this was based on interviewees' experiences with Judges, where they felt actions taken were not trauma informed. On the other hand, one interviewee described the Judges they worked with as "brilliant" but felt that they would still benefit from the one-day session.

⁵ Rape Crisis England and Wales describes five types of trauma responses: fight, flight, freeze, flop and friend. Fight involves physically and verbally fighting, flight involves the individual putting distance between themselves and danger, freeze involves going still; flop involves going still and muscles becoming loose, and friend involves calling a friend or bystander by help and /or negotiating with the dangerous person (Rape Crisis England and Wales, n.d.)

A small number of interviewees felt that security staff should have been offered the training, particularly as they can be the first person a victim-survivor interacts with in the court building, and searches may present a difficulty for victim-survivors⁶.

Evidence of behavioural change

Interviewees were asked if they had identified any changes to their behaviour, or to their colleagues' behaviour since the TI training. Several noted that they, or those they worked with, were now more confident and capable when interacting with victim-survivors. A few members of court staff reflected that this was evident when speaking with distressed victim-survivors, as beforehand they may not have known what to say to help. One ISVA explained they felt that ushers' approach and responses to victim-survivors had improved.

An attitudinal shift was also noted by one WS interviewee, who reported that WS volunteers were now "more empathetic" towards victim-survivors.

A few interviewees described ways they, or their colleagues, had incorporated learnings about trauma types and rape myths into their work. One CPS interviewee described how their deeper understanding of trauma had influenced how they talk with victims. Another CPS interviewee recalled noting peers naming trauma responses when discussing victim-survivor behaviour.

"The first thing a CPS lawyer will say is "how do they come across in their video recorded interview?"...but I think since the trauma training and CPS hearing that not all trauma looks the same means [they know] just because they're not in hysterics doesn't mean that they're not feeling how they're saying"- WCU, Snaresbrook

One WCU officer observed colleagues showing greater awareness of rape myths and being more confident challenging them. Another WCU officer felt similarly, reflecting a positive shift towards more "sensitivity" and away from victim blaming.

Other changes included being more conscious of language and tone used when talking to victim-survivors.

"If I'm talking to a victim or witness, not to use the term allegation because sometimes that can give off the wrong [connotations] when speaking to them, because that would make them think that...we're not taking it seriously" – WCU, Newcastle

⁶ The MoJ did explore training security staff but were unable to actualise this as security staff are not HMCTS employees.

Two WCU officers spoke of the importance of explaining processes to the victim-survivor, so they could understand why certain actions like requesting medical records were being undertaken. This increase in transparency was perceived as a way to help keep the victim-survivor engaged in the process.

The majority of Judges were able to describe direct actions they had taken in response to the trauma awareness session. This included ensuring victim-survivors were given choices; one Judge described how they were now more "pushy" when making sure barristers had checked, rather than assumed, victim-survivor preferences. Another Judge said they now always gave victim-survivors the choice to meet them before the trial.

Judges also spoke of having an increased awareness of the victim-survivor experience. This resulted in them explaining the process (particularly of cross-examination) in greater depth to victim-survivors, and being able to better identify when a victim-survivor was distressed. One Judge explained how they were more aware of victim-survivors' reactions that may be incorrectly interpreted by the jury and described the steps they took to counter this.

"We of course explained to the jury about myths and stereotypes and, you know, not every victim reacts the same way...sometimes there can be nervous giggles and the defence are going to jump up and say she's lying and I simply say look, we've all before been in situations where we found something uncomfortable and nervous and our reaction sometimes is to giggle at it and pass it off" – Judge, Snaresbrook

While several interviewees felt there had been behavioural changes as a result of the training, many had not observed changes. This was often because interviewees felt their colleagues were already working in a way that demonstrated an understanding of trauma. It was also because interviewees had limited opportunities to observe how others interacted with victim-survivors, or often did not interact with victim-survivor themselves.

Perceptions of a trauma-informed approach

Interviewees were asked about their broader understanding of a TI approach, including what would help or hinder it being embedded at Crown Court.

Barriers

When asked what would hinder a TI approach being embedded, court staff, ISVAs and a CPS interviewee identified time as a limiting factor. Lack of time was seen to prevent reflection on behaviour and practice across practitioner groups or even prevent TI practice being applied in the first place.

"[You've] just got to move on to the next – it's like a continuous conveyor belt, sadly" - court staff, Snaresbrook

Interviewees also felt that "stale attitudes" towards RASSO victims, and becoming "hardened" to RASSO cases, prevented a TI approach from being taken at court. A few interviewees reflected that some practitioners may not perceive a TI approach to be relevant to them, or something for them to enact, resulting in a lack of engagement with relevant learning.

Interviewees felt that the presence of rape myths and a misunderstanding of trauma among jurors could inhibit a TI approach. While some of the Judges interviewed discussed their efforts to educate juries on trauma and rape myths, and a few practitioners gave examples of times they felt Judges had provided relevant information to jurors, there was an overall sentiment that jurors did not know enough about trauma.

A few practitioners suggested jurors should receive the TI training. However, other practitioners wondered whether it could be perceived as unduly influencing the jury. Others reflected that it may be too time intensive to offer jury members the TI training. One CPS interviewee suggested instead that information could be provided as part of juror information packs.

Enablers

Interviewees also had views on what would help embed a TI approach in court. As previously discussed, a few interviewees felt that further training and subsequent refresher sessions would be beneficial.

Two interviewees explained how improved communication between practitioners would help enable a TI approach. One felt that smoother communication would result in fewer barriers to meeting victim-survivor needs, while another felt that a greater understanding of each other's roles, created through more regular communication, would help to reinforce the importance of working together to meet victim-survivor needs.

4. Summary and considerations

4.1 Summary

The primary aim of this research was to explore SSVS upgrades in Leeds, Newcastle and Snaresbrook Crown Courts. Practitioners were interviewed regarding what had worked well and what needed further improvement.

The interview findings demonstrate how SSVS measures were generally positively received by practitioners, although implementation had not always been straightforward.

Technology upgrades were viewed as a positive change when working, but their use had been impacted by technical issues. This, in turn, could create greater stress for victim-survivors when trials were delayed as a result of technical issues.

Facilities upgrades were also viewed as a positive change. Where witness suites were upgraded, they were thought to be more comfortable spaces and accessibility upgrades were seen as beneficial. Practitioners reported a limit on how far these changes could improve the victim-survivor experience, given the inherently stressful nature of attending Crown Court.

Awareness of technology and facilities upgrades was mixed. This may have limited the impact of upgrades, as practitioners were not able to make use of them. Alternatively, lack of awareness could suggest the upgrades did not make a difference large enough to be noticed by practitioners who had not been made formally aware of changes.

The TI-training and awareness sessions received overwhelmingly positive feedback. Feedback suggests that the sessions met their original aim, as practitioners described how they felt more equipped to provide support to victim-survivors. Some practitioners described how they had changed their behaviour as a result of the training. These direct behavioural changes may suggest that it is interactions between practitioners and victim-survivors that make the greatest difference to a victim-survivor's experience in the criminal justice system.

4.2 Considerations

1. For existing SSVS courts, **practitioners should be made aware of the technology and facilities upgrades**. This will allow RASSO cases to benefit from the upgraded technology and will mean that victim-survivors with accessibility

needs can utilise facilities such as accessibility ramps and fold down seats in witness boxes.

2. In future, all government initiatives on improving the victim-survivor experience should be **clearly communicated to relevant practitioners** to maximise their use and impact.
3. Given that the measure with the largest described impact was the trauma-informed training, this measure (or equivalent) **should be prioritised for roll-out across all Crown Courts.**
4. **Court staff, CPS staff, WCU officers and WS staff and volunteers across all Crown Courts would benefit from this training** as it could help to improve awareness of trauma and provide improved support to RASSO victim-survivors. If possible, prosecution and defence barristers, and security staff should receive the training too.
5. The lack of victim-survivor insight was a key limitation of this report. When designing future RASSO support initiatives, or evaluating future, alternative policies, **research teams should prioritise the recruitment of victim-survivors for participation in research.**

Bibliography

Burt, M. R. (1980). Cultural myths and supports for rape. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 38, 217-230.

George, R., & Ferguson, S. (2021). *Review into the Criminal Justice system response to adult rape and serious sexual offences across England and Wales: Research report*. Home Office and Ministry of Justice. Retrieved from [Review into the Criminal Justice System response to adult rape and serious sexual offences across England and Wales: Research Report](#)

Ministry of Justice. (2022). *Press release: New pilots to boost support for rape victims in court*. Retrieved from [New pilots to boost support for rape victims in court - GOV.UK](#)

Ministry of Justice. (2025). *Criminal court statistics quarterly: January to March 2025*. Retrieved from [Criminal court statistics quarterly: January to March 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

Rape Crisis England & Wales. (n.d.). *Understanding your response: Fight or flight*. Retrieved from <https://rapecrisis.org.uk/get-help/tools-for-victims-and-survivors/understanding-your-response/fight-or-flight/>

Temkin, J., Gray, J. & Barrett, J. (2016). Different functions of rape myth use in court: Findings from a trial observation study. *Feminist Criminology*, 13(2), 205-226.

Annex A: Sample of interview questions for practitioners

General

Could you tell me a little bit about your role?

In which court are you based?

Are you often in Crown Court?

How would you describe the interactions you have with victim-survivors of rape or sexual assault?

Technology/DAVE

Can you describe your / your clients experience of the technology available at court in RASSO cases?

What technology is used the most?

Has the technology changed over the time you've been in your role?

Had you noticed the DAVE upgrades before hearing about them today?

Were you made aware of these changes?

How were the upgrades to technology communicated to you? And how did you feel about the communication?

Did this communication provide enough information to allow you to inform the victim of their options at court? Why?

(If not aware of changes) If you had known about these changes, is this something you would or wouldn't have discussed with victim-survivors?

What is your experience of how these changes have been implemented?

In your experience or from what you have heard from clients, have the upgrades to sound, microphones and screens worked as you would expect them to?

What has your experience been when interacting with the technology?

How reliable or unreliable have you found the technology to be? Why?

Have there been any logistical issues with using the technology?

If yes: how did these issues impact the experience of the victim-survivor?

How would you describe the availability of the technology when you/your client has needed to use it?

Are you involved in any pre-trial visits?

(If involved) How do you think the upgrades to technology have impacted the court experience of victim-survivors when organising and conducting the pre-trial visit?

How do you think the upgrades have impacted the court experience of victim-survivors when victims are giving evidence?

How do you think the upgrades have influenced the quality of evidence victim-survivors are able to give?

Have there or have there not been noticeable changes to victim-survivor's experience of giving evidence before and after the upgrades? Could you give an example?

Is there anything else (in particular relating to court) you feel have been impacted by the upgrades?

Facilities

Had you noticed the upgrades before hearing about them today?

Were you made aware of these changes?

How were these changes communicated to you?

How did you feel about this communication?

How would you describe the impact of the facility upgrades on the comfort of the victims? What kind of views and experiences have your clients expressed to you around these?

To what extent have these upgrades met the accessibility needs of victim-survivors?

Can you think of examples where needs may or may not have been met?

What are your thoughts on the facilities available to come into court?

What are your thoughts on the witness care suite?

Can you think of any examples of facilities you would change to improve the experience of victim-survivors?

Is there anything else you would like to highlight about the facilities available at court in relation to victims-survivors' experiences?

Trauma-informed training

Were you offered the TI training, and did you attend the session?

How did you find out about the session?

How effectively was information about the session communicated beforehand?

How would you assess the delivery of the session?

Do you feel there was good take up of the session?

Was your session attended by different practitioner groups? Did this impact the training?

Were there particular features of the training you thought were most relevant to better support for victims at crown court?

Where there any particular features of training you thought were less relevant to better support for victims at court?

Overall, were there any particularly good aspects to the training?

Overall, were there any particularly negative aspects to the training?

Do you have any suggestions for improvements to the training?

Have you noticed any changes in how other practitioners have interacted with victim-survivors since the training?

To what extent do you think these changes have impacted victims' experiences at court?

Are there any changes you expected to see in other practitioners and have not yet seen?

For practitioners that attended, do you think the training will or won't lead to a more trauma-informed approach when working with RASSO victims?

What, if anything, would be a barrier to embedding a trauma informed approach at court, across practitioners interacting with victim-survivors?

What, if anything, would enable embedding a trauma informed approach at court, across practitioners interacting with victim-survivors?

Specialist Sexual Violence Support Measures:
A qualitative assessment in Leeds, Newcastle and Snaresbrook Crown Courts



© Crown copyright 2024

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

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

