

# 2017 COURT USER SURVEY

## A summary of findings

We commissioned Colmar Brunton, an independent market research company, to complete the 2017 Court User Survey in May 2017. The survey is designed to measure user experience and satisfaction with the frontline services and facilities provided by the Ministry at court sites. This year's findings are generally positive and help to ensure the voice of our customers are at the centre of improvements we make. This factsheet summarises the survey results.

The survey interviewed a sample of court users at a particular point in time and at particular locations. As a result, please keep in mind that findings from the survey are based on 'court user survey respondents' rather than 'all court users'.

### Main findings

- Overall satisfaction with services and facilities continues to be high with 81% of respondents reporting that they were either satisfied or very satisfied.
- The most important driver of court user satisfaction was feeling safe; 90% reported that they felt safe.
- 90% of respondents observed court security staff at the court entrance.
- Start and finish times of hearings is an area identified that is of importance to our customers. 56% were either very satisfied or fairly satisfied with the convenience of the court hearing start and finish time.
- The length of time waiting to be served at a counter in a court has increased from 2014. 53% of court users were served immediately, 34% had to wait up until six minutes, and 13% longer than six minutes.
- Staff continue to rate highly on aspects of treating court users fairly and doing what they say they would, along with helpfulness, and competency (over 80% rate these four aspects positively).

### Satisfaction with services and facilities remains high

Respondents were asked overall how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with the services and facilities provided:

- Eight out of 10 continue to be satisfied with court services and facilities. Satisfaction varied by the frequency and purpose of visit.
- The more highly satisfied are more likely to be less frequent visitors, older, in paid employment or retired, visiting to deal with a fine or reparation or attending a Youth Court case. Christchurch court users are also especially satisfied.
- Less satisfied court users are more likely to be frequent visitors, unemployed, accused of an offence, visiting for criminal/youth/traffic cases, and/or visiting to take part in a hearing or case.
- Since 2014, overall satisfaction has increased for Auckland District, Hamilton and Christchurch courts.

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## Experience with staff was generally positive

Five of the top 7 drivers of overall satisfaction relate to our staff. Staff delivering a tailored service and being easily identifiable, are important to our court users.

- 67% of respondents had contact with court staff on their visit.
- 74% are satisfied with the overall quality of service delivery to some extent, but only 40% are very satisfied.
- Since 2014, we have seen small but significant declines in favourable ratings of staff treating customers fairly and doing what they say they would. However, customers continued to rate staff highly on these aspects, along with staff helpfulness, and competency (over 80% rate these four aspects positively).
- Staff were rated somewhat lower for taking individual circumstances into account – especially from those who took part in a case (74%) and support people (72%).
- 71% were satisfied that easily identifiable staff were available – this attribute is a moderately strong driver of overall satisfaction.

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## Knowledge and information before coming to court

Most communication received from courts (prior to the visit) is considered to be fit for purpose.

- A letter (38%) and a courts summons (18%) were the most common types of information received prior to the court visit.
- 77% were satisfied with the information
- Most court users who received information found it easy to understand (around nine in 10 users rated most of the types of information positively).

- 43% of court users sought more information before coming to court, up from 40% in 2014. Perceived ease of getting this information has improved since 2014, with 63% rating this as 'very' or 'fairly' easy.
- 70% of court users reported visiting a website other than the Ministry of Justice website to find information.
- Most court users knew what time to come to court (86%), however, there is less certainty about what to do when they got there (75%).
- Communication preferences are increasingly shifting towards electronic mediums, email now sits at 34% and text messages at 26%. Preference for more traditional channels has declined since 2014 – telephone (now at 29%), letter (26%), and face-to-face contact at court (24%).

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## At court

- Nine of out 10 of respondents (90%) observed court security staff at the court entrance, and 15% of respondents observed court security in the court room.
- In total 83% of respondents who observed court security said security staff were approachable.
- A large majority (90%) found it easy to find where to go in the courthouse. Use of notice boards has increased since 2014, reflecting the increased use of electronic noticeboards in courts.
- 12% said they had difficulties getting information or assistance at court. These customers were most commonly looking for information about who they needed to see and where to go.
- Perceived ease of getting information has improved since 2014 (now sitting at 63% for 'very' or 'fairly' easy). However, few gave a rating of 'very easy' (just 21%).
- 56% were satisfied with the times that court hearings start and finish.
- 42% said they would find evening hearings convenient.

- Court users visiting a counter are less likely to be served immediately in 2014 (now sitting at only 53%).
- Little change is evident in wait times for a hearing since 2014. In 2017, 61% waited from less than 5 minutes to up to an hour.
- Long wait times are associated with low overall satisfaction. Only 58% of those waiting longer than 15 minutes for a counter are satisfied with the services and facilities provided at court and only 52% of those waiting longer than 3 hours for a hearing are satisfied.

However, court users facing these wait times are a small minority in the overall population (only 3% of court users wait for these lengths of time).

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## Staff contact (and Common Measurements Tool questions)

Around two thirds (67%) of respondents had contact with court staff on their visit. This compares with 66% in 2014 and 63% in 2012.

### RATING OF STAFF CONTACT (USING COMMON MEASUREMENTS TOOL QUESTIONS)

As part of the questions about staff contact, respondents were asked to agree or disagree with several statements about court staff, using a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 was strongly disagree and 5 was strongly agree).

The questions are drawn from the Common Measurements Tool ('CMT'), which is a set of State Services Commission endorsed standardised questions used to measure satisfaction with public services.

Most court users agreed (either 4 or 5 out of 5) that:

- They were treated fairly (89%).
- Staff were helpful (88%).
- Staff were competent (87%).
- Staff did what they said they would (83%).
- Their individual circumstances were taken into account (78%).

Somewhat fewer agreed that the interaction represented 'good value for tax dollars spent' (63% agreed).

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## Expectations of service

All court users who had contact with staff were asked what service they expected, and what service they received. These questions are also drawn from the CMT (described above).

- Nearly two thirds (64%) expected good service. Just over a quarter expected a 'middling' level of service, and only 8% expected a 'poor' service
- Just over six in ten (63%) said the service was better than expected, nearly three in ten (29%) said the service was in line with their expectations and 8% said the service was worse than they expected.
- In total 92% of court users had their expectations met, similar to previous years.

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## Information on the survey and participants

2,044 face-to-face interviews were conducted with members of the public aged 16 years or older who visited one of the eight selected courts during the dates fieldwork was conducted. This included members of the public attending court in relation to cases or seeking information from the court, and the people supporting them.

Interviewers approached people waiting for their hearing or case to take place or when the user exited the court building. Quotas were set to ensure a minimum of 200 interviews per court location. Final numbers achieved are shown in table 1 below.

**Table 1 – Sample sizes at each court location**

Court location	Sample size
Total sample	<b>2,044</b>
Auckland District Court	304
Manukau	291
North Shore	258
Hamilton	283
Tauranga	228
Wellington	250
Christchurch	228
Dunedin	202

The 2017 survey profile was weighted so that it was similar to the 2014 profile (in terms of location, reason for visit to court and jurisdiction). This ensures that differences between the 2017 and 2014 survey results are likely to be the result of real changes rather than the result of the profile of survey respondents changing.

## PROFILE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

### REASON FOR VISIT

Compared to 2014 there has been an increase in respondents who were visiting as accused in a criminal case (28% vs 23%).

### FREQUENCY OF VISIT

Respondents were asked how many times they had visited a courthouse in the city/town they were interviewed in. A quarter (26%) were using the court building for the first time. Most court users (74%) had been at the court building at least once before. A sizeable proportion (16%) had visited more than twelve times before.

### LIMITATIONS

It should be noted that findings represent survey respondents. This survey only represents a sample of court users (adjusted by interview targets that ensured minimum numbers of interviews for particular types of court user), conducted at eight particular courts during one month of fieldwork in 2017.

The sample may not be representative of all users of New Zealand courts. This should be taken into account when interpreting the findings.