

Family Law User Satisfaction Survey

RESULTS 2011

Better understanding ... Better delivery

DECEMBER 2011

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1 Executive summary

This section contains an executive summary of the user survey and identified areas of improvement.

The Family Court and the Federal Magistrates Court have voluntarily adopted the International Framework for Court Excellence. In the search for 'excellence' in delivery of customer service it is important to consider the needs and perceptions of all court users. One of the key initiatives to better understand the needs and perceptions of court users has been the development of this user satisfaction survey.

The intention is that the research will provide robust measurement of users' perceptions of their court visit and experience that can be re-evaluated on an ongoing basis to determine if satisfaction levels are changing and to identify any areas for improvement.

The findings of the research are presented in this report. This document has been prepared for both internal court use and externally by relevant stakeholders.

The survey process was undertaken with the support of the judiciary and senior management. Thanks is extended to all the students and the volunteers who assisted with the survey and the registry staff who coordinated the survey process.

The user survey involved 13 family law registries where judicial officers are resident. It was undertaken by volunteers who interviewed a sample of 1322 court users. It has qualitative and quantitative elements. The quantitative research consists of 45 questions. Each question contained a quantitative element and where clarification was sought there was a qualitative element.

The first part of the user survey sought to develop a profile of the interviewees and provide a context for the second part of the survey.

The demographic of the interviewee, excluding lawyers and paralegals, considered age, gender, income, language, education and marital status. The demographic provided a clearer profile of the interviewee but had little impact on the research findings of the interviewee's court experience.

The variables that impacted the research findings in the second part of the survey were:

- role of the interviewee e.g. lawyer, applicant or respondent
- frequency of visits to the courts – first time, several times or regular visitor to the courts, and
- matter heard e.g. divorce proceedings, final/ interim orders or other matter.

Nearly half the interviewees were applicants (32%) and respondents (15%) and a quarter (24%) were lawyers. Just over half the interviewees (54%) were at the courts for final or interim orders, a quarter (25%) were present for divorce proceedings.

Over half of the interviewees (excluding lawyers or paralegals) (56%) attended the courts several times this year. Over one-in-ten (13%) were more regular visitors to the courts and nearly a third (31%) were first time visitors. The interviewees had either attended the Federal Magistrates Court (43%) or Family Court (44%) or both (3%).

The second part of the user survey provided an insight into the court user's visit or experience in court. Overall, interviewees were very complimentary of their experience at the Family Law Courts. General satisfaction with their recent court experience was high with 86 per cent of the interviewees expressing satisfaction with their visit to the courts.

Those who were most likely to be unfamiliar with the courts and their procedures, that is, those for whom being at the courts was not a part of their day-to-day role, were more likely to be dissatisfied with the experience. Lawyers therefore had the highest satisfaction rates (93%), followed by applicants (85%) and respondents (79%).

The frequency of their visit to the courts by those for whom being at the courts was not a part of their day-to-day role, was also more likely to have an impact on their satisfaction levels. First time visitors tended to be more satisfied (90%) than those who attended court several times per year (83%). The frequent court users were significantly less satisfied (67%) with their visit to court.

The type of matter heard also impacted the overall satisfaction with the courts. Divorce proceedings were more likely to result in higher satisfaction levels (92%). Orders and 'other' matters that are more substantive and less predictable in time had relatively lower satisfaction levels (85% and 84% respectively).

The courts' key strengths are staff, judicial officers and the court buildings and facilities...

Based on the quantitative data, overall the areas where the courts performed best, where interviewees were most satisfied were:

- The court building was easy to find and navigate (92% agreed or strongly agreed)
- Felt safe in the courtroom or court environment (95% agreed or strongly agreed)
- In general, satisfied with the service provided by the various staff and judicial officers (92% agreed or strongly agreed)
- Treated by staff professionally and respectfully and answered queries promptly (94% agreed or strongly agreed).

Satisfaction with the courts' experience was overall very high (86%) although frequent court attendees satisfaction was the lowest at 67%...

The findings vary depending upon role of interviewee, frequency of visits to court and matter heard...

Despite the courts' overall high levels of satisfaction, there were several areas of improvement identified. These were areas where less than three quarters of the interviewees agreed or strongly agreed. These included:

- Forms required were clear and easy to understand (73% agreed or strongly agreed)
- Matter took the time you were expecting (65% agreed or strongly agreed) – respondent was least satisfied (56%), applicant little more satisfied (63%) and lawyer was more satisfied (75%)
- Matter started on time (66% agreed or strongly agreed)
- Clarity as to what was to happen at the court on the day (77% agreed or strongly agreed) but when we delve further it is the respondents that were insufficiently clear about what was to happen (only 65% agreed or strongly agreed). Whereas, lawyers were extremely satisfied (91%) and applicants had relatively high satisfaction levels (82%)
- National Enquiry Centre (NEC) was helpful and professional (66%) and quick and responsive (56% agreed or strongly agreed).

Overall, the results across the board in the above areas were consistently indicating that lawyers were the most satisfied, respondents least satisfied and applicants were somewhere in the middle. The only exception was in respect of the NEC where lawyers provided their lowest satisfaction rates from all areas surveyed.

Further, the results indicated those interviewees involved in divorce proceedings would be more satisfied with the aspect in question, whereas the interviewee with final/interim orders and other matters was more likely to be far less satisfied with the aspect in question.

The frequency of attendance at court also impacted the results. The more frequently a user attended the courts the lower the satisfaction level. First time users were most satisfied and then several time users. Frequent users' were least satisfied with the aspect of the court experience in question.

Lawyers were most satisfied user group and respondents, esp. frequent users were least satisfied...

Areas for improvement

Better management of the respondent frequent user

If the courts are targeting customer service then the findings indicate that the respondent and regular visitor needs extra care and management. Overall, they were the most dissatisfied user group.

The key areas for improvement identified are based on the qualitative results. If the satisfaction level of the applicable interviewees is below three-quarters (75%) then these findings have been identified as requiring further consideration by the courts.

Better management of expectations about day in court

In respect of the user's day in court, there were several key areas for improvement:

- Better management of expectations of what will happen next in particular in respect of the expectations of the respondent and applicant.
- Better management of expectations of the time a matter will take – in order of priority, in respect of the expectations of the respondent, applicant and lawyer.

- Better management of expectations of the time a matter will take – in order of priority, in respect of the expectations of the respondent, applicant and lawyer.
- Better management of the respondent and frequent users' perceptions of the handling of their case.
- Better management of start times – in respect of the expectation of the respondent, applicant and lawyer.

Tailor information

- Better management about what was to happen at court, in particular in respect of the respondent.
- Simplify the courts' forms for respondents and applicants.
- Improve the user friendliness of the Portal and websites from the respondents and applicants perspective.
In respect of the websites the navigation needs to be improved so that respondents and applicants can easily find the forms required and information they need quickly.
- Improve the service provided by NEC from the perspective of the lawyers and respondents.
Consideration needs to be given to all service aspects from helpfulness and professionalism to the speed of response.

The results of the user survey have been disseminated throughout the courts. The courts are already addressing several areas of improvement:

- **Forms:** the courts recognise the continuing need to simplify the forms and are addressing this on an ongoing basis.
- **NEC:** the courts are addressing the concerns and responsiveness of NEC. The courts have recently introduced an initiative to ensure lawyers have a dedicated phone line for the NEC. The reduction of wait times for applicants and respondents using this service also needs to be addressed.

Overall, the courts' satisfaction levels are extremely high. The areas for improvement have been identified and the search for excellence in delivering user services is an ongoing process for the courts. These user survey results can now become the benchmark for future years.

2 Background and scope

This section outlines the background to the user survey, its scope and understanding of the research objectives.

The Family Court of Australia (FCoA) and Federal Magistrates Court of Australia* (FMC) are federal courts responsible for family law matters in all states and territories except Western Australia.

In order to assist the courts achieve their goals of delivering excellence in service for children, families and parties, the International Framework for Court Excellence has been adopted.

The International Framework for Court Excellence (the Framework) was developed by an international consortium consisting of groups and organisations from Europe, Asia, Australia, and the United States. The signatories who represent the International Consortium for Court Excellence include:

- Australian Institute for Judicial Administration (Australia and NZ)
- The Federal Judicial Centre (USA)
- The National Centre for State Courts (USA)
- The Subordinate Courts of Singapore.

They developed a framework of values, concepts and tools by which courts worldwide can voluntarily assess and improve the quality of justice and court administration they deliver.

Specifically, the Framework represents a resource for assessing a court's performance against seven detailed areas of court excellence and provides clear guidance for courts intending to improve their performance.

* This survey did not include the General Federal Law jurisdiction of the FMC.

The seven key areas are:

- 1 Court management and leadership
- 2 Court policies
- 3 Human, material and financial resources
- 4 Court proceeds
- 5 Client needs and satisfaction
- 6 Affordable and accessible court services
- 7 Public trust and confidence.

The courts have multiple initiatives already in progress to address each of these seven key areas of court excellence. The user survey addresses the fifth area of excellence, being client needs and satisfaction.

The Framework considers one of the important aspects of the 'search for excellence' in that it takes the needs and perceptions of court users into account. Court users include but may not be limited to members of the public using the services of the courts (e.g. applicant, respondent, witnesses, those seeking information or assistance from court staff etc.) and professional partners (lawyers, paralegals/ filing clerks, court experts and court interpreters).

The Framework considers that the measures must address not only the level of satisfaction with the outcome of the court proceeding, but also the level of satisfaction with how the parties, witnesses and lawyers were treated by the judicial officers and court staff; the (perceived) expertise of the judicial officers and staff; and the fairness and understandability of court procedures and decisions. The information gathered can then be used to improve the quality and processes provided by the courts.

One of the key initiatives of the courts to better understand the needs and perceptions of the court users has been the development of the user satisfaction survey.

Scope and research objectives of the user survey

The user satisfaction survey measures the level of satisfaction of all court users including parties, witnesses, lawyers, experts and interpreters.

The scope of the user survey does not include an evaluation of the user satisfaction with decisions of judicial officers.

The intention is that the research will provide measurement of the users' perception of the service to identify areas for improvement. The user survey is also a tool for ongoing annual benchmarking, measurement and improvement.

3 Research methodology

This section outlines the background of the various aspects of the research methodology.

The user survey combines both quantitative and qualitative research. The following outlines the process for the development and delivery of the user survey including the location and sample size. Recommendations for ongoing measurement are also outlined.

Process for development of user survey

Questions for the user survey were developed with consideration of the key issues that the courts sought to explore in respect of the needs and perceptions of court users. In addition, reference was made to previous Australian and international research of court users. Feedback was also sought from the judiciary and registries.

There are 45 questions in the user survey. Each question contains a quantitative element and where clarification is sought there is a qualitative element.

The user survey is as follows:

- **Part 1** – 18 questions about the court users:

Primarily quantitative research covering general demographics, developing a profile of the interviewees and providing a context for the second part of the survey. There was also a qualitative component to enable clarification of exceptions so that more accurate user profiles could be developed.

- **Part 2** – 27 questions about the court users' visit or experience in court.

The quantitative data is collected from a sample size of 1322. The quantitative results that are presented as the percentage of interviewees that 'agreed and strongly agreed' have been rounded off to the nearest whole number. It was not considered necessary to maintain percentages to two decimal points as this would not contribute to the quality of the measurement.

The qualitative component is found more particularly in Part 2 of the user survey. The qualitative information clarifies the expectations about the users' court visit or experience in court and supports the quantitative data collected.

Process for delivery of the user survey

It was determined that the best approach for the user survey was through one-on-one consultation with court users. Each consultation was based on the same set of survey questions about the demographics of the user and feedback on several issues about their day in court. In addition, there was scope for feedback on areas for improvement and comments.

One hundred university students and volunteers from around the country were invited to assist with the surveying.

The user survey simultaneously took place over the month of July 2011.

The interviewees were randomly selected users. If a user agreed to be surveyed, the volunteer would undertake the survey and document the responses. The volunteers and court staff assisted with the input of responses online into 'SurveyMonkey'.

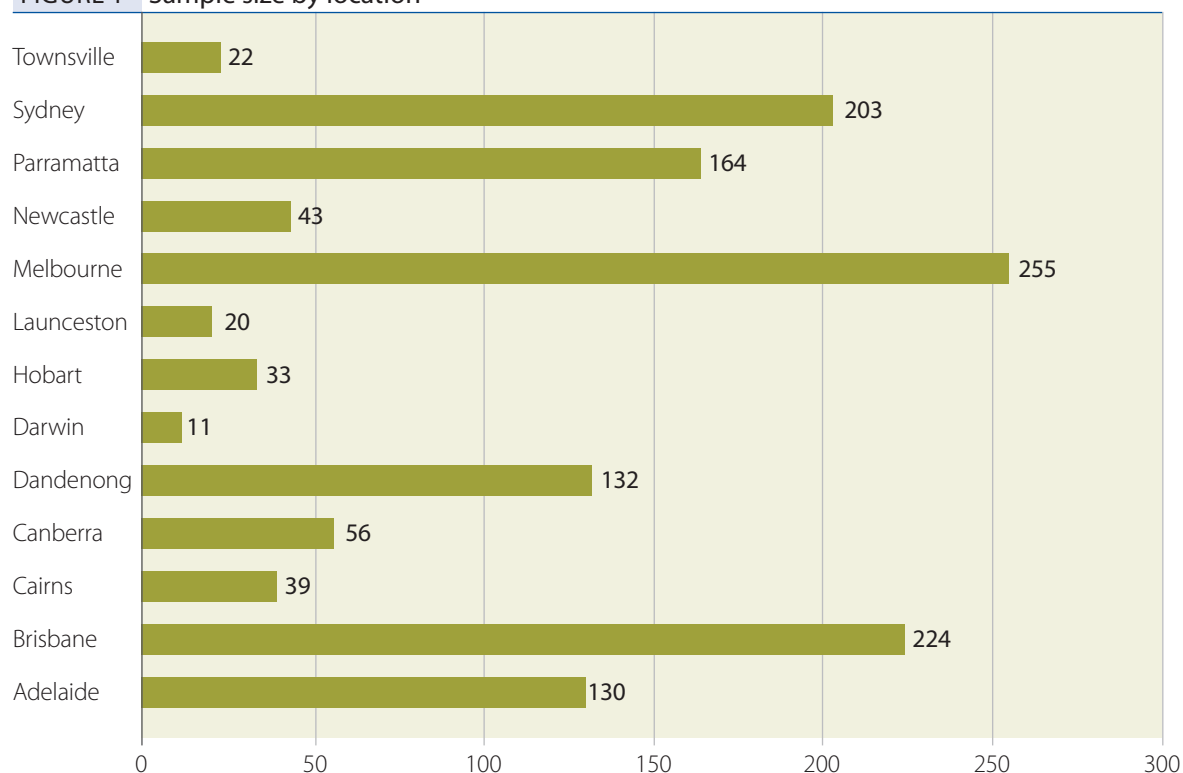
Location and sample size

The user surveys were undertaken at 13 family law registries where judicial officers are resident. Circuit registries were not surveyed. The sample numbers of users surveyed by location is presented in Figure 1.

The survey was based on a sample size $n = 1322$ interviewees. The target had been for a minimum of 1000.

The number of users surveyed at each location was determined by dividing the targeted total number of interviewees ($n = 1000$) by the workload and filings of each registry. Hence, in applying this methodology, several registries such as Darwin, Launceston, Townsville, Hobart, Cairns, Newcastle and Canberra resulted in sample sizes below 60 (as shown in Figure 1). The sample sizes of the remaining registries ranged from 150 to 255 interviewees.

As the sample sizes at some locations were relatively smaller there was not sufficient data to allow for strong analysis of performance variances by location. In order to enable this in future years, it is envisaged that a minimum of 100 users would be surveyed at each of the smaller registries and the sample size of the larger registries would remain based on workload and filings.

FIGURE 1 Sample size by location

Future years

It is envisaged that the process for surveying and implementing any recommendations will occur on an ongoing annual basis. The cycle would be based on:

- Three months for analysis, include surveying of users.
- Three months for design of opportunities.
- Six months for operational implementation of any opportunities.

This would provide the courts with adequate time to implement any changes and embed them within the court systems. The impact of any changes could then be evaluated within the ongoing annual cycles of analysis.

4 Interviewee profile

This section covers satisfaction with the overall experience at the Family Law Courts (disregarding the outcome of their case).

The following section provides an overview of the court users who responded to the user survey. An understanding of their profile provides context for the research findings of this report.

Nearly half the interviewees (47%) were applicants (32%) and respondents (15%) and a quarter (24%) were lawyers. Just over half the interviewees (54%) were at court for final or interim orders and a quarter (25%) were present for divorce proceedings.

The interviewees had either attended the Federal Magistrates Court (43%) or Family Court (44%) or both (3%). Over half of the interviewees (excluding lawyers or paralegals) (56%) attended court several times this year. Over one-in-ten (13%) were more regular visitors to the court and nearly a third (31%) were first time visitors.

The demographic of the interviewee, excluding lawyers and paralegals, considered age, gender, income, language, education and marital status.

Nearly three out of five (59%) interviewees were aged between 31–50 years and just over half the applicable interviewees (57%) were female and just under half (43%) were male. The largest income group, four out of 10 interviewed, earned family income of less than \$50 000 (39%). Nearly half the applicable interviewees (46%) were tertiary qualified, 39 per cent had secondary education as their highest level of qualification and 15 per cent had a trade.

Over eight out of ten interviewed (84%) spoke English as their first language. The remainder of those interviewees represented 43 different languages with Chinese and Arabic the most represented (nearly 15% respectively). Five per cent of the applicable interviewees were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders.

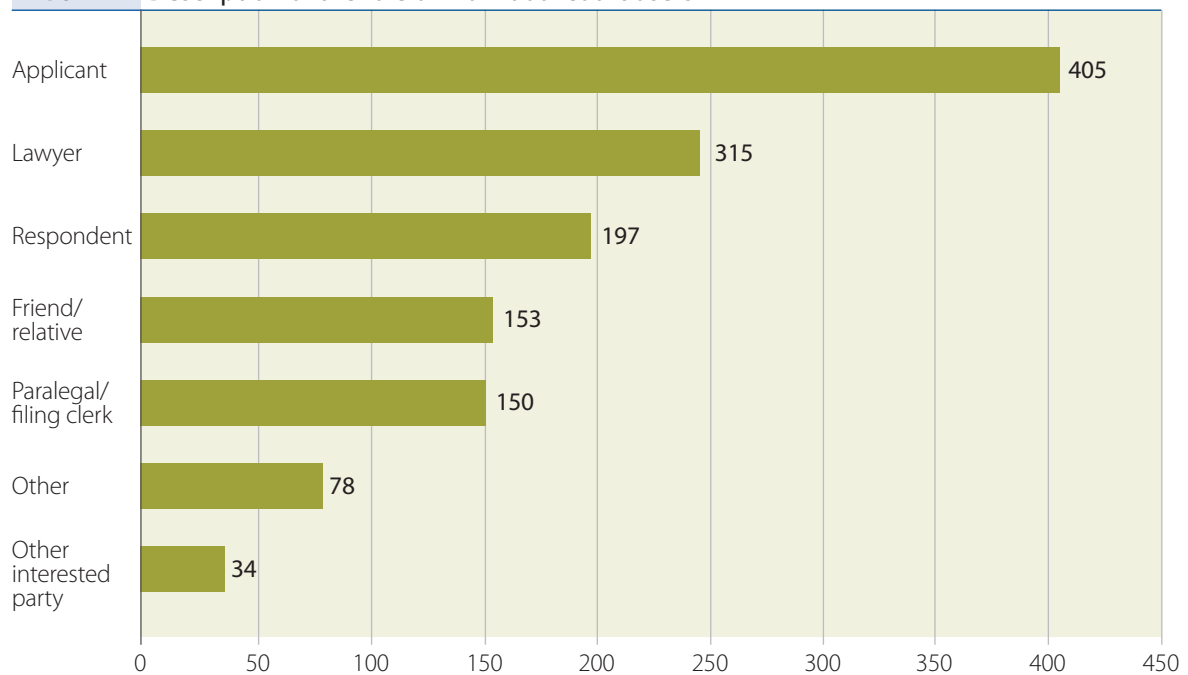
4.1 Type of roles

The court users interviewed were predominantly applicants, lawyers or respondents (see Figure 2).

Parties to the proceedings comprised nearly half the interviewees (47%). Nearly one-in-three interviewees were applicants (32%) and 15 per cent were respondents. The legal profession represented nearly a third (32%) of the interviewees with lawyers comprising nearly a quarter (24%) and paralegals/ filing clerks nearly a tenth (8%).

The remaining fifth (21%) of the interviewees comprised of friends or relatives (12%), 'other' (9%) and 'other interested party' (3%). 'Other' included witnesses, interpreters, support workers and students.

FIGURE 2 Description of the role of individual court users



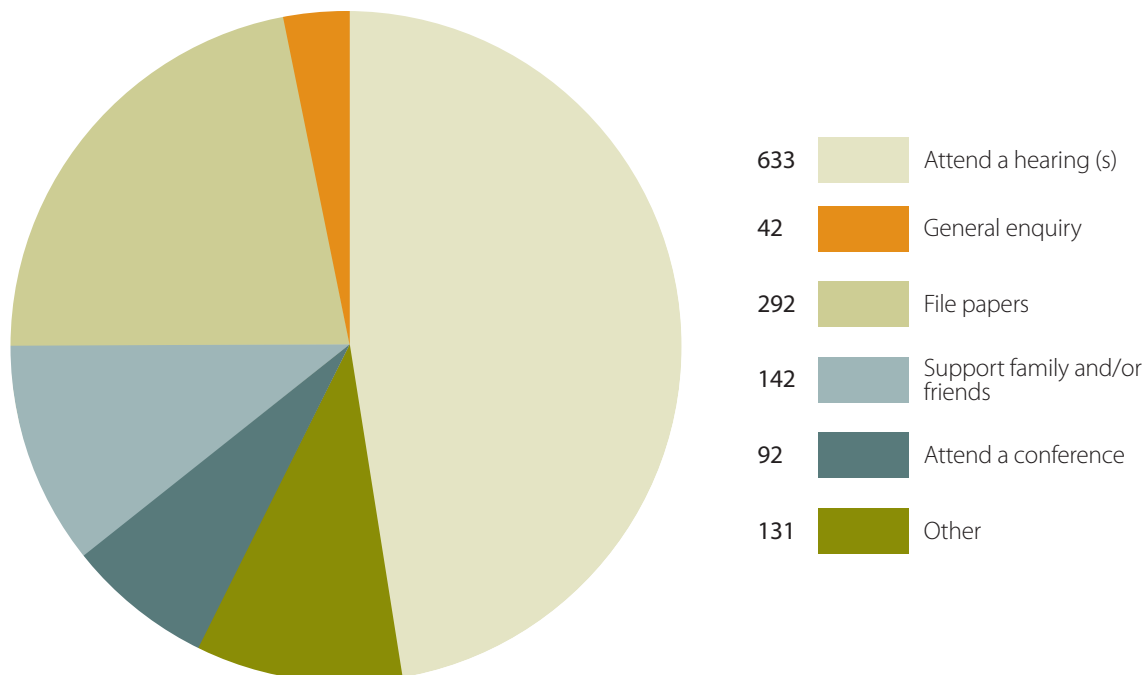
4.2 Purpose of visit to court

The primary purpose of attending court was either to attend a hearing, file papers or support family or friends.

Almost a half of the interviewees (48%) indicated that their primary purpose for attending court on that day was for a hearing (see Figure 3). Just over one fifth (22%) indicated that they were there to file papers. One-in-ten (11%) indicated they were present to support family and or friends. Seven per cent of those present indicated that they were at court to attend a conference. An even smaller amount (3%) had visited court with a general enquiry.

Lawyers (71%) and respondents (64%) were primarily at court to attend hearings. Applicants were at court to attend hearings or file papers ...

FIGURE 3 Reason for attending court



Nearly one-in-ten (10%) were there for 'other' reasons. Several of those indicating 'other' assisted with court processes such as duty lawyers, counsellors, witnesses and interpreters. 'Others' were present to inspect documents or observe court processes.

The profile of the applicant and respondent vary as to why they attended the court. The primary purpose for the lawyer, applicant and respondent attending court was to attend a hearing (71%, 50% and 64% respectively). However, applicants were then primarily at the court to file papers (27%) whereas respondents were there to attend a conference (17%) rather than file papers (9%).

4.3 Type of matter heard

Interviewees were asked about the type of matter to be heard. Just over half the interviewees (54%) were at court for final or interim orders. The remaining interviewees were at court for divorce proceedings (25%) or 'other' reasons (21%).

Lawyers were predominantly present for final/ interim orders (77%). Some of the 'other' matters that contributed to 15 per cent of their workload for their day at court were property settlement, Magellan cases, and duty lawyer and directions hearings.

The results for the respondent vary significantly from those of the applicant. Applicants were equally as likely to be at court for orders (40%) or divorce proceedings (40%). Respondents, on the other hand, were predominantly at the court for final/interim orders (62%) and 13 per cent for divorce proceedings.

The number of applicants and respondents attending court for 'other' matters was similar (20% and 24% respectively). These 'other' matters included property settlement, custody issue, child dispute and family report. It should be noted that several of the 'other' matters could also have been classified under divorce proceedings or orders. However, the confusion around the language could have resulted in misclassification.

Those interviewees present for final/interim orders were present predominantly for matters that involved children:

- Children only issues (64%)
- Combined children and financial issues (17%)
- Financial issues (17%).

Applicants interviewed were at the courts for orders or divorce proceedings, whereas respondents mainly attended for final/ interim orders ...

4.4 Frequency of attendance at court

This question was directed at those interviewees (68%) whose role was not that of a lawyer or paralegal/filing clerk (herein referred to as 'applicable interviewees').

Over half of the applicable interviewees (56%) attended court 'several times' this year. Whereas, nearly one-in-three (31%) were first time visitors. Over one-in-ten (13%) had visited the courts many times this year.

The frequency of visits to the courts by the applicants interviewed was as follows:

- Several times this year – 55%
- First time visits – 33%
- Regularly visits – 12%.

The frequency of visits to the courts by the applicants interviewed was as follows:

- Several times this year – 65%
- First time visits – 22%
- Regularly visits – 13%.

Several time visitors were the most represented group interviewed ...

4.5 Court visited and who they saw

The majority of interviewees had either attended the FMC (43%) or FCoA (44%) or both courts (3%).

The remainder indicated they were either unsure (2%) or had not visited either court (8%). This may represent those at court with a general enquiry or attendance with a Justice of the Peace.

The number of applicants and respondents attending either court was relatively similar. Whereas, nearly three-quarters of the lawyers (69%) interviewed were at the FMC and only a quarter were at the FCoA.

Nearly one in four interviewees (38%) indicated that they had dealings with either court or counter staff on their visit to the court. Over one in three interviewees (35%) saw a judicial officer and 13 per cent saw a registrar (see Figure 4).

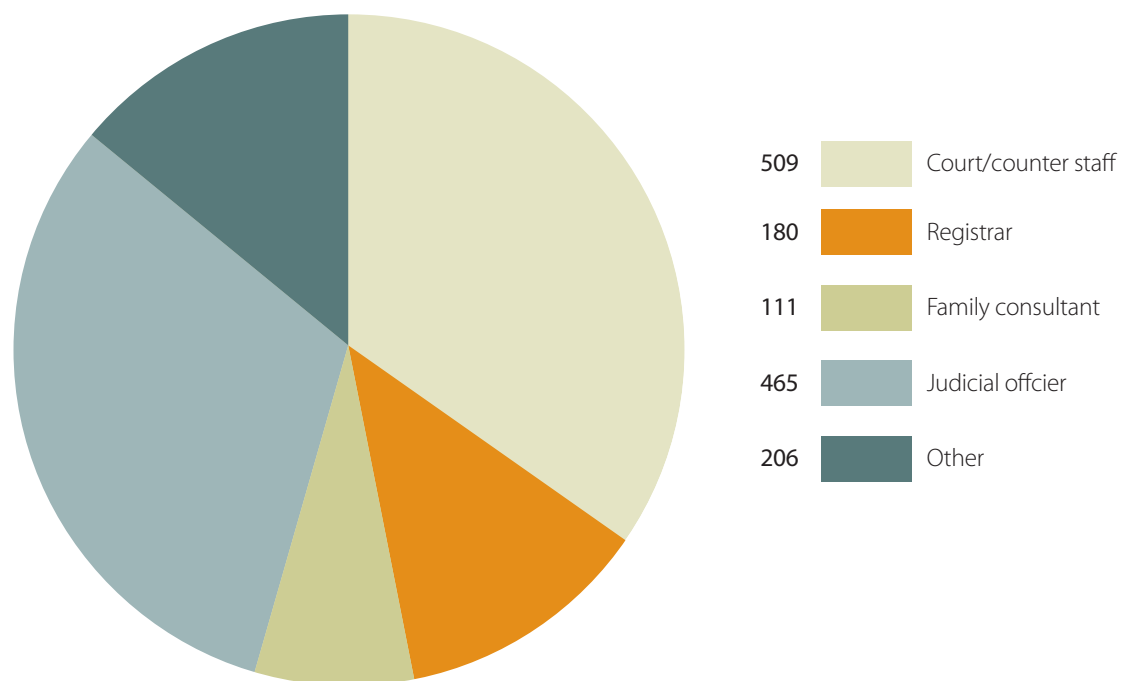
The remaining interviewees (15%) indicated that they had seen 'other' people at the court. 'Other' included their solicitors, barristers, duty lawyers, counsellors, justices of the peace. For about a third of the interviewees who stated 'other' this question was not applicable for reasons varying from being there to support family and/or friends, observing court proceedings or they had not yet seen anyone.

The role of the interviewee determined who the interviewee had the most dealings with at the court. Lawyers were predominantly (62%) dealing with judicial officers, whereas the majority of the paralegals dealings were with court or counter staff (84%). Forty per cent of applicants saw counter or court staff, whereas 40 per cent of respondents saw judicial officers.

An equal number of court users were interviewed at FMC and FCoA.

Judiciary more likely to have assisted lawyers and respondents whereas applicants and paralegals

FIGURE 4 Who the interviewees saw at the courts



4.6 Interviewee demographics (excludes lawyers and paralegals)

In order to better understand the interviewee, excluding lawyers and paralegals/filing clerks, several other factors were considered. These included how old they were, their marital status, their level of education, income and language spoken. The sample of applicable interviewees, those who were not lawyers or paralegals, was nearly 70 per cent of those interviewed (being n= 903 out of 1332).

It should be noted that although the following information assisted with building the interviewee profile, it had minimal impact on the findings.

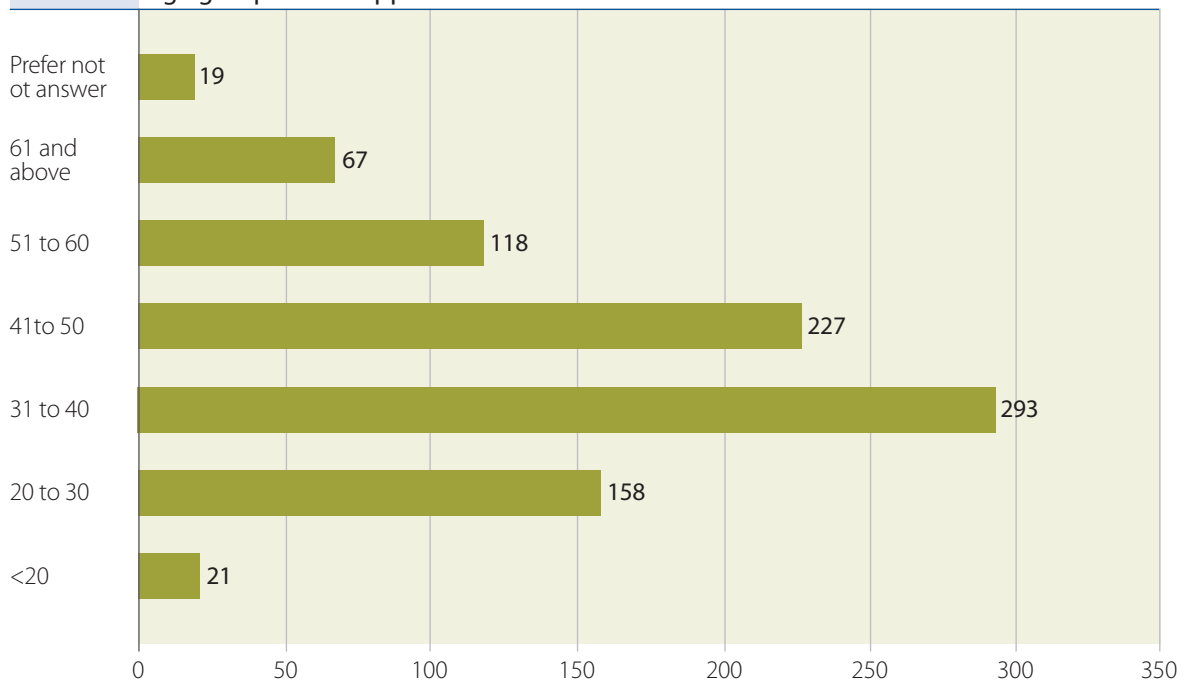
Demographics are of interest but don't impact the findings...

4.6.1 Age and gender

The age groups of the applicable interviewees are represented in Figure 5.

Just over half the applicable interviewees (57%) were female and just under half (43%) were male.

FIGURE 5 Age groups of the applicable interviewees



4.6.2 Education

Just over two out of five applicable interviewees (45%) were tertiary qualified. This was closely followed by nearly two out of five having a secondary education as their highest level of qualification (39%). The majority of the remainder had a trade (15%).

4.6.3 Marital status

The marital status of applicable interviewees was as follows:

- Separated 29%
- Married 22%
- Single 21%
- Divorced 19%
- De facto 10%

4.6.4 Income

The applicable interviewees were asked about their family income. The largest income group, nearly two-in-five interviewed, earned family income of less than \$50 000 (39%). Just over one fifth (24%) preferred not to answer the question. Nearly one-in-five (19%) earned family income of \$50 000–\$80 000 per annum. A little over one-in-ten (11%) earned between \$80 000–\$120 000 per annum. The least represented income grouping, representing seven per cent, were those earning over \$120 000 per annum.

4.6.5 Language spoken

The majority of applicable interviewees spoke English as a first language. Over eight out of 10 interviewed (84%).

- The 15 per cent of non English speakers covered 43 different languages.
- The main languages were Chinese (included Cantonese and Mandarin) (15%) and Arabic (14%).
- Each of the following languages was spoken by about five per cent of the applicable interviewees: Punjabi, Hindi, Spanish and Singhalese (Sinhala) followed by German, Filipino, Greek and Turkish.

43 different languages spoken by non English speaking interviewees

4.6.6 Aboriginal Torres Strait Islanders

Nearly five per cent of the applicable interviewees were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders. The majority of which were Aboriginal (77%) and the remainder were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (14%) and the minority were Torres Strait Islanders (9%).

4.7 Applicant and respondent profile

In order to provide context for the research findings it is worth summarising some of the key differences in the profile of the applicant and respondent interviewed (see Table 1).

The applicant and respondent's frequency of the attendance at court in order for likelihood are as follows:

- Several time visitors to the courts
- First time visitor
- Regular visitor.

The main difference in the frequency of their visits is that the respondents interviewed are more likely to have been at court several times and less first visits.

Both parties are at court to attend a hearing. However, a respondent is 15 per cent more likely to be at court to attend a hearing than an applicant. The other main reason for an applicant attending is to file papers, whereas, for the respondent it is attend a conference.

The type of matter an applicant will have heard is equally likely to be final/ interim orders or divorce proceedings. A respondent is predominantly at the court for final/interim orders and only smaller percentage for divorce proceedings.

The reasons for attending court then determine with whom the users interact within the court. Applicants were more likely to see court staff whereas respondents were more likely to see judicial officers.

Overall, the respondent is at court for more substantive matters that involve less predictability of time. The applicant is at court also for substantive matters but equally for more straightforward matters such as divorce proceedings and filing papers.

Understanding the key differences in the profile of the users is important as it helps explain variations in the two groups' satisfaction levels as highlighted in section 5 and 6. It will also be important when considering which, if any, users to target for improvements by the courts (see Section 7).

Applicant's profile varies from that of the respondent...

TABLE 1 Summary of key differences in profile of applicant and respondent

		Applicant	Respondent
Primary purpose of visit to court	Attend a hearing	50%	65%
	Attend a conference	6%	17%
	File papers	27%	9%
No. of visits to the court	Several times	55%	65%
	First time visitor	33%	22%
	Regular visitor	12%	13%
Who they saw at court	Judicial officer	23%	41%
	Court staff	41%	30%
Type of matter heard	Final/ interim orders	40%	62%
	Divorce proceedings	40%	13%

5 Overall satisfaction with the experience

This section covers satisfaction with the overall experience at the Family Law Courts (disregarding the outcome of their case).

Overall, the general satisfaction with the visit to court rated highly. Eighty six per cent of interviewees were satisfied with their visit to court, of which 35 per cent strongly agreed that they were very satisfied with their visit.

It should be noted that this excludes any consideration of judicial officer decisions, which was not evaluated as part of the user survey.

Lawyers had the highest satisfaction rates (93%) followed by applicants (85%) and respondents (79%). The more frequently a court user attends court, the less satisfied they are with their experience. First time visitor's satisfaction rates of 90 per cent fall to 83 per cent for several time visitors and 67 per cent for regular visitors. This highlights the need for the courts to better manage the relationship with the frequent user.

In general, the satisfaction with the visit to court rated very highly. This indicates that the courts satisfactorily meet user's needs and expectations. In addition, we can evaluate the qualitative and quantitative results from the following perspectives in order to obtain further insight into the results:

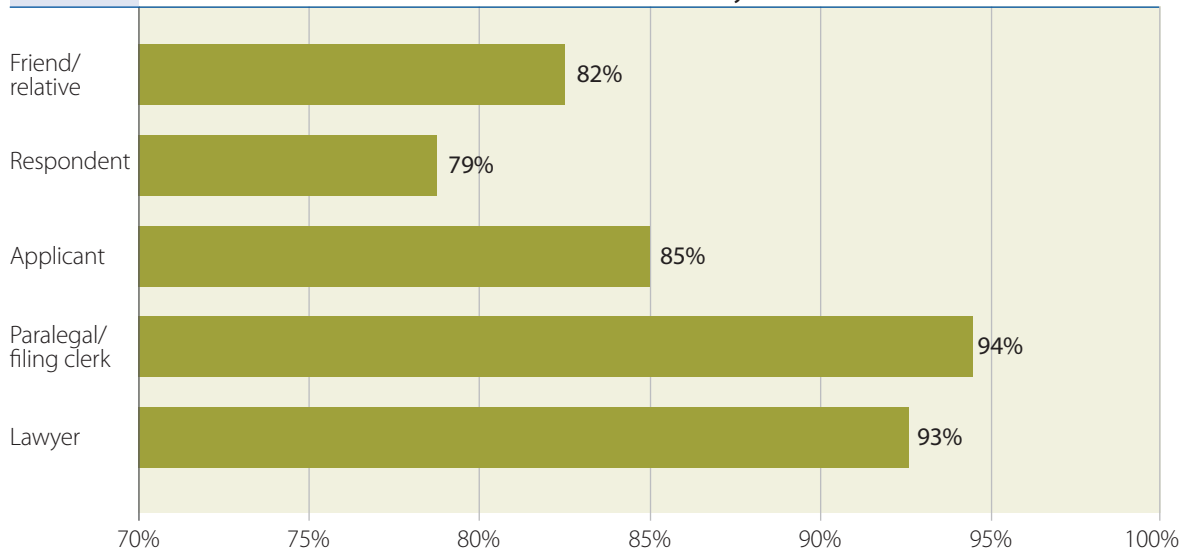
- 1 Role such as lawyer, applicant or respondent.
- 2 Matter heard e.g. divorce proceedings, final/interim orders or other matter.
- 3 Frequency of visits – first time, several times or regular visitor to courts.

Overall satisfaction of lawyers, applicants or respondents

Those who were most likely to be unfamiliar with the courts and their procedures, that is, those for whom being at court was not a part of their day-to-day role, were more likely to be dissatisfied with the experience. Lawyers and paralegals/filing clerks had the highest satisfaction rates (93% and 94% respectively), followed by applicants (85%), friends and relatives (82%) and respondents (79%)(see Figure 6).

Lawyers were extremely satisfied, then applicants and least satisfied were respondents...

FIGURE 6 Overall satisfaction with visit to court considered by role



The respondent's profile provides us with an insight into why their levels of satisfaction may in general be lower. They are at court for more substantive matters that are less predictable of time. This combined with the fact that they are not the initiating party could explain the lower results.

This is consistent throughout the findings. The respondent is less likely to be satisfied than the applicant and the lawyer is overall the user group most satisfied with the services provided by the courts.

Overall satisfaction based upon frequency of visit to court

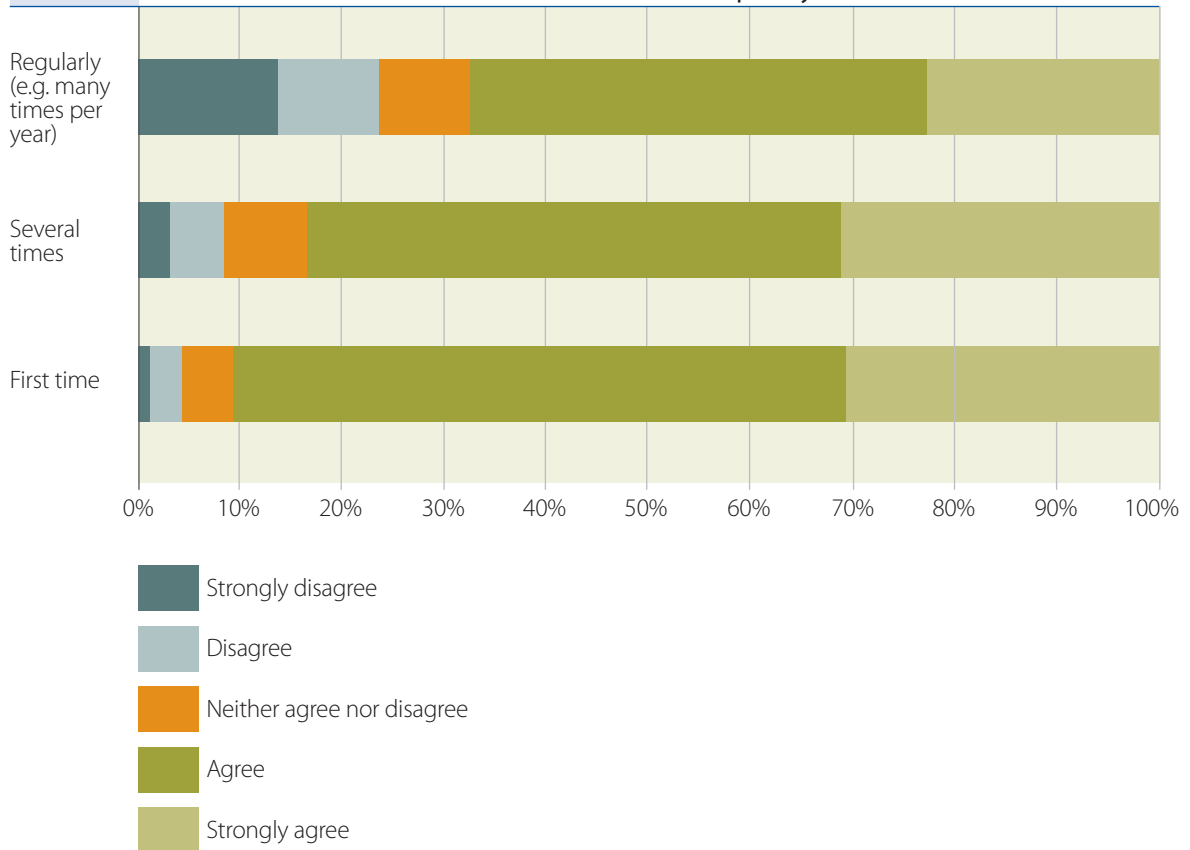
The frequency of the visit to court by those for whom being at court was not a part of their day-to-day role, were also more likely to have an impact on their satisfaction levels.

First time visitors tended to be more satisfied (90%) than those who attended court several times per year (83%). The frequent user was significantly less satisfied (67%) with their visit to court. This implies that the more frequently a court user attends court, the less their expectations are met (see Figure 7).

Although the overall satisfaction levels are high, identification of the frequent user dissatisfaction provides an area for improvement for the courts.

The more frequent the visits to court the more dissatisfied with the experience...

FIGURE 7 Overall satisfaction with visit to court based on frequency of visit



Overall satisfaction for parties to divorce proceedings or orders

The type of matter heard impacted the overall satisfaction with the courts. Divorce proceedings were more likely to result in higher satisfaction levels (92%). Orders and 'other' matters that are more substantive and less predictable in time had relatively lower satisfaction levels (85% and 84% respectively).

Feedback on what impressed the interviewee

Qualitative data was sought from the interviewee about what impressed them about their experience today. The results were highly complementary of staff and the judicial officers. Users were also impressed by the building and how safe they felt.

Some specific comments from lawyers were:

"The court staffs' cheery dispositions!"

"Politely greeted by staff."

"Everyone is always helpful and courteous."

"The compassion of the Federal Magistrate."

"The visiting Federal Magistrate was very courteous and efficient, using language understood by all."

"Professionalism of all involved."

"That the court wants to know how to improve things via a survey."

Some specific comments from applicants were:

"It's good that you can come in and have the form checked by the staff to make sure you are doing it right!"

"More security than the average airport."

"Everyone was nice and helpful."

"The court officer was very organised. Matters ran smoothly. I was missing a form and the registrar told me what to do to get it quickly and I was able to come back and finalise proceedings."

"Smooth less traumatic than expected."

"Willingness of staff to assist me in my situation was excellent."

"Prompt, efficient and really painless."

Some specific comments from respondents were:

"The judge was supportive when doubts were raised."

"The judge was very fair and understanding."

"How nice the building is – modern, well signed."

"Friendly people felt very safe."

"Magistrate was great – took time to make sure I understood."

The assistance and friendliness of staff and professionalism of judiciary are what impress the user the most...

6 Satisfaction with aspects of the experience

This section covers satisfaction with various aspects of the court user experience including court building and facilities, customer service, court processes, about the hearing process, technology and information services.

Overall, interviewees were satisfied with the various aspects of the court experience. The survey results indicate that the courts' buildings and facilities and the staff who work at the courts are definitely one of the courts' main strengths. On the other hand, start times and waiting times at the courts as well as the user-friendliness of court forms and the NEC were its relative weaknesses.

In summary, the areas where interviewees were most satisfied, where more than nine out of 10 interviewees agreed or strongly agreed with the experience:

- Court building was easy to find and navigate (92% agreed or strongly agreed).
- Felt safe in the courtroom or court environment (95% agreed or strongly agreed).
- In general, satisfied with the service provided by the various staff (92% agreed or strongly agreed).
- Treated by staff professionally and respectfully and answered queries promptly (94% agreed or strongly agreed).

Despite the courts' overall high levels of satisfaction, several areas of improvement were identified. These were areas where less than three quarters of the interviewees agreed or strongly agreed. These included:

- Forms required were clear and easy to understand (73% agreed or strongly agreed).
- Matter took the time you were expecting (65% agreed or strongly agreed).
- Matter started on time (66% agreed or strongly agreed).
- NEC was helpful and professional (66%) and quick and responsive (56% agreed or strongly agreed).

6.1 Measures of the court experience

Part 2 of the user survey measured the quantitative and qualitative satisfaction levels of various aspects of the court experience. The areas evaluated were:

- Court buildings and facilities – the ease of finding them, and their way around them, how safe they felt in court and whether there was sufficient facilities e.g. seating.
- ‘Customer’ service – whether provided by staff, registrars, consultants or judicial officers – all aspects from how they were treated, timeliness of attendance to their queries and whether they answered enquiry directly.
- Court processes – covered three areas being forms, ease of understanding procedural advice from staff and whether payment facilities are easy to use.
- Day at court – evaluated the adequacy of the notice required, clarity of expectations about what was to happen during their visit to court, next steps and in respect of the time matter took.
- Hearing in the courtroom – about whether the case was handled fairly, whether they were treated the same as everyone else, if matter started on time and if the judicial officer listened and led the hearing well.
- Technology and information services – questions regarding the effectiveness of the websites, Portal and NEC.

The results from the research findings on the satisfaction levels of these aspects of service are presented in this section. Each of the aspects of service will also be evaluated from the following perspective:

- lawyer, respondent and applicant
- divorce proceedings, orders (final/interim) and other matter, and
- frequency of visit to the courts – first time, several or regular visitor.

6.2 The court buildings and facilities

This section explored the following issues:

- Finding the court building was easy.
- Finding your way around the court was easy.
- You felt safe in the court environment.
- You felt safe in the courtroom.
- The court facilities were sufficient e.g. seating areas.

‘The results from the qualitative and quantitative data indicated that court users were extremely satisfied with ease of finding court building and safety in the courts. The court building and facilities are one of the courts’ key strengths with satisfaction levels predominantly 90 per cent and above.

The majority of lawyers, applicant and respondents all strongly agreed in their satisfaction with various aspects of court building and facilities with majority of responses with satisfaction levels over 90 per cent. By registry location the results were fairly consistent with satisfaction levels of 84 per cent and over (84% to 97%).

The court buildings and facilities found to be one of the key strengths of the court...

Finding the court building and your way around the court

Ninety two per cent of interviewees agreed or strongly agreed that finding the court building was easy. However, despite the strong rating from court users there was a slightly higher percentage of interviewees who found the court building not easy to find. Five per cent of both the applicants and respondents 'disagreed'. Further, the results vary slightly depending upon the location of the court building. This is a matter for consideration by individual registries.

In general, a few of the comments stated:

"Difficult to find the entrance coming in off the street – the location of Level 1 is confusing."

– Applicant

"A bigger sign out the front of the building would be useful – there are too many small signs."

– Applicant

Finding your way around the court was also considered easy, as 92 per cent of interviewees agreed or strongly agreed.

Feeling safe in the court environment and courtroom

Given the nature of the family law matters, feeling safe in the court environment and courtroom is important. The courts have excelled in providing users with an environment where they feel very safe. Overall, 95 per cent of the interviewees felt safe in the court environment and in the courtroom. This was consistent in the results by registry, with all registries recording satisfaction levels over 90 per cent (ranging from 90% to 98%).

Lawyers felt the safest in the court environment and courtroom (98% and 99%). Applicants also felt safe (95% and 93% respectively) and respondent's feelings of safety were slightly lower but also extremely high (89% and 90% respectively).

The type of matter heard made only a slight difference to feelings of safety. Interviewees involved in divorce proceedings felt the safest in the courtroom (98%), followed by final/interim orders (95%) and then other matters (92%). There was only a one per cent variance between feelings of safety in the court environment and the courtroom.

The sufficiency of court facilities

In respect of the sufficiency of facilities such as seating areas, the satisfaction levels remain high (86%). These results, when considered by registry location, are fairly consistent.

Lawyers were generally satisfied with the court building and facilities with less than one per cent of lawyers dissatisfied. However, in respect of seating 16 per cent disagreed and strongly disagreed with the sufficiency of seating. Some of the comments indicating that:

"More client rooms."

"More seats in courtroom."

"More private conference rooms or spaces available for solicitor client conferences would be good."

Twelve per cent of respondents and eight per cent of applicants also disagreed with the sufficiency of the seating.

“Many conference, interview rooms needed – many conferences happen in public space.”
– Respondent

Nearly one in five interviewees (19%) provided comments about court facilities and buildings.

A fifth of the comments were interviewees requesting more seating in areas of the court and additional rooms and private spaces such as conference rooms and interview rooms.

Nearly 10 per cent of the comments requested coffee/tea facilities, vending machines and water fountains.

The comments regarding the need for more seating, rooms and facilities provide an insight into the interviewees’ perceptions. However, should any changes be considered this would need to be addressed at a location level.

6.3 ‘Customer’ service

This section explored the following service issues:

- They treated you professionally and respectfully.
- They attended to you promptly.
- They answered your enquiry directly.
- In general, you were satisfied with the service provided.

The quantitative results from users of the courts indicated that they are extremely satisfied with the service provided by staff, registrars, consultants and judicial officers. The key users being lawyers, applicants and respondents were all very satisfied. Customer service represents the other key strength of the courts.

Ninety four per cent of interviewees agreed or strongly agreed that they were treated professionally and respectfully, answered their enquiries directly (93%), and in general were satisfied with the service provided (92%). The results for FCoA and FMC were nearly the same with only a one to two per cent variance.

The interviewee was only slightly less satisfied with the promptness of attendance by the staff. However, the satisfaction level was still very high (88%).

If we consider the results by type of matter, divorce proceedings have a slightly higher satisfaction and then final/interim orders followed by ‘other’ matters. Similarly, lawyers were slightly more satisfied with the customer service than an applicant and respondent. First time users were most satisfied, followed by several time users and regular court visitors were least satisfied.

The qualitative results provided by just over one-in-ten (11%) of the interviewees reinforced the above results. Over 15 per cent of the general feedback were positive comments about the staff.

Court staff, judicial officers etc found to be one of the key strengths of the courts...

Customer service satisfaction rates are extremely high. Mostly in excess of 90%...

“Court staff are fantastic. Court delays are atrocious.” – Lawyer

“Staff are always courteous kind and accommodating and helpful to myself and my colleagues.”
– Lawyer

“Security were friendly, made me feel at ease.” – Family/ friend

“All the staff and people at the court were helpful and nice.” – Respondent

“I have been operating in the family court since 1976. The staff, especially the registry clerical staff are polite, efficient and a delight to deal with.” – Lawyer

“As a self representing litigant, I have found the service offered exceptionally good. Well done.”
– Respondent

“My enquiries were met at excellent standard.” – First time Applicant

However, there were a percentage of the qualitative results that expressed frustration with wait times in being served by registry staff.

“Waited one hour to see counter staff.” – Applicant

“The process was very slow, boring. The staff were indifferent. Overly bureaucratic.” – Applicant

“Took too long to be served.” – Applicant

“Need more registry staff.” – Filing clerk and Lawyer

“Not enough staff so it takes forever to file.” – Filing clerk

6.4 Court processes

This section addressed three areas of interest: court forms, procedural advice from staff and payment facilities:

- The forms needed were clear and easy to understand.
- The procedural advice from staff was easily understood.
- The payment facilities are easy to use.

Overall, interviewees were most satisfied with the payment facilities and procedural advice from staff. There was a more variable response to the forms needed and how clear and easy they were to understand. The results for the FMC and FCoA were primarily the same (1–2% variance).

The procedural advice from staff was easily understood

The procedural advice from staff appears to be well understood by interviewees. Overall, 86 per cent of interviewees indicated that they were satisfied, with lawyers being most satisfied group (89%), then applicants (86%) and respondent relatively less satisfied (79%).

The procedural advice was equally well understood whether the matter was divorce proceedings, final/ interim orders or other matters (84%–88%).

Customer service satisfaction rates are extremely high. Mostly in excess of 90%...

First time visitors were slightly more likely to be satisfied (88%) with procedural advice from staff than those who had visited the court several times. The courts 'regular users' were six per cent less satisfied than first time visitors.

The payment facilities are easy to use

Overall, interviewees indicated that they were satisfied (87%) with the ease of use of the courts' payment facilities. First time visitors were again the most satisfied (90%) with the ease of use whereas the 'regular user' was the least satisfied visitor group (84%).

There was a disparity in results for satisfaction with payment facilities depending upon the type of matter. Those involved in divorce proceedings were very satisfied with the use of the payment facilities (95%) whereas those with interim/final orders (84%) were slightly lower.

Lawyers ordinarily are the most satisfied with all aspects of the courts. However, in this case applicants were the most satisfied group (91%) and lawyers (86%) and respondents (79%).

Some of the comments of lawyers may provide some insight into some of the problems they perceive with the payment facilities:

"The machines that process the payment take too long, the machines are slow."

"Payment a bit slow – lacks staff."

"Application needs to be simplified. Electronic lodgment of all forms and fees would be great."

The clarity and ease of understanding of court forms

The satisfaction with court forms was relatively lower than other areas evaluated. Seventy three per cent of interviewees found the forms clear and easy to understand. The greater portion of interviewees agreed (48%) rather than strongly agreed (26%).

The results were consistent irrespective of whether the forms were in respect of orders or divorce proceedings. What did make a difference to the results was who was completing the forms and how often they attended court:

- Least satisfied were respondents (62%), applicants (70%) and lawyers (79%) were most satisfied
- First time court users found the forms clearer and easier to understand (73%) than those who visited several times (69%) or regularly (64%).

One-in-ten of interviewees (10%) provided comments on court processes. The greatest level of discussion was in relation to court forms.

Nearly a quarter of interviewees who provided comments indicated that they had used their lawyers for completing all forms.

"A lawyer necessary for paperwork. Personal attempt took 48 hours and then tossed out by judge because should have gone to registry." – Respondent who regularly visits the court

Court forms not as simple and clear as respondents or applicants would like...

Nearly a third of interviewees who provided comments noted the complexity of the forms.

“Easy to understand as a solicitor, not if self-represented.” – Lawyer

“Court directions “make file and serve” are not understood by self represented litigants. The forms are too complex and language is obscure.” – Lawyer

“Forms were confusing. Not sure which papers you need.” – Applicant several times court user

“Finding which form can be difficult if self represented.” – Respondent

“Forms could be simpler.” – Respondent

The two positive comments about the forms were:

“Since the divorce form has been altered it is easy to understand. Divorce application is easy to follow.” – Lawyer

“Sometimes easy to understand.” – Applicant – several times visitor

As the result in relation to court forms being clear and easy to understand is below 75 per cent and relatively lower than the average of the findings, this is an area that requires attention by the courts and is noted as an area for improvement (see section 7).

6.5 About the day at court

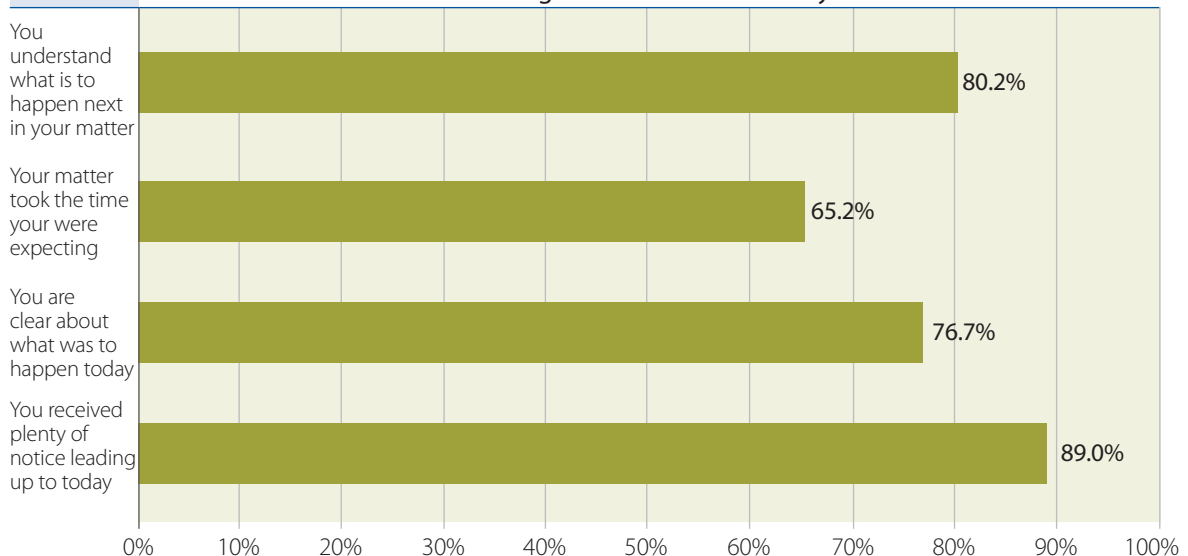
This section explored the following issues in relation to the day at court:

- Received plenty of notice leading up to their day at court.
- Was clear about what was to happen.
- Was happy with how long their matter took to be heard.
- Understood what is to happen next in their matter.

Mixed results with expectations requiring better management

The satisfaction levels with these issues varied substantially. This is highlighted in Figure 8.

FIGURE 8 Satisfaction levels of issues relating to the interviewees day in court



Notice leading up to their day at court

In order of satisfaction, the aspect with which the interviewees were most satisfied was the notice leading up to their day in court (89%). Lawyers were most satisfied (94%), then the applicant (92%). The respondent was nearly 10 per cent relatively less satisfied (81%). This may be an area where the court may wish to consider why there is such a difference in the satisfaction levels between the various court users.

“Only had 5 days notice – not enough” – Applicant – regular visitor to the court

“Received no notice” – Respondent – regular visitor to the court

Lawyers very clear (91% satisfaction) on what was to happen at court but respondents were not (65% satisfaction)...

Clarity about what was to happen next in your matter

Eight out of 10 interviewees (80%) agreed that they understood what is to happen next in their matter. This result varied depending upon the court attended. The FMC result was seven per cent higher than FCoA. At FMC 84 per cent of interviewees agreed and strongly agreed that they understood what was to happen next whereas at FCoA the result was lower (77%). The results for the other issues explored about the day in court were nearly the same for the two courts.

Lawyers were extremely satisfied (94%) that they understood what was to happen next whereas the applicant and respondent were both far less satisfied (76% and 74% respectively). This identifies an area for improvement to services provided to applicant and respondents (see Section 7).

Clarity about what was to happen at the court

Clarity as to what was to happen at the court on the day was overall a little lower (77%). There was a disparity in the expectations amongst court users. Lawyers were again extremely satisfied (91%) and applicants were relatively less satisfied but also sufficiently clear about the proceedings (82%). However, the respondent was insufficiently clear about what was to happen (65%). When we consider some of the qualitative results, they provide some insight into the respondent's experience:

“No clear guidelines to the process.” – Respondent – several times visitor to the court

“Not sure if judge will have time to hear the case. May have to come back in November. Would be nice to know what is going to happen before arriving.” – Respondent – several times visitor to the court

“I came in yesterday and after the hearing was asked to come in today. I thought it would take at least a week, so affecting my work place.” – Respondent – several times visitor to the court

In addition, there are some other thoughts of applicant and friend:

“Not sure about the purpose of dispute resolution and hence not well prepared.” – Applicant

“It was adjourned – expected the matter to be resolved today.” – Friend or relative – Several times visitor

Expectations of time a matter will take

Expectations in respect of the time a matter would take were not being met by the courts. The overall satisfaction level (65%) was relatively lower than the majority of results and lower than the benchmark of 75 per cent and over.

When further considered by role, lawyers were more satisfied (75%) with the time taken, whereas the applicant was far less satisfied (63%) and the respondent least satisfied (56%). This is an area of attention that needs to be addressed by the courts (see Section 7).

When expectations of the time a matter will take were considered from the perspective of how frequently parties attended court, it became clear that the more frequently the interviewee attended the more their expectations of time were not met. Three quarters of first time visitors (71%) were satisfied that the matter took the time they were expecting. Whereas, only just over half of the several time visitors (57%) and frequent users (56%) were satisfied that the matter took the time they were expecting.

Interviewees involved in divorce proceedings were 10 per cent more satisfied (73%) with the time a matter took than those involved in orders (63%) or other matters (64%).

Nearly one-in-ten of interviewees (9%) provided comments about the issues relating to their day in court. Over a quarter of those interviewees (28%) commented that the wait times are too long.

“Took longer than expected.” – Respondent that regularly visits the courts.

“Gone on for too long, wish it could have finished up sooner.” – Applicant – several time court user

“Usually takes longer than expect.” – Applicant – several times visitor to the court

This was balanced by about 10 per cent of the comments stating that the time frame was shorter than expected.

“Shorter than expected.” – Friend/ relative first time at the court

“Shorter time taken than expected.” – Applicant – several time court user

Relatively low satisfaction (65%) with expectations of the time a matter will take...

6.6 About your hearing today (in the courtroom)

This section addressed the following issues:

- Interviewee’s case was handled was fair.
- Judicial officer listened and led the hearing well.
- Matter started on time.
- Interviewee was treated the same as everyone else.

Approximately half of those interviewed did not have a hearing on the day of the survey and therefore were unable to comment on these issues.

From the remaining applicable interviewees who attended a hearing on the day, they were most satisfied that they were treated the same as everyone else (88%). They also felt that the judicial officer listened and led the hearing well (84%) and that the way in which their case was handled was fair (79%). However, they were not satisfied that their matter started on time (66%).

Treated the same as everyone else

The interviewees who attended a hearing were satisfied that they were treated the same as everyone else (88% satisfaction).

A feeling of equality was more likely from first time visitors (94%) but as users attended the court more frequently they were less likely to feel they were treated equally (several time visitor 84% and 'regular user' 76%). A regular visitor to the court was 18 per cent less likely to feel they are treated the same as everyone else when compared with a first time visitor. This is a significant drop in satisfaction and highlights that the courts need to take extra care with more frequent visitors. In particular, care needs to be taken with respondents who are 12 per cent less satisfied than lawyers with the equality of their treatment. Lawyers were extremely satisfied with their treatment (94%) as were applicants (87%). Those involved in 'other' matters (83%) or orders (88%) were also slightly less satisfied than those involved in divorce proceedings (91%).

Judicial officer listened and led the hearing well

Overall, the interviewee was satisfied that the judicial officer listened and led the hearing well (84%). Lawyers were most satisfied (90%) and applicants and respondents had similar satisfaction levels around 80 per cent (82% and 80% respectively). The more frequent the attendance at court either by the applicant or the respondent the lower the satisfaction level. There was an eight per cent variance between first time visitors (88%) and several time visitors (80%). Overall, the satisfaction level dropped by 13 per cent once a visitor became a 'regular user'.

The interviewees involved in divorce proceedings (86%), orders (84%) or 'other' matters (81%) were similarly satisfied by how the judicial officer listened and led the hearing. There was only a five per cent variance.

Way in which the case was handled was fair

The way in which the interviewees' case was handled was considered fair by four out of five (79%) of interviewees with hearings. The results indicated that eight per cent more interviewees attending a hearing at FMC were satisfied with the way their case was handled than those attending FCoA (83% FMC versus 75% FCoA). This was one of the few areas throughout the survey where the results for the two courts varied more than five per cent.

The overall satisfaction level of 79 per cent does not accurately reflect the underlying disparity amongst the attendees at the hearing. Lawyers had extremely high satisfaction levels (92%) and applicants were 14 per cent less likely to be satisfied (78%). However, respondents had only 68 per cent satisfaction levels that their case was handled fairly. The respondent satisfaction levels decreased significantly once they became a regular visitor to the court. This was the area in which the frequent user respondent was most dissatisfied when considering all the issues in respect of their hearing that day. The findings were the same for the applicant.

High satisfaction with judicial officer leading the hearing and being treated equally. Start time of the matter and handling of the case fairly needs attention

In general, first time visitors had satisfaction levels of 85 per cent whereas a frequent users' satisfaction drops by 30 per cent to 55 per cent. Several time visitors were not as dissatisfied with three quarters of them satisfied with how their case was handled (73%). When we consider one of the comments of the respondent who is regular visitor, this may assist understand some of their frustration:

"It's taken 3.5 years." – Respondent regular visitor

Your matter started on time

Only 66 per cent of interviewees agreed or strongly agreed that their matter started on time.

The level of dissatisfaction with start time of matters was fairly consistent among lawyers (69%), applicants (64%) and respondents (63%). The variances were greater when considering the frequency of the visits to court and type of matter heard. First time visitors were far more satisfied (78%) than several time visitors (60%) and regular visitors (62%). Divorce proceedings resulted in higher levels of satisfaction with start times (77%) than final/interim orders (61%). This may be due to the higher level of complexity of the matter with orders and therefore reduced ability to accurately timetable matters.

This represents an area of improvement for the courts (see Section 7).

6.7 About the technology and information services

This section explored the following issues:

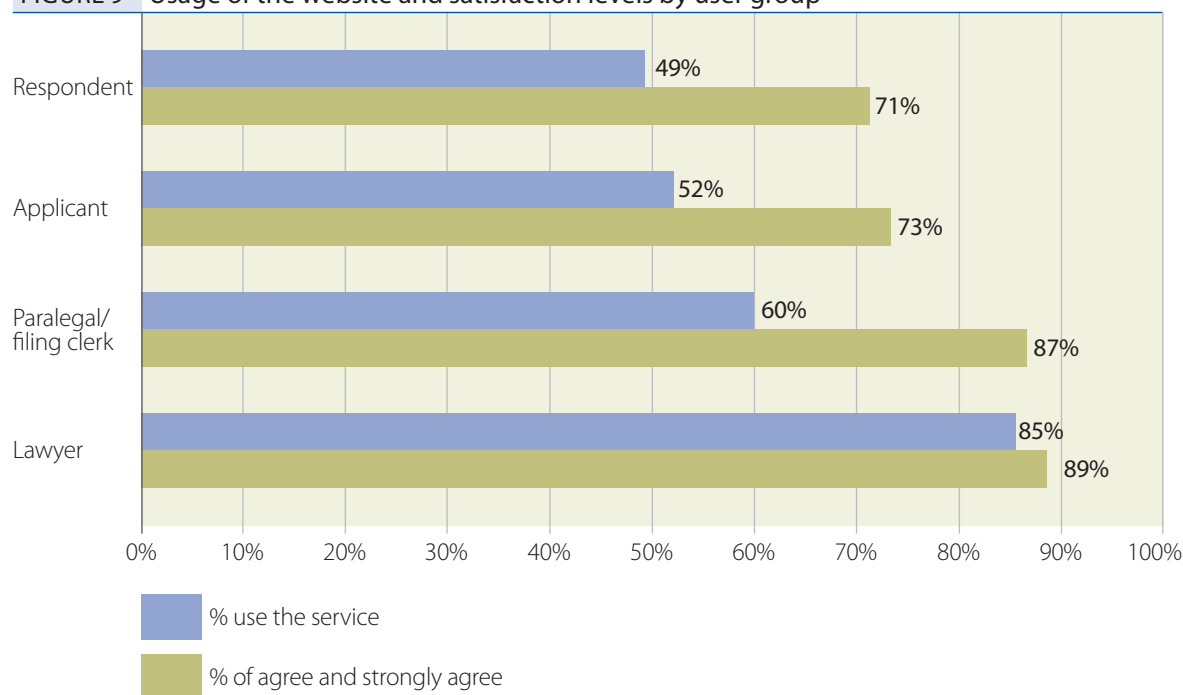
- The courts' websites are easy to use.
- The Courts' Commonwealth Portal (the Portal) was of assistance.
- Information they needed was found quickly.
- The NEC was helpful and professional.
- The NEC was quick and responsive.

Not all interviewees are users of the technology and information services offered by the courts. The Portal and the NEC were used by less than half (40%) of the interviewees. The courts' websites were more popular with nearly three out of five (60%) of interviewees using them.

The courts' websites

Over 80 per cent of interviewees who used the courts' websites (81%) found them easy to use, with three quarters (77%) finding the information they needed quickly. Lawyers were the user group most satisfied with how easy the websites were to use (89%) and to find the information they needed quickly (85%).

The applicant and respondent were less satisfied with using the websites (73% and 71% respectively). They also found it more difficult to find the information needed quickly (69% and 68% respectively) (see Figure 9).

FIGURE 9 Usage of the website and satisfaction levels by user group

The comments of applicants regarding the courts' website indicate that it is difficult to find the forms required and language could be simplified. There was also some confusion as to the difference between the FMC and FCoA. For the user the distinction seems to create confusion.

"The website is too technical. Too much information to search through." – Applicant

**"Difficult to find what was needed – had to google a few things to find the right web site."
– Applicant**

"The website was only difficult because of language (English is not first language). With the helpline, sometimes put on hold for a very long time." – Applicant

"Re website: could not find forms after doing a search for them." – Applicant

"Would be good to make the web site a bit clearer as to what particular link and what forms are needed for each matter." – Applicant

"Forms were not easy to find on the internet." – Applicant

"Website: more information about legal help needed i.e. how to deal with verbal harassment etc. search engine is too broad to find this information. Confusion between Magistrates and Family Court on website." – Applicant

Usage rates of the Portal and NEC

The Portal was launched in July 2007 and enables free web-based access to information about cases before the Family Law Courts.

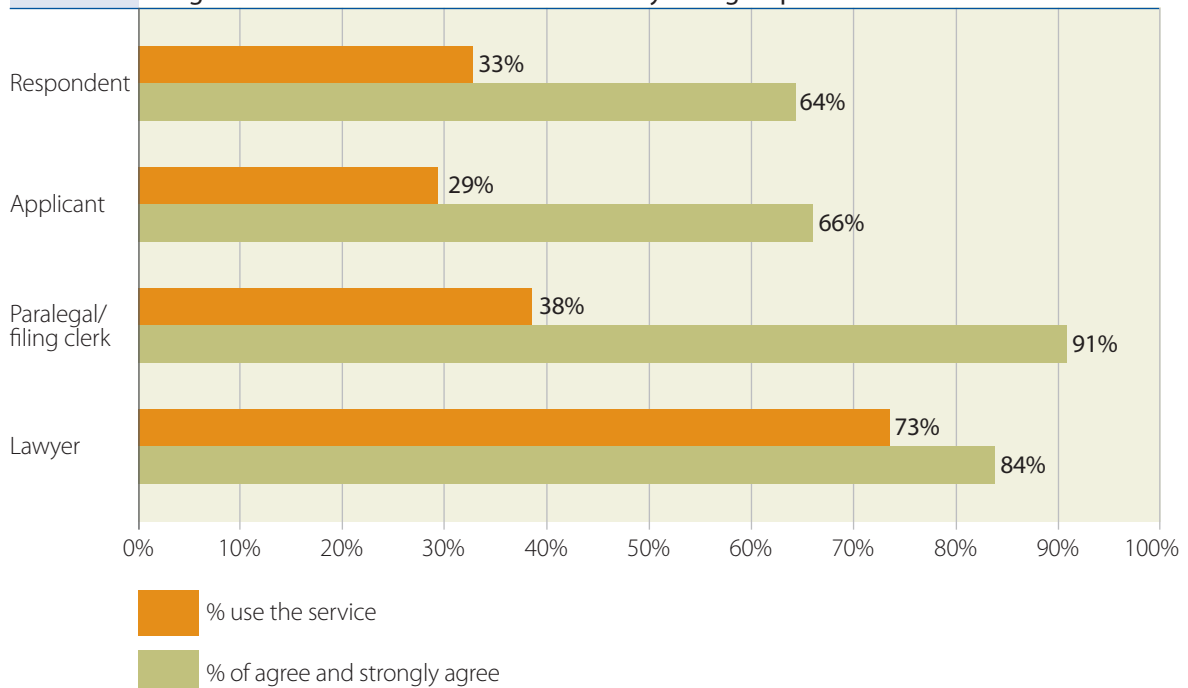
The NEC was established a year before the Portal (April 2006) to provide a centralised telephone and email service to clients contacting the courts. The NEC answers general and simple case-related enquiries previously answered by registries.

Lawyers were the largest user group of both the Portal and NEC. The Portal was more likely to be used by lawyers than the NEC, even though the NEC has been in existence for longer than the Portal. Three quarters of the lawyers interviewed (73%) used the Portal, whereas the percentage using the NEC was lower (65%). It appears that the Portal may better cater for the needs of the lawyers rather than the NEC and therefore should proportionate attention.

Only around a third of applicants and respondents used the Portal (29% and 33% respectively) or the NEC (34% and 32% respectively).

The usage and satisfaction rates for the Portal are outlined in Figure 10 and for the NEC are outlined in Figure 11.

FIGURE 10 Usage of the Portal and satisfaction levels by user group



Lawyers – largest user group of Portal and NEC.

Portal was more used by lawyers than NEC...

Satisfaction levels of the Portal and NEC

Overall, three quarters of interviewees (76.6%) found the Portal to be of assistance. Whereas, the NEC rated relatively lower, with only three out of five (66%) interviewee users finding it helpful and professional and just over half (56%) finding it quick and responsive.

Lawyers were satisfied with the Portal (84%) whereas they were particularly dissatisfied with the NEC's service. The NEC service received the lowest rating from lawyers in the user survey. Just over half the lawyers (57%) found the NEC helpful and professional and only 38 per cent found it quick and helpful.

It should be noted that the courts are aware of lawyers' dissatisfaction with the NEC service. At the time of writing this report a dedicated phone line for lawyers is being developed at the NEC. This is an area for improvement where change is being implemented and will be monitored in future years.

In respect of the Portal, although lawyers were satisfied with the service (84%), from the comments there appears to be room for improvement of the service:

"Portal-Slow NEC-Long waiting time (45 minutes)."

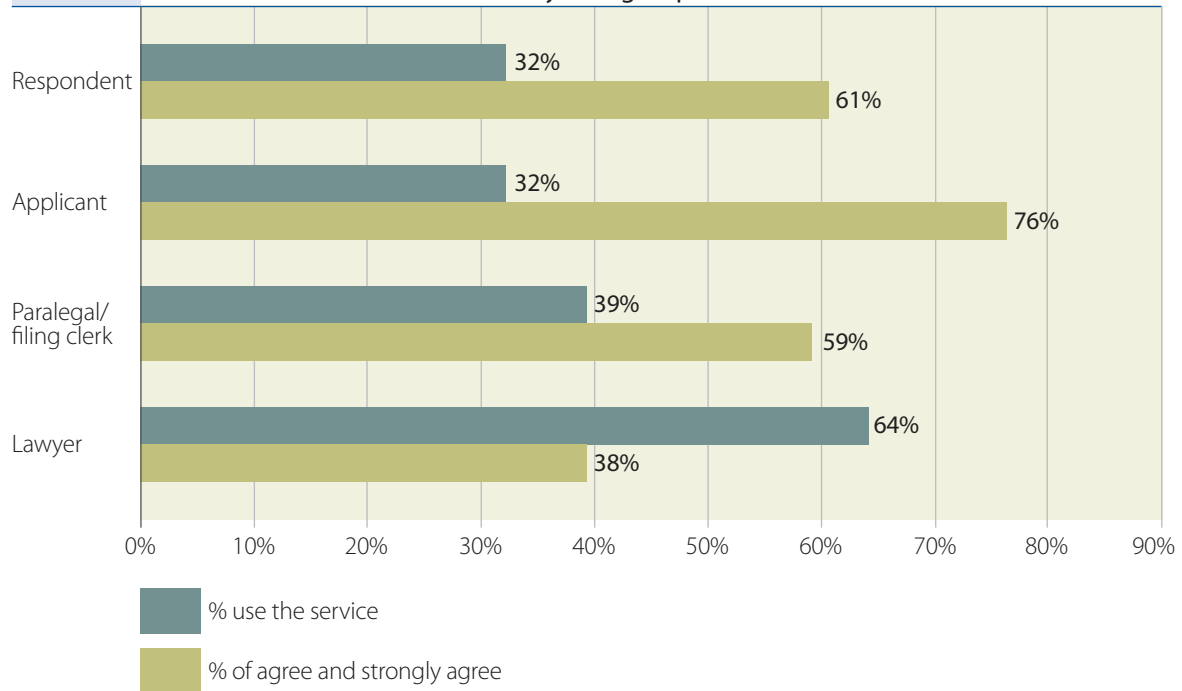
"Having trouble (not user friendly) using Commonwealth Portal – unable to log on even with support. Previous Portal was OK – not this current."

"Information is here but it's hard to find. Registering on Portal takes too long, Portal takes as long as the call centre."

A third of applicants and respondents who used the Portal were far less satisfied (66% and 64% respectively) than lawyers with the assistance it provided. Some of the comments provide an insight into this result:

"With the commonwealth portal, I needed to come into the courts to solve my problem because I couldn't find everything that was needed from the website." – Applicant

"The commonwealth portal is not easy to use and is confusing at times." – Applicant

FIGURE 11 NEC users and satisfaction levels by user group

Applicants and respondents were more satisfied with the NEC than lawyers. Three quarters of applicants were satisfied that the NEC was helpful and professional (77%) and quick and responsive (76%). Whereas, the respondent was less satisfied with the NEC's helpfulness and professionalism (68%) and the speed of response (61%).

Overwhelmingly, nearly all of the comments about the NEC were the same. They commented that the wait times were too long with wait times of half an hour or more quoted.

“Waiting time is too long for NEC, more than half an hour.” – Respondent several time user of the court

Both the Portal and NEC represent areas for improvement and are further discussed in Section 7.

7 Areas for improvement

This section covers areas for improvement identified by qualitative and quantitative results in the user survey.

The research findings from the user survey have identified several areas for improvement in the services and processes provided by the courts.

The key areas for improvement identified are based on the qualitative results. If satisfaction levels of the applicable interviewees are below three-quarters (75%) then these findings have been identified as requiring further consideration by the courts.

Better management of the respondent 'frequent user'

If the courts are targeting 'customer' service then the group who needs extra care and service are the 'frequent users'. Their overall satisfaction with the courts is substantially low and lower than that of the first and several time visitors.

The respondent group is also predominantly far less satisfied with the services provided.

In order to better manage the relationship with the 'frequent user' respondent, the courts may seek to tailor language, services and information to better meet their needs and expectations, in particular in respect of the areas below where their satisfaction levels were below 75 per cent.

The areas for improvement that follow were also areas where other user groups had relatively low satisfaction levels below 75 per cent.

The frequent court visitor and respondent require extra care and attention...

Better management of expectations about day in court

In respect of the users' day in court, there were several key areas for improvement:

- Better management of expectations of what will happen next in particular in respect of the expectations of the respondent and applicant.
- Better management of expectations of the time a matter will take – in order of priority, in respect of the expectations of the respondent, applicant and lawyer.
- Better management of expectations of the time a matter will take – in order of priority, in respect of the expectations of the respondent, applicant and lawyer.
- Better management of the respondent and frequent users' perceptions of the handling of their case.
- Better management of start times – in respect of the expectation of the respondent, applicant and lawyer.

Tailor information

- Better management about what was to happen at court in particular in respect of the respondent.
- Simplify court forms for respondents and applicants.
- Improve the user friendliness of the Portal and websites from the respondents and applicants perspectives.

In respect of the website, the navigation needs to be improved so that respondents and applicants can easily find the forms required and information they need quickly.

- Improve the service provided by NEC from the perspective of the lawyers and respondents. Consideration needs to be given to all service aspects from helpfulness and professionalism to the speed of response.

Feedback from court users

The interviewee was asked what, if anything, would have improved their experience at court today.

The qualitative results indicated that lawyers would have been far happier with coffee whether it was free or just accessible! Some of the other reoccurring themes were a need for more rooms such as conference or interview rooms and to reduce wait times. Some specific comments from lawyers were:

“It would be better if I did not have to come in – should be able to do it online.”

“Timed appearances; consent matters heard alphabetically, not by seniority from 10–11am; requests for adjournments/extension of time for filing documents etc 11–12; requests for u/hearings 12–1pm etc – rather than waiting all day.”

“Confusing with subpoena system. Needs a rework! Not enjoying the changes – they are confusing and don’t make the system work better. Need a process consultant (from manufacturing) to look at it.”

For applicants one of the key areas for improvement of their experience was to reduce wait times and more communication as to what will happen next.

“If there were clear notices of when my matters would be heard and not told what is to happen – it’s just a matter of waiting and hearing for your name to be called.”

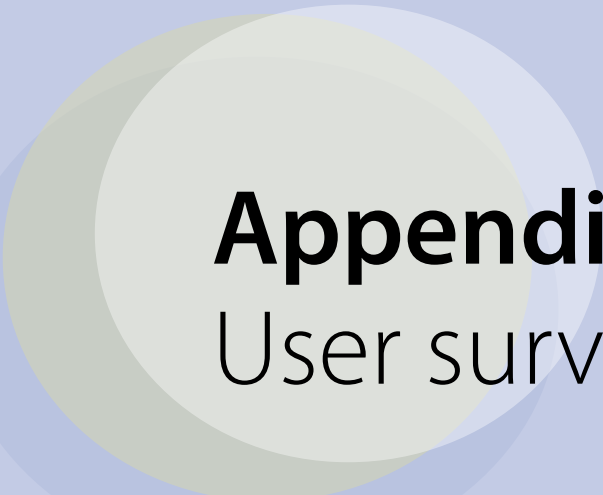
“Too many people and cases for one Federal Magistrate to hear.”

“A letter prior to the hearing outlining procedure.”

Respondents had a range of issues from both parties being treated fairly and equally to timing of the case. There was also mention of adequate notice being given to both parties.

“Make the legal system much simpler so people do not have to spend \$30–40,000 just to see their kids. It is too simple for one party to make allegations and the court believes it without any evidence. Parking.”

“Unfortunately the process takes far too long.”



Appendix A

User survey questions

Family Law Client Satisfaction Survey

* 1. Interviewer Name:

* 2. Interview Details:

Date & Start Time

DD / MM / YYYY HH : MM AM/PM

 / / :

* 3. What was the primary purpose of your visit to court today?

- Attend a hearing(s)
 Attend a conference
 General enquiry
 File papers
 Support family and/or friends
- Other (please specify)

* 4. Which court did you attend?

- Federal Magistrates Court
 Family Court
 Both
 Unsure
 Neither

* 5. What was the type of matter?

- Divorce proceedings
 Final/interim orders
- Other (please specify)

6. If Final/interim orders, the type of orders sought?

- Children issues
 Financial issues
 Children/financial issues
- Other (please specify)

* 7. Who did you see today?

- Court/counter staff
 Registrar
 Family Consultant
 Judicial Officer
- Other (please specify)

Family Law Client Satisfaction Survey

* 8. What is your role?

If you answer Lawyer or Paralegal/Filing Clerk, please skip to Q21

- Lawyer
 Paralegal/Filing Clerk
 Applicant
 Respondent
 Friend/relative
 Other interested party
- Other (please specify)

* 9. What is your age?

- < 20
 20 to 30
 31 to 40
 41 to 50
 51 to 60
 61 and above
 Prefer not to answer

* 10. What is your postcode?

* 11. What is your gender?

- Female
 Male

* 12. What is your current marital status?

- Married
 Divorced
 Separated
 De facto
 Single

* 13. How many children do you have?

- 0
 1
 2
 3
 4
 5 or more

* 14. Is English your first language?

- Yes
 No

15. If no, what is your first language?

16. Do you identify as ATSI?

- No
 Yes

17. If yes, as?

- Aboriginal
 Torres Strait Islander
 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

* 18. How many times have you visited the court?

- First time
 Several times
 Regularly (e.g. many times per year)

Family Law Client Satisfaction Survey

* 19. What is your highest level of education?

- Primary
 Secondary
 Trade
 Tertiary

* 20. What is your family income?

- < than \$50k per year
 \$50-80k per year
 \$80-120k per year
 > than \$120k per year
 Prefer not to answer

Thank you for that information. Now we wish to ask you a few questions about your experience today at the court.

* 21. About the court building and facilities

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	N/A
Finding the court building was easy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Finding your way around the court was easy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You felt safe in the court environment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You felt safe in the courtroom	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There were sufficient facilities e.g. seating areas	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other general comments

* 22. About the people you met (staff, registrars, consultants, judicial officers etc.)

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	N/A
They treated you professionally and respectfully	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
They attended to you promptly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
They answered your enquiry directly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In general, you were satisfied with the service provided	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other general comments

Family Law Client Satisfaction Survey

* 23. About the court process

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	N/A
The forms you needed were clear and easy to understand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The procedural advice from staff was easily understood	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The payment facilities are easy to use	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other general comments

* 24. About the day at court

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	N/A
You received plenty of notice leading up to today	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You were clear about what was to happen today	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your matter took the time you were expecting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You understand what is to happen next in your matter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other general comments

* 25. About your hearing today (in the courtroom)

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	N/A
The way in which my case was handled was fair	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Judicial Officer listened and led the hearing well	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your matter started on time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You were treated the same as everyone else	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other general comments

* 26. Overall (and disregarding the outcome of your case)

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	N/A
You were generally satisfied with your visit to the court	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Family Law Client Satisfaction Survey

27. What, if anything, impressed you most about your experience today?

28. What, if anything, would have improved your experience today?

And finally, a few questions on the technology and other services

*** 29. About the technology and information services**

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	N/A
You found the Courts' website easy to use	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You found the Courts' Commonwealth Portal of assistance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You found the information needed quickly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You found the National Enquiry Centre helpful and professional	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
You found the National Enquiry Centre quick and responsive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other general comments

Many thanks for assisting us with this survey.

Signed (interviewer):

*** 30. End Time:**

Time ^{HH} : ^{MM} ^{AM/PM}