



Ministry of
JUSTICE

HM Courts Service Probate Service Survey 2009

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Statistics bulletin

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Executive Summary

The HM Courts Service (HMCS) Probate Service survey provides evidence of the expectations, attitudes and experiences of legal professionals and personal applicants applying for a grant of representation (grant of probate or letters of administration). It looks at satisfaction with each stage of the process and provides a steer for those working to improve the services of Probate Registries. The survey is conducted by post on an annual basis to help track satisfaction and gauge the extent of any changes across the service from the perspective of its users.

This is the second year the survey has been carried out. The findings commented on in this report are based on 916 completed surveys from legal professionals and 1,100 from personal applicants. This report provides an overview of the key findings from the survey, highlighting good performance as well as areas in need improvement where relevant.

It should be noted that this report focuses on the postal survey of Probate Service applicants. Results from the 2008/9 HMCS Court User Exit Survey and Jurors Survey are provided in separate reports.

Overall satisfaction levels

As in 2008, the great majority of personal applicants and legal professionals are satisfied with all aspects of the service provided by Probate Registries. For example, 95% of legal professionals and 92% of personal applicants are satisfied with the overall process of applying for a grant of representation, with over two thirds (67%) *very* satisfied. The majority of personal applicants (53%) feel that the experience of obtaining a grant of representation exceeded their expectations and this is particularly the case for those applying for the first time (60%). Legal professionals, who may be expected to be more familiar with the system, overwhelmingly feel the service provided meets their expectations (74%).

Table 1 below shows the high levels of satisfaction across key service areas.

Table 1: Performance across key service areas

Key Service Area	% <u>Very</u> satisfied (legal professionals)	% <u>Very/Fairly</u> satisfied (legal professionals)	% <u>Very</u> satisfied (personal applicants)	% <u>Very/Fairly</u> satisfied (personal applicants)
Time taken to obtain grant	61	93	61	86
Cost of obtaining grant	71	92	29	63
Overall satisfaction with process	67	95	67	92
Satisfaction with staff ¹	70	93	83	95
Satisfaction with contacting Registry ²	63	90	72	88
Satisfaction with how interview was handled	-	-	88	97
Satisfaction with facilities ³	-	-	72	89

Personal applicants are particularly positive about the way their interview was handled and with their treatment by staff, but less likely to be satisfied with the cost of obtaining a grant. In addition to the results above, the findings show that large majority of personal applicants found the forms they need to complete easy to obtain (92%) and fill in (80%), and the accompanying information and guidance helpful (96%). Over nine in ten

¹ Please note that this figure is the average rating of staff from Q11 (a), (b) and (c) and excludes those saying 'not applicable'.

² Please note that this figure is the average rating from Q5 (a), (b), (c), (d) and (e).

³ Please note that this figure excludes those saying 'not applicable'.

(92%) were also satisfied with the length of time they had to wait before their interview, while an impressive 97% were satisfied with how their interview was handled (88% very satisfied). Facilities are also viewed favourably by personal applicants, with 89% feeling they took into account any particular needs they had. Encouragingly, those with a disability were equally satisfied in this regard (90% satisfied).

Legal professionals also show high levels of satisfaction, with at least nine in ten satisfied across each measure on table 1. Additionally, legal professionals who used the settling service are satisfied with its usefulness (88%) and speed (83%). Similarly, over four in five (82%) are satisfied with the handling of pre-lodgement enquiries.

Reflecting these positive results, when asked for suggestions for improvement, the most common response from both personal applicants and legal professionals was that 'nothing' could be improved as the current service received was typically of a high standard and delivered by friendly and knowledgeable staff.

What is driving overall satisfaction?

When prompted explicitly, more than seven in ten legal professionals (90%) stated that the **time the application took** is one of the most important aspects of the service offered by Probate Registries, followed by **how staff dealt with them** (51%). Conversely, for personal applicants the way in which staff dealt with them is considered most important (63%), followed by the time their application (57%) took. Also important is the **information and guidance provided** (53% of personal applicants mention this and 38% of legal professionals).

As table 1 shows there are encouragingly high levels of satisfaction with staff, which is a positive finding given the perceived importance of treatment by staff. However, the time taken to obtain a grant of representation – while still largely viewed positively - has the lowest percentage of applicants saying they are *very satisfied* other than cost. Reflecting this, when asked for their suggestions for improvement, speeding up the process emerges as an area which some feel could be improved (16% of legal professionals and 11% of personal applicants mention this). Likewise, wanting a quicker date for interview is also raised by some personal applicants (10% mention this). User perceptions of the Probate Service would likely benefit from improvements in this aspect of service.

In addition, while 80% of personal applicants found the forms easy to complete, only 27% found them *very easy*, suggesting that another area of focus should be ensuring forms and guidance are as user-friendly and clear as possible for personal applicants.

How do 2009 results compare with 2008?

Although the 2009 results are clearly very positive, there is some indication that satisfaction has dropped for some measures since 2008.

Amongst legal professionals, fewer are satisfied with the cost of obtaining a grant (71% *very satisfied* vs. 77% in 2008), the time taken to obtain a grant of representation (61% *very satisfied* vs. 66% in 2008), and the overall process of applying for a grant of representation (67% *very satisfied* compared with 74% in 2008). They are also slightly less positive about their treatment by staff than in 2008 (e.g. 72% *very happy* this year with the politeness and helpfulness of staff compared with 80% in 2008). Overall, the decreases in levels of satisfaction, although significant, are often quite small, which means they should not cause too much concern. However, the Probate Service will need to ensure that this does not signal a more significant downward trend.

As regards personal applicants, the results also show slight decreases from 2008. Like legal professionals, they are less positive about the time taken to receive a grant of representation (86% satisfied overall vs. 91% in 2008) and are less satisfied this year with the overall process (92% vs. 95% in 2008). In addition, they are less satisfied with the length of time they had to wait before their interview (92% vs. 95%). Even so, satisfaction with contacting Registries, with staff, with the forms and guidance, with travelling to the Registry, and with the interview, is in line with 2008 results. As with legal professionals, the drops in satisfaction are usually small, but it will be important to focus on key customer-facing areas of service to ensure high levels of satisfaction are maintained in future years.

How do personal applicants and legal professionals compare?

Several questions in the survey are specific to either personal applicants or legal professionals. However, where the same questions are asked of both groups, some differences emerge (see e.g. table 1).

In particular, legal professionals are more positive than personal applicants about the time taken to obtain a grant of representation (93% vs. 86%), the cost of a grant (92% vs. 63%), and the overall process for obtaining a grant (95% vs. 92%). On the other hand, personal applicants are more likely to be *very satisfied* with the way they were treated by staff. Given that the way staff dealt with them is personal applicants' top priority, it is very positive that they score so highly on this measure.

How Probate Registries compare and sharing good practice

As in 2008, the base sizes for individual Registries are small, which makes comparisons difficult. That said, Cardiff, Manchester, Winchester and Bristol Registries emerge as particularly positive on some measures. It may be useful for Registries performing particularly well in key areas to share their good practice more widely. For example - as in 2008 - Cardiff, Winchester and Manchester Registries score highly as regards the time taken for grants of representation to be issued. It may be that processes and techniques used in these Registries could be explored in order to identify good practice for sharing with other Registries.

Background and methodology

Research background and objectives

The HMCS survey of Probate Service applicants looks at the views of personal applicants and legal professionals about the service they receive when applying for a grant of representation. The survey is a subsidiary of the HMCS Court User Survey, which is carried out across England and Wales. It aims to assist those working to improve the service offered by Probate Registries. The survey is conducted by post on an annual basis in order to enable progress to be monitored. This is the second year the survey has been carried out by Ipsos MORI.

Methodology

A sample of 7,746 personal applicants and legal professionals was sent a postal survey asking them about their experiences of obtaining a grant of representation. The questions remained unchanged from 2008 to enable year-on-year comparisons to be made.

The questionnaire, in the form of a 4-page booklet, was issued by the eleven District Probate Registries and the Principle Registry in London, along with a business reply envelope, to each applicant receiving a grant of representation during the w/c 11th May 2009. At the start of the fieldwork period, each Registry was provided by Ipsos MORI with 650 questionnaires to distribute. By the end of the one-week period for issuing questionnaires, some Registries still had surveys left over where fewer than 650 grants of representation had been issued over the course of the week. In such cases, Probate Registries continued to send out surveys into w/c 25th May.

Fieldwork was conducted between 11th May and 12th June 2009. Ipsos MORI received 2,036 completed surveys, resulting in an overall response rate of 26%. This was similar to the response rate in 2008, when 1,814 responses were received (out of 6,622 issued questionnaires), representing a response rate of 27%. The response rate varied between Registries, as shown in the table overleaf.

Response rate

Probate Registry	Total surveys issued	Total completed surveys received	Response rate
Birmingham	650	153	23%
Brighton	650	146	22%
Bristol	650	157	24%
Cardiff	596	172	29%
Ipswich	650	198	30%
Leeds	650	168	26%
Liverpool	650	170	26%
Manchester	650	180	28%
Newcastle	650	154	24%
Oxford	650	171	26%
Winchester	650	224	34%
London	650	144	22%
Total	7746	2036	26%

Report layout

In this report, we examine the findings for each question picking out the key themes in turn and note where there are differences by relevant groups of respondents.

The appendices at the end of this document contain a sample profile and a guide to statistical reliability.

Interpretation of the data

When interpreting the findings, it is important to remember that the respondents to this survey are only a sample of the total number of personal applicants and legal professionals. Consequently, results are subject to sampling tolerances, and not all differences between sub-groups will be statistically significant.

Throughout the report, we highlight differences between sub-groups of respondents – on the basis of, for example, age, gender, and Registry. Differences are only commented on where they are statistically significant. A guide to statistical significance is included in the appendices. It is important to note that caution should be exercised where groups of less than 50

respondents have been analysed, and large differences between data will need to be present in order for these differences to be statistically significant. In particular, when comparing results between the twelve Registries, it should be noted that the number of applicants responding from each Registry is sometimes very small making comparisons difficult or, at times, not possible. Throughout the report, we have highlighted where caution needs to be exercised in interpreting results.

Where percentages in the charts or tables in the report do not always add up to 100%, this is due to multiple answers, computer rounding and/or the exclusion of neutral, don't know or not stated responses. In addition, where percentages in the charts vary by one percentage point from those in the text, this too is simply due to computer rounding.

Throughout the tables, an asterisk (*) denotes a value greater than zero, but less than 0.5%.

Satisfaction with obtaining a grant of representation

This section examines levels of satisfaction with the cost of, and time taken to obtain, a grant of representation, as well as overall satisfaction with the process. It is clear that the great majority of personal applicants and legal professionals are satisfied with the service received. There are similar patterns to the 2008 data, but satisfaction has dropped for some measures this year.

Cost of obtaining a grant of representation

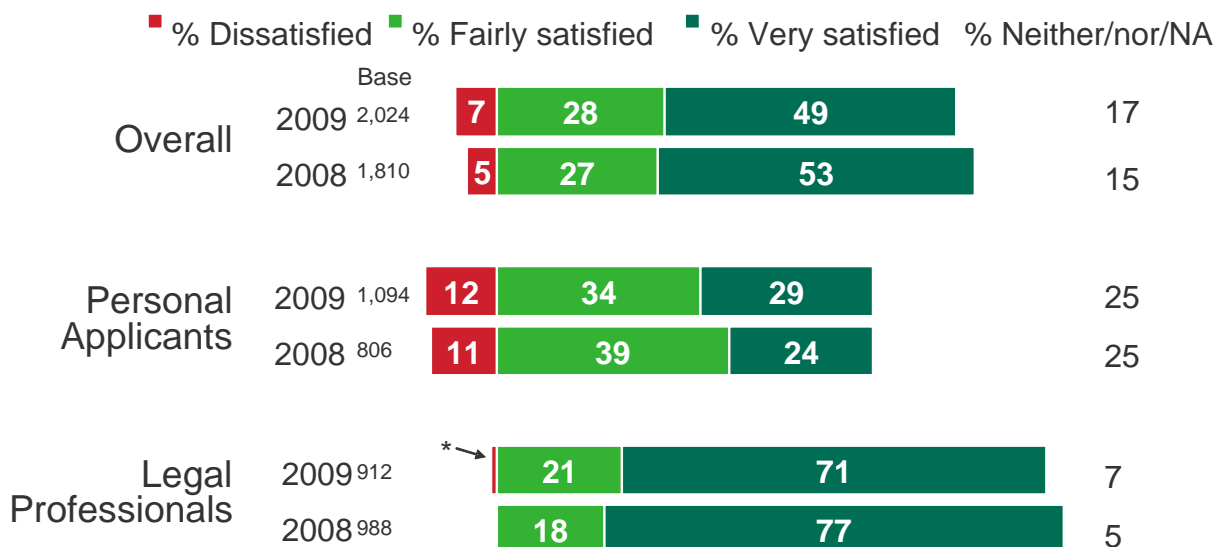
More than three quarters of all respondents (77%) were satisfied with the **cost of obtaining a grant of representation** and around half were very satisfied (49%). Legal professionals were significantly more likely to be satisfied, with more than nine in ten giving a positive response (92%), compared with just over three in five personal applicants (63%).

“[The] cost is high [for] office work. [It] probably took no more than 1 1/2 hours.” **Personal Applicant, Ipswich**

Legal professionals are less satisfied with cost this year than last (92% compared with 95% in 2008), but the percentage of personal applicants who are satisfied is unchanged from 2008, with a greater percentage very satisfied this year (29% vs. 24% in 2008).

Table: Cost of obtaining a grant of representation

How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the cost of obtaining a grant of representation?



Base: All Probate Service users giving an answer, 11th May – 12th June 2009

Time taken to obtain a grant of representation

Almost nine in ten (89%) respondents were satisfied with the **time taken to obtain a grant of representation**. This is true for 86% of personal applicants and 93% of legal professionals. Time taken for a grant of representation to be issued is singled out as the top priority for legal professionals, with 90% rating this as most important to them regarding the service received (see ‘Suggestions for improvement and priorities’). For personal applicants, it comes second only to how staff dealt with them. As a result, it is encouraging that the great majority of respondents are satisfied with the time taken.

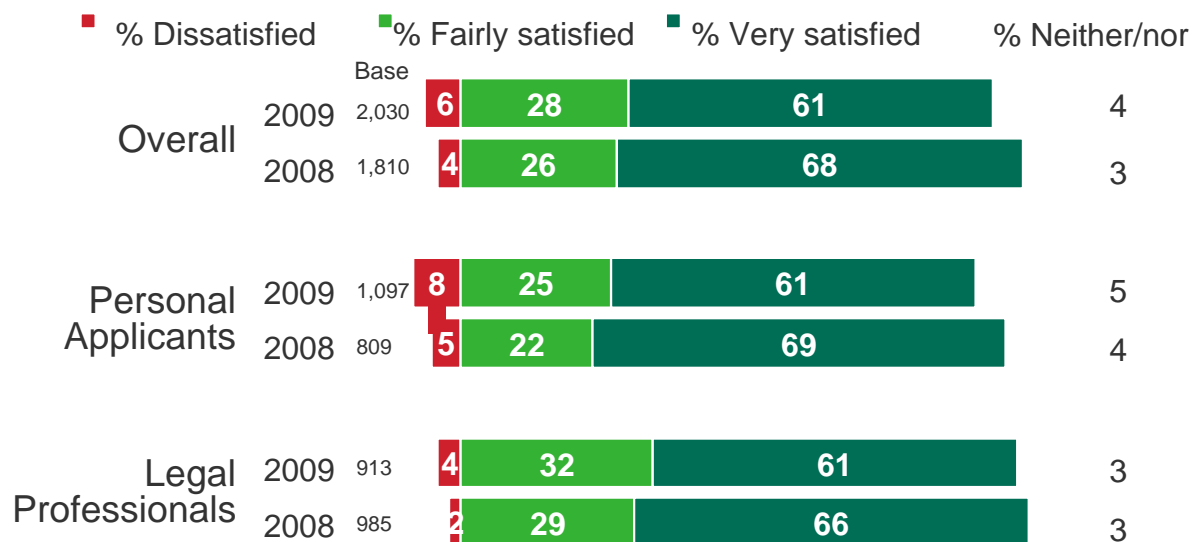
Even so, it should be noted that these values are lower than in 2008, when 91% of personal applicants and 95% of legal professionals were satisfied. The comment below illustrates the frustration felt when the process takes longer than desired.

“[There should be a] much shorter time between completing and sending in the forms and the interview. I had to wait approximately six weeks before I got an interview.” **Personal Applicant, Ipswich**

For personal applicants, those in Cardiff (94%), Manchester (94%) and Winchester (95%) are particularly positive about the length of the process, while for legal professionals this is true of those in Cardiff (100%) and Manchester (99%).

Time taken to issue grant of representation

How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the time it has taken for the grant of representation to be issued?



Base: All Probate Service users giving answer, 11th May to 12th June 2009

Overall process of applying for a grant of representation

The great majority of applicants (94%) were satisfied with the **overall process of applying for a grant of representation**, including 95% of legal professionals and 92% of personal applicants. The comments below illustrate how positive many respondents are about the service received.

“I cannot see how such an excellent service can usefully be improved.” **Legal professional, Winchester**

“I was pleasantly surprised with the whole experience, made far easier by the pleasant and helpful staff in every department.”
Personal applicant, Cardiff

“I have nothing but praise for the service provided by the Manchester District Probate Registry.” **Legal professional, Manchester**

“I cannot think of anything that would have improved the experience. As far as I am concerned the staff, the short time between application and interview and the time it took between interview and receiving the grant were all very impressive.” **Personal applicant, Bristol**

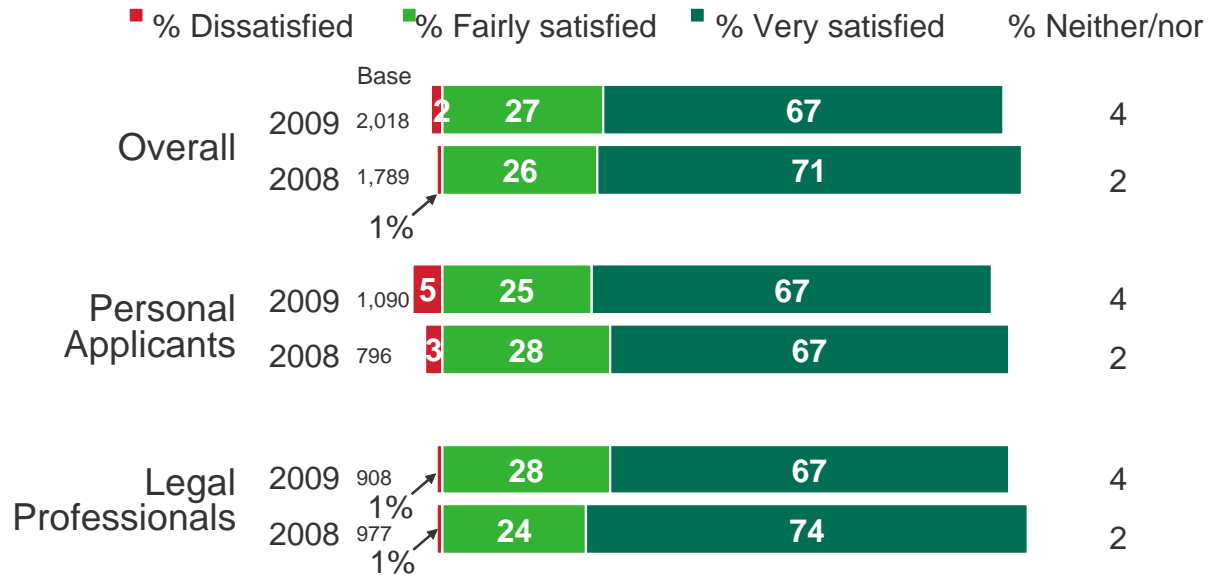
The same proportion of personal applicants was *very* satisfied this year as in 2008 (67%). However, the proportion of those *fairly* satisfied has dropped this year, resulting in a decrease in the overall level of satisfaction (92% vs. 95% in 2008). Personal applicants issued a grant of representation by Cardiff, Bristol and Winchester Registries show the highest levels of satisfaction (99%, 98% and 98% respectively), while those issued their grant by Ipswich are the least satisfied: 85% satisfied, 11% dissatisfied.

That said, because of the relatively small numbers responding from each Registry, although these differences are statistically significant, they should be viewed with a degree of caution.

Satisfaction levels have also dropped this year for legal professionals, with 67% *very* satisfied, compared with 74% in 2008. While satisfaction is largely consistent across Registries, a few show greater proportions saying they were *very* satisfied. This includes Cardiff (90% *very* satisfied), Liverpool (81% *very* satisfied) and Manchester (78% *very* satisfied). However, for some Registries (in particular London and Oxford) the base sizes are very small making comparisons difficult.

Process for obtaining a grant of representation

Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the process for obtaining a grant of representation?



Base: All Probate Service users giving an answer, 12th May to 11th June 2009

Satisfaction with contacting Probate Registries

This section examines personal applicants' and legal professionals' contact with Registries and their satisfaction with this contact. Overall, the results are very positive, with applicants predominantly satisfied with all aspects of their contact with Registries including, where applicable, the way staff treat them.

Methods used to contact Registries

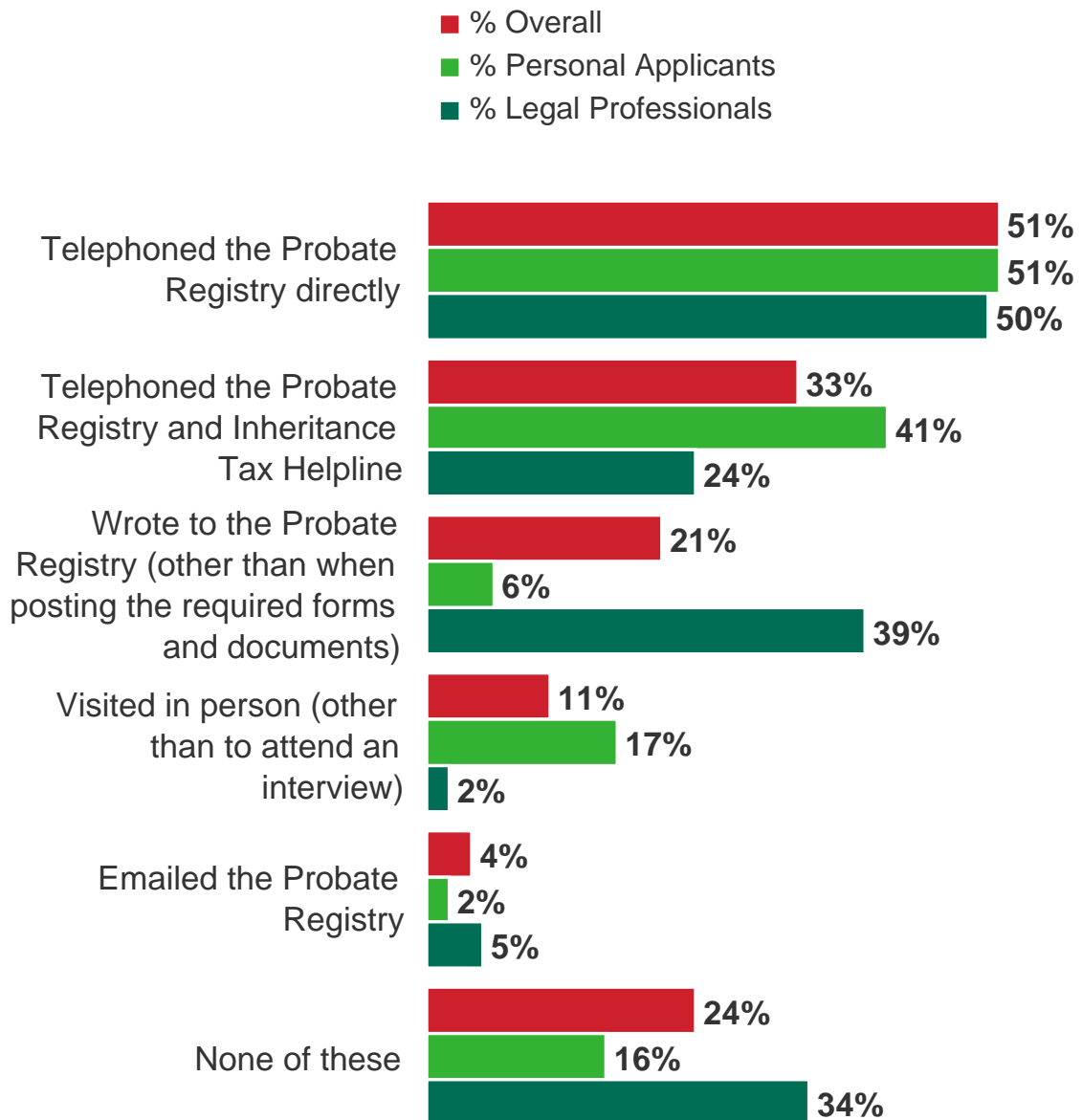
As in 2008, contacting the **Registry directly by telephone** was the most likely method of communication (51%). Similar to last year's findings, a third (33%) telephoned the **Probate and Inheritance Tax Helpline**; one in five (21%) **wrote to the Registry**; one in ten (11%) **visited the Registry in person**; and 4% **emailed the Registry**. A quarter of all applicants (24%) **did not make contact** with the Registry through any of these methods during the process of applying.

As might be expected, personal applicants were more likely than legal professional to **telephone the helpline** (41% vs. 24%) while legal professionals were more likely to **write to the Registry** (39% vs. 6%).

Those in Bristol were more likely to **contact the Registry directly by telephone** than in other locations (61%); and those in Manchester were most likely to say they **did not contact the Registry at all** (31%).

Table: Methods used to contact the Probate Registry

Did you contact the Probate Registry by any of the methods below during the process of applying for a grant of representation?



Base: All Probate Service users giving an answer - Overall: 1,997; Personal Applicants: 1,083; Legal Professionals: 894

Satisfaction with contacting Registries

The vast majority of both legal professionals and personal applicants who contacted the Probate Registries were satisfied with the service they received, across all methods of contact. Ratings were lower amongst those who used **email** although the fairly low numbers of respondents using email means that these differences are indicative only.

Legal professionals were significantly more likely to be satisfied compared with personal applicants with the service they received when **telephoning the Registry directly**. This is due to the significant proportion of those who were *fairly* satisfied, at nearly a quarter (23%) compared with just 16% of personal applicants.

“Telephone links to Probate Registry were always engaged - I had difficulty in making contact.” **Personal applicant, London**

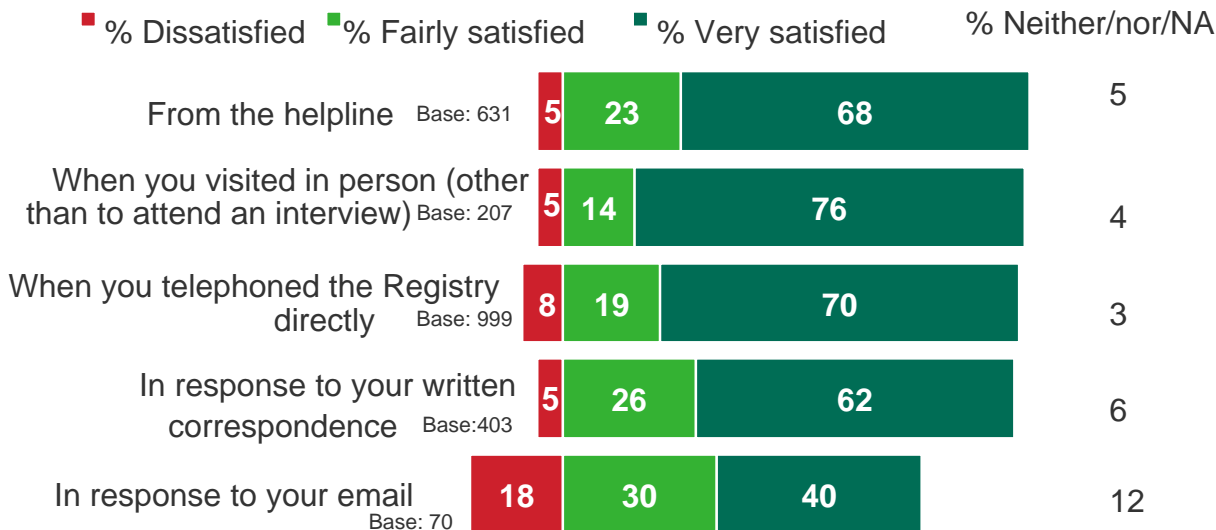
Personal applicants were more likely to be *very* satisfied with the service they received when calling the **Probate Registry and Inheritance Tax helpline**; three quarters (76%) compared with just half (52%) of legal professionals.

“Experience of interview was very positive. The gentleman I saw was very pleasant and helpful and put me at my ease. I did find the forms a bit difficult but the helpline clarified matters for me.” **Personal applicant, Ipswich**

Results are largely in line with 2008, although the percentage of legal professionals satisfied with telephoning the Registry directly has dropped (92% vs. 96% in 2008). Female personal applicants were significantly more likely to be very satisfied with **their personal visit to the Registry** compared with men (83% vs. 71%).

Satisfaction with service provided when contacting Probate Registries

How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the overall service you received from each of the following?



Base: All Probate Service users who contacted Registry by one of the above means 11th May to 12th June 2009

Perceptions of the HMCS Probate Service website

Overall, half of respondents had **accessed the HMCS Probate Service website** and half had not. The proportion of those who had visited the website has increased since last year (from 46%).

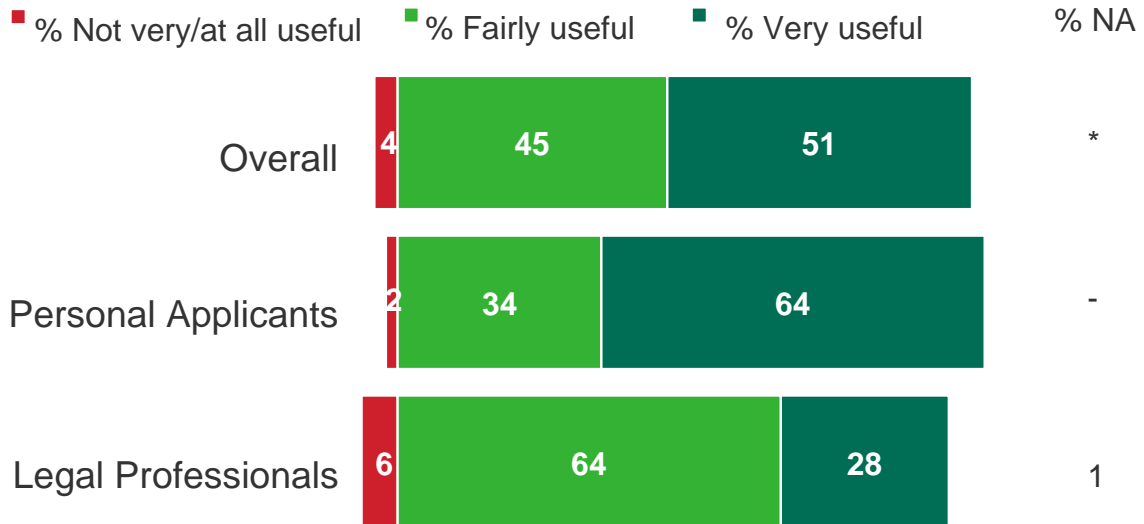
Perhaps unsurprisingly, those aged 18-34 were more likely to say they had accessed the website compared with those aged 55+ (62% compared with 45%). Personal applicants are more likely to have visited the website with nearly three in five (58%) compared with two in five (40%) legal professionals.

Of those who did use the website, an overwhelming 96% found it **useful**, with half (51%) stating it was very useful. Those aged 55+ were most likely to state they found it useful compared with other age groups.

“I found everything I needed from the website (and library books). The expectations set out on the forms and website were fully met.”
Personal applicant, Bristol

How useful is the HMCS Probate Service Website

If yes, how useful did you find the website?



Base: All Probate Service users who have visited the HMCS Probate Service website (992) 11th May to 12th June 2009

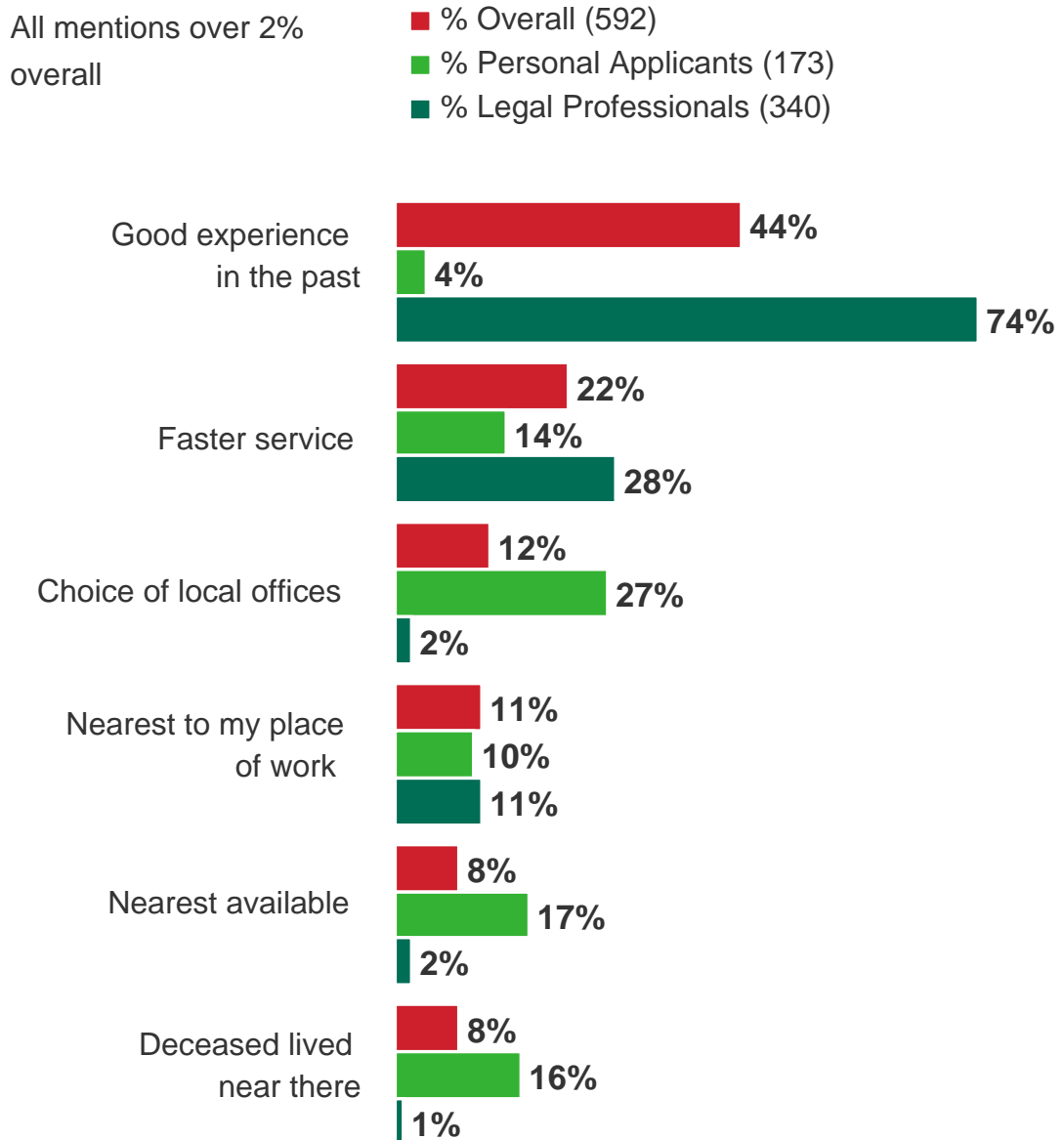
Use of local Registries

Similar to 2008 results, seven in ten (70%) respondents **lodged/presented their application for a grant of representation in a Registry that was local to them**. This was true of more than three quarters of personal applicants (76%) compared with around three in five (63%) legal professionals. For personal applicants, this was significantly higher in Leeds (89%) and Manchester (87%) and significantly lower in Oxford (69%) and Winchester (64%). It is also lower for Liverpool (68%), but the small base size means this result is indicative only. For legal professionals, it was significantly higher in Bristol (75%), Cardiff (79%), Leeds (79%), Manchester (77%) and London (84%) and significantly lower for Ipswich (52%), Newcastle (49%), Oxford (45%) and Winchester (40%).

For the majority of legal professionals (74%), having received a **good service in the past** was the main reason why they chose to lodge their application at a Registry that was not local to them. A perceived **faster service**, was the second most important, with over a quarter stating this (28%). Reasons for not choosing the local Registry are not as clear cut for personal applicants, who provided a wider range of reasons; around a quarter (27%) stated **choice of local offices**, followed by 17% **nearest available** and 16% **near the deceased**.

Reasons for choosing a Registry that is not local

If this was **not** local to you, why did you choose that Registry/Office?



Base: All Probate Service users who did not use a local Registry (592)

Satisfaction with treatment by staff⁴

The vast majority of respondents were satisfied with all aspects of their treatment by staff; **politeness and helpfulness** (95%); **being treated fairly and sensitively** (94%); and the **ability of staff to respond to, and deal with, your query** (93%).

As in 2008, personal applicants were more likely than legal professionals to state they were *very* as opposed to *fairly* satisfied on all of these indicators, as illustrated by the chart below. Personal applicants are also more likely to have come into contact with Registry staff than legal professionals: for each of these questions the proportion of legal professionals stating that the question is 'not applicable' to them is relatively high (note that those saying 'not applicable' have been excluded from the chart below).

Cardiff Registry stands out as being particularly highly rated in terms of the proportion of personal applicants and legal professionals who are satisfied with their treatment by staff: all 61 legal professionals giving a rating are satisfied with the politeness and helpfulness of staff, while impressively all 97 personal applicants giving a rating were satisfied with every aspect of their treatment by staff. Below is a selection verbatim comments received about staff at the Cardiff Registry, illustrating the high levels of satisfaction.

"Nothing could have been improved. It was an upsetting and emotional time. The lady I saw in Bangor then Casernavon firstly made me feel able to cope and put me at ease. She gave me [a] full explanation so I was able to feel in control." **Personal applicant, Cardiff**

"The whole process was straightforward with no difficulty. The staff member at Pontypridd office was polite and most courteous." **Personal applicant, Cardiff**

"I have always found our dealings to be handled efficiently with help being given at any time... The registrar has been most helpful, with his staff always willing to assist and comply. Wish other government departments were this good." **Legal professional, Cardiff**

Satisfaction with staff at the London Registry, although still very high overall, is lower than for other Registries – verbatim comments suggest in some instances greater sensitivity could have been shown.

"It would be helpful if the staff member showed compassion at this time." **Personal applicant, London**

⁴ Please note that, for this section, the number of respondents stating 'not applicable' was high so they have been removed from the analysis to provide a more accurate picture of satisfaction.

“On three occasions, staff answering the phones could have been much more sensitive.” **Personal applicant, London**

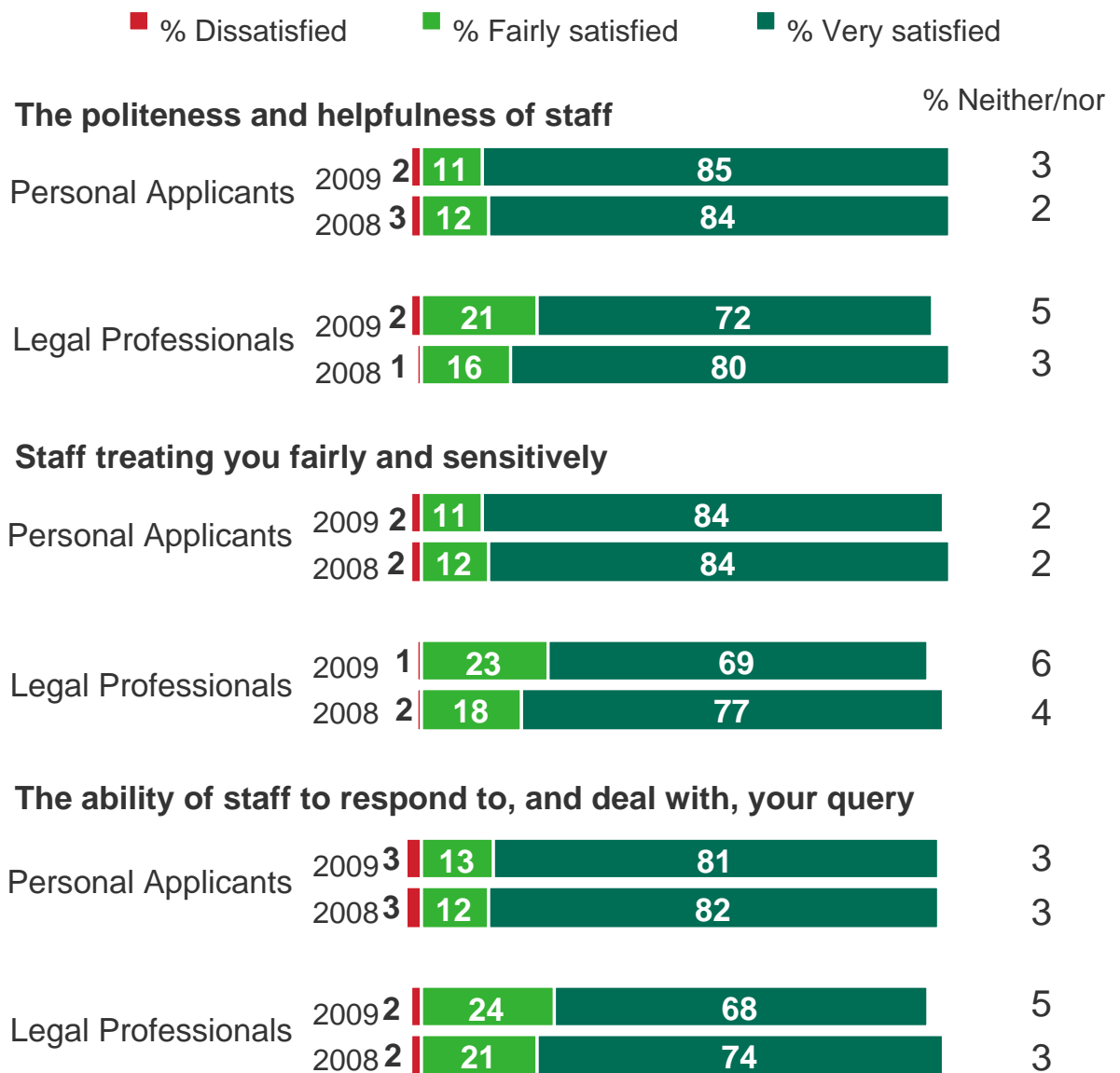
Even so, the great majority of respondents were positive with staff at the London Registry, as in the comment below.

“I had no idea what to expect before I went to my interview and was so nervous, but the lady I saw there was so charming and helpful putting me at my ease. I am 80 years old, thank you.” **Personal applicant, London**

Despite the high levels of satisfaction overall, results are less positive than in 2008 for legal professionals. As shown in the chart overleaf, fewer legal professionals say they were *very* satisfied this year with their treatment by staff – for example 72% were satisfied with the politeness and helpfulness of court staff this year compared with 80% in 2008 and 69% were very satisfied with staff treating them fairly and sensitively compared with 77% in 2008. It will be important for the Probate Service to work to ensure that satisfaction with Registry staff is maintained in forthcoming years.

Satisfaction with staff

Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with each of the following aspects of the service you received when applying for a grant of representation?



Base: All Probate Service users giving a rating (i.e. excludes those saying 'not applicable')

Personal applicants' experiences of filling in the necessary forms and the interview

This section looks at personal applicants' experience of the forms they have to complete to obtain their grant of representation, including the ease with which these forms were obtained and how readily personal applicants were able to fill them out. As with other aspects of the service received, the great majority were positive. Personal applicants were also overwhelmingly satisfied with how their interview was handled and results are broadly in line with 2008.

Ease of obtaining and completing the necessary forms

For more than three quarters of personal applicants (78%), this was the **first time** they had applied for a grant of representation. Those who applied for the first time were more likely than those who had applied previously to say they were not confident about what to expect, but that afterwards, they found the experience better than expected.

Two in five (40%) obtained the necessary forms from the **HMCS Probate Registry website**. Last year, the greatest proportion obtained them directly from the Probate Registry, although more than a third (36%) still used this method this year.

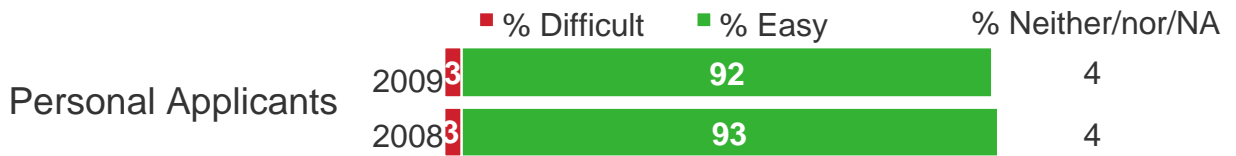
A great majority of 80% stated they found the forms **easy to complete**, although only 27% found them very easy.

Similar to 2008 scores, 96% found the **information and guidance available helpful**, and nearly three in five (58%) found it very helpful.

Those aged 55+ and those who were confident about what to expect were more likely to find the forms very easy to complete and find the information and guidance provided very helpful.

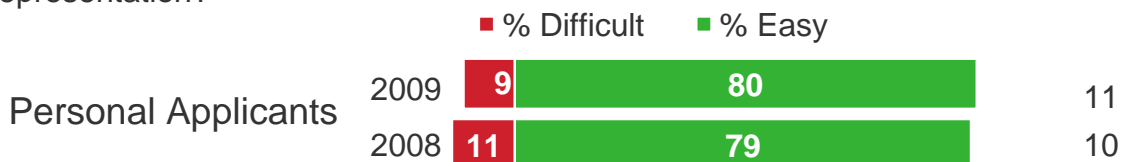
Table: Ease of obtaining and completing forms for grant of representation

How easy did you find it to obtain the necessary forms to apply for a grant of representation?



Base: All Probate Service users giving an answer who are Personal applicants (1,096), 11th May – 12th June 2009

How easy did you find it to complete the application forms for the grant of representation?



Base: All Probate Service users giving an answer who are Personal applicants (1,095), 11th May – 12th June 2009

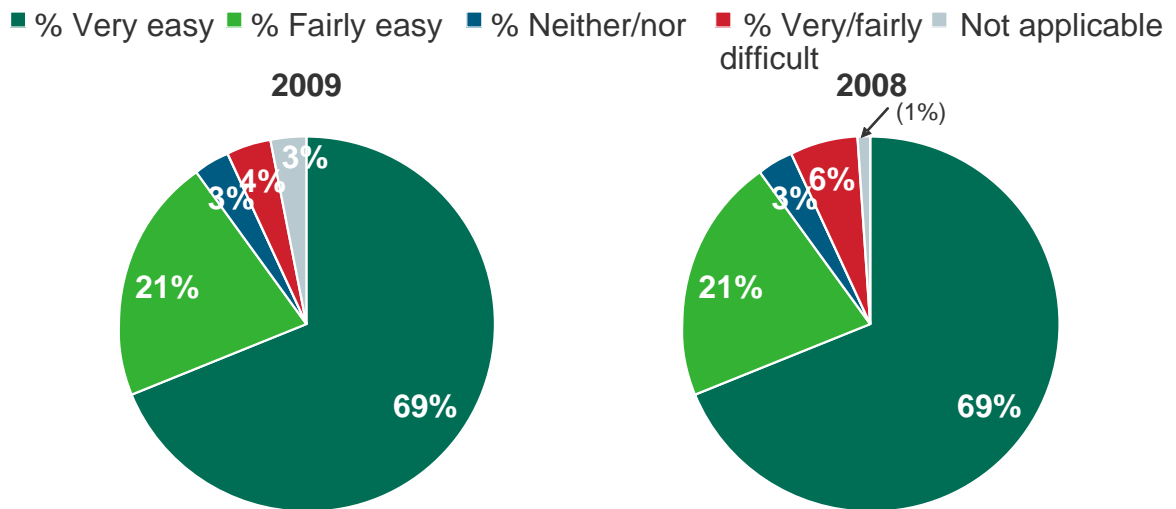
Ease of finding the Registry/Office

As in 2008, nearly seven in ten personal applicants (69%) found the Probate Office or Registry *very easy* to get to. Results are largely consistent across Registries but, as in 2008, Newcastle is considered to be less easy to find; 47% found it very easy to find compared with 69% overall.

“Better directions to the office and the right door to use when you arrive.” **Personal applicant, Newcastle**

Table: Ease of finding the Probate Registry or Probate Office

How easy was it to find the Probate Registry or Probate Office – including following any directions provided?



Base: All Probate Service users giving an answer who are personal applicants 2008: 806; 2009: 1,093, 11th May – 12th June 2009

Satisfaction with distance travelled

More than half (53%) of personal applicants were **very satisfied with the distance** they had to travel to reach the Registry and a further three in ten (30%) were fairly satisfied. Those who were not local were more likely to say they were dissatisfied (15% vs. 3% of those local).

There is little variation in these scores between Registries, but those in Cardiff were the most likely to be satisfied (91% vs. 83% overall).

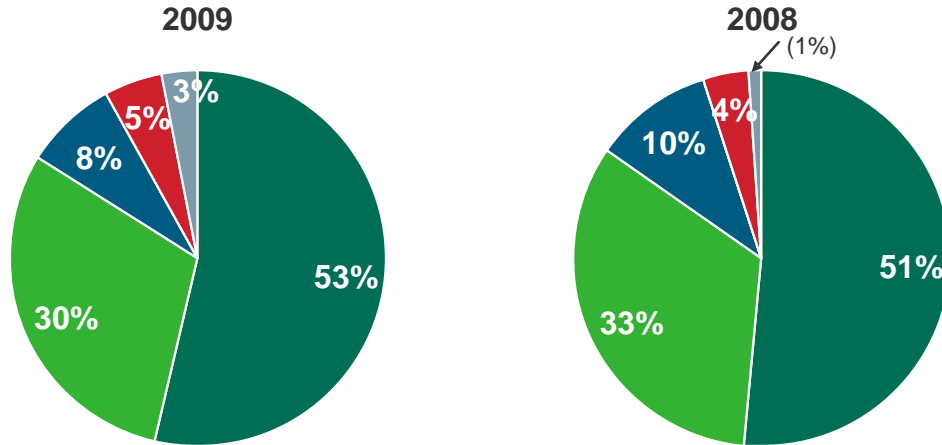
Those who were satisfied overall with the service they received and found the experience better than expected were less likely to be dissatisfied with the distance travelled to the Registry.

“The time for the probate interview was totally disproportionate to the travel times. No one informed us the application was moved to Brighton.” **Personal applicant, Brighton**

Satisfaction with distance travelled to get to Registry or Office

How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the distance you had to travel to get to the Registry or Office?

■ % Very satisfied
 ■ % Fairly satisfied
 ■ % Neither/ Nor
 ■ % Very/fairly dissatisfied
 ■ Not applicable



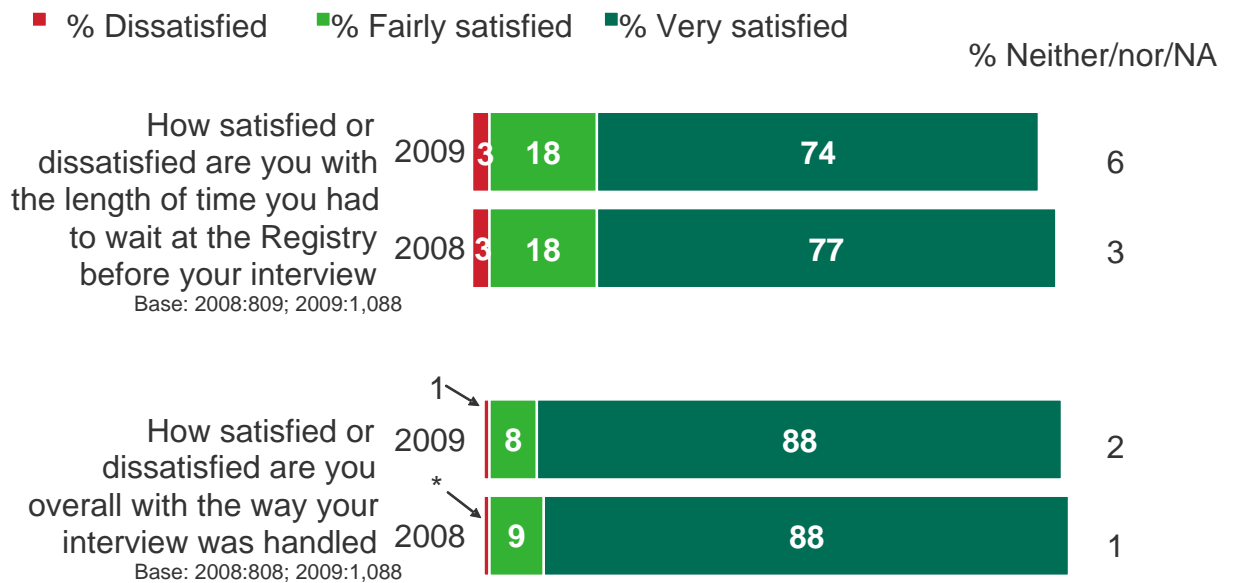
Base: All Probate Service users giving an answer who are personal applicants 2008:807; 2009:1,095, 11th May – 12th June 2009

Satisfaction with waiting time

Around three quarters (74%) of personal applicants were very satisfied with the length of time they had to wait before their interview, whilst a further 18% were fairly satisfied. This represents a drop in overall satisfaction from 2008 (95% to 92%).

The highest rated Registry on this measure was Bristol, with nine in ten (90%) very satisfied with the wait (and 99% satisfied overall), followed by Manchester where 97% were satisfied overall.

Satisfaction with interview



Base: All Probate Service users giving an answer who are personal applicants 11th May – 12th June 2009

Satisfaction with how the interview was handled

Less than a third of personal applicants (31%) were very confident before their interview that they knew what to expect, but the vast majority were subsequently very satisfied with the way the interview was handled (88%); only 1% were dissatisfied. This is the same proportion as in 2008. While results are largely consistent across Registries, the proportion very satisfied is highest in Bristol (97%) and Cardiff (96%). Those in London were the least satisfied, with around three quarters very satisfied (77%) and 4% dissatisfied.

Satisfaction with facilities

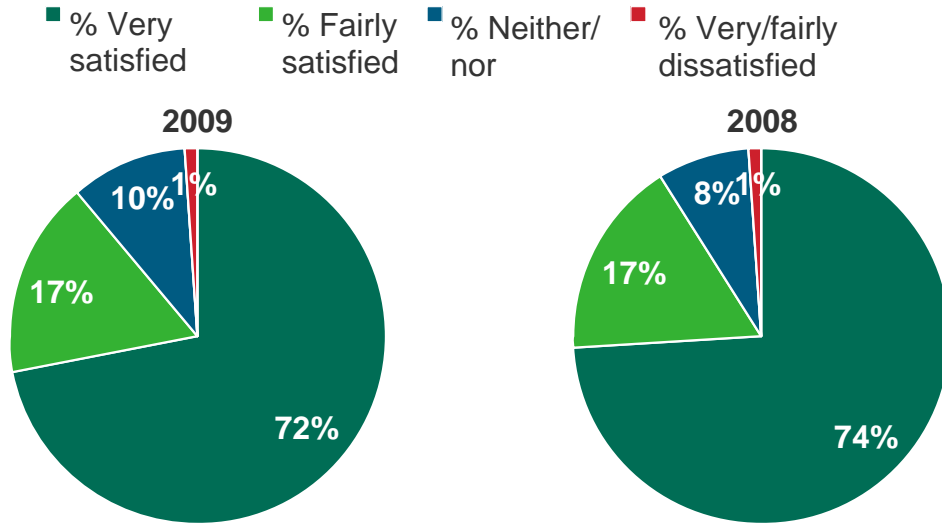
Similar to 2008 scores, nearly three quarters (72%) were very satisfied that the facilities provided met their needs and a further one in six (17%) were fairly satisfied⁵.

As in 2008, these scores are not affected by disability; a similar proportion (90%) of those with a disability were satisfied compared with 89% of those with no disability.

⁵ Please note that 'not applicable' responses have been excluded from these figures.

Table: Satisfaction with facilities

And how satisfied or dissatisfied are you that the facilities provided took into account any particular needs that you may have?



Base: All Probate Service users giving a rating who are personal applicants (excluding not applicable) 2008: 663; 2009: 901, 11th May – 12th June 2009

Legal professionals' satisfaction with settling service and pre-lodgement enquiries

This section looks at legal professionals' experience of using the settling service and how pre-lodgement enquiries are handled. As in 2008, more than eight in ten are satisfied with each of these aspects of the service received.

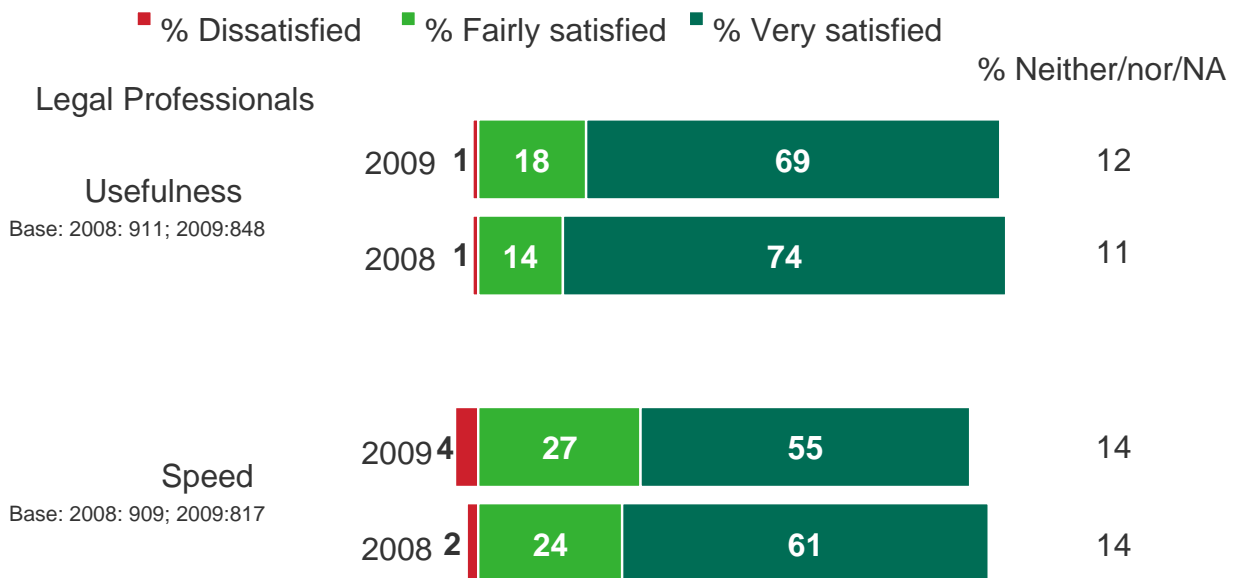
Satisfaction with usefulness and speed of settling service

As in 2008, almost nine in ten (88%) legal professionals who used the settling in service were satisfied; nearly seven in ten (69%) were very satisfied. Satisfaction with usefulness stands out in Cardiff with more than four in five (85%) stating they were very satisfied.

A slightly lower proportion than in 2008, 55% were very satisfied with the speed of the settling service (55% compared with 61% in 2008) although overall satisfaction remains in line with 2008 results (83%).

Satisfaction with settling service

If you have used it, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the usefulness and speed of the setting service?



Base: All Probate Service users giving an answer who are Legal Professionals 11th May – 12th June 2009

Satisfaction with handling of pre-lodgement enquiries

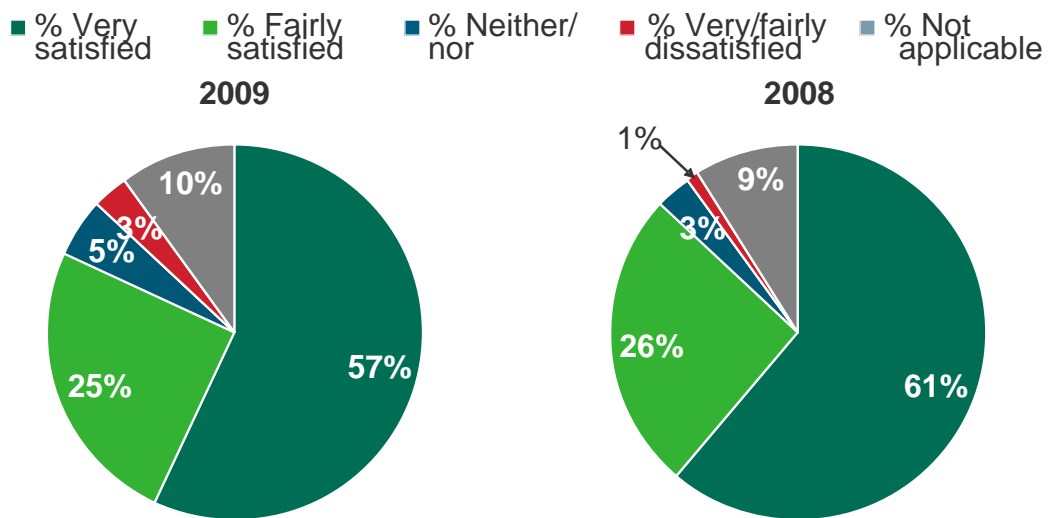
More than four in five legal professionals (82%) were satisfied with the handling of pre-lodgement enquiries. This is a slight decrease since 2008 (86%).

Ipswich and Newcastle Probate Registries were less well rated in this respect, with around four in ten very satisfied with this service (44% and 38% respectively) compared with nearly three in five (57%) overall and nearly four in five (78%) in Cardiff, and 70% in Liverpool and Manchester. London Registry also had fewer legal professionals saying they were very satisfied than for other Registries, but the small base size means this finding is indicative only.

“Pre-lodgement enquiry turn-around time for correspondence. It would be good if acknowledgment sent with last estimate of when a reply is likely so that professionals can advise.” **Legal professional, London**

Satisfaction with how pre-lodgement enquiries are handled

How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way pre-lodgement enquiries are handled?



Base: All Probate Service users giving an answer who are Legal Professionals
2008:912; 2009:835, 11th May – 12th June 2009

Suggestions for improvement and priorities

The majority of personal applicants felt that the process of obtaining a grant of representation exceeded their expectations, while legal professionals (who are likely to be more familiar with the system) mostly felt that it met their expectations. When asked what would have improved their experience of obtaining a grant of representation, legal professionals and personal applicants alike were most likely to say nothing, feeling that the service they received was very good. However, in some cases applicants mention that the speed of obtaining a grant of representation could be improved. Some personal applicants also feel that the forms could be simpler, that there could be more local offices, and that guidance and information could be clearer. Legal professionals meanwhile seem frustrated with the need to photocopy wills, feeling that this could be done by the Probate Registry. Many of these findings are similar to those in 2008.

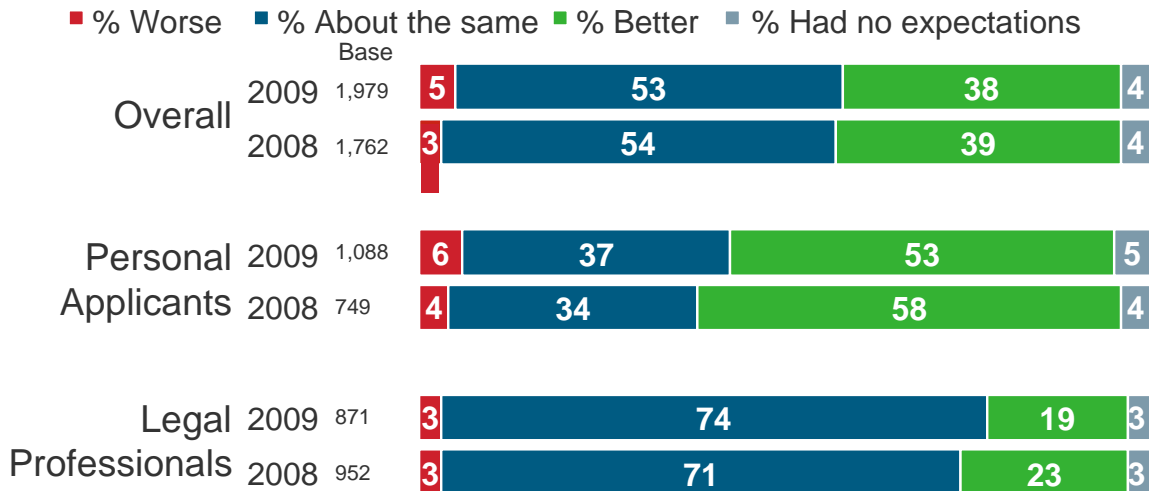
How the experience of obtaining a grant of representation matches expectations

Nearly two in five applicants (38%) felt that their experience of obtaining a grant of representation had been better than expected, while the majority (53%) felt it matched their expectations. As is to be expected given their greater familiarity with the process, legal professionals were more likely to feel that the experience matched their expectations. Encouragingly, the majority of personal applicants, on the other hand, felt that it exceeded their expectations (53%). Personal applicants who were applying for a grant of representation for the first time are more likely than others to say the experience was better than expected (60% say this). Likewise, those who used a local Registry are more positive than others, with 55% feeling the experience was better than expected (compared with 46% of those not using a local Registry).

Legal professionals are less likely to say their experience was better than expected than in 2008 (19% vs. 23% in 2008) and this is also true of personal applicants (53% vs. 58% in 2008).

Experience better, worse or the same as expected?

Has your experience of obtaining a grant of representation been better, worse or about the same as you expected it to be?



Base: All Probate Service users giving an answer, 11th May to 12th June 2009

For legal professionals, those obtaining a grant from the Cardiff District Probate Registry (as in 2008) are more likely than others to say the experience was better than expected (41% compared with 19% overall). By contrast, those obtaining a grant from the Ipswich District Probate Registry are more likely than others to say that the experience was worse than expected (9% compared with 3% overall).

As regards personal applicants, those receiving their grant from the Cardiff District Probate Registry are also more likely to say their experience was better than expected (64%) while those receiving it from the London Principle Registry are more likely to say it was worse than expected (13% compared with 6% overall).

Suggestions for improvement

Eighteen percent of respondents say that they do not have any suggestions for improvement. Further analysis of responses to the question: "what, if anything, could have improved your experience of applying for a grant of representation?" shows that, as in 2008, many legal professionals and personal applicants alike have something complimentary to say about the Probate Registry which was used:

"Nothing – I found the service to be excellent". **Personal applicant, Bristol**

“In 23 years of practice I have always found the Probate Service to be excellent.” **Legal professional, Cardiff**

“Have owned my practice for 24 years and have always had an excellent service from Brighton District Probate Registry.” **Legal professional, Brighton**

“Very satisfied with service received - I wish that I had the confidence and found the time to tackle the process sooner.” **Personal applicant, Ipswich**

“Liverpool DPR provide a great service.” **Legal professional, Liverpool**

“I cannot see how such an excellent service can usefully be improved.” **Legal professional, Winchester**

Where legal professionals do make suggestions for improvements, issues around the speed of the process and not wanting to provide copies of wills are most frequently mentioned (16% mention each of these). Thus, although as discussed earlier, the majority of legal professionals are satisfied with the time the process takes, this appears to be an area with some scope for further improvement. The verbatim comments below provide a few examples of the comments made by legal professionals:

“Speed of processing seems to have slowed upon all applications but still efficient.” **Legal professional, Birmingham**

“Speed of response - an acknowledgment confirming receipt of papers on application.” **Legal professional, Leeds**

“I do not agree with the new rule that we should provide two A4 photocopies of the will/codicil. I feel the Registry should, as before, make their own copies.” **Legal professional, Brighton**

“Don't understand why two copies of the will have to be sent. Surely we are doing half your administration for you at not reduced cost.” **Legal professional, Bristol**

Issues most commonly mentioned by personal applicants also relate to the speed of the process, including the time taken to issue grants of representation (11% mention this) and wanting a quicker date for interview (10%). Other points raised include having more local offices and easier forms with clearer directions for filling them out (9% and 8% respectively). Verbatim comments from personal applicants addressing these issues are provided below.

“Forms could be made easier to complete giving examples and a simple guide.” **Personal applicant, London**

“Speed of process. I had all the forms but it still took from 20th April (when documents delivered to office) to 14th May to receive the grant. A long time without money.” **Personal applicant, Winchester**

“Speed - I had to phone on more than one occasion to obtain an interview. It took 6 weeks from the date of receipt of my application to the interview date. I had a three hour round trip for a 5 minute interview on a small estate. The whole thing could have been done in writing”. **Personal applicant, Oxford**

Occasionally, the verbatim comments highlight particular issues at individual Registries, where certain points are raised several times. For example, a number of comments suggested that it can be difficult for personal applicants to contact the London Registry by telephone, as illustrated below.

“Probate office phone constantly engaged. Office only open during office hours. Telephone appointment late by 45 minutes - need to keep to allocated time via telephone enquiry/ dealt with unsympathetically.”

“Very difficult to get answer to telephone call - took a week.”

“The phone lines at the Registry were either engaged or unanswered for significant periods.”

“Was difficult at times to get through to Probate Registry by telephone - often engaged.”

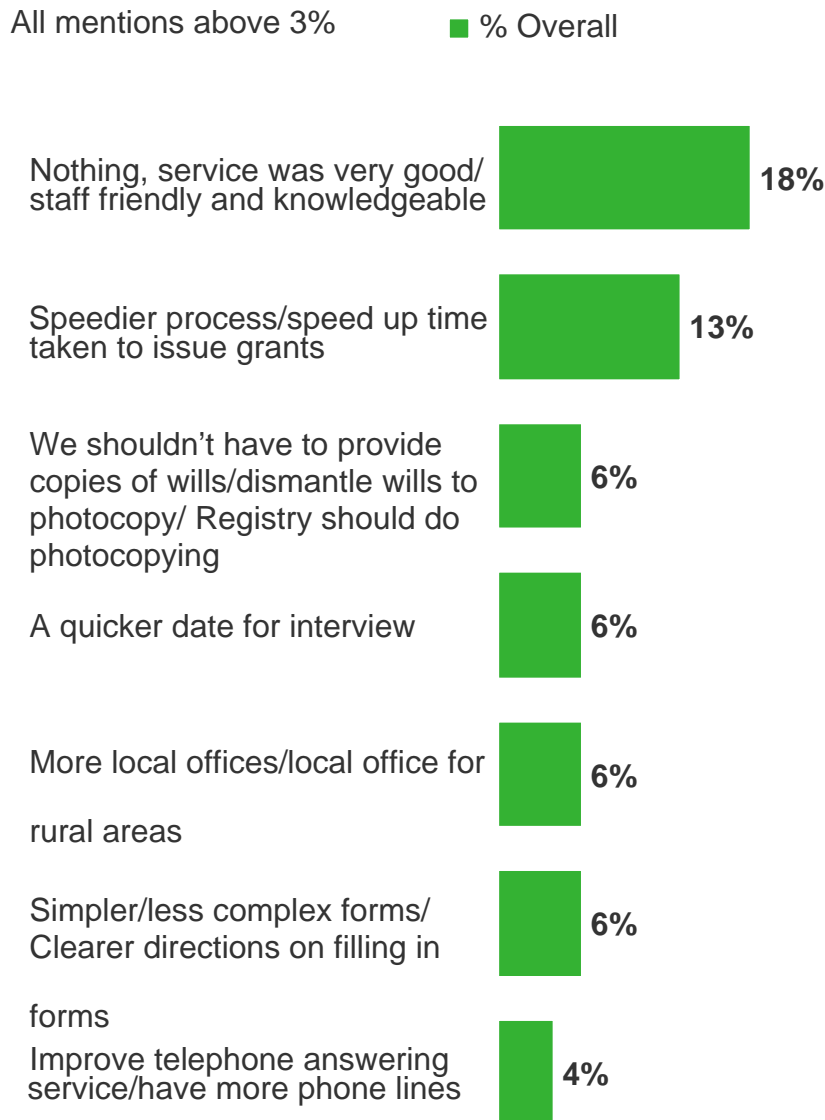
“Better telephone access to Probate Registry – is sometimes difficult to get through to obtain advice.”

“Telephone of London permanently engaged. Appointment not sent until I phoned.”

The chart overleaf shows the ten most frequently mentioned suggestions for improvement.

Table: Suggestions for improvement

What, if anything, would have improved/improve your experience of applying for a grant of representation?



Base: All Probate Service users giving an answer (777)

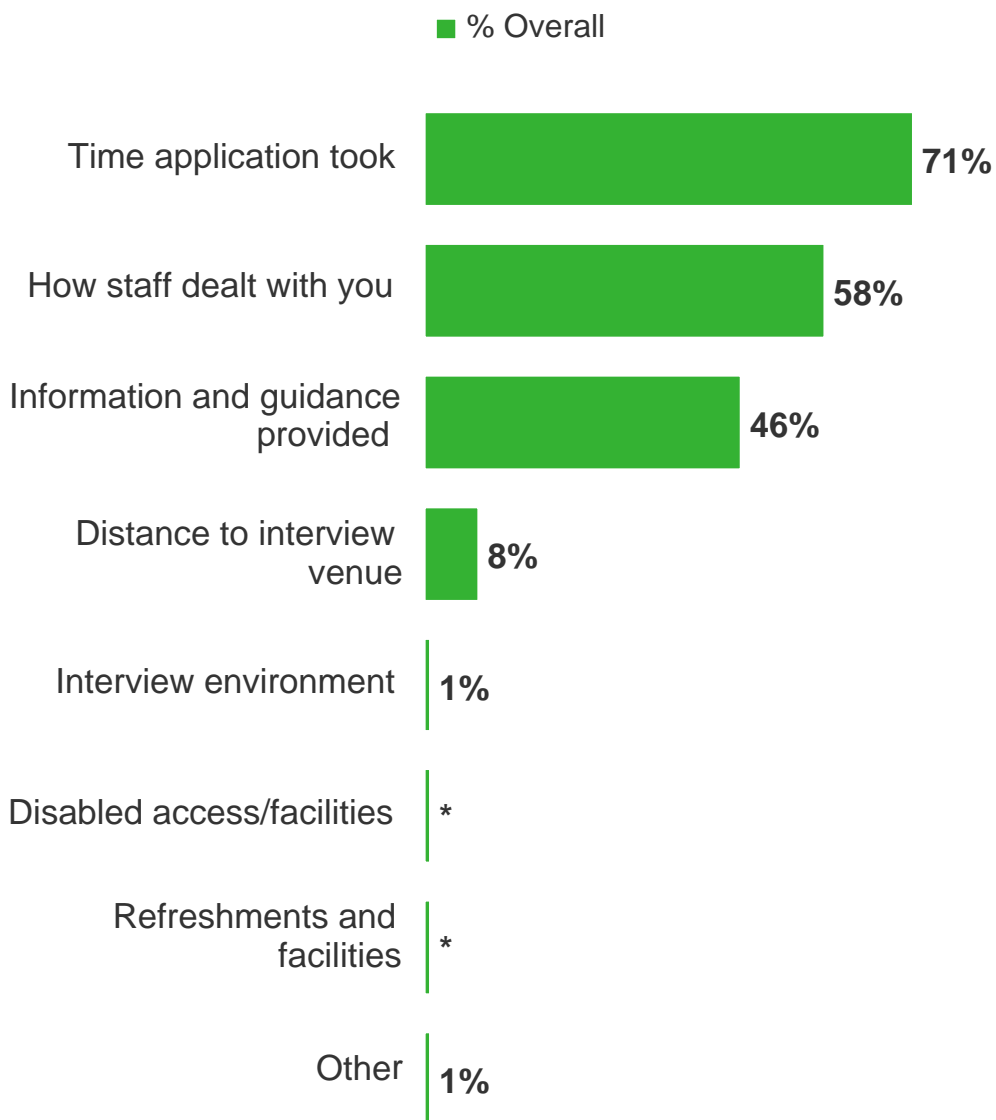
Customers' priorities when obtaining a grant of representation

Finally, reflecting the comments mentioned above, seven in ten (71%) Probate applicants state that the **time that the application took** is a key aspect of the service offered by Probate Registries. Also considered important by applicants is the **way in which staff dealt with them** (58% mention this aspect) and the **information and guidance provided** (46%). The importance and ordering of these three factors remains unchanged from 2008.

Legal professionals are more likely than personal applicants to say that the time that the application took is most important (90% vs. 57%). On the other hand, personal applicants (as in 2008) are more likely to mention that the way in which staff deal with them (63% versus 51%) and the information and guidance provided (53% versus 38%) are most important to them.

Priorities regarding the service received

Overall, which one or two of these are the most important to you regarding the service you received from the Probate Service?



Base: All Probate Service users giving an answer (2,003)

Appendix 1

Sample profile

	Personal applicants 2009	%	Personal applicants 2008	%	Legal applicants 2009	%	Legal applicants 2008	%
Total	1100		989		916		809	
Gender								
Male	537	51	399	51	353	43	421	46
Female	522	49	386	49	473	57	489	54
Age								
18-34	14	1	14	2	163	19	181	19
35-54	290	27	225	28	388	44	417	44
55+	781	71	565	70	322	37	345	37
Ethnicity								
White	1068	99	771	98	840	98	897	97
BME	9	1	18	2	16	2	24	3
Disability								
Yes	121	11	101	13	20	2	25	3
No	936	89	680	87	817	98	887	97

Statistical reliability

It should be remembered that the respondents to this survey are only a sample of the total 'population' of legal professionals and personal applicants issued a grant of representation by the Probate Service. This means that we cannot be certain that the figures obtained are exactly those we would have if everybody had been interviewed (the 'true' values). We can, however, predict the variation between the sample results and the 'true' values from our knowledge of the size of the samples on which the results are based and the number of times that a particular answer is given. The confidence with which we can make this prediction is usually chosen to be 95% - that is, the chances are 95 in 100 that the 'true' value will fall within a specified range. The table below illustrates the predicted range for different sample sizes and percentage results at the '95% confidence interval'.

Overall statistical reliability			
Size of sample on which survey result is based	Approximate sampling tolerances applicable to percentages at or near these levels		
	10% or 90%	30% or 70%	50%
	±	±	±
200	4	6	7
500	3	4	4
809	2	3	3
989	2	3	3
1,000	2	3	3
1,814	1	2	2
2,036	1	2	2

Source: Ipsos MORI

For example, with our sample of 2,036 where 30% give a particular answer, the chances are 19 in 20 that the 'true' value (which would have been obtained if the whole population had been interviewed) will fall within the range of plus or minus 2 percentage points from the sample result.

When results are compared between separate groups within a sample, different results may be obtained. The difference may be 'real', or it may occur by chance (because not everyone in the population has been interviewed). To test if the difference is a real one – i.e. if it is 'statistically significant', we again have to know the size of the samples, the percentage giving a certain answer and the degree of confidence chosen. If we assume the '95% confidence interval', the differences between the two sample results must be greater than the values given in the table overleaf:

Statistical reliability between subgroups			
Size of sample on which survey result is based	Approximate sampling tolerances applicable to percentages at or near these levels		
	10% or 90%	30% or 70%	50%
	±	±	±
100 vs. 100	8	13	14
100 vs. 250	7	11	12
100 vs. 500	7	10	11
250 vs. 250	5	8	9
250 vs. 500	5	7	8
500 vs. 500	4	6	6
916 vs. 1100	3	4	4

Source: Ipsos MORI

For example, if 90% of personal applicants give a particular answer compared with 85% of legal professionals, the chances are 95 in 100 times that this 5 percentage point difference is significant (i.e. greater than 4 points), which could not have happened by chance. In other words, the last line shows that when comparing results of legal professionals and personal applicants, a percentage change of between 3 and 4 percent needs to be observed to say that the difference in results is statistically significant.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to:

Ipsos Mori Social Research Institute, for carrying out the field research.

The team in HMCS Probate Service who managed the survey and the staff at the Probate Registries who distributed the surveys.

The personal applicants and legal professionals who took the time to respond to the survey.

Explanatory notes

1. The statistics in this bulletin relate to a sample of Probate Service applicants about the service they receive when applying for a grant of representation. The survey questionnaire was issued by eleven District Probate Registries and the Principle Registry in London to each applicant receiving a grant of representation during week commencing 11 May 2009.
2. The survey is conducted by post on an annual basis in order to enable progress to be monitored. This is the second year the survey has been carried out by Ipsos Mori for Her Majesty's Courts Service.

Symbols and conventions

The following symbols have been used throughout the tables in this bulletin:

- = No response
- * = denotes a finding of less than 0.5% but greater than zero
- N/A = Not applicable

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