

The Research, Development and Statistics Directorate exists to improve policy making, decision taking and practice in support of the Home Office purpose and aims, to provide the public and Parliament with information necessary for informed debate and to publish information for future use.

Findings are produced by the Research, Development and Statistics Directorate. For further copies contact:

Communication Development Unit  
Room 264,  
Home Office,  
50 Queen Anne's Gate,  
London SW1H 9AT.

Tel: 020 7273 2084  
Fax: 020 7222 0211  
publications.rds@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

## Jurors' perceptions, understanding, confidence and satisfaction in the jury system: a study in six courts

Roger Matthews, Lynn Hancock and Daniel Briggs

Juries are often seen as one of the cornerstones of the criminal justice system in England and Wales. This research looked at the views and attitudes of a sample of jurors who had recently completed jury service in six English courts. Specifically, it looked at jurors' perceptions, understanding, confidence and satisfaction as a result of their service.

### Key points

- The majority of respondents had a more positive view of the jury trial system after completing their service than they did before. Furthermore, virtually all jurors interviewed considered jury trials to be an important part of the criminal justice system.
- Confidence in the jury system was closely associated with the perceived fairness of the process, adherence to due process, respect for the rights of defendants and above all the diversity of the jury and its ability to consider evidence from different perspectives. A jury's representation of a broad spectrum of views was a key factor in jurors' confidence in the Crown Court trial.
- Jurors were very impressed with the professionalism and helpfulness of the court personnel. In particular, they praised the performance, commitment, and competence of judges.
- The main impediment to understanding proceedings was the use of legal terminology, although jurors also felt that evidence could sometimes be presented more clearly.
- Over half said that they would be happy to do jury service again, while 19% said that they 'would not mind' doing it again. The most positive aspects of engaging in jury service were reported to be having a greater understanding of the criminal court trial, a feeling of having performed an important civic duty and finding the experience personally fulfilling.

The research was carried out under the Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate's Innovative Research Grant Scheme. It was based on interviews (using a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods) with 361 jurors who had recently completed jury service at

six Crown Court centres. The survey was conducted between October 2001 and October 2002 at Southwark, Central Criminal Court (Old Bailey), Wood Green, Blackfriars, Snaresbrook and Norwich Crown Courts.

Jurors were interviewed either by telephone or on a face-to-face basis on the court premises, following their completion of service. Jurors were initially approached at their empanelling sessions (when people are enrolled onto juries) and asked to take part; the research focused on jurors who actually participated in trials.

The research examined jurors' experiences of their role within the criminal justice system, whilst being careful not to contravene Section 8 of the Contempt of Court Act (1981), which prohibits discussion or investigation into jurors' deliberations about individual cases. More specifically, the study looked at:

- their perceptions and attitudes towards jury service
- their understanding of the information and the evidence they received
- jurors' confidence as a result of their contact with the court system
- their satisfaction with the process in general.

### Objectives of the study

As this was one of the few studies which has been carried out in this country looking explicitly at jurors' experiences (see also Zander and Henderson 1993; Baldwin and McConville 1979), the aim was to examine a number of different aspects of the jury system, including:

- aspects of the selection process and willingness to participate
- jurors' views and attitudes towards the media and court personnel
- the quality and quantity of information that jurors receive
- jurors' understanding of information, procedures and evidence
- the main factors which both enhance and undermine jurors' confidence in the court and jury system
- jurors' satisfaction with court facilities and services and engaging in jury service
- jurors' experience of intimidation and stress.

### Jurors' perceptions

Half of those included in the survey claimed to be 'enthusiastic' or 'very enthusiastic' following receipt of their summons, while just under a third of respondents claimed to be 'reluctant' or 'very reluctant' (Table 1). Where reluctance was expressed this was often due to work or domestic pressures, whilst enthusiasm stemmed from believing that it would be an interesting or valuable experience or that it was a moral duty that had to be undertaken.

The inconvenience of undertaking jury service at the allocated time prompted just over a third (36%) to apply

**Table 1 Reaction to receiving the jury summons**

Reaction	No. of jurors	%
Very enthusiastic	30	8
Enthusiastic	152	42
Indifferent	67	19
Reluctant	75	21
Very reluctant	37	10
Total	361	100

for deferral, excusal or exemption. This finding is in line with previous research (Airs and Shaw, 1999). Many jurors had previous court experience as:

- witnesses (13%)
- defendants (8%)
- victims (4%)
- jurors on a previous occasion (19%).

The majority (65%) of respondents felt confident about taking on their role as a juror.

While over half of the jurors interviewed said that the media had been influential in shaping their perceptions of the jury system, most jurors expressed a healthy scepticism toward the media.

Just under two-thirds of those engaging in jury service had a more positive view of the jury trial system after completing their service than they did before. The main factors associated with this positive change were the professionalism of the judge and court staff and how jurors were treated. Indeed, jurors greatly appreciated the work of the court personnel in general and of judges in particular.

Negative views of respondents usually centred on the court system rather than the jury system. In particular, critical responses were largely shaped by delays, the trivial nature of some cases that jurors heard, the way in which some cases were presented and the standard of some court facilities. Some jurors were not impressed by the court rituals, dress and procedures and some were critical of other jurors who were not seen to take their duties seriously.

### Jurors' understanding

In general, many jurors felt that engaging in jury service had been a good learning experience that had taught them about the operation of the criminal court system.

The vast majority of jurors found the summons and the leaflet '*You and Your Jury Service*', as well as the induction video, to be straightforward and informative. (*You and Your Jury Service* is a 14-page leaflet given to jurors on confirmation of their attendance containing information on rules, roles and procedures.) The main

impediment to understanding proceedings was the use of legal terminology. Some jurors expressed confusion in relation to discussion of 'points of law' and the requirement for the jury to leave the courtroom while these were discussed. Other confusions centred around whether or not they should take notes during a trial or whether it was appropriate to ask questions.

Jurors felt that evidence was not always presented in the clearest ways and that maps, diagrams, photographs and other visual aids were under-used in courts. Problems also stemmed from jurors not being able to hear evidence or understand the evidence of witnesses or victims.

### Factors affecting confidence

Previous research on confidence in the criminal justice system has identified a number of factors which contributed in various ways to public confidence. These include the perceived 'fairness' of the process, the adherence to due process and the efficiency and professionalism of the court staff (Mirrlees-Black, 2001; Southgate and Grosvenor, 2000). Many of these views were reflected in the current study when jurors were asked to say what factors most influenced their confidence.

#### Positive factors affecting confidence

##### *Diversity*

The most important reported factor that had a positive influence on juror confidence in this study was the perceived benefits of having a diverse group of people from different social and economic backgrounds with different viewpoints and experiences. Diversity was seen as an essential component in deciding guilt and innocence in all trials ranging from the minor cases to the most serious.

##### *Fairness of the trial process*

The second most important factor positively influencing confidence was the perceived fairness of the trial process. Great significance was attached to the ways in which defendants were treated, their rights respected and the way evidence was presented.

##### *Professionalism and staff competence*

The professionalism and competence of the court staff was considered to be an important part of providing a fair and efficient trial. The commitment of the staff and fellow jurors influenced levels of confidence, and jurors who were seen not to be taking their responsibilities seriously were generally frowned upon.

#### Negative factors affecting confidence

The most important factors or conditions that had a negative influence on juror confidence were poor preparation of cases or poor quality of evidence and the inclusion of what were considered trivial or minor cases. It should be noted, however, that some jurors felt that allowing such cases to be heard in the Crown Court was

an important democratic right and that their very inclusion increased the jurors' overall confidence in the trial process and the criminal justice system.

Amongst those who had not performed jury service in the past, over two-fifths (43%) left jury service with a higher level of confidence in the court system than before their service. One-fifth left with a lower level of confidence. Those who had visited a court in the past, either as victims or witnesses, were more likely to leave with a higher level of confidence following their service.

### Juror satisfaction

The most positive aspects of engaging in jury service were:

- having a greater understanding of the criminal court trial
- a feeling of having performed an important civic duty
- meeting new people/finding it personally fulfilling (Table 2).

**Table 2 Positive aspects of jury service**

Positive aspect	Number of jurors	%
Have a greater understanding of the criminal trial/positive learning experience	207	57
A feeling that my 'civic duty' had been done	146	40
I met new people	144	40
It was personally fulfilling	79	22
The experience enhanced my confidence in the criminal justice system	62	17
The experience enhanced my self-confidence	30	8
Good facilities	13	4

Over half (55%) said that they would be happy to do jury service again, while 19% said they 'wouldn't mind' doing it again. Only 15% said that they definitely would not want to do it again. The great majority of minority ethnic and mixed race jurors interviewed said that they would be happy to undertake jury service again.

The vast majority of respondents (95%) considered juries 'very important', 'essential', 'necessary' or 'quite important' in our system of justice (Table 3). Participating in jury service appeared to produce a remarkable level of social solidarity amongst jurors while enhancing their sense of citizenship.

**Table 3 The significance of juries to our system of justice**

Significance	Number of jurors	%
Very important, essential, integral or necessary	224	62
Quite important	120	33
Not important	15	4
No response	2	1
Total	361	100

Reported negative aspects included complaints about the heating, air conditioning and the comfort of seating for jurors. In terms of the court's general amenities and facilities, the main complaints were about:

- the service and quality of food available in the canteen (33%)
- the lack of facilities to alleviate boredom (14%)
- the general accommodation (14%)
- the lack of separate areas for smokers and non-smokers (14%)
- parking facilities (3%).

Just over one-third of jurors (36%) reported that they felt intimidated or very uncomfortable in the courtroom, often at the prospect of meeting the defendant or his or her family on the street or coming out of court. Female jurors were more likely to express these feelings.

Some jurors experienced stress as a consequence of doing their service, associated with worry about reaching the 'wrong' verdict (19%), or feeling under pressure to reach a verdict (5%) as well as work-related and domestic responsibilities. Nearly one-fifth of all jurors and nearly half of women reported being greatly inconvenienced because of their jury service.

One in five jurors felt that delays, waiting around, cases being dismissed or their being involved in what they considered to be minor or trivial cases was a waste of public money. Among these jurors, the emphasis was on making the trial process more efficient and improving co-ordination.

### Conclusion

For the majority of jurors covered by this research, engaging in jury service was a unique experience, which increased their sense of social solidarity and citizenship, while enhancing their confidence in the jury system. Clearly, for the vast majority of respondents here, juries are seen as an essential component of providing a fair and just trial process, and the diversity of the jury is seen as the best way of avoiding bias and arriving at a sound verdict. Although jurors expressed views which embodied tensions and ambiguities, their general experience of the jury system was extremely positive.

### References

Airs, J. and Shaw, A. (1999). *Jury excusal and deferral*. Research Findings No. 102. London: Home Office.

Baldwin, J. and McConville, M. (1979). *Jury Trials*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mirrlees-Black, C. (2001). *Confidence in the criminal justice system: findings from the 2000 British Crime Survey*. Research Findings No. 137. London: Home Office.

Southgate, P. and Grosvenor, T. (2000). *Confidence in the criminal justice system: a qualitative study*. Paper presented at seminar held at the Home Office, London, July 2000.

Zander, M. and Henderson, P. (1993). *The Royal Commission on Criminal Justice: Crown Court Study*. London: HMSO.

For a more detailed report, see *Jurors' perceptions, understanding, confidence and satisfaction in the jury system: a study in six courts* by Roger Matthews, Lynn Hancock and Daniel Briggs (2004). It is available as an Online Report No.05/04 on <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/>

Roger Matthews, Lynn Hancock and Daniel Briggs are at the Centre for Criminology, Middlesex University.