



Crown Court

Annual Report 2006 - 2007

Reading Crown Court

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Annual Report by the Resident Judge and Court Manager

RESIDENT JUDGE & COURT MANAGER COMMENTS:

Workload, capacity and time taken for cases to come to trial

The number of cases received by the court continued at the same level as the previous year, which had seen an increase in the workload of 38.7%. The impact on listing has been critical and continues to cause considerable problems giving rise to an increase in the average waiting time for trials from 17 to 23 weeks, 30% higher than last year. The court has experienced difficulties in listing trials within custody time limits and, with consideration being given to other priorities eg PYO's, youths and vulnerable victims and witnesses, the number of outstanding bail cases remains high. The court was again targeted to sit to capacity during the year and was assisted by the booking of Recorders to fill the majority of vacancies. However, the outstanding caseload remains unacceptably high for a six court centre. Efforts are being made to increase the number of courtrooms in Thames Valley and in the meantime some work will be listed at Oxford in an attempt to relieve the pressure on listing at Reading.

Type and length of cases heard

The court continues to receive a higher than average number of Class 1 and 2 cases. In 2006-2007 the court received 2 manslaughter cases, 7 murders and 12 attempted murders. The loss of two attempted murder tickets, through the retirement of two Circuit Judges, has caused difficulties in listing. There is only one Judge with an attempted murder ticket and therefore a further or two further attempt murder tickets are required.

The court has seen an increase in cases estimated to last more than 6 weeks. Fixtures are now being given dates for trial in January 2008 and our warned lists are full till October 2007.

Causes of ineffective trials and cracked trials

We consider that one of the main reasons for ineffective/cracked trials is because the parties are not trial ready at the PCMH. On the 7th June 2007 a meeting was arranged for CPS representatives and regular defence solicitors to discuss why cases were not ready at the time of the PCMH. One of the causes identified was the difficulty solicitors had arranging conferences at Bullingdon prison. To this end we (the Resident Judge and the Court Manager) visited the Governor to explain the difficulties and in January 2007 he attended Reading Crown Court to discuss the matter with the solicitors, and it would appear now that prison legal visits are taking place with greater ease.

A further reason we see as the reason for the parties not being trial ready at PCMH is that the professions (barristers and solicitors) continue to see the hearing as a preliminary hearing, despite the new Criminal Procedure Rules. We did, however, make a small improvement to the ineffective trial rate this year. Because of the high workload more risks were taken by listing floater trials on a regular basis with no adverse effect on the number of ineffective trials. We were not assisted by flooding which occurred at court on two separate Mondays which resulted in all trials listed on those days being stood out.

Case progression Officers

Owing to the very large workload the CPOs are unable to follow up on orders of the court to the degree they would want. The Court manager would very much like to be able to have another CPO. . The case progression team meet with the CPS and witness care unit on a weekly basis to manage the cases in the warned and fixed lists but we continue to suffer from witness problems. We make every effort to engage with the defence but as we are experiencing an increasingly widespread Solicitor base this can prove difficult.

Court User meetings

The Court held three Court User meetings at which local issues were discussed. The Resident Judge and the Court

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Manager also attend the Berks, Bucks and Oxon consultative committee meetings twice a year and do so in order to ensure that Reading Crown Court is providing the services that the legal profession require.

Witness/Jurors

There is an excellent witness service at the court. The court staff and volunteers work closely to ensure that victims and witnesses are cared for and their needs are met. Arrangements are made to facilitate any special requirements in liaison with the witness service, police and family protection unit. The Jurors are well cared for by the jury bailiffs and their facilities have been enhanced this year by the provision of a quiet room and the installation of a cooled water dispenser. The listening quality for Jurors was improved by the provision of a sound amplification system in the Jury assembly room enabling the speech and announcements to be heard more clearly.

Prison escort

The improvement shown in 2006 continues and generally the vans are in good time for conferences to be held before court sittings.

School visits and other work with the community

In the year 2006 – 2007 the Court has once again had visits from numerous schools, university students, work experience students, police NVQ assessors, National Fraud Office training school, University of the Third Age and other organisations.

Nine schools brought several students throughout the year. A total of 12 school based, work experience students attended for either a whole week or on one day where a week could not be accommodated. Eight university students and one solicitor shadowed members of the judiciary for a week each. Several other university students observed proceedings from the public gallery, three of whom were on a year's work experience at the police serious crime analysis unit at Bramshill and followed a case for three days.

Groups from the National Fraud Training Centre attended on three occasions to observe witnesses giving evidence. On one occasion the group was made up of Nigerians who had come to England for training. On at least seven other occasions a variety of other groups visited the court and were shown an empty court room, able to ask questions about how the Crown Court operates and stayed to listen to trials.

The court has also formed an arrangement with the police training centre at Sulhamstead to loan a courtroom after hours to enable trainee CID officers to experience the reality of giving evidence in a court room rather than staging this in a class room.

In March the Serious Organised Crime Agency filmed part of a training video, in a courtroom on a Saturday.

Accommodation

The accommodation at Reading is of a good standard. The facilities for witnesses and Jurors have been improved again this year and the new screens which were provided at the end of last year have proved invaluable.

Xhibit

Xhibit has been embedded successfully. The Judges have benefited from having a court log in the file.

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Unresolved issues

We continue to think that the failure to appoint a further Judge to Reading has caused difficulties with listing sex cases and long cases as these are generally not suitable for Recorders.

Staff

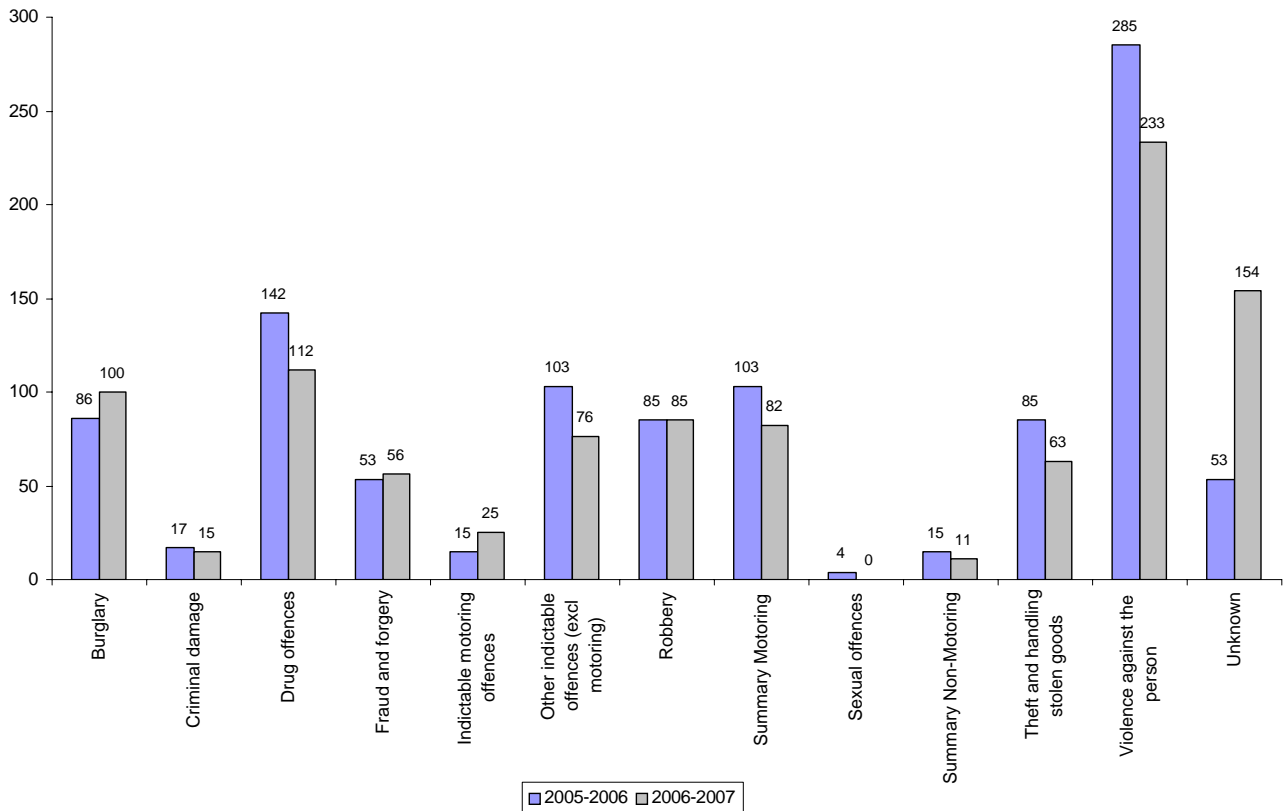
The heavy workload at Reading has put enormous pressure on the staff. Despite this they have continued to strive to ensure that the work necessary for the court to operate efficiently has been undertaken for which I, the Resident Judge, am very grateful.

RESIDENT JUDGE:	ZOE SMITH	DATE:	12.06.07
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COURT MANAGER:	SUSAN HEATH	DATE:-	12.06.07
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Crown Court Receipts by Offence Group

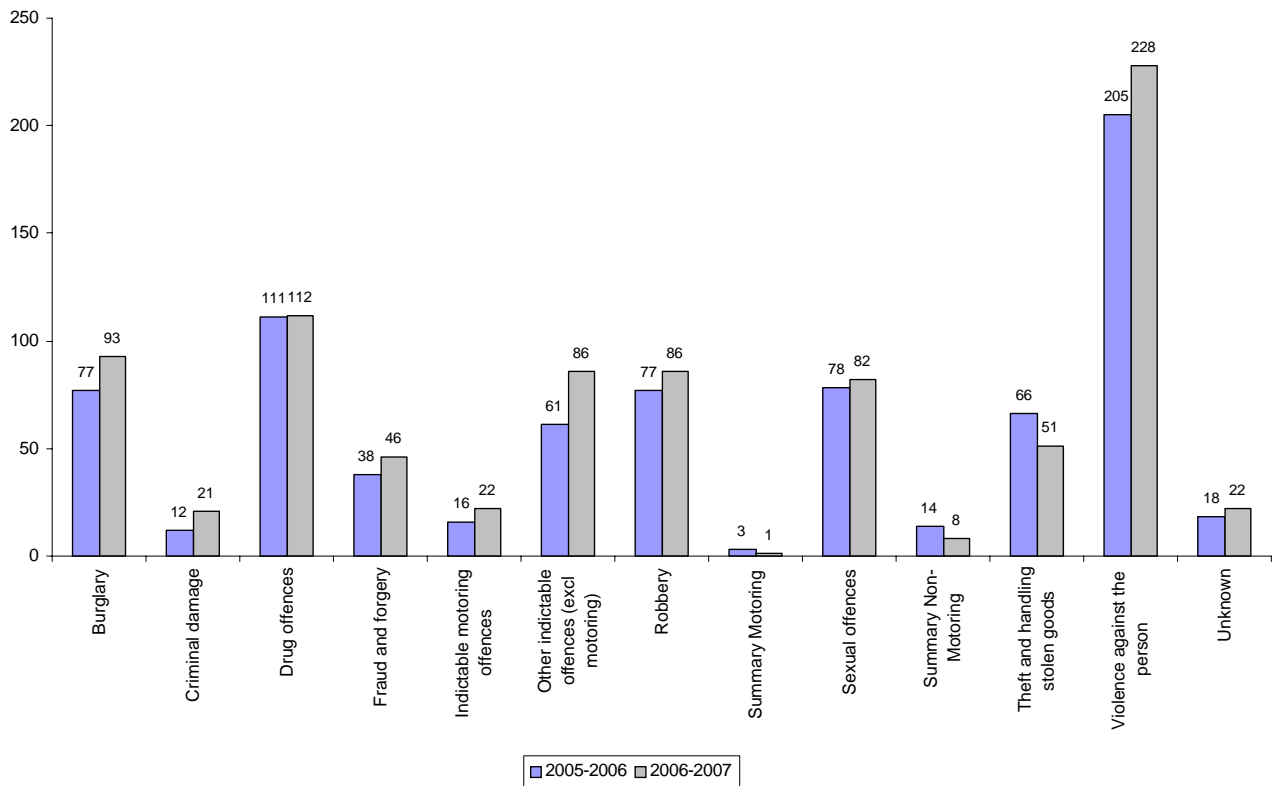
Group	2005-2006	% of Total	2006-2007	% of Total
Burglary	86	8%	100	10%
Criminal damage	17	2%	15	1%
Drug offences	142	14%	112	11%
Fraud and forgery	53	5%	56	6%
Indictable motoring offences	15	1%	25	2%
Other indictable offences (excl motoring)	103	10%	76	8%
Robbery	85	8%	85	8%
Summary Motoring	103	10%	82	8%
Sexual offences	4	0%	0	0%
Summary Non-Motoring	15	1%	11	1%
Theft and handling stolen goods	85	8%	63	6%
Violence against the person	285	27%	233	23%
Unknown	53	5%	154	15%
Total	1046	100%	1012	100%



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Crown Court Disposals by Offence Group

Group	2005-2006	% of Total	2006-2007	% of Total
Burglary	77	10%	93	11%
Criminal damage	12	2%	21	2%
Drug offences	111	14%	112	13%
Fraud and forgery	38	5%	46	5%
Indictable motoring offences	16	2%	22	3%
Other indictable offences (excl motoring)	61	8%	86	10%
Robbery	77	10%	86	10%
Summary Motoring	3	0%	1	0%
Sexual offences	78	10%	82	10%
Summary Non-Motoring	14	2%	8	1%
Theft and handling stolen goods	66	9%	51	6%
Violence against the person	205	26%	228	27%
Unknown	18	2%	22	3%
Total	776	100%	858	100%



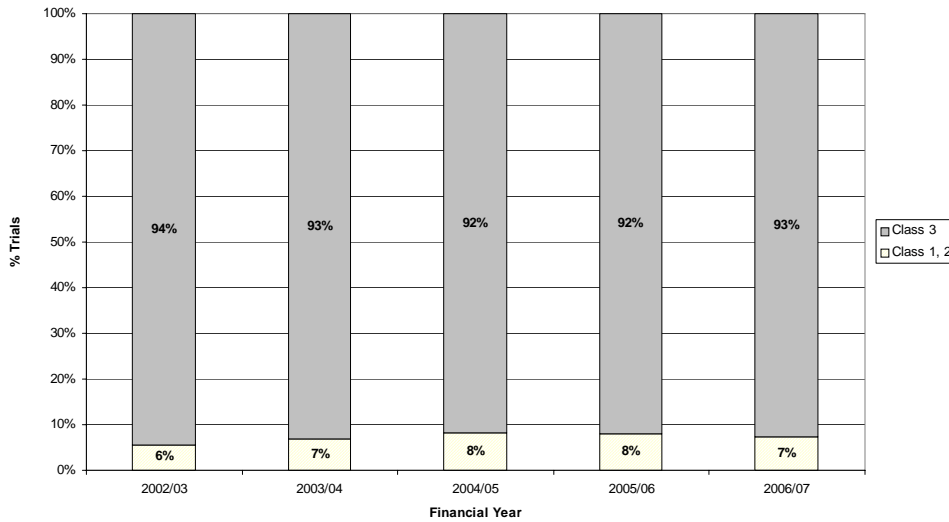
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Workload

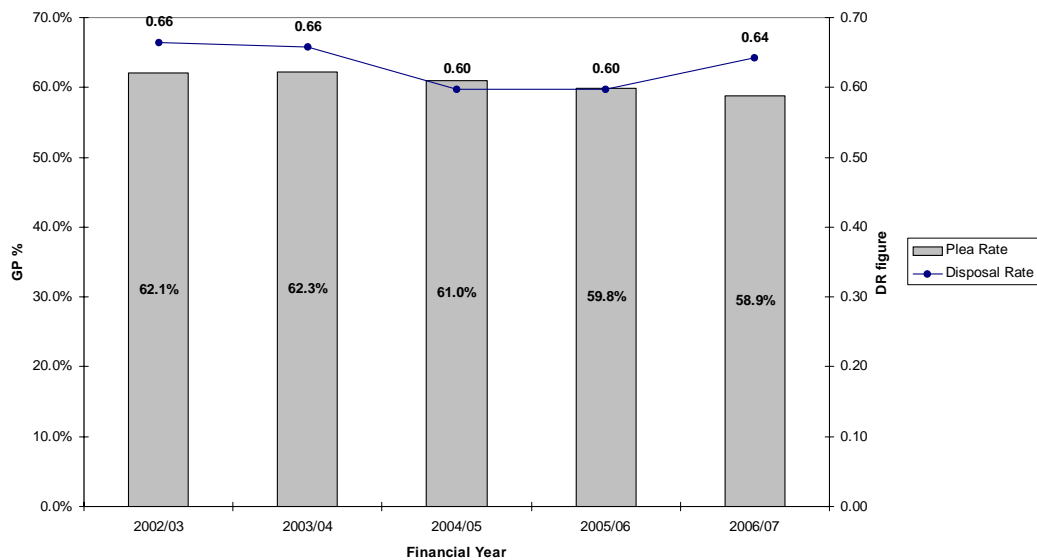
	EW 06/07	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	% Diff
Trial Receipts	77,765	945	866	751	1,048	1,014	-3.2%
Class 1, 2	6%	6%	7%	8%	8%	7%	-10.0%
Class 3	94%	94%	93%	92%	92%	93%	0.9%

Trial Receipts by Class



	EW 06/07	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	% Diff
Sentence Receipts	35,959	337	389	353	431	401	-7.0%
Appeal Receipts	13,004	115	115	124	129	140	8.5%
Disposals	79,045	879	843	801	849	926	9.1%
Plea Rate	66%	62.1%	62.3%	61.0%	59.8%	58.9%	-1.6%
Disposal Rate	0.75	0.66	0.66	0.60	0.60	0.64	7.6%

Guilty Plea Rate and Disposal Rate



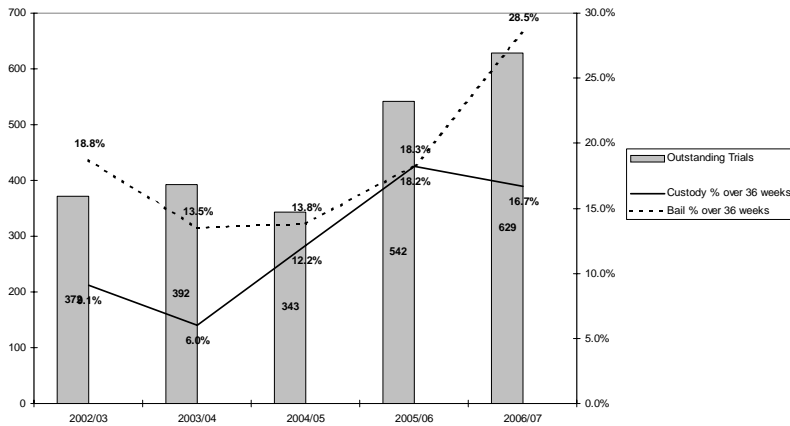
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Outstanding Cases

	EW 06/07	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	% Diff
Outstanding Trials	31,593	372	392	343	542	629	16.1%
Custody % over 16 weeks	27%	21.2%	36.8%	26.4%	37.8%	29.0%	-23.2%
Custody % over 36 weeks	10%	9.1%	6.0%	12.2%	18.2%	16.7%	-8.5%
Bail % over 16 weeks	30%	30.0%	32.8%	21.5%	37.5%	34.7%	-7.6%
Bail % over 36 weeks	13%	18.8%	13.5%	13.8%	18.3%	28.5%	55.7%

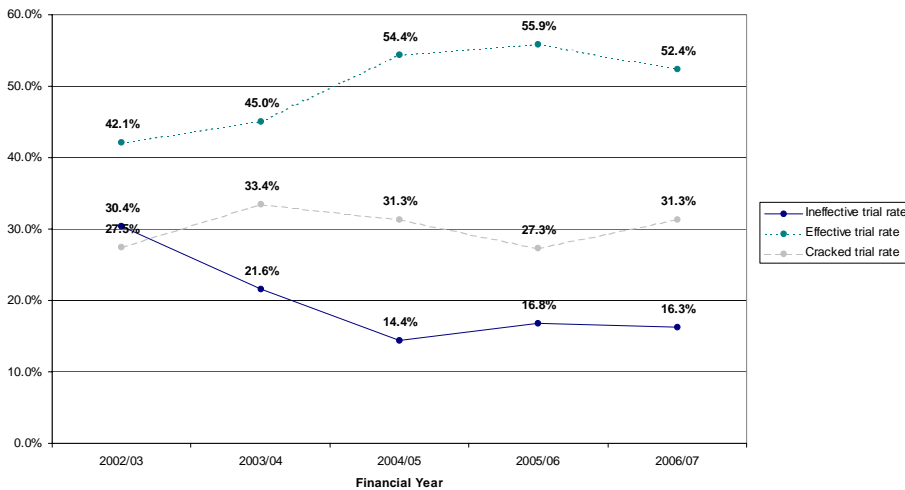
Outstanding Cases and the proportion over 36 weeks



Cracked and Ineffective

	EW 06/07	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	% Diff
Trials listed (number)	37,149	560	464	390	388	479	23.5%
Ineffective trial rate	12%	30.4%	21.6%	14.4%	16.8%	16.3%	-2.8%
Effective trial rate	48%	42.1%	45.0%	54.4%	55.9%	52.4%	-6.3%
Cracked trial rate	39%	27.5%	33.4%	31.3%	27.3%	31.3%	14.6%

Ineffective, Effective and Cracked Trials



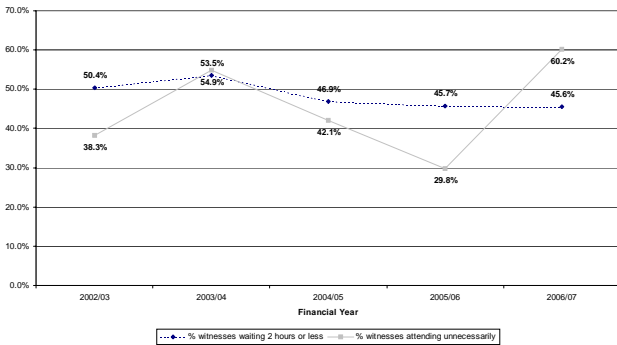
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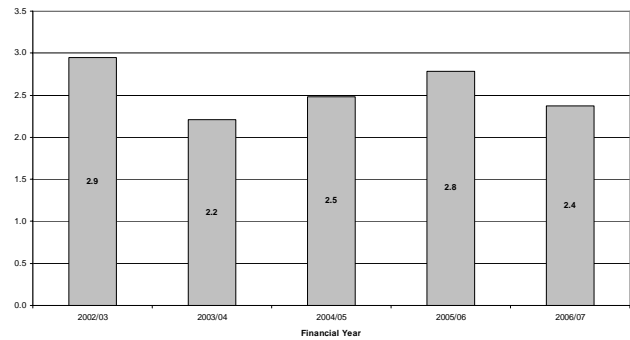
Witness and Juror service¹

	EW 06/07	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	% Diff
Juror days as % of attendance	60%	68.0%	54.9%	56.5%	56.8%	63.8%	12.3%
% witnesses waiting 2 hours or less	48.0%	50.4%	53.5%	46.9%	45.7%	45.6%	-0.2%
% witnesses attending unnecessarily	43.2%	38.3%	54.9%	42.1%	29.8%	60.2%	102.1%
Hours waited (witnesses attending unnecessarily)	2.7	2.9	2.2	2.5	2.8	2.4	-14.8%

Percentage of Witnesses Waiting Within Target and Proportion Waiting Unnecessarily



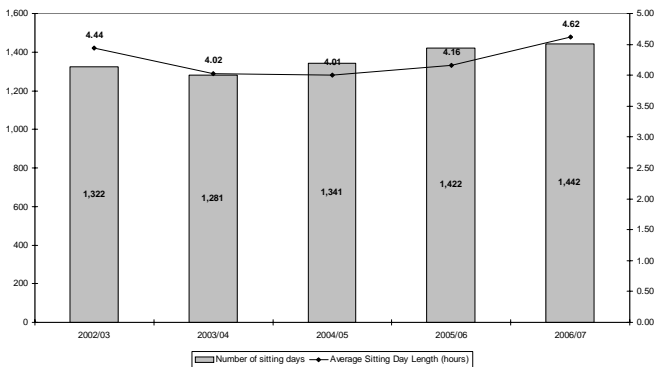
Average Waiting Time for Witnesses Attending Unnecessarily (hours)



Sitting Days

	EW 06/07	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	% Diff
Average Trial Hearing Time (hours)	9.6	21.8	12.3	13.5	11.1	11.6	4.4%
Average Sitting Day Length (hours)	4.37	4.44	4.02	4.01	4.16	4.62	11.0%
Number of sitting days	105,629	1,322	1,281	1,341	1,422	1,442	1.4%

Number of Sitting Days & Average Length of Sitting Day



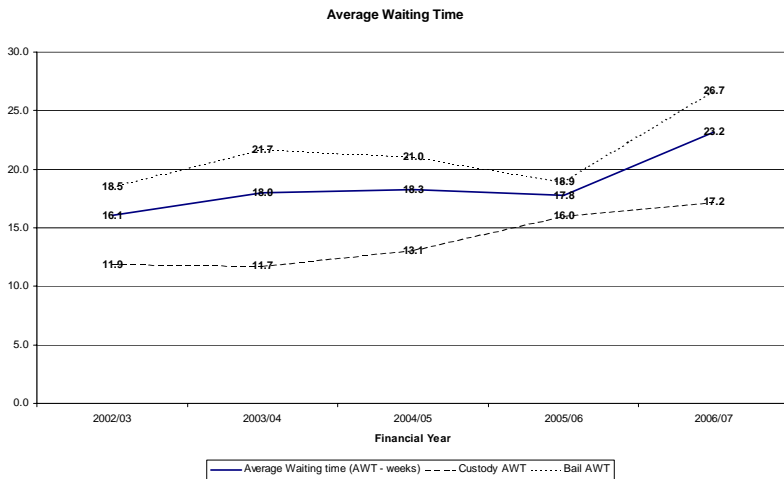
¹ Witness Survey data are from the combined June and November survey
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Waiting Times

	EW 06/07	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	% Diff
Average Waiting time (AWT - weeks)	17.0	16.1	18.0	18.3	17.8	23.2	30.4%
Custody AWT	13.8	11.9	11.7	13.1	16.0	17.2	7.8%
Bail AWT	18.7	18.5	21.7	21.0	18.9	26.7	41.1%



PSAs

	EW 06/07	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	% Diff
% Defendants commencing in target	75.4%	72.7%	68.1%	71.4%	68.5%	59.4%	-13.3%
Committal for Trial	67.0%	66.7%	64.8%	60.4%	65.8%	57.2%	-13.1%
Sent for Trial	73.5%	73.6%	68.4%	72.2%	70.5%	56.6%	-19.8%
Committal for Sentence	89.9%	79.7%	75.3%	87.1%	67.2%	60.8%	-9.5%
Appeal	86.2%	80.0%	57.6%	76.1%	80.0%	79.4%	-0.7%

