NHS
Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent
Integrated Care Board

Have NHS Appointment Letters Reached You on Time?

People's Panel Survey Findings



October 2026

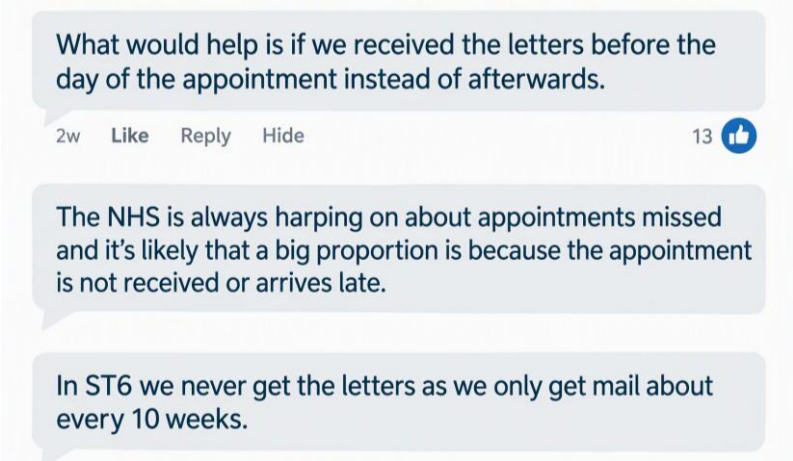
Introduction

Background

Timely and reliable communication is essential to helping patients access NHS services and attend appointments. Concerns about appointment letters arriving late, arriving too close to the appointment date, or not being received at all have been reported as contributing to missed appointments, delays to treatment and increased anxiety for patients.

This survey was developed following feedback received through a previous People's Panel survey on health literacy and NHS communications (view **report** here, **comments** here). Feedback received through the survey, email and social media highlighted concerns about NHS letters arriving late, after the appointment date, or not arriving at all.

In response, Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Integrated Care Board commissioned this People's Panel survey to better understand how often appointment letters arrive late or not at all, and the impact this has on patients' ability to access care. The findings may help inform local improvements to NHS communications and appointment processes.



Examples of comments received via social media during the Health Letters Survey (June 2026)

These concerns reflect a wider national issue. A 2025 report by The King's Fund, Healthwatch England and National Voices[1] found that **20% of NHS service users** had received a postal appointment invitation after the **appointment date had already passed**. Follow-up analysis, published by the King's Fund in April 2026[2] found the situation had worsened, with **23% of patients** reported receiving postal appointment notifications after the **appointment had already taken place**.

[1] https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/insight-and-analysis/long-reads/lost-in-system-need-for-better-admin
[2] https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/insight-and-analysis/long-reads/still-lost-system-urgent-need-better-nhs-admin

Approach

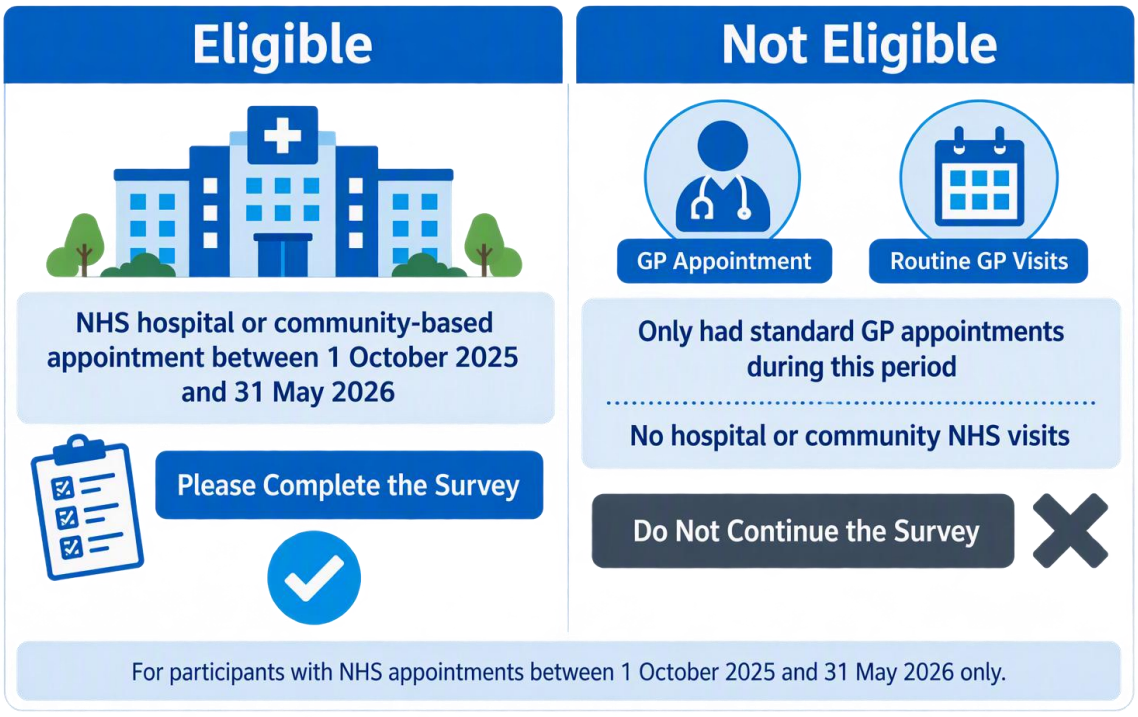
The survey was co-designed with the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Integrated Care Board (ICB) and shared with the People's Panel between 30 July and 13 September 2026.

Each questionnaire included a unique survey ID. This helped us understand who had responded, and allowed responses to be linked to demographic profiles for further analysis (such as age, location, or health condition).

Eligibility

The survey sought views from panel members who had a hospital or community-based appointment between 1 October 2025 and 31 May 2026.

Appointments after 31 May 2026 were excluded to ensure respondents had enough time to receive any appointment correspondence before the survey began. This reduced the risk of capturing appointments where letters may not yet have been sent or delivered.



Prize draw

As a thank you for taking part, all completed questionnaires were entered into a prize draw to win one of two £50 Love2shop vouchers. The draw was held in September 2026, and two lucky panel members received their £50 vouchers by email, ready to spend online or on the high street.

Technical testing of the survey

As part of the design process, the questionnaire was tested as follows:

1. a structured in-house testing plan was used to assess the survey's design, logic, and overall operability
2. piloting with five survey testers (non-panel members), who checked and reported on areas such as usability and complexity of wording
3. software tools were used to assess fatigue and accessibility scores, ensuring the survey was user-friendly and inclusive.



Note: For fatigue, lower scores are better (less respondent burden). For accessibility, higher scores are better (greater accessibility).

Fatigue and accessibility scores for this survey

Fieldwork

The survey was open between 30 July and 13 September 2026. During this period, panel members were invited to participate through email invitations and reminders. Individuals who joined the People's Panel during fieldwork were also given the opportunity to take part.



Promotion of the survey

The survey was promoted to existing People's Panel members through email invitations and reminder emails. To increase participation and recruit new panel members, additional promotion was undertaken through door-to-door leafleting, hospital sites, GP practices and a series of social media campaigns.



Who we spoke to

A total of **3,084 email invitations** were successfully delivered to People's Panel members, and **446 people completed the survey**. These responses provide insight into people's experiences of receiving NHS appointment letters and related communications.



Response rates have not been reported because the survey targeted only people who had a non-GP NHS appointment between 1 October 2025 and 31 May 2026. As the number of eligible recipients within the invited panel is unknown, a response rate would not provide a meaningful measure of participation.

Technical notes

Percentages and number of responses per question

Due to rounding, not all percentages shown may equal 100%.

n= When shown in this report, '*n=XX*' indicates the number of responses received for a given question.

Respondents' comments

Several questions gave the option for respondents to explain further the reason for their answer. Where a comment may potentially identify a respondent, specific provider or clinician, these details are redacted. To preserve confidentiality, the identities of participating organisations have been anonymised throughout this report. References to individual organisations are described generically as provider or organisation where appropriate.

All free-text responses have been lightly edited for spelling accuracy only; otherwise, they are presented verbatim to preserve the respondent's original wording and intent.

Respondents' comments reflect personal experiences and perceptions. The survey was not designed to determine whether delays occurred during NHS administrative processes, printing, dispatch or postal delivery.

Limitations

The findings should be interpreted with the following limitations in mind:

- People affected by appointment letter delays may have been more likely to participate.
- Delays may have occurred at provider, printing or postal delivery stages, which this survey was not designed to distinguish. We, do, however, acknowledge some respondents may have attributed responsibility for the delay in their comments.

Abbreviations used in this report

Abbreviation	Meaning
DNA	Did Not Attend. Used when a patient does not attend a booked appointment without notifying the provider in advance.
ICB	Integrated Care Board. The NHS organisation responsible for planning and funding health services within a local area.
MPFT	Midlands Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust.
NHS App	A digital service that allows people to access selected NHS services, health information and communications.
PALS	Patient Advice and Liaison Service.
PKB	Patient Knows Best, a digital personal health record system used by some NHS organisations.
UHNM	University Hospitals of North Midlands NHS Trust.

The People's Panel

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Integrated Care Board People's Panel is a digital group of just over 3,000 local residents (as of June 2026) from across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

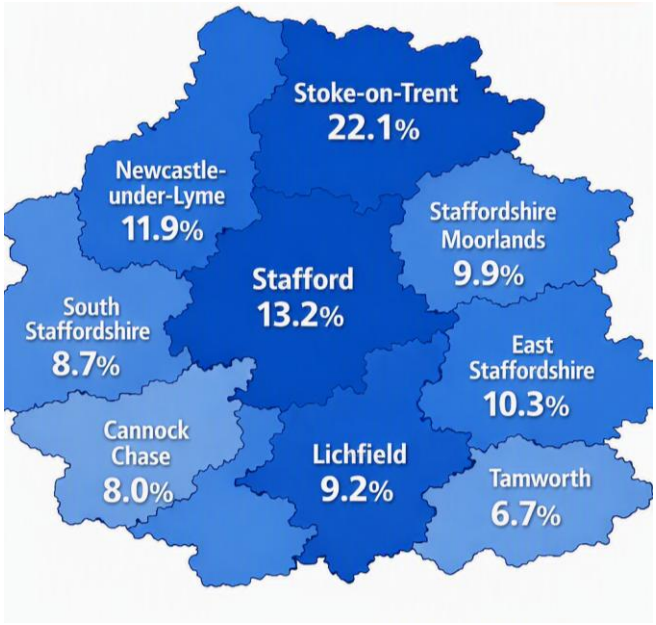
Members are asked about their experiences and to share their views about health and care services through online surveys; their responses help to shape decisions about health services that affect their community.

How it works

• Several times a year, members are sent surveys about local and national NHS topics
• a newsletter is sent four times a year, with updates on healthcare changes and actions we have taken as a result of panel feedback
• taking part is always voluntary. All responses are published anonymously in reports of findings on the Integrated Care Board (ICB) website. These reports are shared with system partners, who can also access them via the ICB website. A new 'You said; we did' section has also been added to the ICB website, outlining the actions taken following feedback from panel members.

Our current panel membership closely matches the population profile of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, based on Office for National Statistics (ONS) 2021 Census data.

Panel membership will differ from smaller to larger areas of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, and representation of areas. Larger districts will show proportionally higher levels of participation, while smaller areas will show proportionally lower representation.



Breakdown of the People's Panel as of June 2026

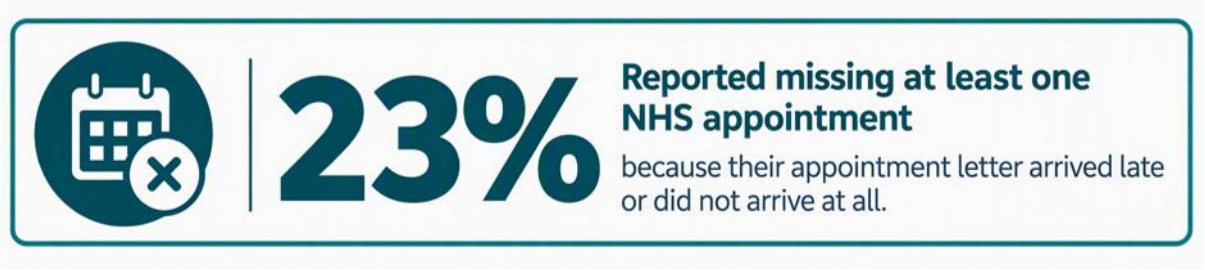
Executive Summary

Overview of Findings

Although most respondents received their appointment information successfully, almost one in four respondents who received appointment letters by post reported missing at least one NHS appointment because a letter arrived late or did not arrive at all. The findings highlight the continuing impact of communication failures on patient access, service efficiency and patient experience.

Reported missed appointments

Almost **one in four** respondents (23%) reported missing an NHS appointment because their appointment letter arrived late or did not arrive at all.



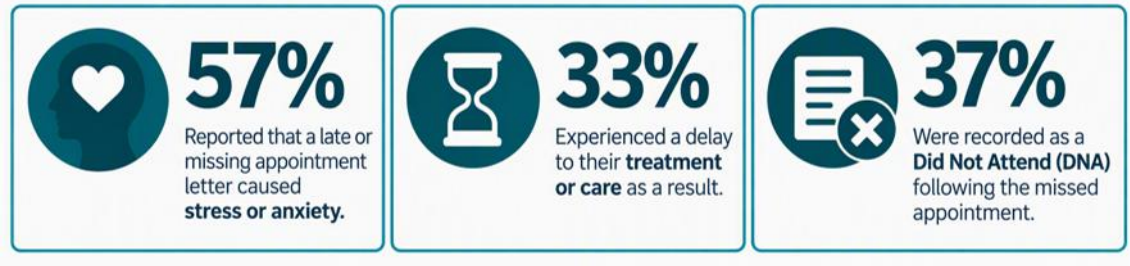
Letter delivery and communication failures

Communication issues were common where an appointment was missed, with **29% never receiving their appointment letter**, 24% receiving it after the appointment date, and 18% receiving it too late to make necessary arrangements such as transport or time off work.



Impact on patients

Late or missing letters had a significant impact, with **57% reporting stress or anxiety**, 33% experiencing delays to treatment or care, and 37% being recorded as a DNA.



Why the cause is difficult to identify

Respondents were often unable to identify where the problem occurred, with potential causes including provider administration, printing and dispatch processes, Royal Mail delivery, or data quality and address issues.



As a result, reported late or missing letters cannot always be attributed to a single point of failure, highlighting the need for end-to-end visibility across the appointment communication pathway.

What this means

Late or missing appointment letters continue to have a significant impact on both patients and NHS services. The findings suggest that communication issues can lead to:

- Missed appointments and increased DNA rates
- Delays to treatment and care pathways
- Increased patient stress and anxiety
- Additional administrative workload for NHS services
- Reduced confidence in NHS correspondence systems

Survey Findings

Have NHS Appointment Letters Reached You on Time? 1 October 2025 to 31 May 2026

Social media non-panel responses

The People's Panel social media channels received more than 100 comments during the promotion of the survey. These comments covered a range of topics, including delayed or undelivered appointment letters, wider issues relating to NHS appointments, and matters not directly related to the survey.

Where comments highlighted individual concerns, complaints, or requests for support, contributors were signposted to the most appropriate service, including local NHS providers or Patient Advice and Liaison Services (PALS), to help address their issue.

Several social media comments related to NHS letter issues are shown below.

Appointment letter arrived very late

"My uncle passed away on 19 July. On 6 August mail was delivered to his property containing a hospital appointment letter for 11 July."

Letter arrived on the day

"The appointment letter arrived Monday 3 August at 12.30pm, the appointment was for 4pm. Luckily, I made it…"

Received letter after appointment

"I received mine yesterday after coming home from my appointment. Luckily, I had a phone call 3 days before to inform me."

Appointment and DNA letter arrived the same day

"Once received 2 letters on the same day; one informing me of an appointment and the other telling me I had missed my appointment."

Letters did not arrive

"Letters did not arrive and I was referred back to my GP. My condition worsened with still no appointment made…. Weeks later, a few letters came. You have a problem that needs fixing!"

Delayed letters caused confusion

"I also had letters from the hospital five weeks after they were typed, which caused upset and confusion because the information was out of date, and referred to an operation I had initially and not the one I expected the letter to be about."

Now uses NHS App to avoid missing appointments

"Since I downloaded the NHS App, I haven't missed an appointment. It's always on there a week before the letter."

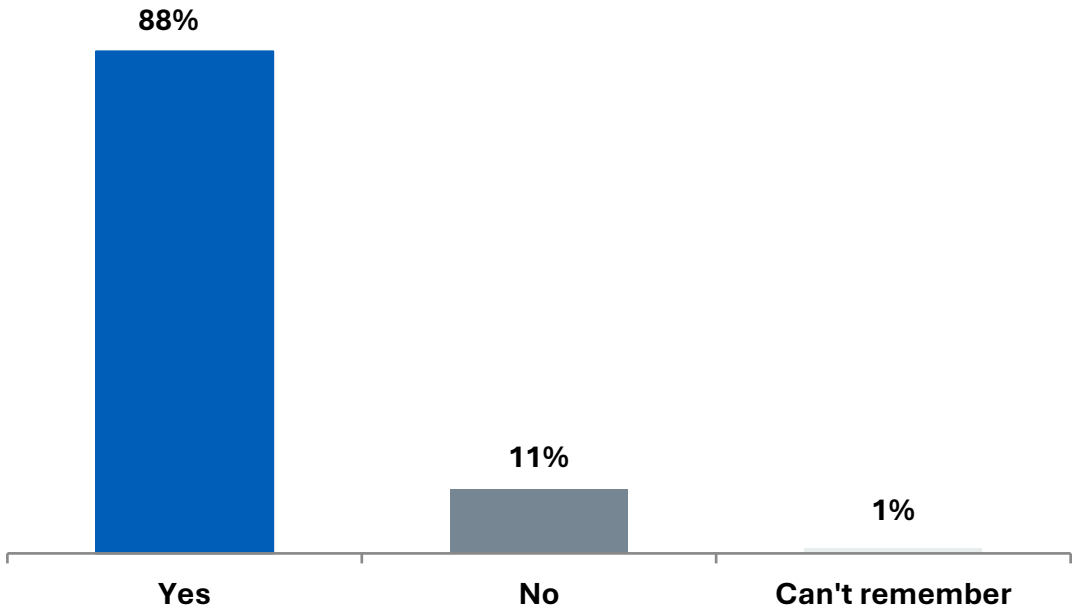
Comments have been published with permission from the original poster

Eligible respondents

This screening question was included to confirm whether respondents met the survey eligibility criteria.

The survey was intended only for individuals who were due to attend a hospital or community-based NHS appointment during the reporting period. As this requirement was clearly stated in the survey invitation, individuals who had not attended, or were not due to attend, such an appointment were advised that the survey was not applicable to them.

Between 1 October 2025 and 31 May 2026, were you due to attend any hospital or community-based NHS appointments (excluding GP appointments)?



n=446

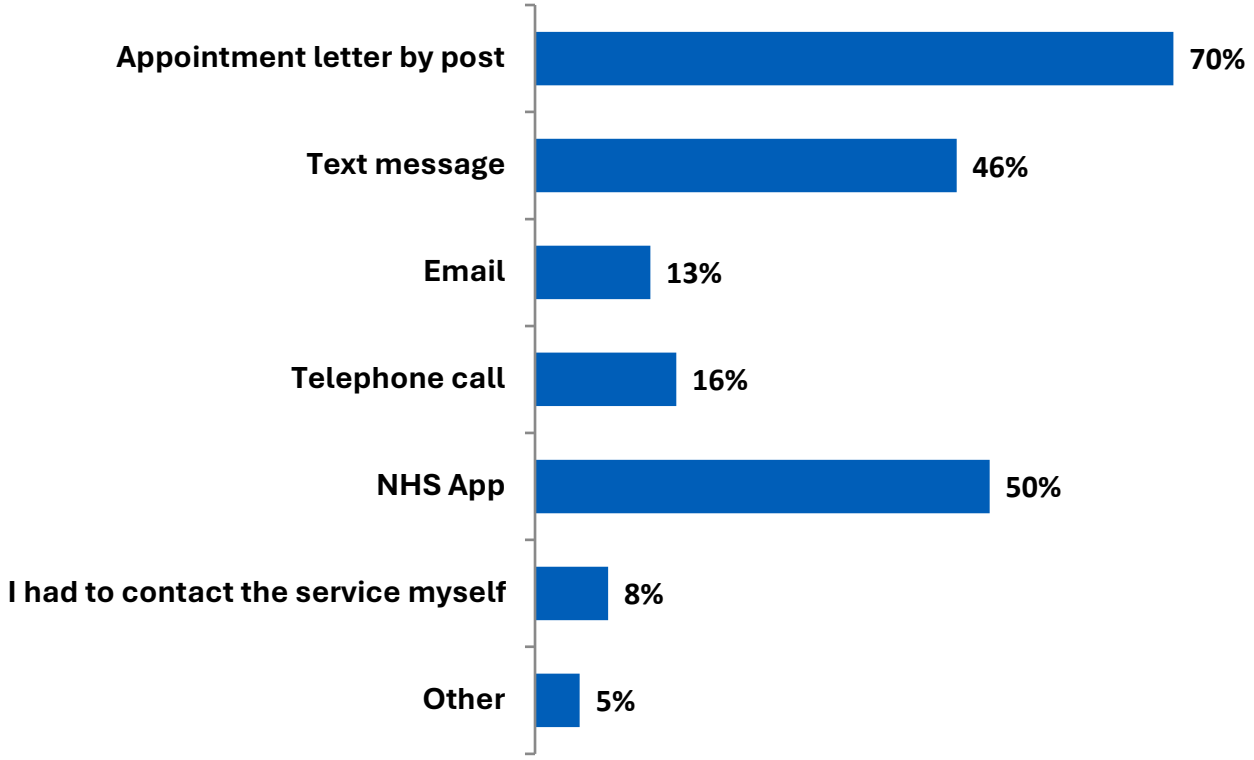
The 12% of respondents who answered "No" or "Can't remember" did not meet the criteria for the remaining survey questions and were therefore directed to the end of the survey and thanked for their participation.

How appointment information is communicated

Respondents most received appointment information by post (70%), followed by the NHS App (50%) and text message (46%). Smaller proportions were contacted by telephone (16%) or email (13%), while 8% reported having to contact the service themselves.

How did you receive details about your appointment?

If you had more than one appointment, please select all the ways you received the details



n=385. Respondents could select more than one option

Interpretation notes

As the survey was titled "***Have NHS appointment letters reached you on time?***", it is possible that individuals who had received a postal appointment letter were more likely to open and complete the survey than individuals who had received their appointment details via alternative methods.

Consequently, the proportion of respondents reporting that they received an appointment letter by post (70%) may be higher than would be expected across the wider patient population and should be interpreted with this potential response bias in mind.

Other Responses

A small number of respondents selected "Other" and provided additional details about how they received appointment information.

Several respondents referred to **Patient Knows Best** (PKB) or **other online patient portals**, suggesting that digital platforms play an important role in appointment communications. Others reported receiving **information during a previous appointment**, via a healthcare professional, or through a hospital portal.

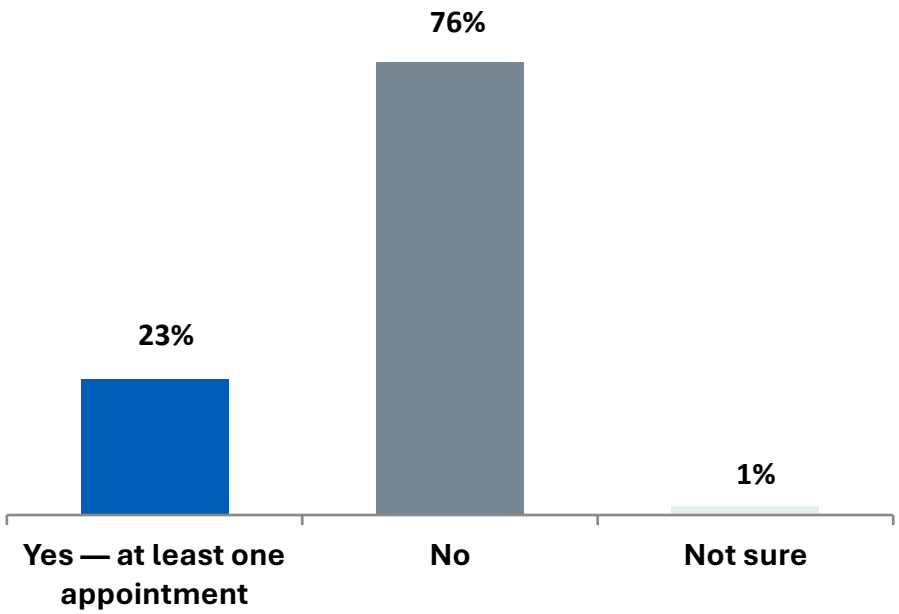
Please note:

The remainder of the survey focused specifically on **experiences relating to appointment letters sent by post**. Respondents who indicated that they had not received their appointment information via post were routed to the end of the survey and thanked for their time and participation.

Missed appointments due to late or missing letters

Most respondents (76%) said they had **not** missed an NHS appointment because a letter arrived late or did not arrive. However, **23%** reported missing **at least one appointment** for this reason, while 1% were unsure.

During this period (1 October 2025 and 31 May 2026), did you miss any NHS appointments because the appointment letter arrived late or did not arrive at all?



n=269

While methodologies differ, these findings are broadly in line with national evidence from a 2025 report by **The King's Fund**, **Healthwatch England** and **National Voices** (view report here), which found that **20% of NHS service users had received an appointment invitation after the appointment date had passed** (23% in their 2026 follow-up analysis).

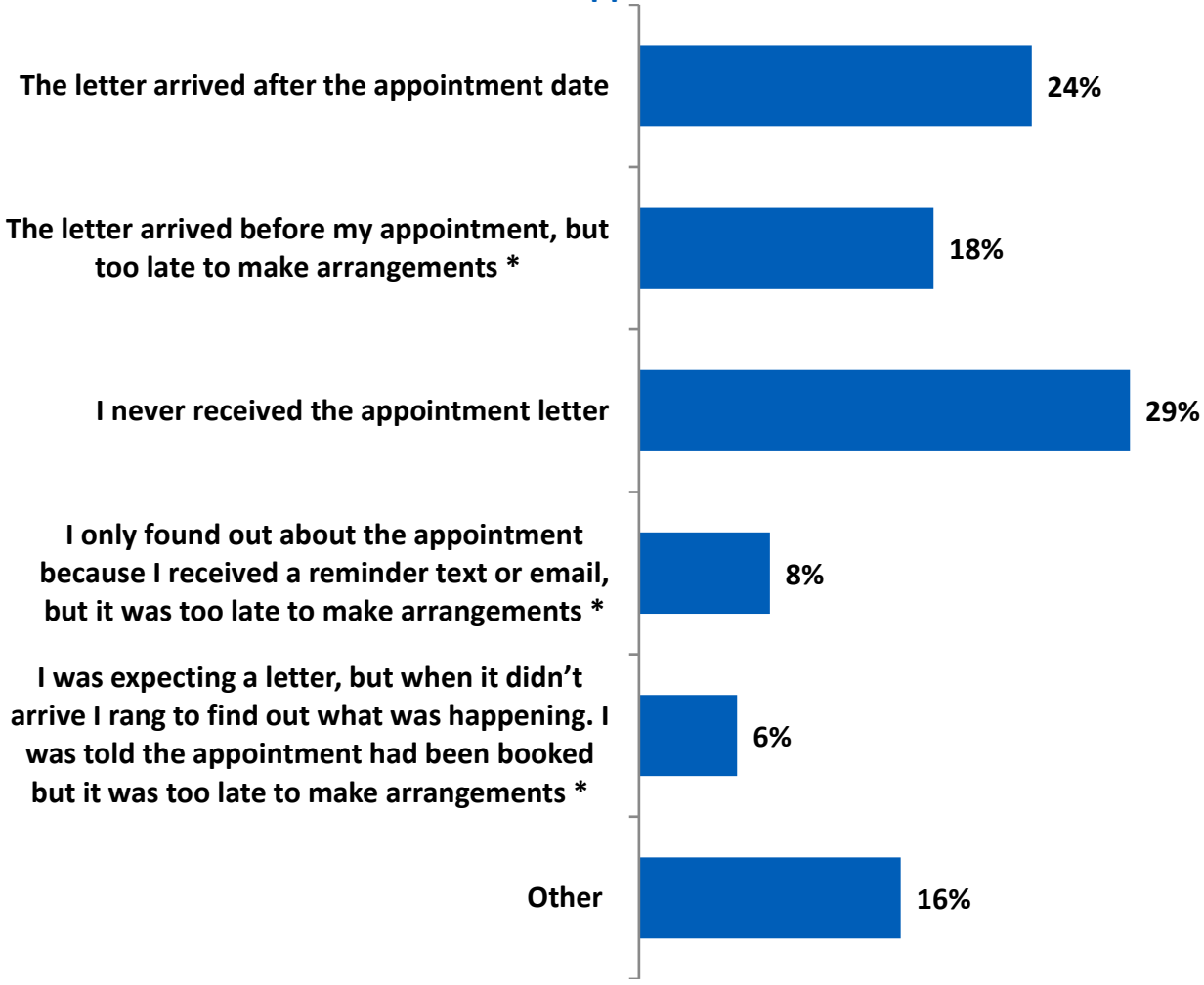
Reasons appointments were missed

Respondents who reported missing an appointment due to a late or missing appointment letter were asked to identify the main reason.

The most common response was that they **never received the appointment letter** (29%), followed by the letter **arriving after the appointment date** (24%). A further 18% said the letter arrived before the appointment but too late to make the necessary arrangements, such as organising transport, time off work or caring responsibilities.

Smaller proportions reported only becoming aware of the appointment through a reminder text or email (8%) or having to contact the service themselves after a letter failed to arrive (6%). Additionally, 16% selected "Other", highlighting a range of different experiences.

When your NHS appointment letter arrived late or not at all, which of the following applied?



*n=51. * e.g., transport, time off work, caring responsibilities, etc.*

The eight "Other" responses are shown below.

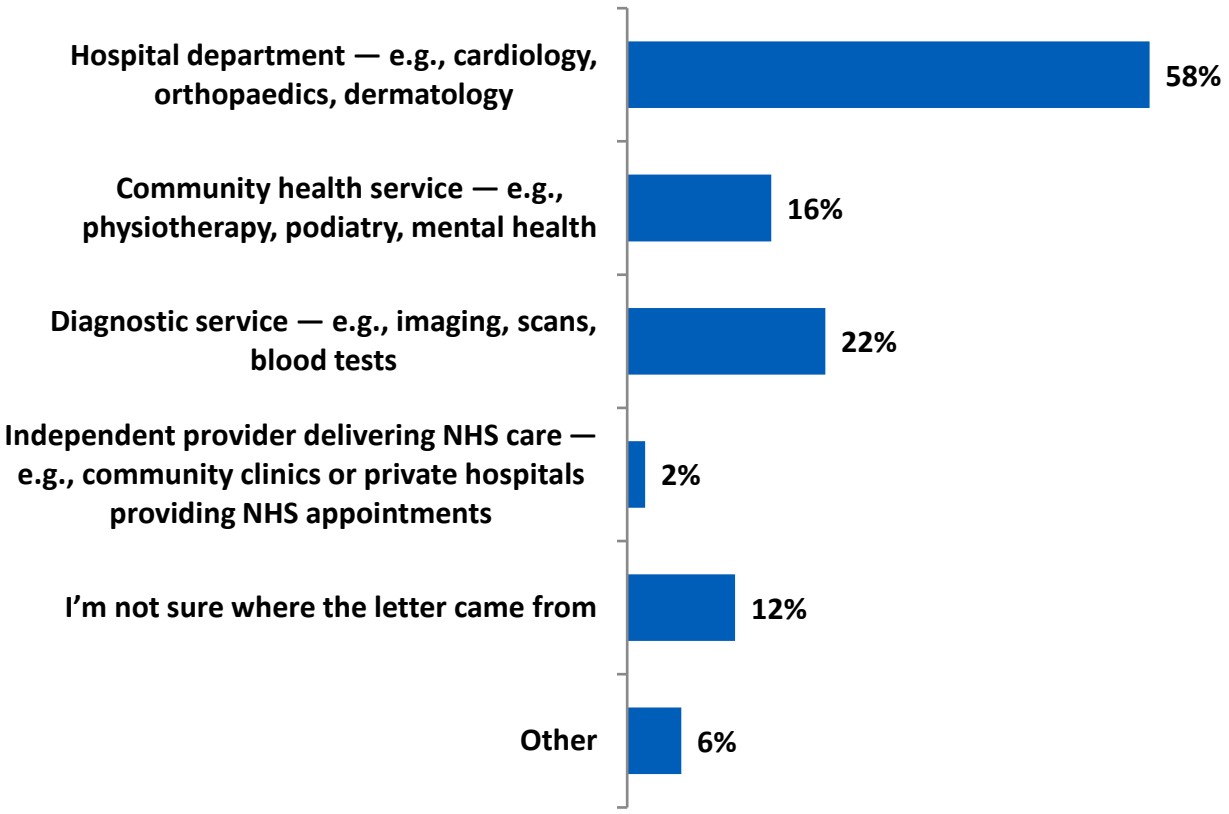
Area	Comment
Cannock Chase	I did not miss my appointment because I phoned to find out when it was. Had I not called, I would have missed it, as the letter arrived two days after the appointment date.
Newcastle-under-Lyme	Communications at Provider 1 are shockingly poor. I received a letter containing incorrect details about my operation. After checking with Provider 1, I was still given incorrect information. As a result, my cancer surgery was cancelled on the day and had to be rescheduled for the following week. On another occasion, an appointment letter never arrived and I only became aware of the appointment after contacting the department by telephone.
Newcastle-under-Lyme	The first I knew about my appointment was when I received a text reminder. Had I relied solely on the letter, I would have missed the appointment because it arrived after the appointment date. It seemed a waste of time and resources to send a letter that arrived after the appointment had taken place.
South Staffordshire	A mixture of the above. I only became aware of one appointment because the letter arrived after the appointment date and I missed it. For another appointment, the letter arrived late and I was unable to attend because I did not have sufficient time to make arrangements.
Staffordshire Moorlands	I found out about an appointment from a text reminder, which was the first notification I received. When I attended, staff asked whether I had brought my appointment letter. I had not received one. The letter eventually arrived the following week.
Staffordshire Moorlands	I had a text message reminding me of my appointment.
Stoke-on-Trent	A letter was sent for a referral appointment to diabetic services asking me to make contact by phone within two weeks. Fortunately, I had an appointment with my GP practice and the nurse advised that these letters do not always arrive within the two-week timeframe. She provided the contact number, which I used. The letter did not arrive in time and I would otherwise have missed the deadline.
Tamworth	My appointment letter arrived around a week after the appointment date. The only reason I did not miss the appointment was because the hospital sent a text reminder.

Where did the letter come from (or not arrive) for your missed appointment?

Respondents who experienced a missed appointment as a result of a late or non-arriving appointment letter were asked to identify the source of the correspondence. This information helps to highlight where delays in appointment communication may be affecting patients and their access to care.

Most missed appointments related to letters from hospital departments (58%). Smaller proportions involved diagnostic services (22%) and community health services (16%). A further 12% were unsure where the letter came from, while 6% selected another service and 2% reported an independent provider delivering NHS care.

If you missed one or more appointments due to your appointment letter not arriving in time, please can you tell us where the appointment letter came from



n=50

The three respondents who selected "**Other**" cited issues relating to a diabetic clinic appointment at Burton, bowel cancer screening correspondence, and a delayed appointment letter that ultimately did not result in a missed appointment.

If you missed one or more appointments due to your appointment letter not arriving in time, please tell us the name of the hospital, community service, diagnostic service, or independent provider that sent the appointment letter?

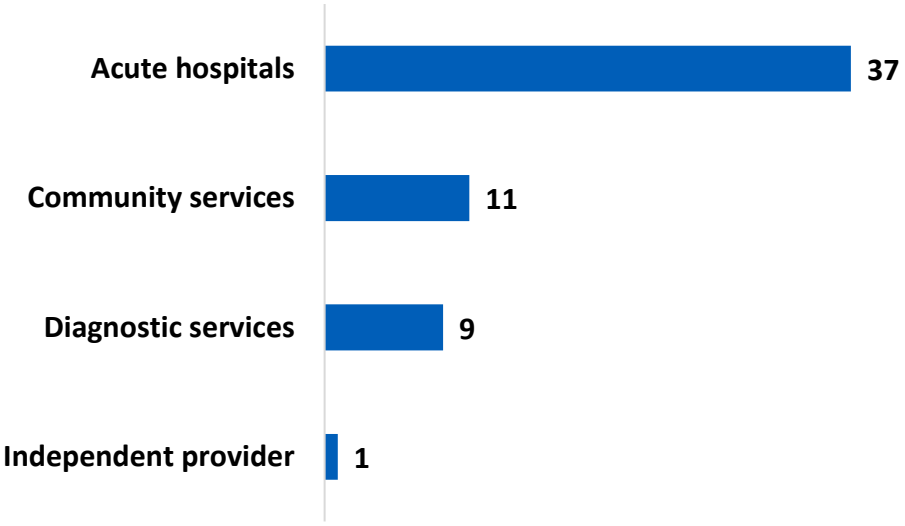
Respondents who provided the name of the organisation that sent the appointment letter most frequently identified **Royal Stoke Hospital / University Hospitals of North Midlands (UHNM)**. Other acute providers referenced by respondents included **County Hospital Stafford**, **New Cross Hospital**, **Queen's Hospital Burton**, **Derby and Burton Hospitals**, **Nottingham Queen's Hospital** and **University Hospitals Birmingham**.

Community-based services cited included diabetes, respiratory, audiology, pain management, physiotherapy, podiatry and orthopaedic services. Diagnostic appointments were commonly associated with MRI, CT and blood testing services. One respondent identified the independent provider Health Harmonie.

These findings should not be interpreted as indicating poorer performance by any particular provider. Larger providers are likely to be mentioned more often because they manage a substantially greater number of appointments.

The findings suggest that delayed or missing appointment letters were reported across a range of acute, community and diagnostic services and were not limited to a single provider.

Service that sent the appointment letter



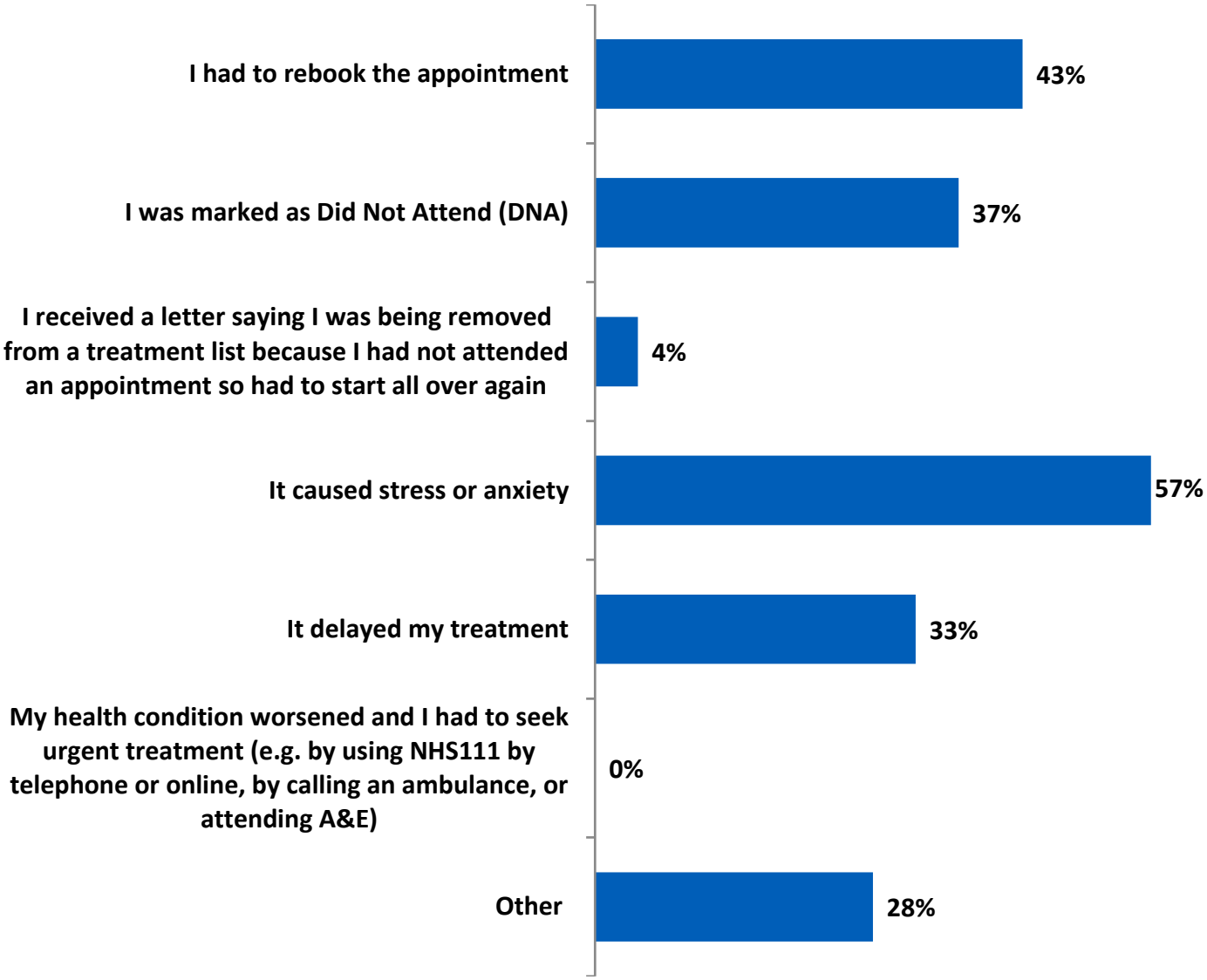
Respondents could select more than one option

Impact on health or care

Respondents who missed an appointment because their appointment letter did not arrive in time were asked whether this had any impact on their health or care.

Respondents reported a range of impacts after missing an appointment because their letter arrived late or did not arrive. The most common effects were stress or anxiety (57%), having to rebook the appointment (43%), being recorded as DNA (37%), and delayed treatment (33%).

Please tell us if the late letter had an impact on your health or care



n=46. Respondents could select more than one option

Where a respondent selected 'Other', their comments are shown on the next page.

Area	Comment
Lichfield	The delay in receiving the appointment letter delayed my asthma diagnosis and the start of treatment.
Newcastle-under-Lyme	I had the consultant on the phone asking where I was. I explained about the letter, and he acknowledged that it was an administrative error and apologised. This caused significant stress and anxiety during an already difficult situation. My surgery was cancelled that day and rescheduled for the following week, resulting in wasted theatre time, staff resources, and inconvenience for all involved. This was not an isolated incident with Provider 1. I also experienced problems with district nurses attending an address I had not lived at for five years, despite the correct address being recorded on the paperwork sent from the hospital. Letters and appointments from Provider 2 and Provider 1 are not fit for purpose.
Newcastle-under-Lyme	I was only able to attend the appointment because I phoned to find out where my appointment letter was. That was when I was informed of the appointment date and time.
Stafford	I rearranged my schedule to attend. This was only possible because I am recently retired. Fortunately, no harm was done, but the issue was not with the department. I live in a rural area where postal deliveries are notoriously slow.
Staffordshire Moorlands	Always had reminders on my phone, but letters have arrived after the appointment date. I was fortunate to receive the reminder on my phone.
Staffordshire Moorlands	When I phoned to rearrange the appointment, I felt that staff did not believe me when I explained that the letter had arrived after the appointment date.
Stoke-on-Trent	I attended the appointment, which had been arranged by telephone. The appointment letter arrived two days later.
Stoke-on-Trent	I felt embarrassed that I had missed my appointment and wasted people's time and NHS resources.
Stoke-on-Trent	I was lucky to be told who to contact without delay. I have experienced similar issues when arranging physiotherapy appointments, where patients are sent a letter with contact details and given only 14 days to respond. In practice, the letter can arrive with only a few days remaining before the appointment is withdrawn. Contacting the service can also be difficult due to high demand. I have also been told that contact must be made within seven days of referral or patient details may not yet be available. The system needs to change to reduce postal costs, inconvenience for staff and patients, and repeat referrals.
Stoke-on-Trent	Managed to attend.
Stoke-on-Trent	The letter did not arrive in time. I tried to call to find out when my appointment was but was unable to obtain the information. I have multiple health conditions, and this delayed part of my care.
Tamworth	I received a text reminder a couple of days before the appointment, which was the first notification I received. I had to make childcare arrangements at short notice in order to attend. When the letter finally arrived, it was dated almost four weeks earlier.
Tamworth	I was able to attend.

Thinking about the letter, please tell us any details you can about the date of the letter, the date of the appointment, and the date you received the letter

Respondents were asked to provide any details they could recall about the date of their letter, their appointment date, and when the letter was received. These responses are shown below and offer further insight into the delays experienced.

Delayed letter delivery

"The letter arrived almost four weeks after the date shown on it."

Letter arrived after appointment

"The letter was received about four days after my appointment date. Three days later, I received another letter stating that I had not attended my appointment."

Letter arrived after appointment

"I do not remember the appointment date, but it was for the sleep clinic. The letter arrived two days after the appointment."

Impact on patient experience

"It is very frustrating having to explain repeatedly that the appointment letter arrived after the scheduled appointment date and that I did not intentionally miss the appointment."

Letter not received

"I never received my appointment letter. The first time I knew about my appointment was when I received a letter stating that I had not attended my appointment."

Multiple letters not received

"I did not receive two appointment letters. I completely missed the first appointment, and the staff were unhappy even though it was not my fault. I only found out about my second appointment because I attended a procedure where the consultant said my sugar levels were too high to proceed."

Area	Comment
Cannock Chase	I have to have at least a month's notice to be able to book time off work. Now my diabetes care has moved from Provider 3 to Provider 4, they only give me around two weeks' notice, which is not helpful at all.
Cannock Chase	I received the letter the day before, but it stated I should see my GP before attending.
Cannock Chase	I never received my appointment letter. The first time I knew about my appointment was when I received a letter stating that I had not attended my appointment.
East Staffordshire	I did not receive two appointment letters. I completely missed the first appointment, and the staff were unhappy even though it was not my fault. I only found out about my second appointment because I attended a procedure where the consultant said my sugar levels were too high to proceed. The consultant contacted the diabetic clinic, who advised that another appointment had been booked. However, the letter never arrived.

East Staffordshire	I have noticed recently that appointment letters often arrive the day before, a couple of days before, or even a couple of days after the appointment. This is not very helpful. If I had not already received appointment details via Patients Know Best or email, I would have had several DNAs recorded against my name unfairly.
East Staffordshire	The appointment letter was delivered just over three weeks after the date shown on the letter.
East Staffordshire	The letter was received about four days after my appointment date. Three days later, I received another letter stating that I had not attended my appointment.
Lichfield	I cannot remember the exact details, but it was sometime in November last year.
Lichfield	I do not know, as the letter never arrived.
Newcastle-under-Lyme	I cannot remember the date on the letter. My appointment was on 21 January, and I received the letter on 23 January.
Newcastle-under-Lyme	I cannot remember, but it arrived with a batch of other mail four days after my appointment.
Newcastle-under-Lyme	My letter stated that I had an afternoon theatre slot on 25 November, but the appointment was actually scheduled for the morning. I visited the hospital to query the fasting instructions and was initially told the afternoon appointment was correct. The letter was dated 11 November. I kept all correspondence because the experience was very poor and I am considering making a formal complaint. I was also booked for a CT scan but received neither a letter nor an NHS App notification. I only became aware of the appointment after telephoning the hospital.
South Staffordshire	My February 2026 appointment letter was received in March 2026, after I had missed my pain management appointment. No other correspondence was received. Orthopaedic appointments appear on the NHS App, but letters often arrive only a day or two before the appointment or even after it.
Stafford	I cannot recall the exact date, but it related to my annual oxygen review, which should be identifiable by the service.
Staffordshire Moorlands	I did not receive the appointment letter. I only received a letter from the consultant stating that I had not attended.
Staffordshire Moorlands	I cannot remember the exact date, but the letter arrived a few days after the appointment. The Provider 5 letter arrived approximately two weeks later.
Staffordshire Moorlands	The letter arrived around 10 days after the appointment.
Staffordshire Moorlands	The letter arrived only two days before the appointment. This was not necessarily the NHS's fault, as we only receive post once or twice a week in our village.
Staffordshire Moorlands	The letter arrived one week after the appointment date.
Staffordshire Moorlands	I received a text message informing me about the appointment. Postal delivery is unreliable for appointment notifications.
Staffordshire Moorlands	The letter arrived approximately three days after the appointment. This was for a pre-operative assessment before surgery.
Stoke-on-Trent	The appointment was in May, and I attended for a catheter change. The confirmation letter arrived two days afterwards.
Stoke-on-Trent	The issue was due to the postal service, which can be unreliable.

Stoke-on-Trent	Postal delays are causing significant issues. I now rely on the NHS App for my appointments.
Stoke-on-Trent	I cannot remember the exact date, but the letter arrived a week late. I was told another appointment letter would be sent, but when it failed to arrive I contacted the service and found that my appointment had already been scheduled for the following Monday.
Stoke-on-Trent	I only became aware of a missed appointment with my diabetic nurse when I received a DNA letter.
Stoke-on-Trent	I do not remember the appointment date, but it was for the sleep clinic. The letter arrived two days after the appointment.
Stoke-on-Trent	I had an MRI scan with contrast. I never received a formal appointment letter and relied on the NHS App, which only provided basic details. I later discovered I should have arrived an hour earlier to have a cannula fitted. This information had not been communicated, resulting in the scan being completed without contrast. The department later acknowledged that no appointment letter had been sent.
Stoke-on-Trent	The referral letter instructed patients to make contact within two weeks of the letter date, otherwise the referral process would need to start again. However, the letter itself arrived after that deadline had passed.
Stoke-on-Trent	I was promised a letter containing the date and time of my appointment, but it did not arrive until after the appointment had already taken place.
Stoke-on-Trent	I received a text reminder about my appointment, but I needed to rearrange it due to other commitments.
Stoke-on-Trent	I cannot recall the exact dates. The original appointment was in February or March, and the rebooked appointment was in late March.
Stoke-on-Trent	It is very frustrating having to explain repeatedly that the appointment letter arrived after the scheduled appointment date and that I did not intentionally miss the appointment.
Tamworth	I cannot remember the exact dates, but approximately three weeks had passed between the date on the letter and the date I received it.
Tamworth	The letter arrived almost four weeks after the date shown on it.

Thinking about your communication preferences, have you asked for appointment notifications to be sent a different way but are still being sent letters?

Respondents were asked whether they had requested appointment notifications to be sent in a different format or by a different method but continued to receive letters.

Many respondents were unaware that alternative notification methods were available and only requested these options after experiencing problems. While some patients continue to value paper correspondence, the feedback suggests there is demand for increased use of digital communications and clearer information about the options available to patients.

Unaware of the option

"No, I did not know I could request this."

Lack of awareness

"No, I did not know there was an option."

Now using online services

"I have now asked that all appointments be sent via text message or the NHS App…"

Not informed about alternatives

"I was not told there were any other options. I would happily opt out of letters because of the postal issues."

Switched to the NHS App

"I always preferred to have a physical copy because I could keep it on my noticeboard as a reminder. However, after missing my last appointment and seeing how unreliable Royal Mail has become, I now use the NHS App and write my appointment details on a piece of paper to display at home."

Informed after complaining

"It was only when I complained that my appointment letter arrived after the appointment date that I was told I could use Patients Know Best instead of receiving appointments by post."

Area	Comment
Cannock Chase	I am now using the NHS App, so hopefully my future appointments will appear there rather than being sent by post. However, I am not confident this will happen.
Cannock Chase	No.
Cannock Chase	No, I prefer letters.
East Staffordshire	I have now asked that all appointments be sent via text message or the NHS App, but I have been told that some services may still send appointments by post. It feels like a guessing game as to how I will receive my next appointment

	details. All appointments should be available through the app or text, as the postal service has become so unreliable.
East Staffordshire	No, but after the delayed appointment letter and the poor service that now seems standard from Organisation 1, I have requested that appointments be delivered through the NHS App where possible.
East Staffordshire	The system did not have a mobile phone number recorded for me. I made sure this was added when I attended my appointment.
East Staffordshire	They now go through Patients Know Best.
Lichfield	I have downloaded the NHS App and assumed that all future appointments would be notified through the app.
Lichfield	No, I did not know I could request this.
Newcastle-under-Lyme	I have now requested this. It was only when I complained that my appointment letter arrived after the appointment date that I was told I could use Patients Know Best instead of receiving appointments by post.
Newcastle-under-Lyme	NHS App. I access letters and appointments through it, although I sometimes also receive duplicate letters by post. At other times I receive nothing in the post at all. It is very variable.
Newcastle-under-Lyme	No. I did not know there was an option.
South Staffordshire	Yes, I have asked for NHS App appointment reminders, text message notifications and letters where needed.
Stafford	I was not told there were any other options. I would happily opt out of letters because of the postal issues.
Staffordshire Moorlands	I have requested phone calls, app notifications and email.
Staffordshire Moorlands	No, I did not know I could.
Staffordshire Moorlands	No. They send letters and, to make sure they are not late, they also ring or send a text message.
Staffordshire Moorlands	Text and email are better for me.
Staffordshire Moorlands	Yes.
Staffordshire Moorlands	Yes, my post seems to be held back and delivered in bundles. This can cause significant delays.
Stoke-on-Trent	Did not realise this was possible.
Stoke-on-Trent	I also now receive appointment notifications by text message, along with a reminder a couple of days beforehand.
Stoke-on-Trent	I always preferred to have a physical copy because I could keep it on my noticeboard as a reminder. However, after missing my last appointment and seeing how unreliable Organisation 1 has become, I now use the NHS App and write my appointment details on a piece of paper to display at home.
Stoke-on-Trent	I asked to be notified by email or SMS. I still receive some appointments by email and I also receive notifications through Patients Know Best. However, I only receive the date and time through this system, not the full appointment letter or supporting documentation.
Stoke-on-Trent	I have advised that I would prefer messaging, email or the NHS App, but certain clinics and appointments do not use these methods. Also, a recent

	diabetic referral letter displayed the Provider 6 address prominently, while the clinic address was hidden further down the page. According to staff, this regularly causes patients to attend the wrong location.
Stoke-on-Trent	I have asked for appointments to be sent via NHS Online.
Stoke-on-Trent	I have only a landline telephone number.
Stoke-on-Trent	I have not asked, but I would prefer text messages or email.
Stoke-on-Trent	I still need a printed copy in case it is required by other agencies. I also request email, text messages and telephone calls where appropriate.
Stoke-on-Trent	Just ring the landline.
Stoke-on-Trent	NHS App.
Stoke-on-Trent	No.
Stoke-on-Trent	No, I did not know I could. I have always had letters sent to my home address.
Stoke-on-Trent	Not yet. I have a new appointment in August.
Tamworth	I do not use the NHS App and was told that my initial appointment details cannot be sent by text message because they contain too much information.
Tamworth	Text messages as well now.

Thinking about your postal deliveries, tell us if you have noticed or experienced any delays to post arriving, or going missing

Respondents were asked whether they had experienced delays to postal deliveries or instances of post going missing. Their feedback below provides context on potential postal issues affecting the receipt of appointment letters.

Bundled postal deliveries

"Postal deliveries are unreliable. I do not receive regular deliveries and have complained to Organisation 1 because I often receive numerous letters in a single delivery after several days with no post."

Significant delays

"Yes, letters are often delivered weeks after the posting date or not delivered at all."

Prioritisation of parcels

"Yes, post is frequently delayed and sometimes never arrives. The postman says they are instructed to prioritise parcels because they generate more income."

Impact on appointments

"Post is much slower, which is why people are missing appointments."

Concerns about postal reliability

"Yes, post is now so unreliable. Letters often arrive long after the date shown on them, and some never arrive at all. I have noticed that several companies now only include the month a letter was sent rather than the specific date."

Area	Comment
Cannock Chase	Constantly receiving post in a batch after days of no post at all.
Cannock Chase	I hardly receive any postal deliveries.
Cannock Chase	Our postal service is shocking. I am now trying my best to have all my important correspondence delivered paperless.
Cannock Chase	Postal deliveries are unreliable. I do not receive regular deliveries and have complained to Organisation 1 because I often receive numerous letters in a single delivery after several days with no post.
East Staffordshire	I tend to get all my post for the week in one batch. They certainly are not delivering every day, or even every other day. Organisation 1 are unreliable now unless you are waiting for a parcel.
East Staffordshire	No, only my appointment letters.
East Staffordshire	The postal service has gone downhill significantly. Not only have I experienced delays and missing mail, but I have also received post intended for other people on several occasions. I always return it to a post box, but I suspect many people simply throw it away.
East Staffordshire	Yes, the postal service is not fit for purpose. I recently had a birthday card arrive a week after my birthday, despite my friend posting it a week beforehand.

Lichfield	Yes, letters are often delivered weeks after the posting date, or not delivered at all.
Lichfield	Yes, post is now so unreliable. Letters often arrive long after the date shown on them, and some never arrive at all. I have noticed that several companies now only include the month a letter was sent rather than the specific date.
Newcastle-under-Lyme	I have noticed over the last year that the postal service has deteriorated significantly. Not only are there delays in receiving post, but I have also received post intended for other people. Several expected letters have not arrived, and I suspect they were delivered to the wrong addresses and not returned.
Newcastle-under-Lyme	There are delays and sometimes nothing is received at all. Our postman is reliable, so it appears the issue may be NHS-related.
Newcastle-under-Lyme	Yes, the postal service has declined so much that it is no longer fit for purpose.
South Staffordshire	Over the last two to three years there has been a significant decline in the regularity of postal deliveries, with long delays in receiving post.
Stafford	Always. It is an ongoing problem because I live in a rural area. It is not necessarily the fault of the NHS.
Staffordshire Moorlands	Delays and infrequent deliveries.
Staffordshire Moorlands	I receive a delivery only once a fortnight if I am lucky.
Staffordshire Moorlands	Our letter service is awful. I recently received a government letter requesting household information for jury service. It arrived three and a half weeks after the date on the letter.
Staffordshire Moorlands	Post is much slower, which is why people are missing appointments. This can make it appear that people no longer want the appointment when they actually do. It also places additional pressure on the system to arrange replacement appointments.
Staffordshire Moorlands	We have gone up to 11 days without any deliveries.
Staffordshire Moorlands	We seem to have a limited service in Tean, with deliveries only once or twice a week.
Staffordshire Moorlands	Yes.
Staffordshire Moorlands	Yes, letters are arriving late.
Stoke-on-Trent	Definitely. Post is late, letters go missing, and I have even received envelopes with no letter inside.
Stoke-on-Trent	I now seem to receive post only on Thursdays.
Stoke-on-Trent	I honestly think the issue is caused by the postal service. For example, I had a mammogram in early July and was told I would receive the results within a couple of weeks by post. I finally received the letter on *Date**, although it was dictated on *Date** and postmarked *Date**. It took ten days to travel from Stafford to Stoke-on-Trent. I often receive no letters for a week and then several arrive together. I do not think this is the hospital's fault.
Stoke-on-Trent	Many delays due to the lack of regular postal deliveries.

Stoke-on-Trent	NHS post tends to take five to seven working days and may be delayed further due to public holidays.
Stoke-on-Trent	Postal deliveries are left on the doorstep or thrown over the alleyway. As my front step is on the roadside, post often goes missing.
Stoke-on-Trent	Post arriving late or letters not being sent on time. I am not sure which is the cause.
Stoke-on-Trent	There are some delays, but I do eventually receive everything.
Stoke-on-Trent	Yes.
Stoke-on-Trent	Yes.
Stoke-on-Trent	Yes, it is shocking. I have experienced both delays and missing post.
Stoke-on-Trent	Yes, it often takes more than two weeks from the date on the letter, but I am unsure whether the problem lies with the NHS or the postal service.
Stoke-on-Trent	Yes, our postal service is shocking. Post does not arrive, and letters sometimes arrive several weeks after the date shown on them.
Stoke-on-Trent	Yes, post is frequently delayed and sometimes never arrives. The postman says they are instructed to prioritise parcels because they generate more income.
Stoke-on-Trent	Letters do not arrive or are delayed, sometimes for more than a week.
Tamworth	Postal services are shocking, and even our postman admits this. He used to deliver mail on foot, but now drives from door to door delivering parcels. It seems you only receive letters if your house is near a parcel delivery route.
Tamworth	Yes, a lot at the moment.

* *Date – Dates removed to protect respondent confidentiality.*

Wider issues raised

Although outside the scope of this survey, concerns regarding unidentified telephone calls were raised frequently enough to merit consideration within wider NHS communication improvement programmes.

Calls from withheld or mobile numbers

Several respondents to the survey and social media posts reported avoiding calls from unfamiliar mobile numbers because they were concerned the calls might be spam or scams. Some later discovered that missed calls had been made by NHS services attempting to contact them.

Typical comments included:

- People not answering unfamiliar numbers
- Calls not being followed up with a voicemail
- Calls with no caller ID
- Difficulty identifying whether a call genuinely came from an NHS service
- Preference for a text message identifying the service before a call is made.



Recommendations and Conclusion

Recommendations

Based on the survey findings, the following actions are recommended:

- **Review appointment communication processes** to identify and address causes of delayed or non-received appointment letters.
- **Increase the use and promotion of digital communications**, including the NHS App, text messaging and email notifications, where appropriate.
- **Ensure patient communication preferences are routinely recorded and regularly updated** to support timely delivery of appointment information.
- **Undertake targeted reviews of services reporting higher levels of communication issues** to identify opportunities for improvement.
- **Monitor patient experience relating to appointment communications** through ongoing feedback and engagement activities to assess the impact of any changes implemented.

These actions could help reduce missed appointments, improve patient experience and support timely access to care.

Conclusion

While most respondents reported receiving their appointment letters on time, the survey highlights that delays and non-receipt of correspondence continue to affect some patients. These issues can contribute to missed appointments, the need to rebook appointments and delays in accessing care.

Findings suggest that increasing the use of digital communication methods, alongside improvements to existing processes, may help reduce some of these issues and improve patient experience.

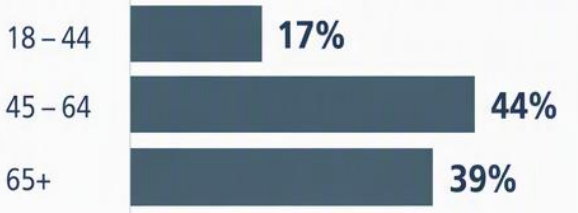
Respondent Profiles

Who Responded?

A total of **434** People's Panel members completed the survey.

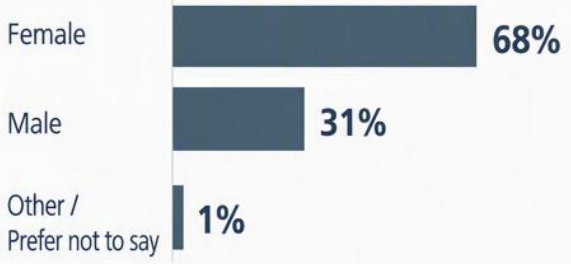
434 respondents

Age profile

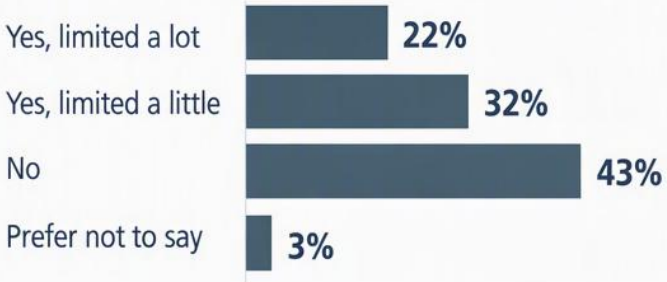


83% of respondents were aged 45 years or over.

Gender

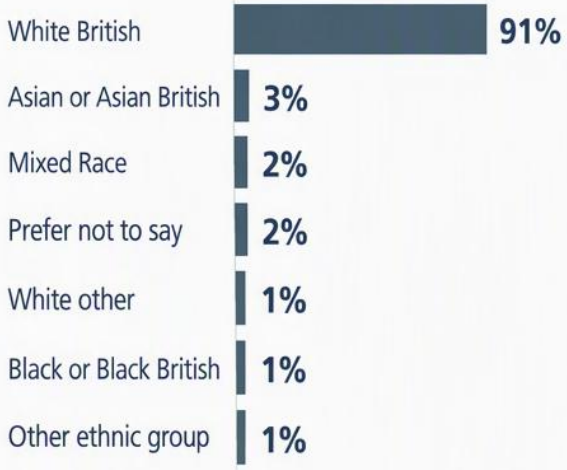


Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health condition?

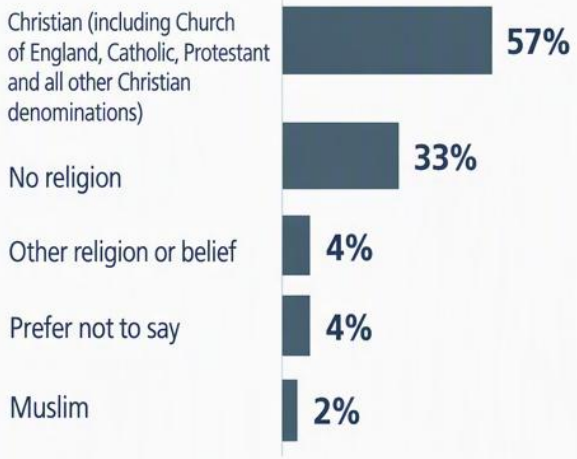


54% reported that their day-to-day activities are limited because of a health condition.

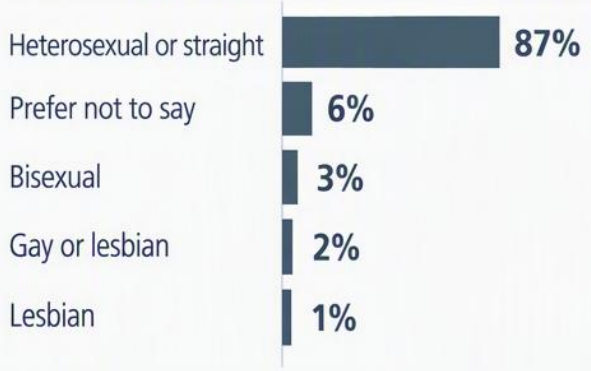
Ethnic background



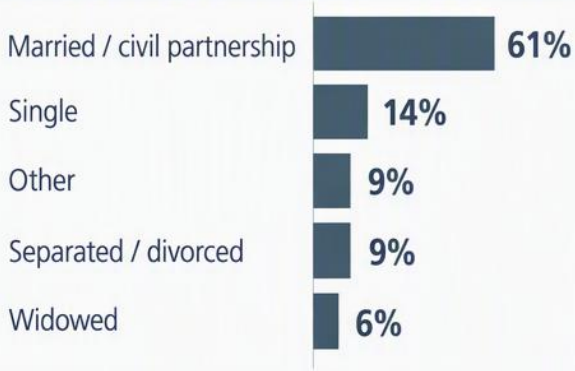
Religion or belief



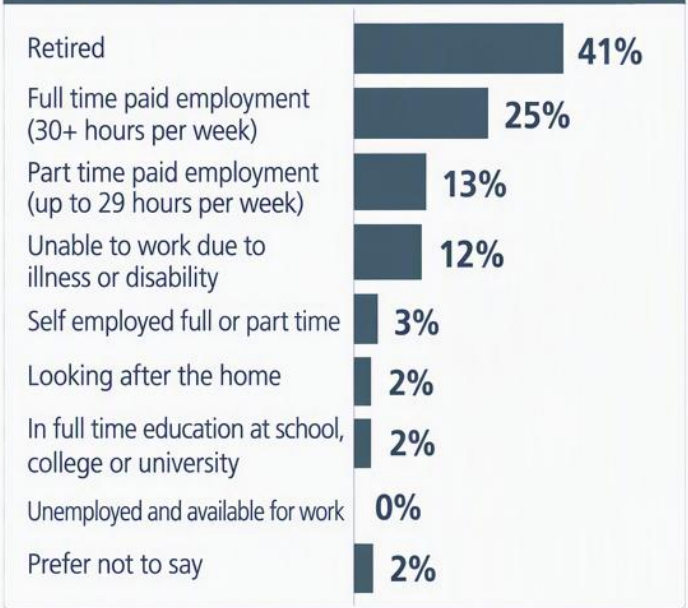
Sexual orientation



Relationship status



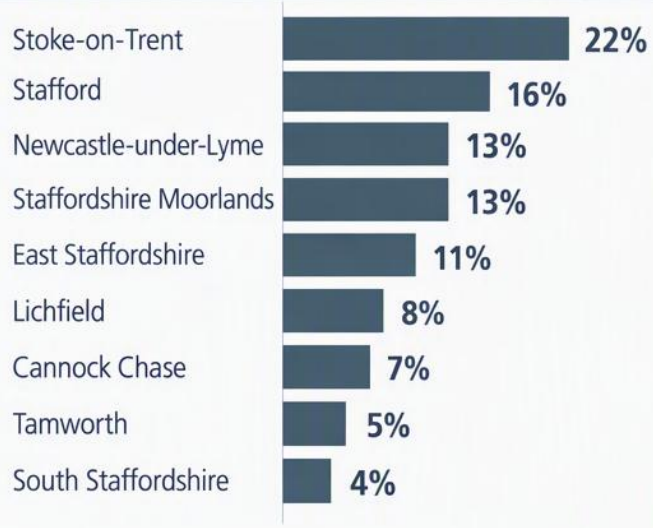
Employment status



Have you ever served in the armed services?



Where respondents live





Survey, data analysis and report production undertaken by Direct Data Analysis Ltd, who run the People's Panel on behalf of the Integrated Care Board.

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