



HM Courts &
Tribunals Service

Justice matters

Evaluation Report

The Metropolitan Police Single Justice Procedure Notice Pilot: preliminary findings

Customer Directorate

March 2020



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Summary

The evaluation report summarises key findings and recommendations from the Metropolitan Police pilot which trialled the redesigned Single Justice Procedure Notice (SJPN) between December 2019 and February 2020.

Key findings

1. There was a significant increase in online plea submissions (including a slight increase in guilty pleas requesting a hearing).
2. There was no increase in call volumes in London received by the Courts & Tribunals Service Centre (CTSC) despite a national increase.
3. There was an improvement in the amount of financial information details provided by defendants.
4. There was a decrease in the number of unnecessary documents posted back with the plea form.
5. The redesigned SJPN asks defendants to provide their driving licence number rather than surrendering their licence. Most defendants provided their licence number.
6. A significant proportion of returned plea forms complied with machine reading requirements.

Key recommendations

Based on the positive findings presented in this evaluation report, it is recommended that all police forces adopt the redesigned SJPN template.

Further secondary recommendations:

1. Police forces should consider adding a footer to police evidence documents if feasible, to deter defendants from returning unnecessary documents.
2. The redesigned SJPN should include information regarding it being issued due to driving licence not being submitted when responding to the Fixed Penalty notice.
3. If feasible, police forces should only list the number of rows corresponding to the number of offences on both the SJP notice and the plea form.
4. HMCTS should try to ensure that the SJPN template is shared in the relevant version (e.g. MS Word 2003), to allow for an easy implementation and integration within the relevant case management systems.
5. HMCTS should ensure that character fields and text fields on the paper form are of sufficient size such that defendants have plenty of room to provide their answers within the designated areas and do not write in the margins.
6. HMCTS should monitor the effects of the redesigned SJPN template to flag up any problems/issues that might have not been captured by the Met pilot.

Introduction

Background Information

Overall SJP engagement rates are low, with the majority of defendants failing to make a plea on time. In addition, more defendants choose to submit a postal plea rather than use the online plea services. We identified that the SJPN template could be redesigned to improve engagement rates. After gathering feedback from a range of stakeholders and experts we created a template that meets user needs, encourages defendants to plead, and provides a standardised template that will be easier to process by prosecutors and HMCTS.

The redesign content of the SJPN template includes behavioural techniques to leverage engagement, clear reminders and prompts to encourage defendants to plead online, and uses language and layout that makes it easier to understand and fill in. The redesigned SJPN pack includes (see Annex A for examples):

1. **Cover letter** offering an easy to understand introduction to the notice
2. **SJP notice** outlining the charge and statements of facts, and plea options
3. **Paper plea form** which consists of two parts:
 - a. SJPN100 includes personal details, plea, mitigating evidence, court hearing
 - b. MC100 includes financial information (e.g. income, benefits, outgoings)
4. **Leaflet** explaining the key information with regards to the SJP notice/process

Aims

The main aims of the pilot were to assess whether the redesigned notice:

1. Increases defendant engagement
2. Increases digital take up (online plea rate)
3. Reduces the number of calls with regards to the plea process and paper applications

The pilot also helped us understand how the redesigned notice may impact:

- Prosecutors
- Courts
- Courts & Tribunal Service Centres

As police prosecutors migrate to the Common Platform, returned SJPNs will be machine read and automatically attached to the relevant case. The redesigned SJPN template adheres to the machine reading requirements which will allow more efficient processing of paper pleas. During the pilot we assessed the readiness of the redesigned SJPN template for machine reading.

Pilot details

Cases

The Metropolitan Police adopted the redesigned SJPN template on the 9th December 2019. The redesigned template is intended to be used for all cases, which is approximately 71,000 cases per year. The Metropolitan police postal pleas are returned to Bromley Magistrates' Court where the majority of cases are then processed. However, some cases are sent on to Lavender Hill Magistrates' Court or Willesden Magistrates' Court. On average there are 700 cases per week processed at Bromley, 450 cases processed at Lavender Hill, and 230 processed at Willesden.

Timeline

The findings in this evaluation report cover the pilot period between 9 December 2019 and 29 February 2020. The Metropolitan Police are continuing to use the redesigned SJPN and there is no intention to revert back to the original SJPN.

SJPN pack

The Metropolitan Police recreated the template developed by HMCTS in their case management system. The only difference between the provided SJPN template and the template currently used by the Metropolitan Police is that the layout and size of the leaflet changed. The original leaflet was size A5 and the Metropolitan Police require a template to be size A4 to meet their posting requirements.

Caveats

During the pilot, the redesigned SJPN template was slightly amended following a serious incidence review regarding a failure to identify the correct driver's record. The aim of the changes was to try to maximise the number of defendants providing their driving licence number. The following sentences were added to the driving licence question on the first page of the paper plea: *"If you fail to tell us your licence could be suspended. Do not send your driving licence with this form."* (see Annex B).



Evaluation methods

Quantitative Methods

Table 1. This table provides an overview of the quantitative metrics used in the evaluation.

Type	Measures
HMCTS Databases	Engagement rates, channel type (online/paper), plea type (guilty/not guilty/guilty requesting a hearing), outcomes (e.g. successful prosecution vs withdrawal)
MET Databases	Engagement rates, channel type (online/paper), plea type (guilty/not guilty/guilty requesting a hearing), outcomes (e.g. successful prosecution vs withdrawal).
CTSC 8x8 call data	Volume of calls compared to control groups or prior pilot. Reason for calling wrap code (e.g. paper application).

Qualitative Methods

Table 2. This table provides an overview of qualitative metrics used in the evaluation.

Type	Measures
Dip sample	Compare a random sample of returned SJPNs (redesigned vs. original style) for correctness/completeness of responses, patterns in completion error.
Interviews with court staff and observations of SJPN sessions	Impact of SJPN redesign on court processes
Focus Group with HMCTS CTSC staff	Perception of the impact of the SJPN with call centre staff: reasons for calling about the SJPN, noticeable changes in query type.
Prosecution feedback	Prosecutor perception of SJPN redesign; implementing, printing and processing.

Findings

Online plea rates

Online plea rates were estimated by identifying the volume of pleas submitted via the Make a Plea (MaP) online service. The Met online plea rate was identified by adding the number of pleas submitted for the relevant courts (Bromley, Lavender Hill, and Willesden) and then compared to the number of pleas submitted to all other courts (which will be referred to as 'Other'). However, records for plea rates split by court only date back to 16/09/19 and thus, historic plea rates are limited.

Figures 1 and 2 show trends in plea rates over time for the Met and Other courts, the dashed line marks the period before and after the implementation of the redesigned SJPN template. The trend prior to the pilot appears stable with a weekly average of 280 Met pleas and 2,284 Other pleas. The period after the implementation indicates two dips during w/c 23 Dec and 13 Jan. The first is likely to be caused by the Christmas break meaning that less notices being issued in December.

Fig 1. Online plea rates for Met courts between Sep 2019 and Feb 2020.

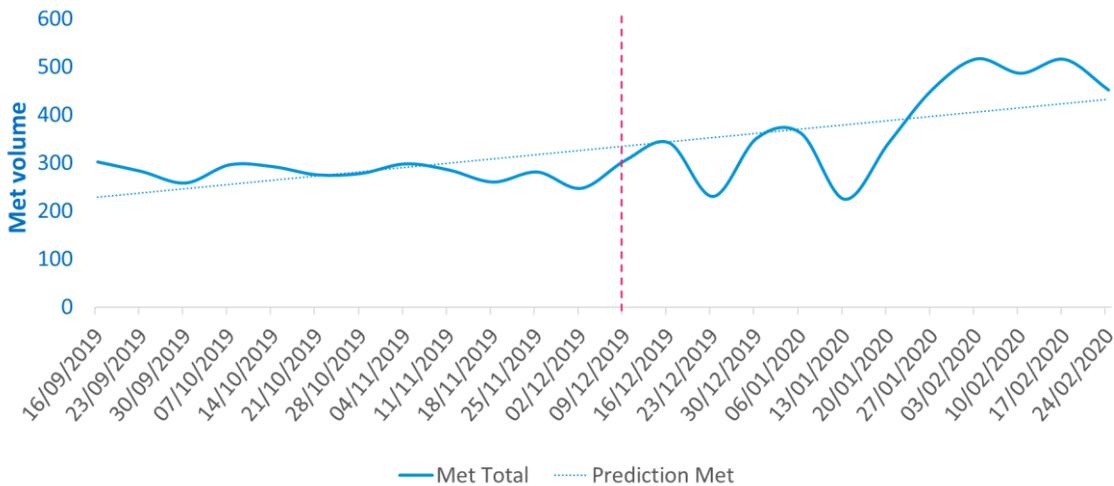
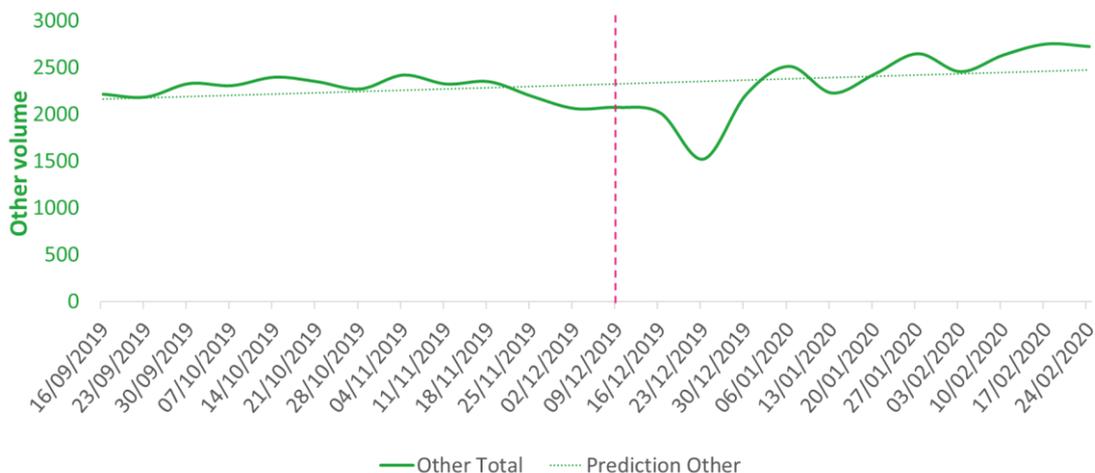


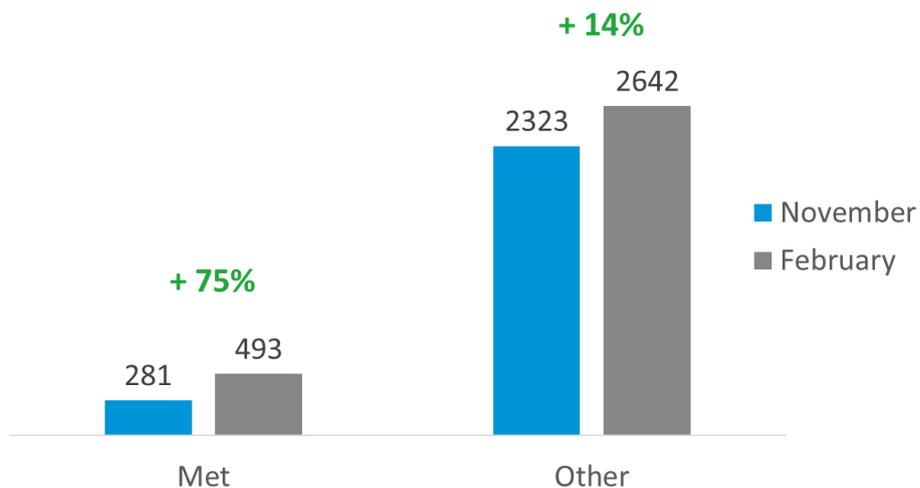
Fig 2. Online plea rates for all Other courts between Sep 2019 and Feb 2020.



Both December and January pleas will contain a mix of original and redesigned SJPN templates. February is the first full month of only the redesigned SJPN template. Therefore, to accurately evaluate the effects of the redesigned SJPN template, the analysis presented in this evaluation report compares online plea rates in November 2019 (original SJPN) and February (redesigned SJPN). Figures for the whole period are reported in Annex C.

Figure 3 shows the average number of online pleas before and after the pilot. Met online pleas increased by 75% with 212 more pleas being submitted online per week following the implementation of the redesigned SJPN template. The comparative group of all Other courts showed an increase of only 14% for the same time period which is 320 more online pleas per week. This indicates an increase of approx. 60% for the Met courts.

Fig 3. Online plea averages in Nov 2019 (before) and Feb 2020 (after) for Met courts and all Other courts.



Online plea type

Defendants are asked to indicate whether they want to plead guilty or not guilty to the offences they are charged with. We looked at whether the increase in all pleas was driven by equal increases in both guilty and not guilty pleas.

When comparing plea rates in November and February, on average guilty pleas increased by 78% for Met courts (175 cases per week) and by 13% for Other courts (264 cases per week). Not guilty pleas increased by 67% for the Met courts (38 cases per week) and by 17% for Other courts (56 cases per week). This indicates an increase of 65% increase in guilty pleas and 50% increase in not guilty pleas for the Met courts after the implementation of the redesigned SJPN template.

Furthermore, it should be noted that guilty pleas make up a high proportion of all pleas. The proportion of guilty pleas before and after the pilot increased by 1% for Met cases (80% vs 81%). There was a slight decrease of 0.4% for Other courts (86.2% vs 85.8%). Therefore, it can be argued that the pilot did not affect the proportion of guilty pleas.

Online guilty requesting a hearing

The proportion of the defendants who pleaded guilty and wanted to attend a hearing in person was also compared. Only a small proportion of defendants who plead guilty want to attend court. For the Met courts it increased from 12% in November to 15% in February. This 3% increase indicates that proportionally 12 defendants more are requesting a hearing per week in February. For the Other courts it decreased from 8.4% in November to 7.4% in February.

Postal plea rates

The Libra database, needed to assess the effects of the pilot on the number of postal pleas, does not currently have the latest case data. In addition, there are discrepancies between the Metropolitan Police case records and HMCTS records (approximate 30% of cases are not shown on the HMCTS databases). As such it is not possible to reliably estimate the number of paper plea forms received in the last few months.

Overall engagement rates

Due to the data issues outlined above, overall engagement rates were not possible to estimate. The overall engagement figures will be provided once the database is restored.

HMCTS Calls

Police calls migrated from the courts to the Courts & Tribunal Service Centres (CTSC) in October 2019. Police call data was examined to assess the impact of the redesigned SJPN template. The analysis focused on changes in the number of calls as well as reasons for calling. Wrap codes relating to the region and reason for calling were used to achieve this. Wrap codes are tags used to note the key information for inbound and outbound calls. NB: Due to the recent migration of police calls to the CTSC the historic data is limited.

The London region wrap code contains all of the Metropolitan police calls as well as a small proportion of calls from the City of London police force. There was a total of 15,066 inbound police calls between 28 Oct 2019 and 29 Feb 2020 of which 14,929 had a region wrap code assigned. London calls make up 15% of all police calls. There is also a small proportion of calls (9%) where region has been marked as 'Unknown'.

Figures 4 and 5 show weekly call volumes over time. For the London regions, on average there were 129 calls a week prior to the pilot and 123 calls after the pilot began, indicating a small decrease of 4.5%. However, the decrease is most likely caused by a lower number of calls over the Christmas period. Thus, it could be argued that there were no noticeable differences in the volume of calls for the London region.

Fig 4. Weekly volumes of calls for the London region between 28 Oct 2019 and 29 Feb 2020.

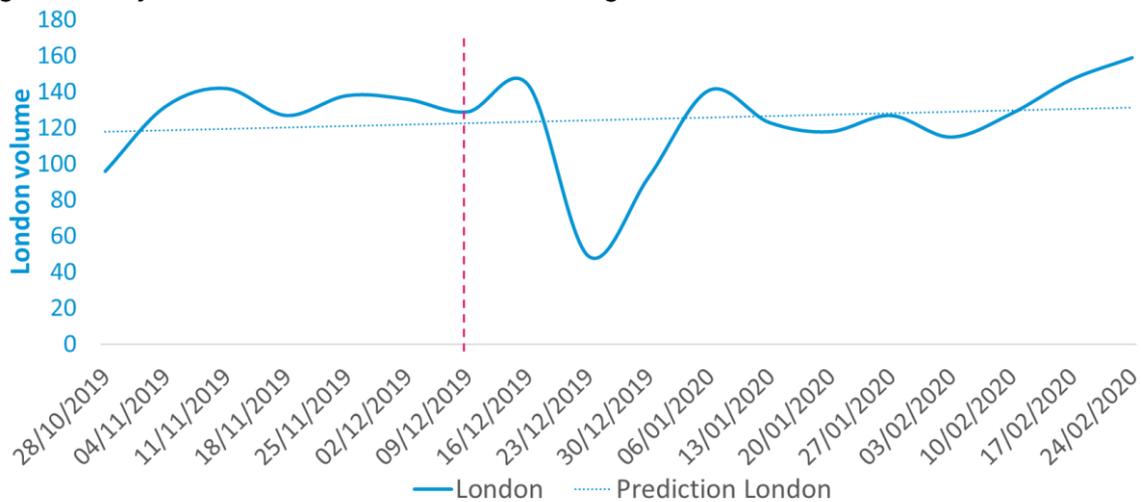
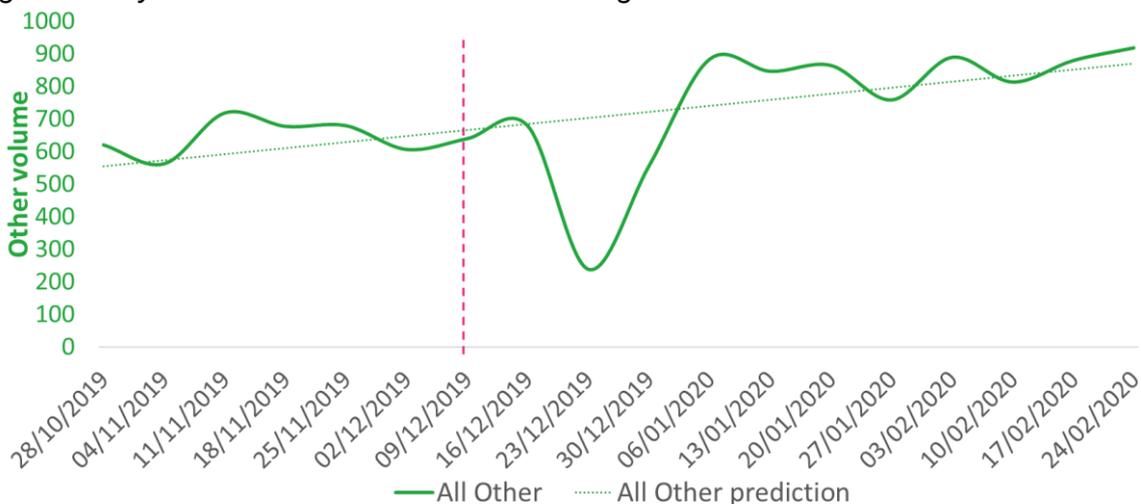


Fig 5. Weekly volumes of calls for the all Other regions between 28 Oct 2019 and 29 Feb 2020.

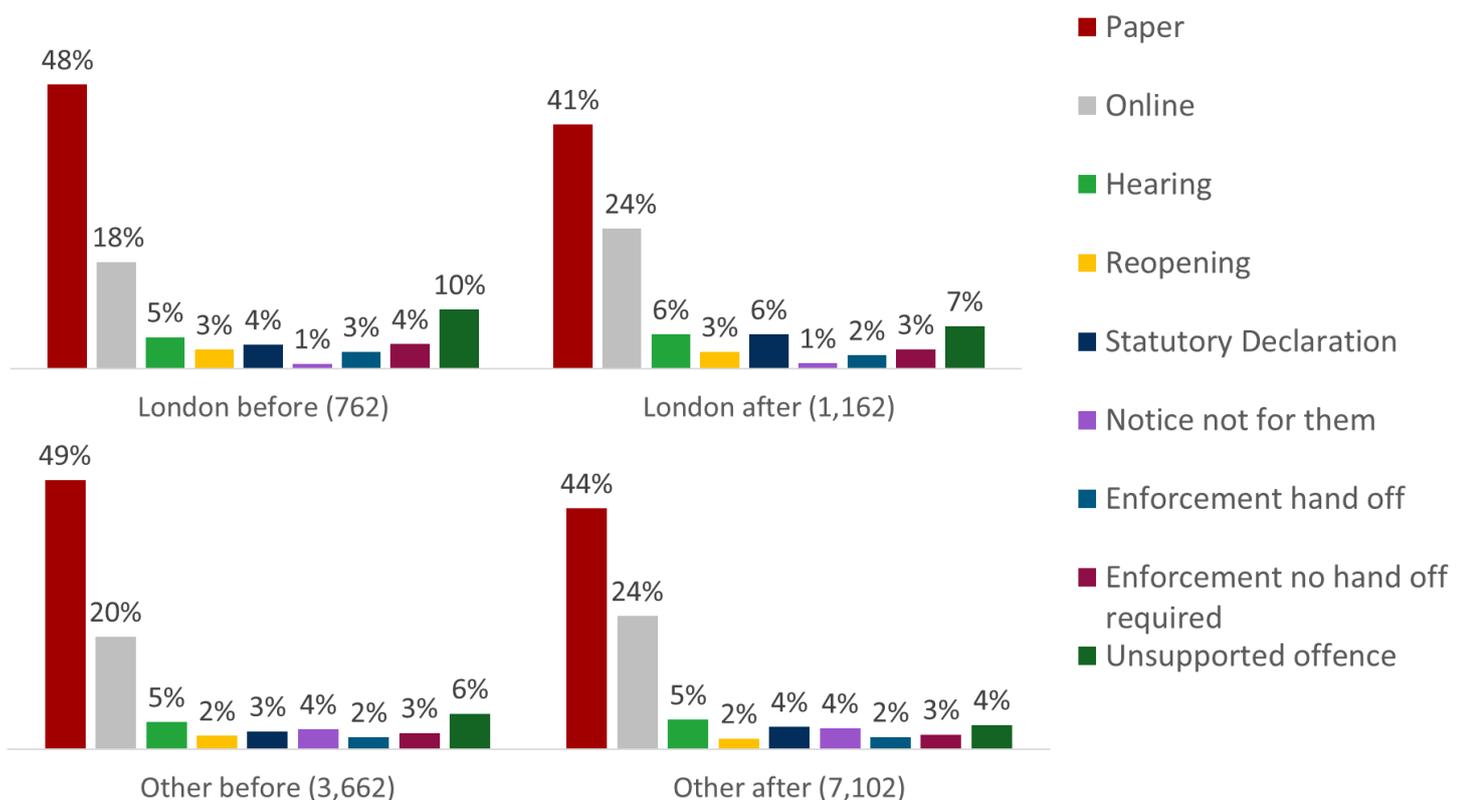


As with plea rate, the number of calls in November and February were compared to assess the impact of the redesigned SJPN template. For the London region, there were 135 calls per week in November 2019 and 137 in February 2020 which indicated a slight increase of 1.9%. Further, for all Other regions there was an increase in the number of calls, from 659 per week in November to 875 per week in February, which indicates an increase of 32.7%.

This suggests that the number of police calls relating to the London region were not impacted by the pilot. Further, considering the increase of calls for Other regions and the increase in online pleas for the Met police, it can be concluded that proportionally the number of London calls decreased.

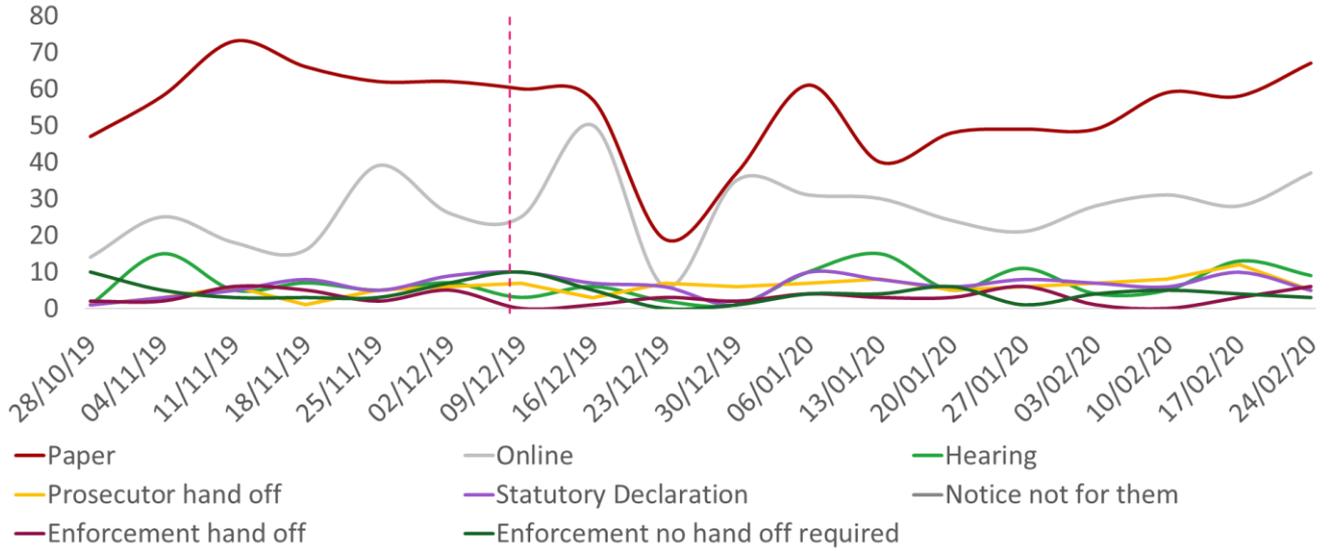
Next, the reasons for calling were examined. Figure 6 shows the most frequent reasons for calling. Over 60% of all calls relate to postal/online applications across the various groups. The number of ‘paper’ calls for the London region decreased by 7% whereas for all Other regions it went down by 5% in the same period. The number of calls regarding online applications increased by 6% for the London region and by 4% for all Other regions.

Fig 6. Reasons for calling for the London region and the Other regions. Before/after refers to calls received before/after 9 Dec 2019.



Lastly, call volumes for the most frequent reasons for the London region were plotted over time to understand the impact of the pilot. Figure 7 shows no notable differences in calls relating to the most frequent reasons before and after the implementation of the redesigned SJPN.

Fig 7. Reason for calling for the London region between 28 Oct 2019 and 29 Feb 2020.



Dip sample

A dip sample of 208 returned plea forms was reviewed. This included 100 of the original SJPN and 108 of the redesigned SJPN; 54 of each of the two variants of the driving licence question (see Annex B). The sample included guilty, not guilty and mixed pleas.

The sample showed that in general defendants understood how to fill in the redesigned SJPN plea/MC100 form. Respondents generally completed the necessary sections only, and not those they should omit based on their selections. For both the original and redesigned SJPN 91% of defendants returned the MC100 form. However, for the redesigned SJPN defendants were more likely to return a fully completed form.

The redesigned SJPN sample showed improvement across almost all form elements:

- decrease in unnecessary documents being returned with the plea form
- increased in financial information needed by the courts

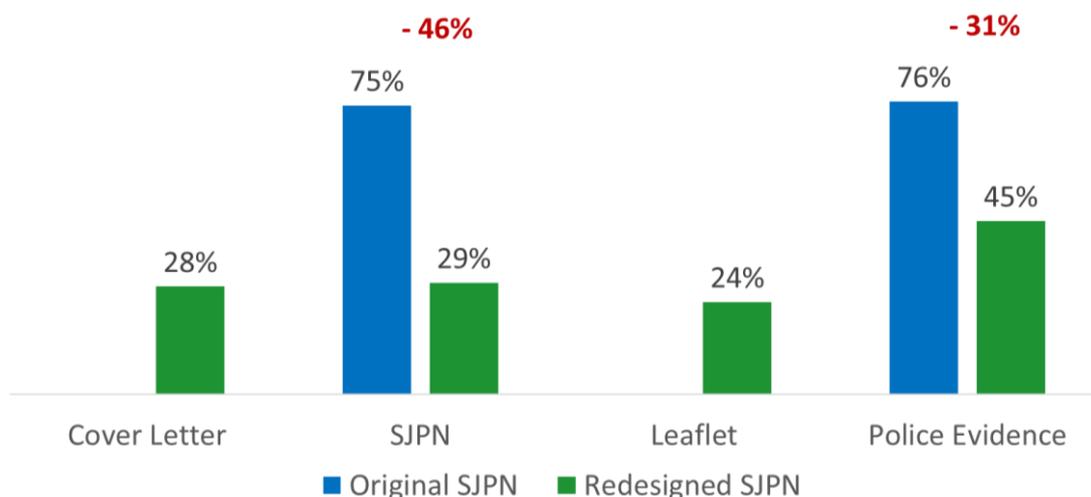
The sample showed that 94% of defendants made a plea on the original SJPN plea form, whilst 100% respondents made their plea on the redesigned SJPN plea form.

Documents returned with the plea form

Defendants often return unnecessary documents along with their plea form and this adds to their postage costs and HMCTS processing effort. Changes were made to the redesigned SJPN to encourage defendants to only return their plea/MC100 form. This was done by stating in the footer which pages should be kept and which returned, e.g. 'keep this page for your information' and 'Return this page by post or complete online'.

Whilst approx. a third of defendants returned the redesigned SJPN documents, (cover letter, notice and leaflet), 45% continued to return the police evidence documents, e.g. police witness statements and photos. Figure 8 shows a 46% decrease in returned SJP notices and a 31% decrease in returned police evidence.

Fig 8. Documents returned with the Plea form/MC100 form.



Recommendation: That, if feasible, forces consider adding a footer to police evidence documents to deter defendants from returning unnecessary documents, e.g. ‘keep this page for your information/do not return this page’

Driving licence and contact details

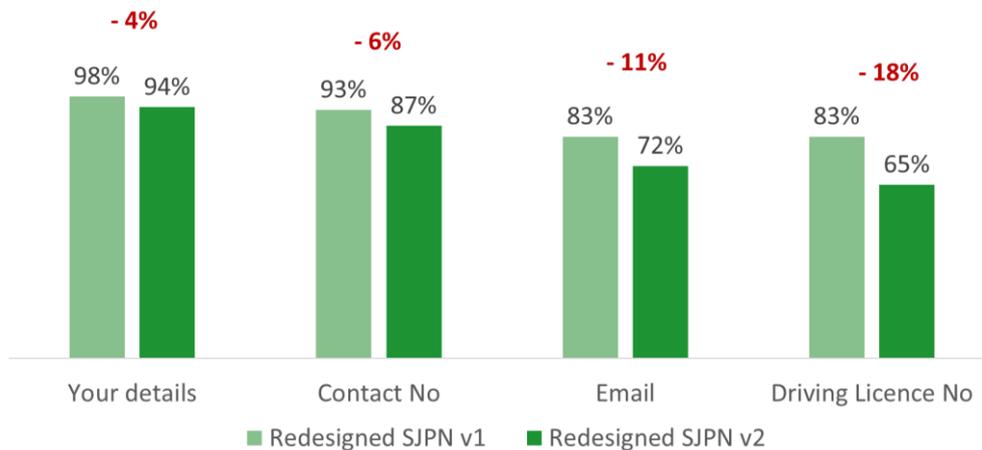
The redesigned SJPN no longer requires that defendants surrender their physical driving licence and instead requests only the driving licence number. Two variants were tested during the evaluation period, the differences were limited to personal and contact details, the aim being to try to maximise the number of defendants providing their driving licence number.

54 of each of the two variants was sampled. Across all fields version 1 performed best, particularly with respect to driving licence number (see Annex B for versions 1 and 2).

The sample showed version 1 of the redesigned SJPN had higher completion rates (see Figure 9). The key results are:

- 4% more confirming or correcting their name, address and DOB details
- 6% more providing a contact telephone number
- 11% more providing an email address
- 18% more providing a driving licence number

Fig 9. Proportion of defendants completing the ‘Your details’ section: comparison between version 1 and 2 of the redesigned SJPN



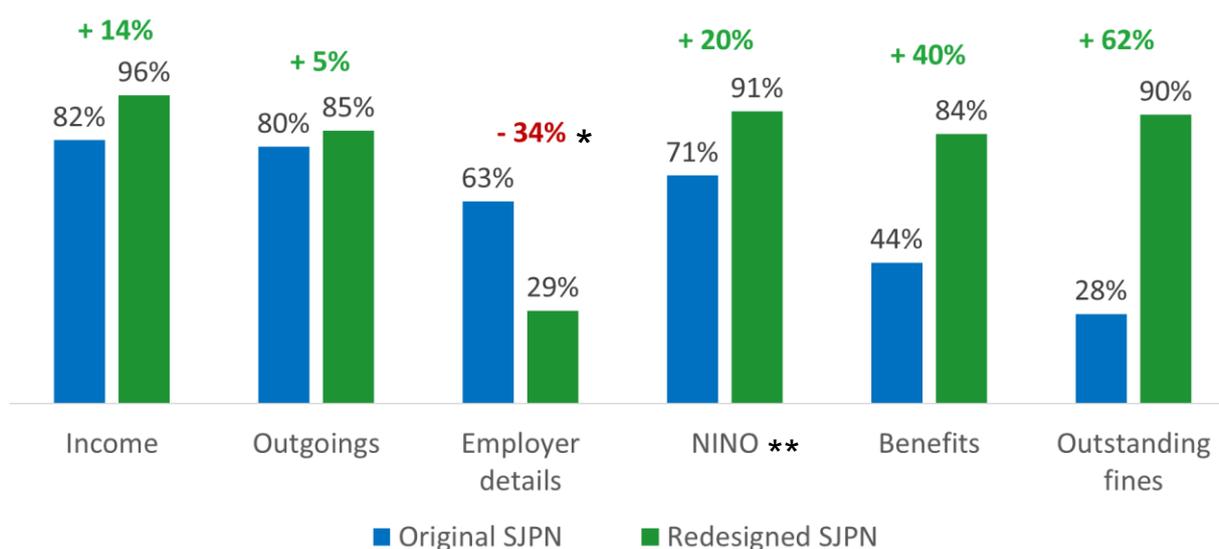
Recommendation: That version 1 of the redesigned SJPN be adopted as standard.

Financial information

When a defendant is found guilty the courts base the financial penalty on the information the defendant provides on the MC100 form. The aim of the redesigned MC100 was to increase completion of the necessary sections to assist the courts in setting the appropriate level of penalty.

The sample showed an increase in the financial information provided by defendants on the redesigned MC100. This increase was across all sections needed by the courts ranging from 5% increase in outgoings to 62% increase in outstanding fines (see Figure 10).

Fig 10. Proportion of defendants providing financial information: comparison between original and redesigned SJPN versions 1 and 2.



* The 34% decrease in employer details could be attributed to an additional question on the redesigned MC100. The question asks defendants whether they wanted any subsequent penalty to be deducted from their earnings. 96% of defendants answered this question; with majority checking the 'NO' box and therefore only 29% of defendants went on to provide their employer details.

** To compare the proportion of defendants providing their national insurance number (NINO) only SJPN version 2 was considered because version 1 did not have the NINO field.

Readiness for machine reading

From spring 2020, as prosecutors migrate to the Common Platform, the redesigned SJPN will be returned by defendants to a central P.O Box instead of the courts. Key Optical Character Recognition (OCR) fields will be machine read and automatically attached to a case and a scanned image of the plea/MC100 form will also be attached. To support this the redesigned SJPN adheres to OCR and scanning requirements. This means that the plea/MC100 form is longer.

The redesigned SJPN sample was assessed to determine whether respondents completing the plea/MC100 form adhered to on-form instructions and the likelihood of form elements being correctly machine read (OCR) and scanned.

In general respondents adhered to instructions, however, lowercase text was often used for the email address resulting in some characters exceeding box boundaries. This means that it would not be read correctly by scanners.

Recommendations:

1. As only 44% of respondents used uppercase letters in the character boxes which meant that the tails of some characters (e.g. g and y) exceeded box boundaries. Thus, we should remind respondents to use capital letters at this point on the form.
2. Ensure that the blank space at the end of each page is kept to a minimum to help avoid defendants using this space to write in.

List of offences

Some plea forms contained empty offence/plea rows and at least one defendant also indicated their plea to an empty row plea (see pictures in Annex E)

Recommendation: Prosecutors should list only the required number of offence rows, i.e. no empty offence/plea rows.

Internal HMCTS feedback

Key internal stakeholders were consulted regarding the redesigned SJPN template to assess the impact on operations. Bromley Magistrates' Court admin staff were shadowed and SJP sessions were observed. Feedback was also provided by team leaders and staff members from the Courts & Tribunal Service Centre.

Bromley admin team feedback

The admin team welcomed the redesigned SJPN and thought it would improve the existing processes. Additionally, they felt that there had been a distinct rise in online pleas and that paper pleas had not reduced. An increase in the number of online pleas was welcomed as the effort to process these is considerably less than postal pleas. The staff said they typically process approx. 2-3 times as many online pleas as postal pleas.

Online Pleas	Postal Pleas
Open file and update Libra	Plea received and sorted in post room
Copy and paste information and upload onto Libra (copy automatically sent to prosecutor)	Locate Libra reference and hand write onto plea form
	Enter relevant details from plea form on Libra
	Scan plea forms in batches, check each file and add filename, send copy to prosecutor

The redesigned SJPN no longer requires the defendant to send in their driving licence. The admin team said this saved considerable time/effort as previously they would have:

- Updated the licence details on Libra
- Scanned the licence
- Returned the licence to the defendant with a note
- Dealt with queries for licences not received by the court or back by the defendant

Observations of SJP sessions

Overt observations were carried out on three SJP sessions and a follow up question (“do you have any feedback on the new notices”) was asked at the end of the 3rd SJP session. Both the Magistrate and the Legal Advisor reported they had not seen the new notice prior to the first session.

The key findings were:

- The redesigned SJPN was instantly recognised as being a new form without any input from the researchers.
- They noted that the new SJPN is “quite clearly set out”.
- They liked the layout of the charge sheet for offences and that the plea page followed the same format: “*quite like the charge sheet broken down by offences*” as it is quick and easy to look at.
- They thought defendants would find the form easy to fill in: “*I think it’s easier for the customer as there’s more instructions*” (paraphrased)
- The addition of a deadline date at the beginning of the notice saves processing time.
- They thought that a possible improvement would be to separate the information needed by the court into a separate “pack” (like what they receive for Online Plea).
- A major pain point is having to decipher police hand written statements.

Courts & Tribunal Service Centres (CTSC) feedback

Feedback from team leaders

Team leaders were positive about the redesigned SJPN and said that having one standard SJPN adopted by all prosecutors would be of considerable benefit to the CTSC and would:

- Make it much easier for staff to deal with queries
- Make training simpler for new staff
- Support and speed up the admin associated with pleas

They felt that the redesigned SJPN is easier to understand and more straightforward for defendants. It also does not require the defendant to surrender their driving licence and instead asks for the driving licence number. The team leaders felt both these factors had likely led to London region call volumes in February increasing by less than 2%, when compared with November, whilst nationally in the same period the increase was over 30%.

Staff feedback

A focus group was held with three new staff members. They estimated that the majority of Police calls were; 'I paid the penalty notice fine, I don't understand why I've received an SJPN'. They said they generally find that the SJPN was issued because the defendant did not also surrender their driving licence. The Norfolk and Suffolk SJP notice was highlighted as an exemplar for clearly stating the reasons for issuing the SJPN.

Recommendation: include relevant text in the redesigned SJPN template to reduce calls of this type.

The group liked the clear layout of the redesigned SJPN. They felt that standardisation across prosecutors would make it easier for the CTSC to support defendants and eliminate the need to refer to the knowledge bank to look up a specific prosecutor's SJPN. They identified some improvements, such as the prominent placement and duplication of the return address, the deadline date for submission being clear and not having to surrender the driving licence with the plea form as likely to reduce calls.

Additionally, they felt that a standardised SJPN would help with processing plea forms and that the clear and easy to follow layout would help in the updating of cases on Common Platform.

Prosecutor feedback

Feedback from the Metropolitan Police

Implementation and processing

The Metropolitan Police provided feedback on implementation and processing of the redesigned SJPN template. First, the template that was provided by HMCTS was not optimised for the existing case management system. The format and layout of the template was disturbed when fed into the system as such the template needed to be recreated in the case management system.

Further, staff took some time to get used to preparing and processing the redesigned SJPN template. However, there is no reason to believe that productivity has either increased or decreased.

With regards to the number of calls from defendants or number of hearings, once again there were no significant changes. There was one call enquiry from a defendant regarding the header of the cover letter stating that it is a criminal offence.

Recommendation: ask prosecutors what MS Word version they use and try to supply the template in such version to avoid having to recreate the template.

Printing and posting

The Metropolitan Police advised that they produce the SJPN pack in three separate parts, which takes a little longer when compared to the original SJP notice. However, they believe that it did not result in a significant change in printing times.

Lastly, while the weight has increased from approx. 52g to 81g the postage amount has not changed. The Metropolitan police advised that they are able to go up to 100g before they are charged a higher postal fee rate.

Feedback from other Police Forces

All police forces were given the opportunity to review and provide feedback on the redesigned SJPN. Feedback was received from 15 police forces and fed into the final version of the SJPN template. A copy of the full feedback and our responses has been included alongside this evaluation report. Below we highlight the most frequently raised points.

The most common feedback areas related to:

- **Placement of the Certificate of service** – forces noted that this was missing from the redesigned SJPN pack. This is because the Metropolitan police insert it as a separate sheet. We have advised that local variations are fine, e.g. including it as a section within the SJP notice or inserting it on a separate sheet.
- **Deadline date** – forces mainly asked how this would be achieved. We have advised that this would likely best be achieved through auto population of the field. If forces have issues doing this we may be able to provide some limited support. Failing this the '21 days' deadline could continue to be used.
- **Response times** – a number of forces noted that the redesigned SJPN led defendants to believe they would receive a response within 6 weeks of submitting their plea. We can confirm that this was a reasonable timescale for the Met pilot only. Locally each force will determine what is a reasonable timescale. This is needed to manage the defendant's expectations and reduce calls to the CTSC.
- **Statement of facts** – many forces advised that they refer to this by a different title. We have confirmed that the title can be changed so long as the word 'statement' is included in any change, e.g. 'Section 9 statement', or even just 'statement'.

A completed redesigned SJPN has been included with this pack to help illustrate the above.

Postage costs

A possible increase in postage costs was noted by one force. We can confirm that the Metropolitan police have advised no increase in postage costs during the pilot. (see 'Feedback from the Metropolitan police', above).

Caveats

Pilot

When considering the pilot findings presented in this report, it is crucial to understand the following limitations:

1. Due to operational limitations it was not possible to conduct a randomised control trial where defendants would either be sent the original SJPN template or the redesigned SJPN template. Therefore, to assess the impact of the pilot, it is necessary to compare baseline figures (before the pilot) with figures following the implementation. The findings presented in this evaluation might be affected by other causal factors.
2. During the first three months of the pilot there were several changes to the template regarding the driving licence question (see Annex B). This could affect the results.
3. It should be noted that the present findings could be affected by the fact that the pilot was conducted in the London region as such, any findings presented here might not be precisely replicated in other regions due to differences between the present sample and the whole population (e.g. varying levels of defendant digital capability).

Data

In addition, there are a number of caveats regarding the quantitative analysis which should be considered:

1. There is no flag for the different prosecutors and therefore, to identify SJPN cases issued by the Metropolitan Police force it was necessary to search for cases that were processed at three Magistrates' courts. It might be that some cases are processed at other courts (e.g. Stratford) and as such those cases are not included in the present analysis.
2. Lack of historic data for online plea rate means that seasonal trends were not identified and the impact of such trends on engagement rates is not understood.
3. There are discrepancies in case volumes between internal and external data sources, with approximate 30% of cases not showing in HMCTS databases. Although online plea numbers can be accurately estimated using the Make a Plea reporting tool, it is challenging to estimate postal plea for the same period due to the data being unreliable.
4. The present evaluation does not report figures on outcomes as at present a proportion of the pilot cases have not been processed.
5. Call estimates in this report are based on HMCTS wrap code data called at the CTSC. However, the present findings do not include all Police SJP calls as a proportion of these calls are still dealt with by courts.

Recommendations

Key Recommendations

Based on the positive findings presented in this evaluation report, the main recommendation is that all police forces adopt the redesigned SJPN template.

In addition, there are several minor recommendations listed below:

1. Police forces should, if feasible, consider adding a footer to police evidence documents posted with SJP notices indicating that such documents should be kept by defendants to deter defendants from returning unnecessary documents to HMCTS.
2. Additional text should be included in the notice regarding an SJPN being issued due to defendants failing to surrender their driving licences when responding to the Fixed Penalty notice. This should reduce the number of caller enquiring about it. The current Norfolk and Suffolk SJP notice is considered a good example.
3. Police forces should list on the SJP notice and the plea form only the number of rows corresponding to the number of offences if feasible.
4. Where police forces will use MS Word to create their local template HMCTS should try to ensure that the SJPN template is shared in the relevant version, e.g. MS Word 2003, to allow for an easy implementation and integration within the relevant case management systems.
5. HMCTS should ensure that character fields and text fields on the paper form are of sufficient size. This will ensure that defendants have plenty of room to provide their answers within the designated areas and do not write in the margins of the form.
6. HMCTS should monitor the effects of the redesigned SJPN template to flag up any problems/issues that might have not been captured by the Met pilot.



Annex B

SJPN notice amendments (driving licence question)

Make your plea by post

Fill in this paper form to plead by post - or you can plead online at: gov.uk/make-a-plea

PLEASE COMPLETE THIS FORM IN BLACK INK. PRINT NEATLY IN CAPITAL LETTERS AS SHOWN. PLACE A CLEAR 'X' INSIDE THE BOX IF YOU MAKE A MISTAKE. FILL THE ENTIRE BOX, AND MARK THE CORRECT BOX.

S M I T H No Yes

1. Your details

Name
 Address
 Date of birth

1.1 Are these details correct?
 Yes – go to section 2
 No – tell us of any changes

2. Additional details

The court may need to contact you, so they can deal with your case more quickly

2.1 Contact number

2.2 Email address

2.3 Driving licence number
 This is a 16-digit number found in section 5 of your driving licence photocard. If you fail to tell us your licence could be suspended. Do not send your driving licence with this form.

Now go to section 3

Version 1

Version 2

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S M I T H No Yes

1. Your details

Name «OFFENDER_FULLNAME»
 Address «OFFENDER_ADDRESS»
 Date of birth «OFFENDER_DATEOFBIRTH»

1.1 Are these details correct?
 Yes – go to section 2
 No – tell us of any changes

1.2 Driving licence number
 This is a 16-digit number found in section 5 of your driving licence photocard. If you fail to tell us your licence could be suspended. Do not send your driving licence with this form.

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Annex C

Plea rate analysis including all months

Online plea rate

The average number of online pleas before and after the pilot. Met pleas increased by 37% which is 102 more pleas submitted online per week following the implementation of the redesigned SJPN. The comparative group of all other courts showed increase of only 3% for the same time period which is 68 more pleas submitted online per week.

Online plea type

On average, guilty pleas increased by 35% for Met courts (81 cases per week) and by 2% for Other courts (34 cases per week). Furthermore, not guilty pleas increased by 45% for the Met course (21 cases per week) and by 4% for Other courts (11 cases per week).

Guilty pleas make up a high proportion of all pleas. The proportion of guilty pleas before and after the pilot indicates that there was a slight decrease of 1% in the proportion of guilty pleas for Met cases (before: 83%, after: 82%) and there was no change for Other cases (approx. 86%).

Online guilty requesting a hearing

The proportion of the defendants who pleaded guilty and wanted to attend a hearing in person was compared before and after the implementation of the redesigned SJPN. Only a small proportion of defendants who plead guilty want to attend court. For the Met cases it is approximately 13% and for other cases it is approximately 8%. There were no changes before and after the implementation of the redesigned SJPN.

Annex D

Dip sample

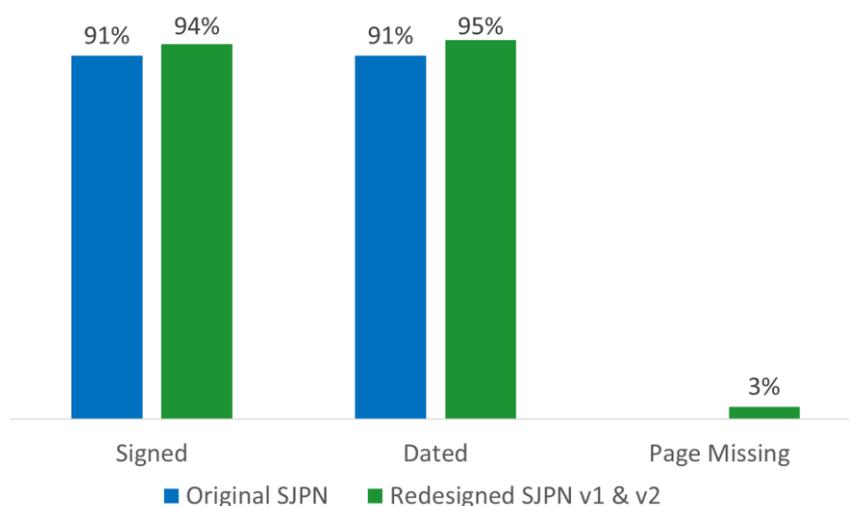
A dip sample of 208 notices was taken. This included 100 of the original SJPN and 108 of the redesigned SJPN; 54 of each of the two variants. The sample included guilty, not guilty and mixed pleas. Additional findings not contained in the full report are listed here.

Plea form declaration

A defendant's plea cannot be accepted if the plea form has not been signed and dated. Samples of the original and redesigned SJPN plea forms showed a small increase with the redesigned form:

- 3% increase in signing of plea form
- 4% increase in dating of plea form

Fig 1. Plea form declaration comparison between original and redesigned SJPN



Court attendance – capturing defendants' needs

Knowing the dates a defendant cannot attend court reduces the need for rescheduling and helps avoid wasting court session time. Capturing the defendant's language and disability and accessibility needs prior to the hearing are key in ensuring those needs are met and that court time is not wasted.

The redesigned SJPN features two new questions designed to capture dates a defendant cannot attend a hearing and their disability and accessibility needs. The original SJPN asked defendants to identify their need for an interpreter only if they had a need and the placement of this question meant it could be missed.

The interpreter question on the redesigned SJPN asks defendants to respond to a yes/no question. A direct comparison cannot be made between the questions but 8% identified that they did need an interpreter on the original SJPN whilst 64% identified whether they needed an interpreter or not on the redesigned SJPN.

On the redesigned SJPN sample:

- 51% identified dates they could not attend court
- 61% identified whether they had access or disability needs
- 64% identified whether they needed an interpreter

Information needed for enforcement action

If a defendant is found guilty and does not pay the court imposed financial penalty then the enforcement service relies on information provided within the MC100 to take further action. The sample showed an increase and decrease between the original and redesigned MC100 with; the number of respondents providing their national insurance number increasing but the number providing their employer details decreasing.

With the redesigned MC100 the sample showed 96% answered the yes/no question of whether they wanted any subsequent penalty to be deducted from earnings; responses were generally 'no' and therefore 29% went on to provide their employer details.

The redesigned MC100 sample showed:

- 24% decrease in respondents providing employer details
- *21% increases in respondents providing NI number

* The redesigned SJPN v1 has been omitted as it was sent to defendants without the character boxes needed for respondents to enter their NI number. Even without these 69% still recorded their NI number.

Prosecution witness statement

User testing has shown that the prosecution witness statement section on the original SJPN is not well understood by defendants. The sample of original SJPN showed that just 7% used this section to raise their objection to the statement. On the redesigned SJPN this section has been removed and combined with the not guilty plea statement section.

Readiness for machine reading

From spring 2020 onwards as prosecutors migrate to the common platform, the redesigned SJPN will be returned by defendants to a central P.O Box instead of the courts. Key Optical Character Recognition (OCR) fields will be machine read and automatically attached to a case and a scanned image of the plea/MC100 form will also be attached. To support this the redesigned SJPN adheres to OCR and scanning requirements. This has meant that the plea/MC100 form is longer.

The redesigned SJPN sample was assessed to determine whether respondents completing the plea/MC100 form adhered to on form instructions and the likelihood of form elements being correctly machine read (OCR) and scanned.

In general respondents adhered to instructions, however, lowercase text was often used for the email address resulting in some characters exceeding box boundaries.

Table 1: Machine reading sample results

	Section	%	Results
OCR	Ink Colour	99%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 92% of responses were completed using the recommended black ink, 5% in blue ink and 2% and mixture of both ink colours One respondent used green ink
	X ✓	96%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 70% of responses used the recommended crosses to mark their selection, 25% used ticks and 1% used either/both 4% used other symbols, e.g. 'V' or wrote 'Yes' or 'No' inside each box. One respondent coloured in each box voiding all their choices
	Text inside - character box	78%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 78% of responses were inside the character box 22% were responses were outside, this was generally the 'tails' of lowercase letters e.g. 'g' and 'y'
	Upper case	44%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 44% of respondents used the recommended uppercase 40% used a mixture of both upper and lower case and this was generally: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> uppercase for driving licence number lowercase for email address 16% used lower case
Scanning	Text inside text Boxes	82%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 82% of responses were contained within the text boxes 18% of responses went outside the text boxes, with roughly half of these exceeding the boxes completely by continuing in any blank space; the bottom of the page and/or margins

Recommendations:

- As only 44% of respondents used uppercase letters in the character boxes consider reminding respondents to use capital letters in the email character boxes to reduce the likelihood of the 'tails' of lowercase letters, (e.g. 'g' and 'y'), exceeding the boundaries of these boxes.
- Ensure that the blank space at the end of each page is kept to a minimum to help avoid defendants using this space to write in.

Other observations

3 sample redesigned SJPN plea forms included a solicitor's cover letter and a photocopy of the plea form. The photocopies were poor quality and machine reading these would like result in failure.

On some redesigned SJPN plea/MC100 forms the character boxes were of varying line depth, some were barely detectable, making it difficult for defendants to see all boxes. One defendant routinely missed all boxes on a plea/MC100 form of this type (see pictures in Annex E).

Some plea forms contained empty offence/plea rows, at least one defendant also indicated their plea to an empty row plea (see pictures in Annex E).

Recommendation: Prosecutors should list only the required number of offence rows, i.e. no empty offence/plea rows.

Annex E

Dip sample pictures

Picture 1: Example of empty offence/plea rows completed by defendant

3. Your plea

Pleading guilty: This means you agree you committed the offence. You must say if you want to come to court or not.

Pleading not guilty: This means you do not agree you committed the offence. You must come to court. You'll get a letter with the court date. You must explain why you think you are not guilty.

Offences charged	Guilty	Not guilty
Offence 1 Drive on road other than motorway, fail comply with red / green arrow / lane closure light signals - automatic equipment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Offence 2 N/A	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If all pleas are Guilty complete section 4
 If all pleas are Not Guilty complete section 5
 Complete sections 4 and 5 if you plead both Guilty and Not Guilty

Picture 2: Example of additional empty offence/plea rows

Offences charged	Guilty	Not guilty
Offence 1 Use a motor vehicle on a road / public place without third party insurance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Offence 2 DRIVING LICENCE	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Offence 3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Offence 4	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Offence 5	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Offence 6	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Picture 3: Example of varying character box boundary line density

9.1 If you need to pay a penalty, would you like us to deduct it from your earnings?
 Answer this question if you're employed
 Yes No - go to 9.5

9.2 Name of the organisation/company you work for

9.3 Your employee payroll number

9.4 Employer's address (enter the head office or where your payroll is)

Employer's address line 1

Employer's address line 2

Employer's address line 3