

**Young peoples' experience of accessing GP booking
systems
(Accessing Primary Care Services)**



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Introduction

Residents of Sandwell regularly express frustrations with accessing GP Surgery appointments. The appointment booking systems can cause problems for many patients and the demand for appointments exceeds supply which may create inequalities in access. There are alternative primary care service options which could relieve pressure on the system, although awareness of these options may be limited.

Aim of the project

Healthwatch Sandwell (HWS) carry out projects, the purpose of the projects being to gather information to help inform and influence change in health and social care delivery in Sandwell.

This project aimed to find out:

- young peoples' experiences, challenges and issues with using the routes to G.P. Surgery appointment booking systems
- whether young people are aware of alternative options for primary care services

Background to project

The overarching theme for 2022/23 projects is inequality which focused on the examination of the patient's experience of access and receipt of health and care services. This project aimed to support **Priority Project 1: The patient experience of accessing primary care services (PPI)** and focused on young people, as it is recognised that young people may have specific experiences that differ from adults. HWS have a team of volunteers who, alongside staff, support the priority projects. One of our youth volunteers led this project at their high school, Holly Lodge High School College of Science, which is situated in Holly Lane, Smethwick, and has over 1,500 students.

Our youth volunteer, with support of HWS, sought approval from the Head to implement this project across the students years 7 – 13, disseminated publicity and completed the survey with 46 students across the year groups. See demographics graph.



Methodology

This project used a survey that was adapted from the survey that was used with the general population for Priority Project 1. The survey included 9 questions and some of the questions used a set of emojis that reflected feelings: very happy, satisfied, OK, dissatisfied and very unhappy. 46 students completed the survey from a variety of backgrounds and ages, see demographics for break down (Page 11). All data collected was anonymised.

Findings

46 surveys were completed, the questions have provided the following data:

The GP practices students' were registered with.

Holly Lodge is situated in Smethwick and borders with West Bromwich, Oldbury and Birmingham. The 46 students at Holly Lodge each listed which GP practice they were registered with. This list totalled 25 GP practices, meaning that some were at the same practice. Practices in Birmingham including Summerfield Primary Care Centre and Urgent Care Centre and Heathfield Medical Centre were listed as well as Sandwell practices.

The most popular Sandwell practices were:

St Paul's Road Surgery Smethwick (7)

Smethwick Medical Centre Regent St, Smethwick (5)

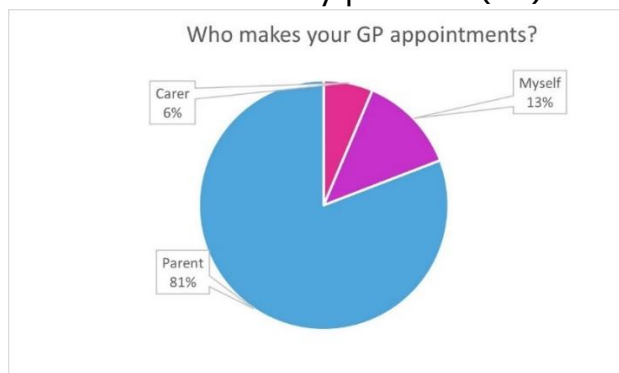
Oldbury Health Centre Albert St, Oldbury (5)

Cape Hill Medical Centre Raglan Rd, Smethwick (4)

Many students **did not** know who their GP was and a member of staff had to check their records to inform them.

Who makes your GP appointments?

The majority of appointments were made by parents (38)



Rating options for booking appointment at GP practice

The feedback has been generalised and does not specify which GP practice. Some students chose more than one option as they use a variety of the booking options:

67% rated face to face (in person at reception) as very happy* and satisfied* and **8%** being very unhappy.

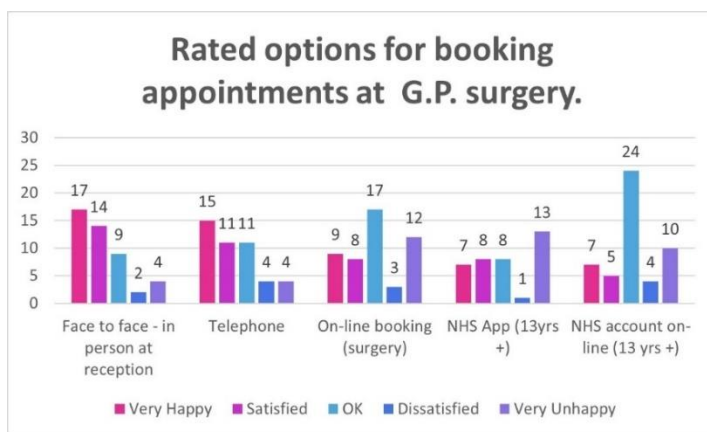
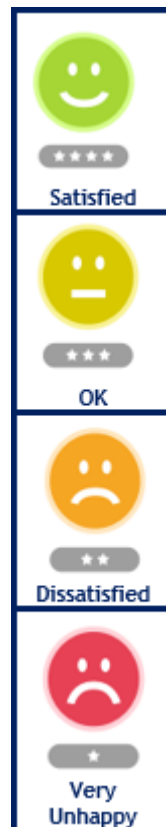
50% rated booking appointments by telephone as very happy* and satisfied* and **8%** as unhappy.

19 % rated on-line booking (surgery) as very happy and **26%** as unhappy.

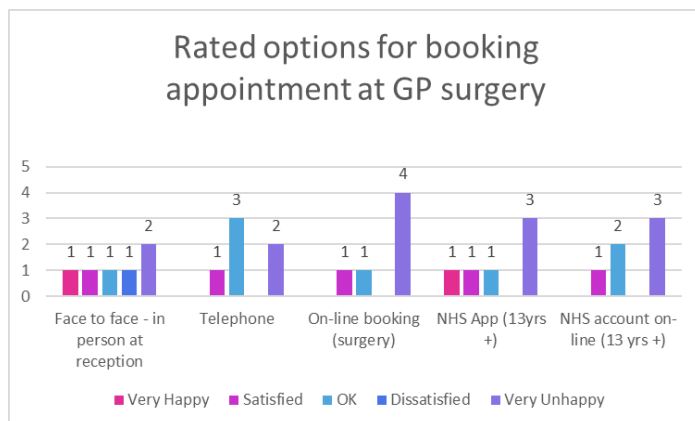
15% rated NHS App (13 years +) as happy and **28%** as unhappy.

15% rated NHS account on-line (13 yrs +) as very happy, **21%** as poor and **24%** as OK.

*ratings amalgamated as respondents may have chosen more than one option.



The following data relates to the **6** students who book their own appointments, the majority of these students were aged 16 – 18 years. Their dissatisfaction also related to on-line booking(surgery), the NHS app and the NHS account on-line.



What respondents do if they can't get an appointment.

Respondents listed various routes they take when they can't get an appointment with their GP, including:

47% wait for the next day or available appointment

21% of the respondents said they would visit Accident and Emergency

6% would use NHS 111

6% would try and get advice online and search for treatment of symptoms

4% would go to a Walk in Centre

Others commented saying they would look for a different doctor, take medication such as ibuprofen, go to a Pharmacy or ask a family member (who is a doctor).

"I always get an appointment because of my medical needs"

Knowledge and use of alternative primary care service options.

Respondents were aware of:

Phone NHS 111 (**52%**), Pharmacy (**47%**) and Emergency Accident and Emergency (**52%**)

They were not so aware that some G.P. Surgeries offer registration for an on-line Doctor service (**17%**)

Respondents had used the following services:

Pharmacy (**50 %**), Emergency Accident and Emergency (**39%**) and Phone NHS 111 (**23%**)

Alternatively only **10%** had used NHS account - on-line (13 yrs +) and the registration for on-line Doctor service.

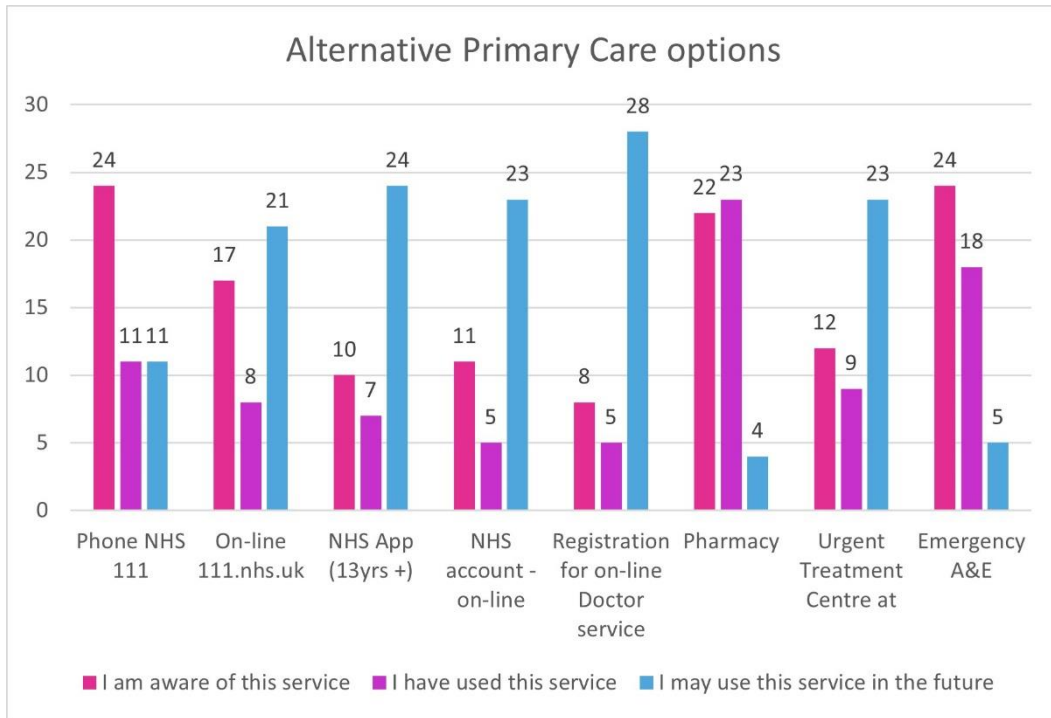
Respondents stated that may use this service in the future:

Registration for on-line Doctor service (**60%**)

NHS account - on-line (13 yrs +) (**50%**)

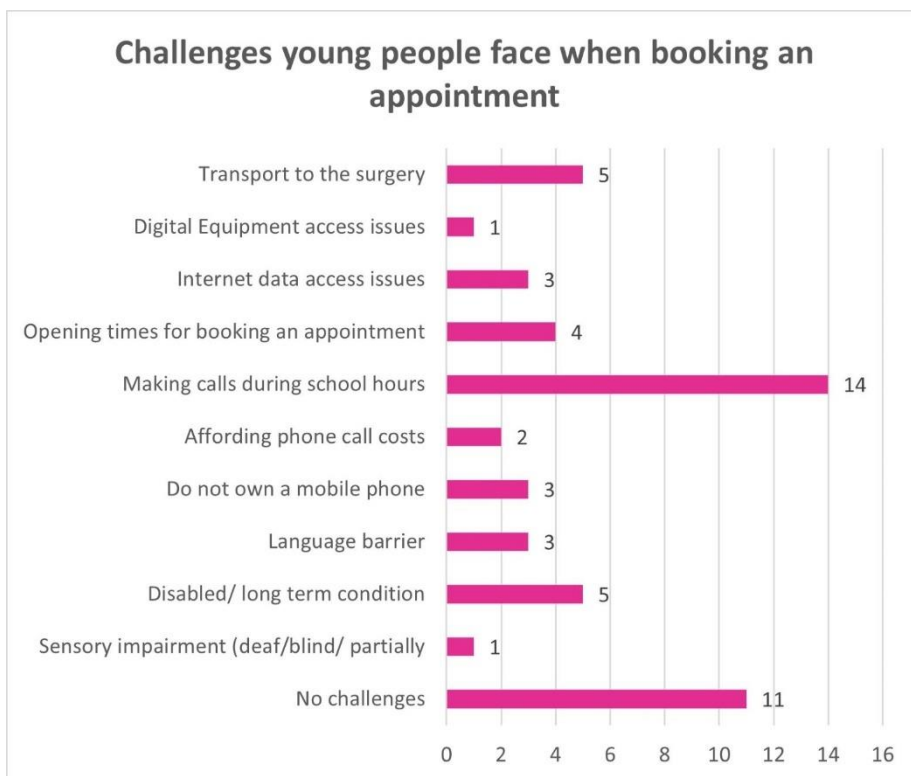
Urgent Treatment Centre at Sandwell Hospital (**50%**)

NHS App (13 years +) (**52%**)



Challenges young people face when booking an appointment

30% of young people said that the biggest challenge for them was making calls during school. However 23% experienced no challenges.



Effect on Young peoples' health when unable to get an appointment.

Respondents feedback can be divided into the following themes:

- **Effects on physical health**

Respondents expressed concern that their physical health would deteriorate further and they may not be able to complete normal activities such as sports and may feel more tired.

'It affects me as I do not feel like my needs have been met and my symptoms could worsen meaning that my health and wellbeing will become worse'

- **Effects on mental Health**

Respondents described feeling worried and anxious/stressed about their health. They described feelings of anger and being scared.

'It makes me feel nervous to talk about my health'

'Pain becomes worse and I do not feel like myself'

- **Effects on school attendance**

Respondents described not wanting to go to school due to not feeling well/tired and also prioritising their health:

'I feel tired and do not want to go to school'

'I believe that my health comes first so I do not want to go to school and instead choose to rest'

Finally, **15%** reported that it had no effect on them, other than frustration:

'Timewise it can be a lengthy process so can be frustrating but it doesn't have any other effect'

Ideas for the future with regards to booking appointments

Respondents feedback can be divided into the following themes:

- **Supportive Behaviour from GP practice staff and school.**

Respondents requested support of an adult to help them e.g. teachers. Also to allow time to make appointments during school time.

Respondents suggested that staff at the GP practice be more polite and supportive, as they had experienced rudeness during phone calls. They would like them to be more reassuring when booking an appointment which the young people thought this would encourage confidence in themselves to make the appointments themselves.

- **Digital support including Apps.**

This report has identified that young people did not know about the NHS digital app. There were suggestions to create apps which are quick and efficient through which bookings can take place and to raise awareness (of Apps) in the school.

Other ideas included:

- Email/phone call alerts without having to set a reminder and digital receipts from the booking.
- More on line booking at GP practices as this would make it easier for them and their parents to book.

- **Appointments (Generalised advice)**

- Provide an appointment on the same day of the booking and more phone call consultations
- More home visits by GP
- Regular well-person appointments as one respondent was concerned that there is no prevention with regards to their health:

'An appointment is given only when something is wrong - my health is not valued'

Conclusion

This project, via **46** students (across year groups) from Holly Lodge High School College of Science Holly Lane, Smethwick has provided information (using a survey) about young peoples' experiences, challenges and issues faced whilst using the routes via the GP surgery appointment booking system. It has identified their awareness of alternative options for primary care services.

The **46** students each listed which GP practice they were registered with, which totalled **25** GP practices, including practices in Birmingham as well as Sandwell practices. Many students **did not** know who their GP was and the majority of appointments were made by parents, only **6** students book their own appointments and the majority of these students were aged 16 – 18 years.

The most popular booking option was face to face (in person at reception). The least popular was the NHS App and NHS account on-line. Their dissatisfaction related to on-line booking (surgery), the NHS app and the NHS account on-line.

There was a lack of knowledge about the NHS app¹, although it is now live in **95%** of GP practices.² Although **95%** is a high number, HWS were unable to find usage of the app in Sandwell. The GP contract^{3 4} sets out that from April 2019, all practices must offer patients an opportunity to book a minimum of **25%** of all appointments, online. However this figure of **25%** can be made up of GP appointments, all nurse appointments or other practice staff, as well as appointments made available online to NHS 111.

Students had used and had good knowledge of alternative primary care service options especially Phone NHS 111, Pharmacy and Emergency Accident and Emergency. They were not so aware that some G.P. Surgeries offer registration for on-line Doctor service however, a large number stated that may use this service and the NHS account – on-line, this may be because the projects had raised the profile of these alternatives options.

¹ <https://www.blackcountryandwestbirmccg.nhs.uk/your-health-services/health-advice/nhs-app>

² <https://digital.nhs.uk/blog/transformation-blog/2019/>

³ [NHS Long Term Plan and Investment and Evolution: a five-year framework for GP contract reform](#)

⁴ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/gp/investment/gp-contract/gp-contract-documentation-2019-20/>

When students cannot get an appointment the most popular answer was that they would wait for the next day or available appointment even though they were unwell. A small number would try and get advice online and search for treatment of symptoms. The largest challenge for young people was making phone calls during school hours. However a large number stated they experienced no challenges, this may be a consequence of parents making the calls on their behalf.

Young people described how not getting an appointment affected them and this information can be divided into physical health, mental health and school attendance. The respondents gave ideas for the future with regards to booking appointments and can be divided into the following themes: Supportive behaviour from GP practice staff and school, digital support including Apps. and general advice about appointments including the need for prevention. Some of these ideas have informed HWS recommendations.

Recommendations

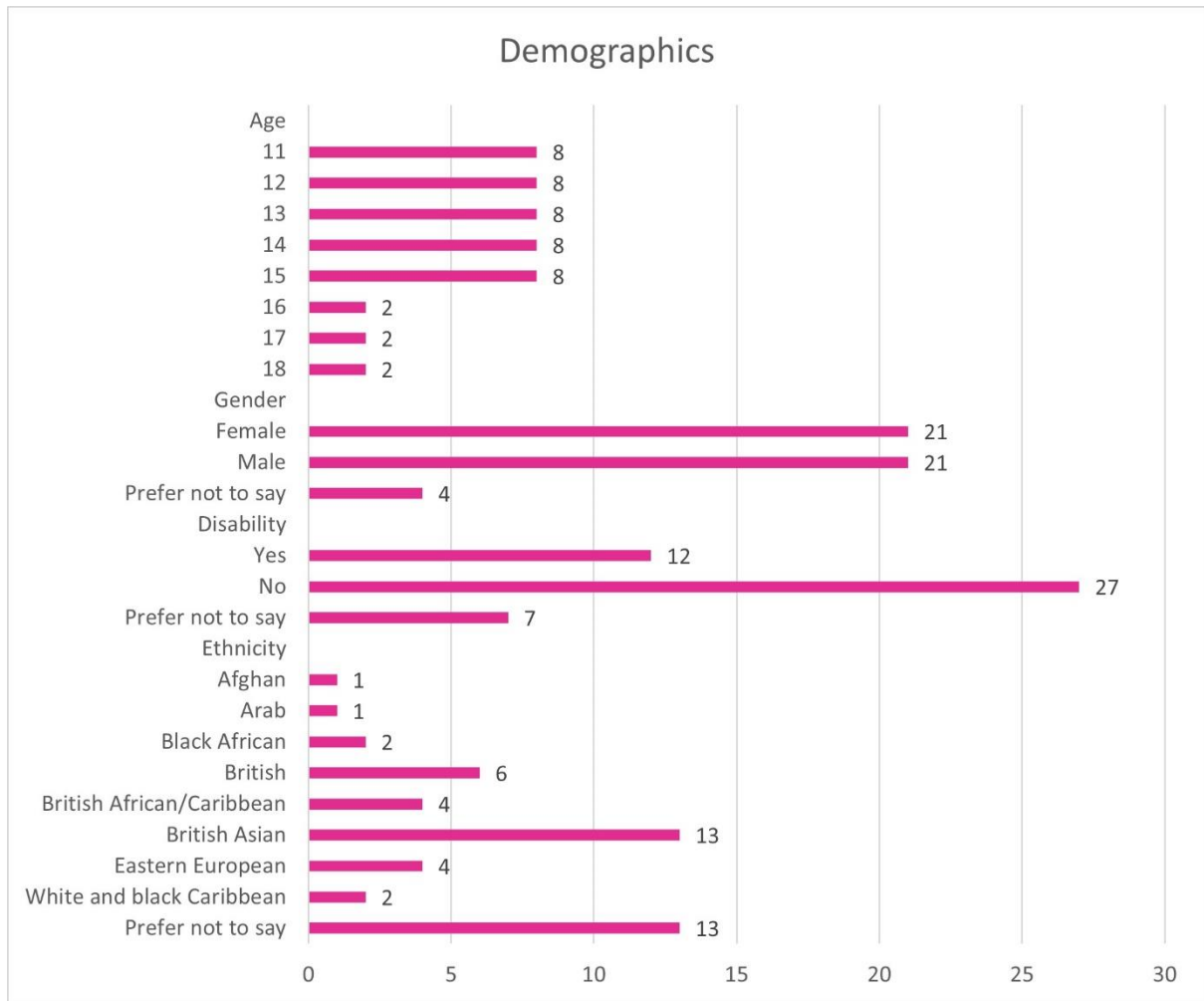
From the findings, HWS would make the following recommendations:

- The NHS BLACK COUNTRY Integrated Care Partnership and associated Board to raise awareness of alternative booking systems with parents, perhaps publicity via schools, especially the NHS digital app and GP for on-line booking.
- The NHS BLACK COUNTRY Integrated Care Partnership and associated Board to promote and monitor provision of GPs on-line booking option.
- GP surgeries that do not offer on line booking, to consider providing this option.
- NHS England to develop and create apps which include email/phone call alerts and digital receipts from the booking.

Acknowledgements

HWS would like to take this opportunity to thank our Healthwatch Youth Volunteer for the commitment given to support this project. Also to Holly Lodge High School College of Science for supporting the project and our volunteer.

Demographics of students



Disclaimer

All data provided in this report was accurate at the time of the project.

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