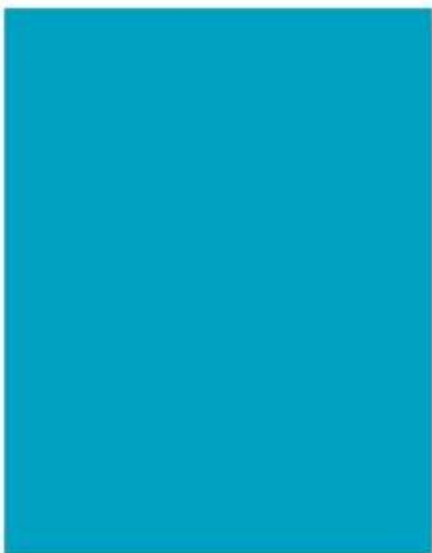


# NHS Diagnostic Waiting Times and Activity Data

## Monthly Report

December 2013



## Contents

December 2013 Key Findings.....	3
1. Background.....	4
2. Key Terms.....	4
3. National Trends.....	5
3.1. 6+ Week Waits.....	5
3.2. Total Waiting List .....	6
3.3. Median Waiting Time .....	6
3.4. Total Activity.....	7
4. December 2013 Data.....	8
4.1. 6+ Week Waits.....	8
4.2. Total Waiting List .....	11
4.3. Median Waiting Times .....	11
4.4. Total Activity.....	12
5. Annex.....	13
5.1. Methodology .....	13
5.2. Data Revision.....	13
5.3. Data Availability .....	13
5.4. Glossary.....	14
5.5. Feedback welcomed.....	15
5.6. Additional Information .....	15

## December 2013 Key Findings

- The total number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer for one of the 15 key diagnostic tests at the end of December was 9,100. This represents 1.3% of the total number of patients waiting for a diagnostic test at the end of the month. Nationally, the operational standard of less than 1% of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer was not met.
- The total number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer has shown an increase of 2,400 from the end of December 2012. The 9,100 patients waiting 6 weeks or longer is the highest number reported since September 2011.
- The percentage of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer has increased by 0.2 percentage points from the same period last year. In between these periods the percentage has fluctuated slightly, with a high of 1.3% (December 2013) and low of 0.7% (October 2013).
- The test with the highest proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer in December 2013 was Urodynamics with 6.9% of all patients waiting 6 weeks or longer. The test with the smallest proportion was Barium Enema with 0.3%.
- An alternative measure of diagnostic waiting times is the average (median) waiting time. The average patient waiting for a diagnostic test had been waiting 2.5 weeks at the end of December 2013.
- There were 682,000 patients still waiting for a diagnostic test at the end of December 2013. This is an increase of 64,000 from December 2012. In the past twelve months the total number of patients waiting for a diagnostic test has been gradually increasing with an average monthly increase of 0.8%, which is similar to the rise seen in activity.
- A total of 1,395,000 diagnostic tests were undertaken in December 2013. This is an increase of 10.0% from the same period last year. When adjusted by the number of working days in the month this growth is 4.5%. In the previous twelve months activity has increased slightly with an average monthly increase of 0.8% (0.4% adjusted for working days).

## 1. Background

- 1.1. This report presents a monthly summary of diagnostic waiting times and activity across the NHS in England.
- 1.2. The data measures the current waiting times of patients still waiting at the month end. This data is split by number of weeks waiting, and by test. The waiting times reported are for those patients who have been referred for a test, but whose test had not taken place by the end of the reporting period.
- 1.3. The six week diagnostic wait was initially introduced as a 'milestone' from March 2008 towards achieving the standard Referral to Treatment wait of 18 weeks by December 2008.
- 1.4. Diagnostic waiting times form part of the 2013/14 NHS Constitution that gives patients the legal right to treatment within 18 weeks of referral (18 week RTT) and as part of this pledges that patients should not be required to wait 6 weeks or longer for a diagnostic test. The [NHS Commissioning Board's guidance](#) states that there is a threshold of 99% for this pledge. The financial penalty for non-delivery of the standard is set out in the NHS Standard Contract 2013/14.
- 1.5. England figures quoted are commissioner based. Commissioner based returns reflect data for patients for whom English commissioners are responsible.

## 2. Key Terms

- 2.1. 6+ Waits  
A count of the number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer for a diagnostic test.
- 2.2. Activity  
A count of the number of diagnostic tests undertaken.
- 2.3. Diagnostic Test  
A test or procedure of which the primary function is to identify a patient's disease or condition to allow a medical diagnosis to be made.
- 2.4. Waiting List  
A count of the number of patients that are waiting for a diagnostic test at the end of the month.

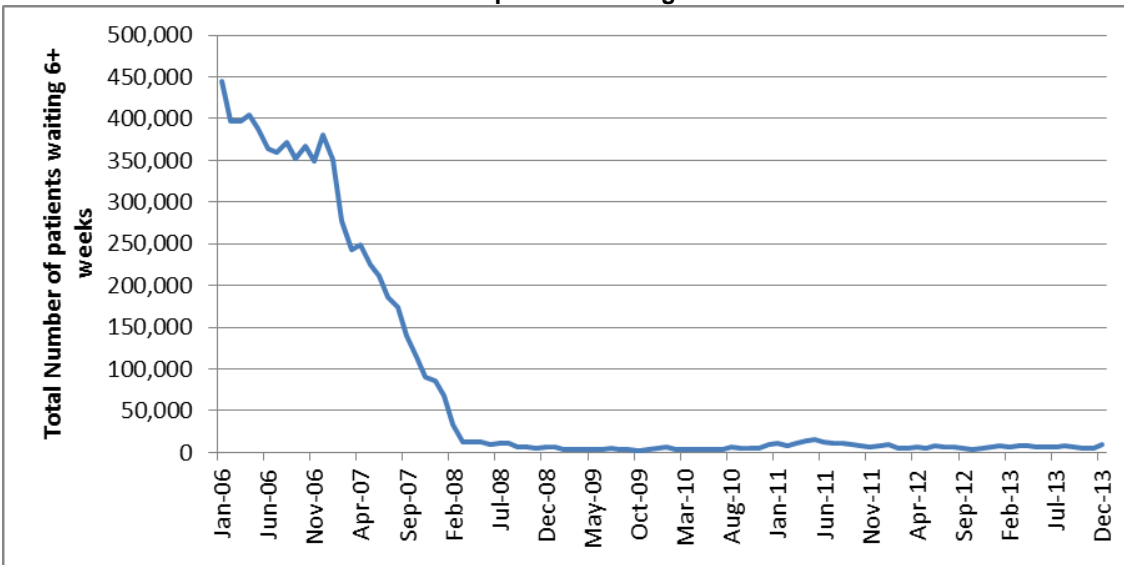
### 3. National Trends

This section analyses trends in monthly diagnostic waiting times and activity data that has been collected since January 2006.

#### 3.1. 6+ Week Waits

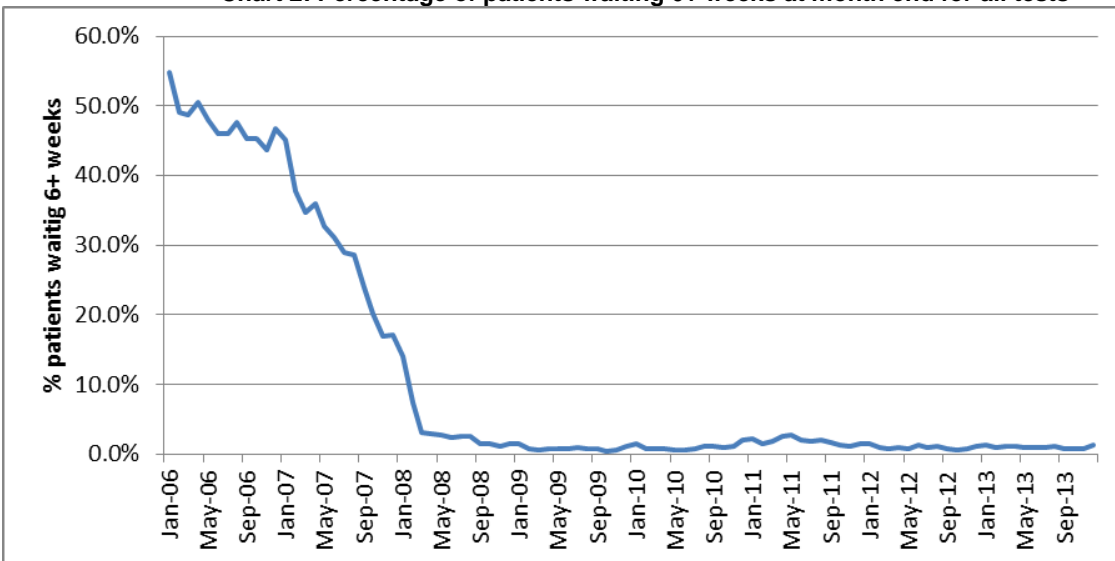
3.1.1. The total number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer dropped dramatically between January 2007 and March 2008, before maintaining a slight average monthly reduction (Chart 1). The total number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer was showing a steady reduction prior to this month, where it has increased by 3,600 from November. However, the number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer usually does increase in December.

**Chart 1: Total number of patients waiting 6+ weeks at month end for all tests**



3.1.2. The proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer shows a similar drop between January 2007 and March 2008 before stabilising (Chart 2). Over the past 12 months it has remained around 1.0% with a low of 0.7% (October 2013) and a high of 1.3% (December 2013). In this period the 1% operational standard has been met 7 times.

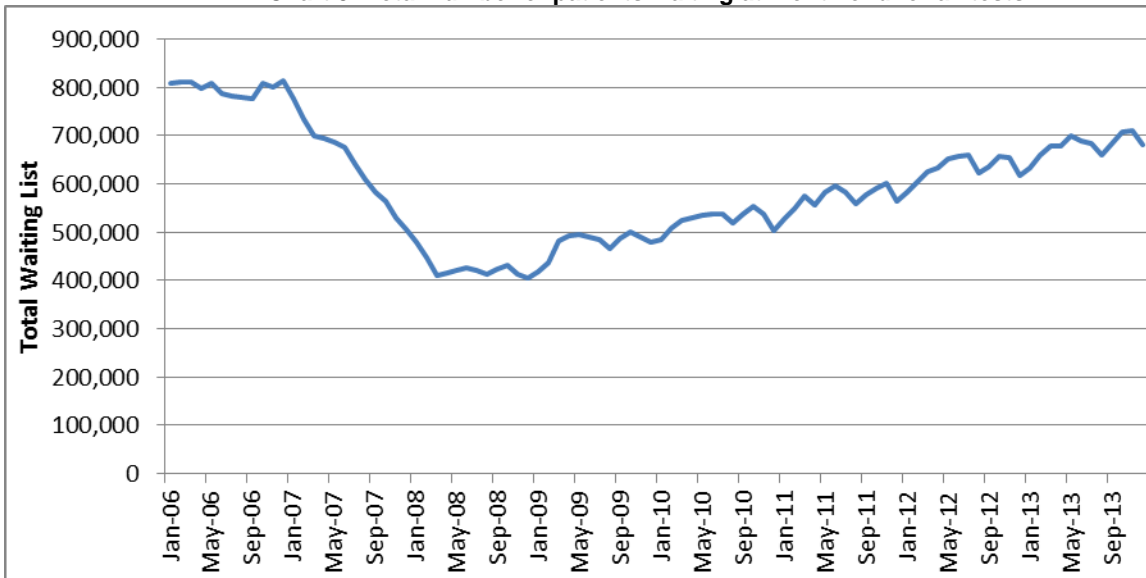
**Chart 2: Percentage of patients waiting 6+ weeks at month end for all tests**



### 3.2. Total Waiting List

3.2.1. The total number of patients waiting at the month end dropped dramatically between January 2007 and March 2008 (Chart 3). This is likely to be a result of the NHS Improvement Plan (June 2004) milestone that no one should wait longer than 6 weeks for a diagnostic test by March 2008. Between March 2008 and January 2009 the total waiting list remained stable, after which the underlying trend has shown an increase, similar to that seen with activity. In the last twelve months the average monthly increase was 0.8%.

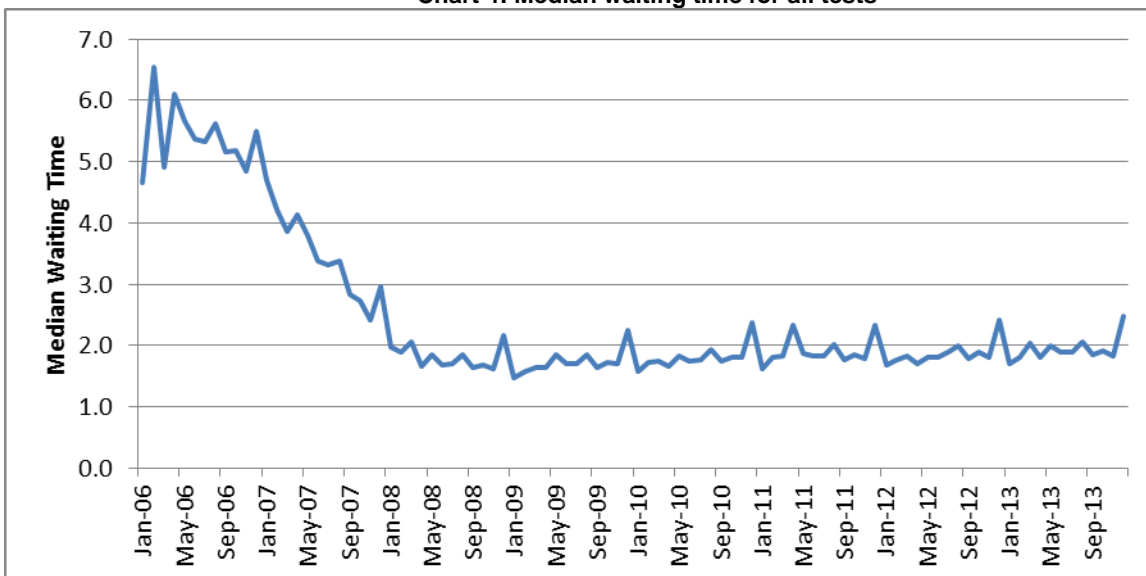
Chart 3: Total number of patients waiting at month end for all tests



### 3.3. Median Waiting Time

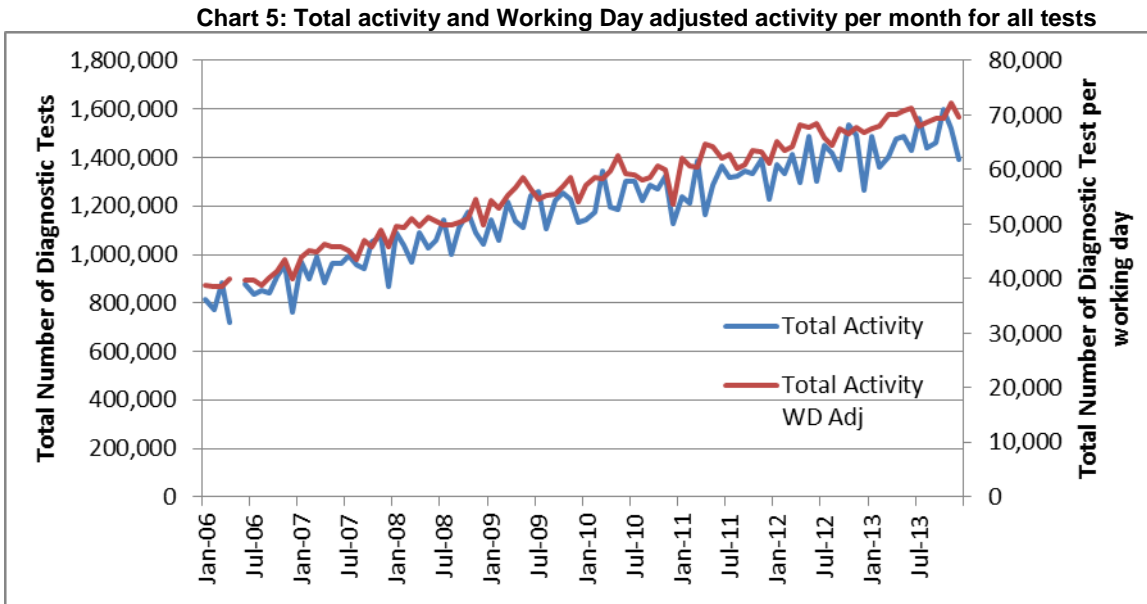
3.3.1. The average (median) waiting time displays a similar trend to the total waiting list and 6+ waits. After a rapid decrease in the first two years leading to the 6 week milestone, the median waiting time has remained stable (Chart 4). The data shows significant increases during December every year but in the last twelve months the median waiting time has remained stable at around 1.9 weeks, with a high of 2.5 weeks (December 2013) and a low of 1.7 weeks (January 2013).

Chart 4: Median waiting time for all tests



### 3.4. Total Activity

3.4.1. The monthly activity figure can fluctuate significantly month to month, with particularly notable decreases in December due to the bank holidays. However, the underlying trend has shown an increase since January 2006. If the data is adjusted to show activity per working day, the monthly variation becomes less pronounced. (Chart 5)



Please note that activity data was not collected in May 2006 and as a result all activity time series graphs will show missing values for that month.

3.4.2. Monthly activity has increased steadily over the last 12 months with an average monthly increase of 0.8% (0.4% adjusted for working days).

3.4.3. In the previous twelve months individual tests are showing small changes in activity (<2%) with the exception of Barium Enema which has shown an average monthly reduction of 3.1%.

## 4. December 2013 Data

This section analyses the December 2013 diagnostic waiting times and activity data including, comparisons between tests, area teams, providers and commissioners.

### 4.1. 6+ Week Waits

4.1.1. At the end of December 2013, there were a total of 9,100 patients waiting 6 weeks or longer for one of the 15 key diagnostic tests. This represents 1.3% of the total number of patients waiting at the end of the month. The number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer has shown an increase of 2,400 from the same period last year. The proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer has increased by 0.2 percentage points from December 2012.

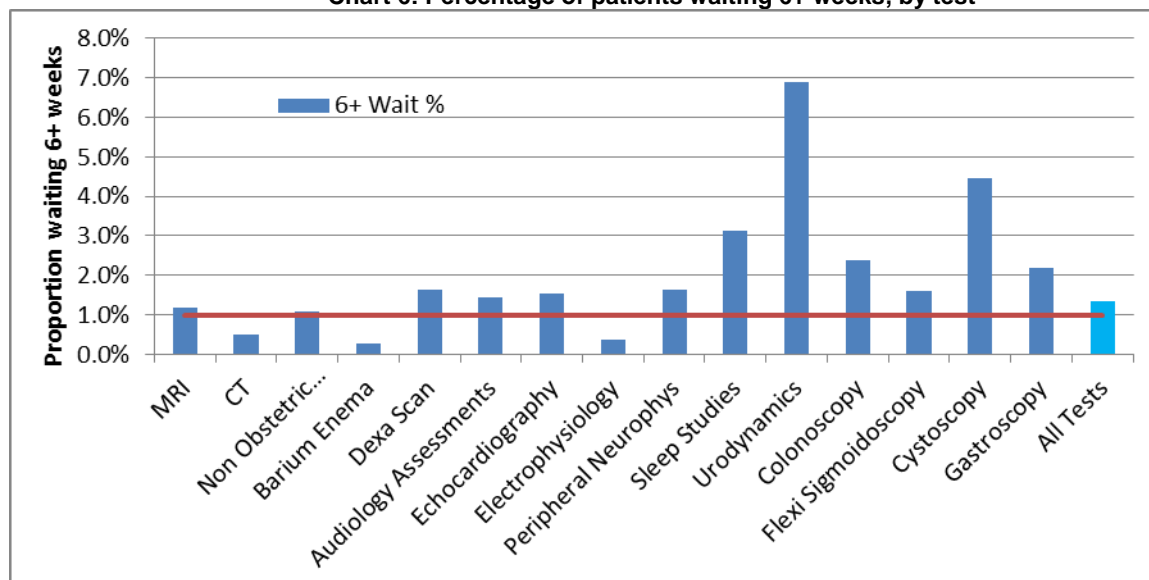
4.1.2. Compared to December 2012, Urodynamics has shown the largest increase in the proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer for a diagnostic test (2.0 percentage points). Sleep Studies has shown the largest decrease from December 2012 (-1.7 percentage points). (Table 1)

**Table 1: Change in proportion of patients waiting 6+ weeks, by test.**

	Dec-12	Dec-13	Difference (%age points)
MRI	0.9%	1.2%	0.2%
CT	0.3%	0.5%	0.2%
Non Obstetric Ultrasound	0.6%	1.1%	0.5%
Barium Enema	0.9%	0.3%	-0.6%
Dexa Scan	0.3%	1.6%	1.3%
Audiology Assessments	1.8%	1.5%	-0.3%
Echocardiography	1.5%	1.5%	0.1%
Electrophysiology	1.2%	0.4%	-0.8%
Peripheral Neurophys	0.9%	1.6%	0.7%
Sleep Studies	4.8%	3.1%	-1.7%
Urodynamics	4.9%	6.9%	2.0%
Colonoscopy	3.2%	2.4%	-0.8%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	2.4%	1.6%	-0.8%
Cystoscopy	3.3%	4.5%	1.2%
Gastroscopy	2.1%	2.2%	0.1%
All Tests	1.1%	1.3%	0.2%

4.1.3. This month, the 2013/14 operational standard that less than 1% of patients should wait more than 6 weeks for a diagnostic test was met in 3 out of 15 tests. The test with the lowest proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer was Barium Enema (0.3%) and the test with the highest proportion was Urodynamics (6.9%). (Chart 6)

**Chart 6: Percentage of patients waiting 6+ weeks, by test**



4.1.4. Out of 160 Acute Trusts, 46 providers (29%) failed to meet the 1% operational standard.

4.1.5. Of the 211 CCGs, 74 commissioners (35%) failed to meet the 1% operational standard.

4.1.6. In total 13 area teams failed to meet the 1% operational standard. Merseyside Area Team reported the highest proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer (3.7%) and Essex Area Team the lowest (0.3%). (Table 2)

4.1.7. Variations can exist between different area teams due to a variety of reasons from machines breaking down to staff shortages in NHS trusts that usually only affect one area team.

**Table 2: Diagnostic Waiting Times and Activity by Area Team, Commissioner based data**

Region	Area Team	Activity	Total Waiting List	No. of 6+ week waits	6+ Wait %	Median Waiting Time
North	Cheshire, Warrington and Wirral	36,578	18,533	178	1.0%	2.4
North	Durham, Darlington and Tees	36,396	16,739	133	0.8%	2.4
North	Greater Manchester	72,555	39,741	692	1.7%	2.7
North	Lancashire	38,439	17,909	246	1.4%	2.3
North	Merseyside	35,026	15,744	586	3.7%	2.3
North	Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear	55,071	27,333	159	0.6%	2.5
North	North Yorkshire and Humber	44,263	23,758	179	0.8%	2.4
North	South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw	44,586	14,796	291	2.0%	2.4
North	West Yorkshire	60,389	32,547	146	0.4%	2.5
Midlands & East	Arden, Herefordshire and Worcestershire	42,840	22,803	167	0.7%	2.5
Midlands & East	Birmingham and The Black Country	59,589	32,002	227	0.7%	2.6
Midlands & East	Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire	47,726	21,725	447	2.1%	2.2
Midlands & East	East Anglia	59,839	28,525	222	0.8%	2.5
Midlands & East	Essex	44,955	18,943	66	0.3%	2.3
Midlands & East	Hertfordshire and The South Midlands	64,599	31,498	436	1.4%	2.4
Midlands & East	Leicestershire and Lincolnshire	36,080	22,699	247	1.1%	2.5
Midlands & East	Shropshire and Staffordshire	43,199	19,385	87	0.4%	2.5
South	Bath, Gloucestershire, Swindon and Wiltshire	36,634	19,701	86	0.4%	2.4
South	Bristol, North Somerset, Somerset and South Gloucestershire	38,530	19,433	215	1.1%	2.6
South	Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	45,821	23,073	638	2.8%	2.5
South	Kent and Medway	48,457	24,830	98	0.4%	2.4
South	Surrey and Sussex	66,274	26,925	636	2.4%	2.3
South	Thames Valley	44,672	19,638	333	1.7%	2.3
South	Wessex	68,667	31,940	802	2.5%	2.7
London	London	215,526	110,991	1,811	1.6%	2.5
England (including all Independent Sector Providers)		1,394,592	682,357	9,140	1.3%	2.5

## 4.2. Total Waiting List

4.2.1. At the end of December 2013 there were a total of 682,000 patients still waiting for a diagnostic test. This is an increase of 64,000 (10.4%) from December 2012. The test with the largest waiting list was Non Obstetric Ultrasound (238,278) accounting for 34.9% of all patients waiting. The test with the smallest waiting list was Barium Enema (1,447) accounting for 0.2% of all patients waiting. (Table 3)

**Table 3: Total number of patients waiting at month end, by test**

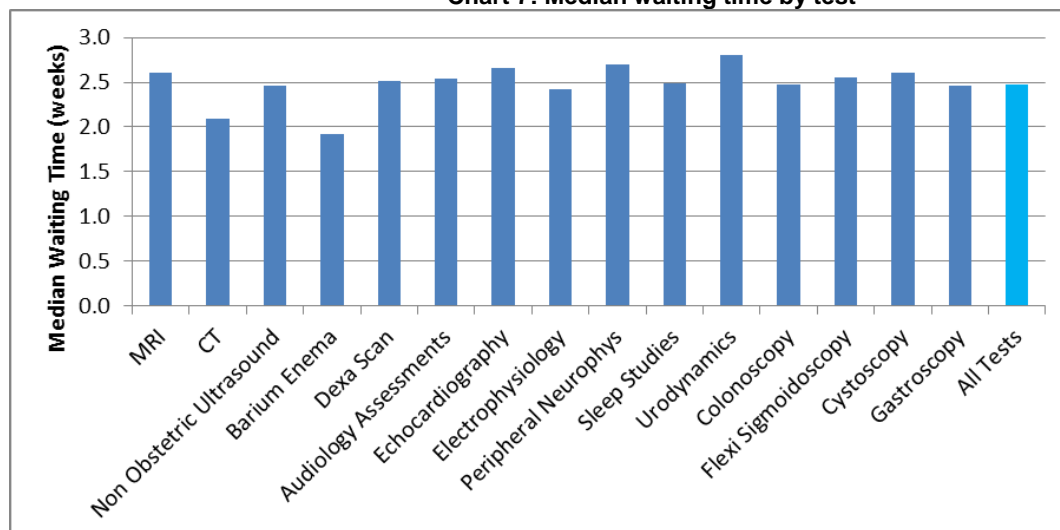
	Dec-12	Dec-13	Growth (%age)
MRI	125,803	144,083	14.5%
CT	77,213	83,991	8.8%
Non Obstetric Ultrasound	209,817	238,278	13.6%
Barium Enema	2,129	1,447	-32.0%
Dexa Scan	17,995	20,689	15.0%
Audiology Assessments	34,352	35,563	3.5%
Echocardiography	40,758	46,522	14.1%
Electrophysiology	1,281	1,925	50.3%
Peripheral Neurophys	13,030	14,248	9.3%
Sleep Studies	4,563	5,215	14.3%
Urodynamics	4,313	4,293	-0.5%
Colonoscopy	28,484	26,731	-6.2%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	15,176	14,168	-6.6%
Cystoscopy	12,919	13,212	2.3%
Gastroscopy	30,451	31,992	5.1%
All Tests	618,284	682,357	10.4%

Please note that Barium Enema is a test that should be replaced by colonoscopy or CT Colonography, so the number of tests undertaken should be reducing.

## 4.3. Median Waiting Times

4.3.1. In December 2013 the estimated median waiting time for all 15 diagnostic tests was 2.5 weeks, which is an increase of 0.1 weeks from December 2012. The test with the shortest median waiting time was Barium Enema (1.9 weeks), and the test with the longest waiting time was Urodynamics (2.8 weeks). (Chart 7)

**Chart 7: Median waiting time by test**



4.3.2. The area team with the shortest median waiting time was Derbyshire & Nottinghamshire (2.2 weeks). The area team with the longest median waiting time was Wessex (2.7 weeks). (Table 3)

#### 4.4. Total Activity

4.4.1. In total 1,395,000 of the 15 key diagnostic tests were performed during December 2013. This is an increase of 127,000 (10.0%) from the same period last year. When adjusted for the number of working days in the month this increase is 4.5%. Total activity has increased by 6.1% year to date compared to the same period last year (4.4% adjusted). (Table 4)

**Table 4: Total Activity & Growth by test**

	Dec-13	Dec-12	YTD 13/14	YTD 12/13	Growth Dec 13 vs Dec 12	Growth YTD 13/14 vs YTD 12/13	Adjusted Growth Dec 13 vs Dec 12	Adjusted Growth YTD 13/14 vs YTD 12/13
MRI	215,110	190,504	1,967,018	1,793,398	12.9%	9.7%	7.3%	8.0%
CT	344,403	311,859	3,172,156	2,949,208	10.4%	7.6%	4.9%	5.9%
Non Obstetric Ultrasound	483,932	437,580	4,707,702	4,429,442	10.6%	6.3%	5.1%	4.6%
Barium Enema	2,540	3,689	28,461	45,610	-31.1%	-37.6%	-34.6%	-38.6%
Dexa Scan	27,885	23,307	282,896	252,834	19.6%	11.9%	13.7%	10.1%
Audiology Assessments	87,504	82,705	903,756	896,851	5.8%	0.8%	0.5%	-0.8%
Echocardiography	89,137	80,431	881,794	829,993	10.8%	6.2%	5.3%	4.6%
Electrophysiology	2,402	2,310	24,135	23,267	4.0%	3.7%	-1.2%	2.1%
Peripheral Neurophys	13,898	12,368	136,773	129,318	12.4%	5.8%	6.8%	4.1%
Sleep Studies	7,656	6,733	77,468	70,687	13.7%	9.6%	8.0%	7.9%
Urodynamics	6,091	6,095	63,115	66,144	-0.1%	-4.6%	-5.1%	-6.1%
Colonoscopy	28,970	29,537	296,942	300,865	-1.9%	-1.3%	-6.8%	-2.9%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	17,759	16,955	168,632	175,741	4.7%	-4.0%	-0.5%	-5.6%
Cystoscopy	22,856	21,421	218,354	217,183	6.7%	0.5%	1.4%	-1.0%
Gastroscopy	44,449	42,061	430,979	417,259	5.7%	3.3%	0.4%	1.7%
All Tests	1,394,592	1,267,555	13,360,181	12,597,800	10.0%	6.1%	4.5%	4.4%

Please note that Barium Enema is a test that should be replaced by colonoscopy or CT Colonography, so the number of tests undertaken should be reducing.

4.4.2. Non obstetric ultrasound was the test with the highest activity (483,932 tests), accounting for 34.7% of all activity in December 2013. Electrophysiology was the test with the lowest reported activity (2,402 tests) accounting for 0.2% of all activity.

## 5. Annex

### 5.1. Methodology

NHS England compiles diagnostic waiting time and activity data through a central return. Data collected includes:

- The number of patients waiting at the month end, split by test and week.
- Total activity classified as either; Waiting List tests (excluding planned), Planned tests, or Unscheduled Tests.

Providers submit data to NHS England via Unify2 where it checked and signed off by commissioners. For full details, please refer to the [Data Quality and Methodology Statement](#).

### 5.2. Data Revision

Revisions to published figures are released on a six-monthly basis and in accordance with the NHS England Analytical Services (Operations) team's revision policy. The revisions policy can be found here: <http://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2012/04/Unify2-revisions-policy.pdf>

### 5.3. Data Availability

Monthly diagnostic waiting time and activity data is published on a monthly timetable. The next publication of this report and accompanying data will be **12<sup>th</sup> March 2014**. A full calendar of all statistical publications can be found here: <http://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/12-months-statistics-calendar/>

In addition to monthly publication, diagnostic waiting time and activity data is also published in a quarterly census and annual report.

Quarterly census data can be found here: <http://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/diagnostics-waiting-times-and-activity/diagnostics-census-data/>

Annual Imaging and Radiodiagnostics data can be found here: <http://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/diagnostics-waiting-times-and-activity/imaging-and-radiodiagnostics-annual-data/>

## 5.4. Glossary

### **Area Team**

A geographical area of NHS England with direct commissioning responsibilities for GP services, dental services, pharmacy, and certain aspects of optical services.

### **Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)**

A group of GP practices, which working with other healthcare professionals and in partnership with local communities and local authorities, commission NHS services for patients with in their local communities.

### **Diagnostic Test**

A test or procedure of which the primary function is to identify a patient's disease or condition to allow a medical diagnosis to be made. 15 key diagnostic tests are used to monitor diagnostic waiting time and activity. For a full description of each test see the guidance document here: <http://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/diagnostics-waiting-times-and-activity/monthly-diagnostics-waiting-times-and-activity/>

### **Endoscopy**

A categorisation of diagnostic tests that include; Colonoscopy; Flexi sigmoidoscopy; Cystoscopy and Gastroscopy.

### **Imaging**

A categorisation of diagnostic tests that include; Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI); Computed Tomography (CT); Non-obstetric ultrasound; Barium Enema and DEXA Scan.

### **Median Waiting Time**

A measurement of the average time a patient is required to wait for a diagnostic test. The median is the middle value when waiting times are put in numerical order. 50% of patients will wait less than the median. The median is the preferred measurement of average waiting time as it is less susceptible to extreme values than the mean.

### **Physiological Measurement**

A categorisation of diagnostic tests that include; Audiology Assessments; Echocardiology; Electrophysiology: Peripheral Neurophysiology; Sleep Studies and Urodynamics.

### **Provider**

An organisation that provides NHS treatment or care, for example, an NHS Acute Trust, Mental Health Trust, Community provider, or an Independent Sector organisation.

## 5.5. Feedback welcomed

We welcome feedback on the content and presentation of statistics within this report and those published on the NHS England website.

If you have any comments on this, or any other issues regarding these statistics, then please email [unify2@dh.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:unify2@dh.gsi.gov.uk)

Alternatively, we welcome your comments via our [user feedback form](#).

Feedback about the user's experiences of using these statistics is available [here](#).

## 5.6. Additional Information

Full details of diagnostics data for individual organisations are available at:  
<http://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/diagnostics-waiting-times-and-activity/>

For press enquiries please contact the NHS England media team on 07768 901293

The Government Statistical Service (GSS) statistician responsible for producing these data is:

Mark Svenson  
NHS Operations  
NHS England  
Room 8E10, Quarry House, Quarry Hill, Leeds LS2 7UE  
Email: [unify2@dh.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:unify2@dh.gsi.gov.uk)