



NHS Diagnostic Waiting Times and Activity Data

NHS Diagnostic Waiting Times and Activity Data

January 2015 Monthly Report

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Contents

- Contents 3
- 1 Executive summary 4
 - 1.1 Consultation on Annual Imaging and Radiodiagnostics Data 5
- 2 January 2015 Key Findings 6
- 3 National Trends 7
 - 3.1 6+ Week Waits 7
 - 3.2 Total Waiting List 8
 - 3.3 Median Waiting Time 9
 - 3.4 Total Activity 10
- 4 January 2015 Data 11
 - 4.1 6+ Week Waits 11
 - 4.2 Total Waiting List 15
 - 4.3 Median Waiting Times 16
 - 4.4 Total Activity 16
- 5 Revisions 18
- 6 Annex 19
 - 6.1 Methodology 19
 - 6.2 Data Revision 19
 - 6.3 Data Availability 19
 - 6.4 Glossary 19
 - 6.5 Feedback welcomed 20
 - 6.6 Additional Information 20

1 Executive summary

This report presents a monthly summary of diagnostic waiting times and activity across the NHS in England. This monthly report is part of a routine series of publications produced by NHS England.

The data presented in this report measures the current waiting times of patients still waiting for any of 15 key diagnostic tests or procedures 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. Referrals may be from a variety of sources including GPs.

One of the main measurements covered in this report is the number and proportion of patients waiting six weeks or longer for a diagnostic test, from time of referral.

This 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, but diagnostic waiting times now form part of the 2013/14 NHS Constitution. This 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.

NHS England's planning 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 2014/15.

The 15 key diagnostic tests included in this report are:

- Imaging - Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI)
- Imaging - Computerised Tomography (CT)
- Imaging - Non-obstetric Ultrasound
- Imaging - Barium Enema
- Imaging - Dual-Energy X-Ray Absorptiometry (DEXA) Scan
- Physiological Measurement - Audiology Assessments
- Physiological Measurement - Echocardiography
- Physiological Measurement - Electrophysiology
- Physiological Measurement - Neurophysiology – peripheral neurophysiology
- Physiological Measurement - Respiratory Physiology – sleep studies
- Physiological Measurements - Urodynamics – pressures & flows
- Endoscopy - Gastroscopy
- Endoscopy - Colonoscopy
- Endoscopy - Flexible Sigmoidoscopy
- Endoscopy - Cystoscopy

For detailed descriptions of each diagnostic test please see the [collection guidance document](#).

Some of the key terms used throughout this report are outlined below:

- **6+ Waits**
A count of the number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer for a diagnostic test at month end from referral.
- **Activity**
A count of the number of diagnostic tests undertaken during the month.
- **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.
- **Waiting List**
A count of the number of patients that are waiting for a diagnostic test at the end of the month.

A more comprehensive glossary is available in the Annex.

All England figures quoted are commissioner based. Commissioner based returns reflect data for patients for whom English commissioners are responsible.

1.1 Consultation on Annual Imaging and Radiodiagnostics Data.

NHS England has begun a consultation on the future of the Annual publication of Imaging and Radiodiagnostics statistics. More information about the consultation can be found at <https://www.engage.england.nhs.uk/consultation/imaging-radiodiagnostics-statistics>.

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

2 January 2015 Key Findings

- The total number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer from referral for one of the 15 key diagnostic tests at the end of January 2015 was 18,700. This represents 2.4% 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 5,600 from the end of January 2014.
- The percentage of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer in January 2015 has increased by 0.6 percentage points from the same month last year. In between these months the percentage has shown a peak of 2.4% (January 2015) and low of 1.2% (November 2014).
- The test with the highest proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer in January 2015 was Urodynamics with 9.3% of all patients waiting 6 weeks or longer. The test with the smallest proportion was Barium Enema with 0.5%.
- An alternative measure of diagnostic waiting times is the average (median) waiting time. The average patient waiting for a diagnostic test had been waiting 1.8 weeks at the end of January 2015.
- There were 766,400 patients still waiting for a diagnostic test at the end of January 2015. This is an increase of 34,000 from January 2014. In the past 12 months the total number of patients waiting for a diagnostic test has continued to increase with an average monthly increase of 0.4%.
- A total of 1,642,800 diagnostic tests were undertaken in January 2015. This is an increase of 2.9% from the same period last year (7.8% when adjusted for the number of working days). In the past 12 months activity has continued to increase with an average monthly increase of 0.2% (0.6% when adjusted for the number of working days).
- Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust failed to submit any diagnostic data this month, due to issues with their Patient Administration System.
- Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust failed to submit any diagnostic data this month, due to quality assurance reasons.

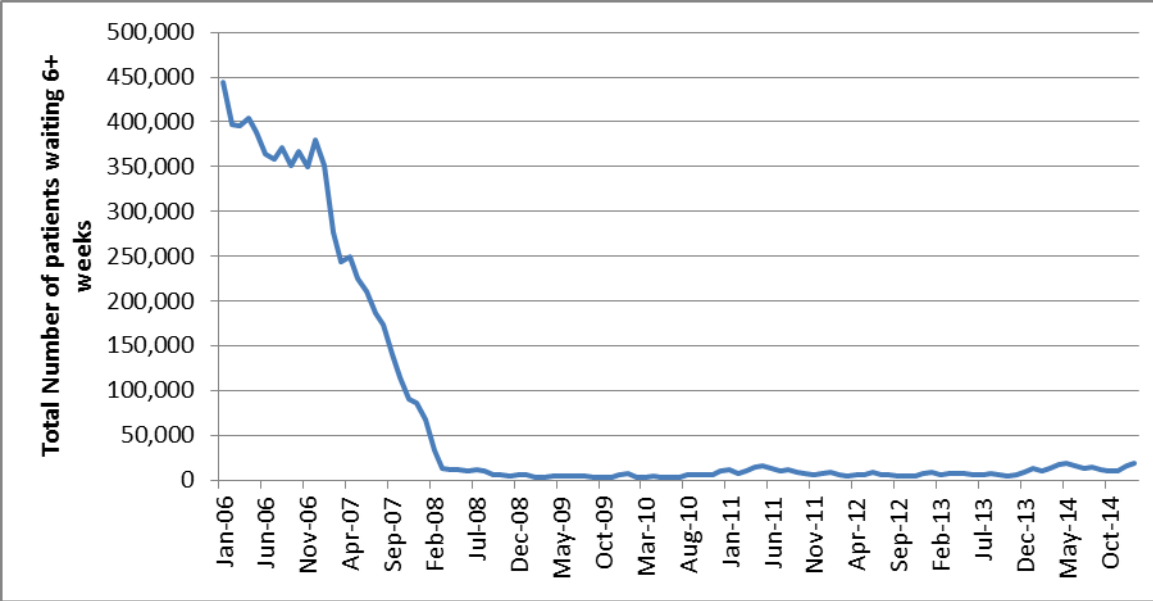
3 National Trends

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

3.1 6+ Week Waits

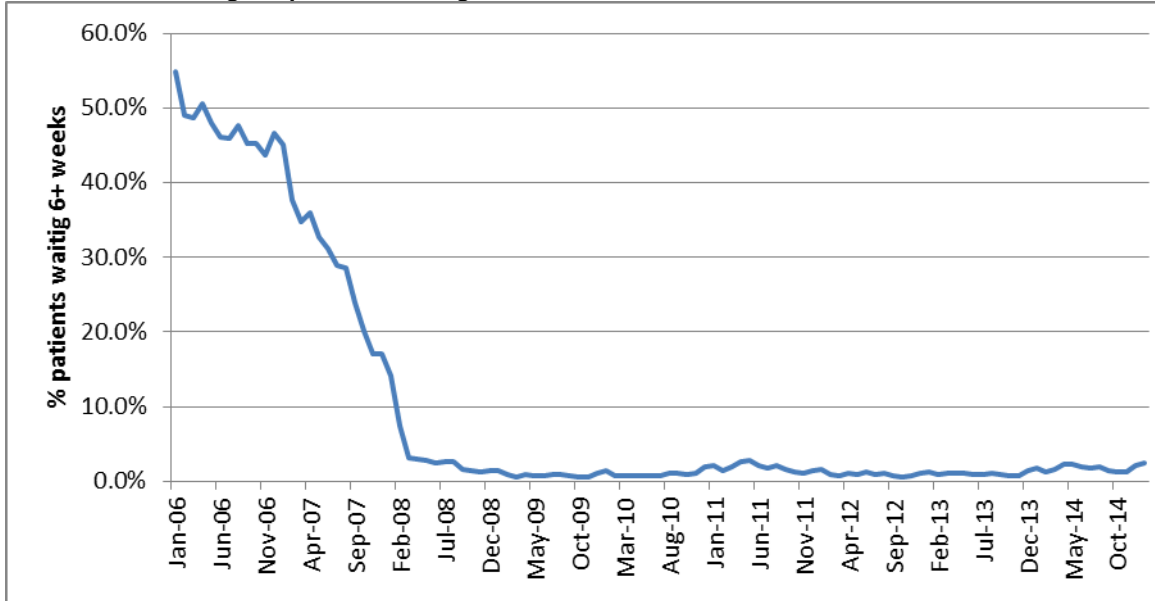
- 3.1.1. The total number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer dropped sharply between January 2007 and March 2008, before maintaining a slight average monthly reduction (Chart 1). This reduction is most likely the result of Trusts working towards the NHS Improvement Plan (June 2004) milestone that no one should wait longer than 6 weeks for a diagnostic test by March 2008.
- 3.1.2. Since March 2008 there have been fluctuations in the total number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer. Between October 2013 and May 2014 there was a significant increase in the number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer. That number had been decreasing in following months but increased again in January 2015, in line with the seasonal trend.

Chart 1: Total number of patients waiting 6+ weeks at month end for all tests – Jan 2006 to Jan 2015



- 3.1.3. The proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer shows a similar drop between January 2007 and the 6 week milestone in March 2008 before stabilising (Chart 2). Over the past 12 months the proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer has shown a low of 1.2% (November 2014) and a high of 2.4% (January 2015). The 1% operational standard was last met in November 2013.

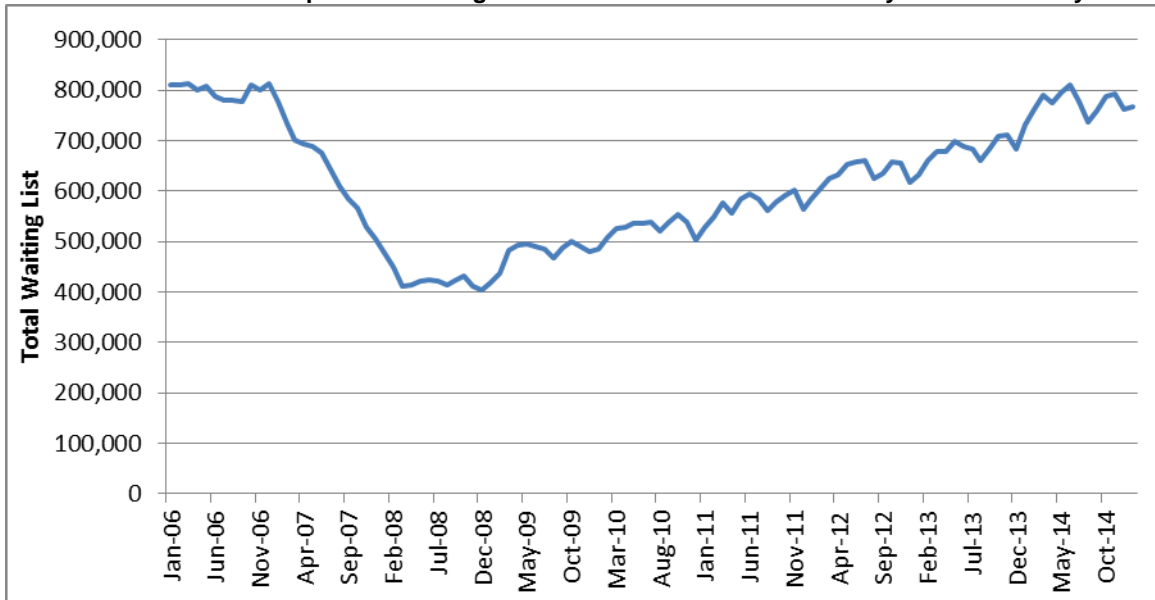
Chart 2: Percentage of patients waiting 6+ weeks at month end for all tests – Jan 2006 to Jan 2015



3.2 Total Waiting List

3.2.1. As seen with the number and proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer, the total number of patients waiting at the month end dropped dramatically between January 2007 and the 6 week milestone in March 2008 (Chart 3). Between March 2008 and January 2009 the total waiting list remained stable, after which the underlying trend has shown an increase. In the last twelve months the average monthly increase was 0.4%

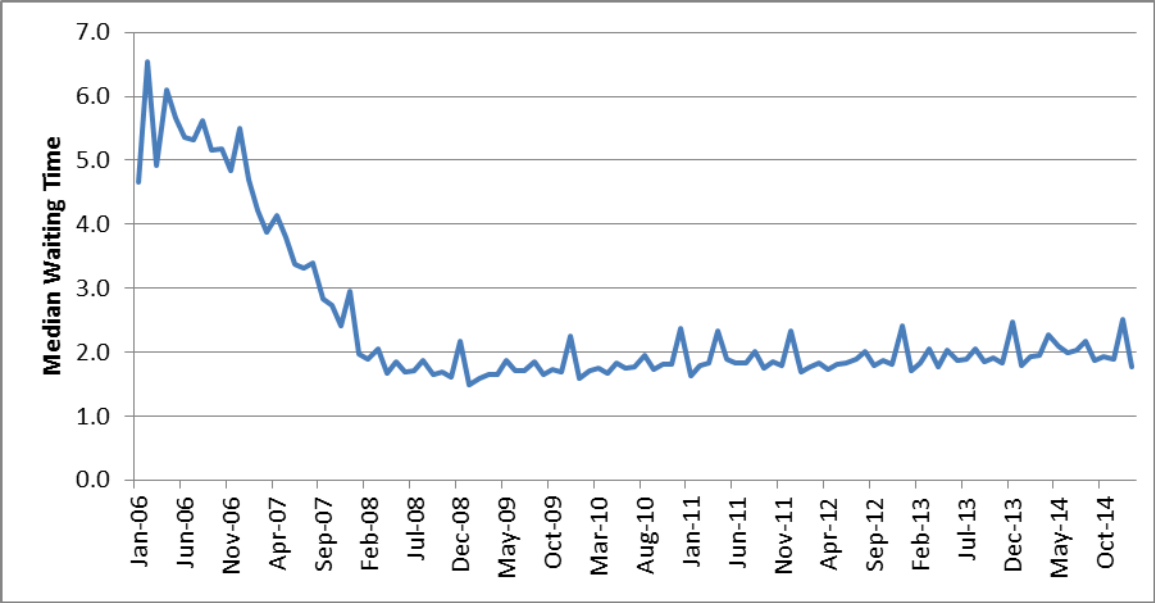
Chart 3: Total number of patients waiting at month end for all tests – January 2006 to January 2015



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, as a result of the increased number of bank holidays and resulting staff shortages. However, in the last twelve months, the median waiting time has remained stable at around 2.0 weeks, with a high of 2.5 weeks (December 2014) and a low of 1.8 weeks (January 2015).

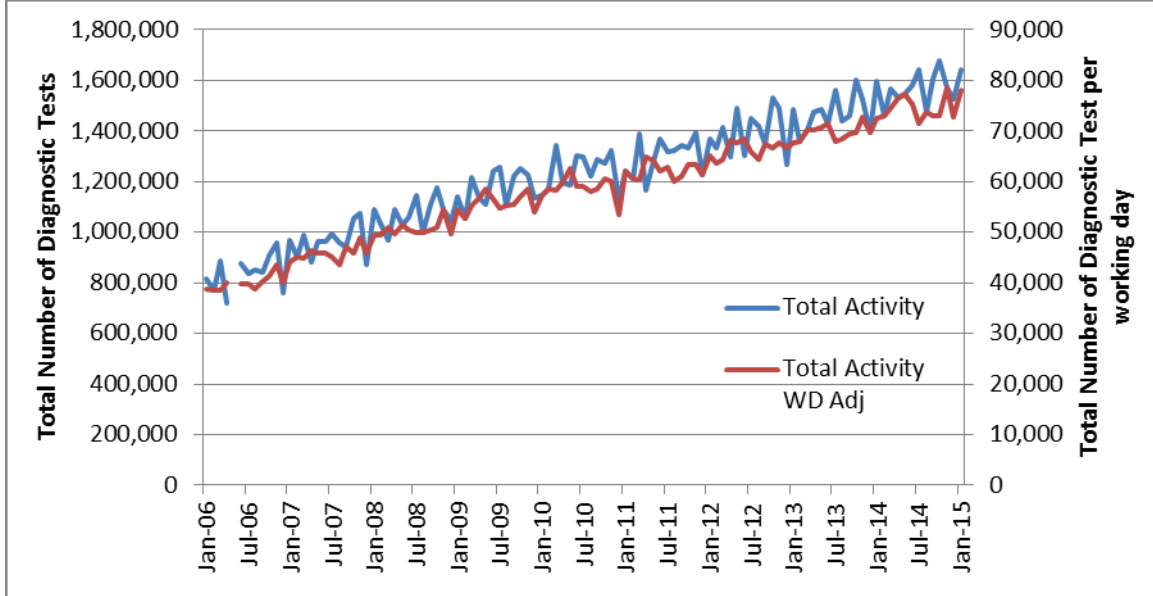
Chart 4: Median waiting time for all tests – January 2006 to January 2015



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).

Chart 5: Total activity and working day adjusted activity per month for all tests – Jan 2006 to Jan 2015



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 slightly over the last 12 months with an average monthly increase of 0.2% (0.6% when adjusted for working days).
- 3.4.3. In the previous twelve months, individual tests have shown slight changes in activity. The largest changes have been for Barium Enema, which have shown an average monthly decrease of 1.0%. The tests with the largest growth in activity were MRI scans and CT scans. Both of these tests have shown an average monthly decrease of 0.6%

4 January 2015 Data

This section analyses the January 2015 diagnostic waiting times and activity data, and includes comparisons between tests, area teams, providers and commissioners.

4.1 6+ Week Waits

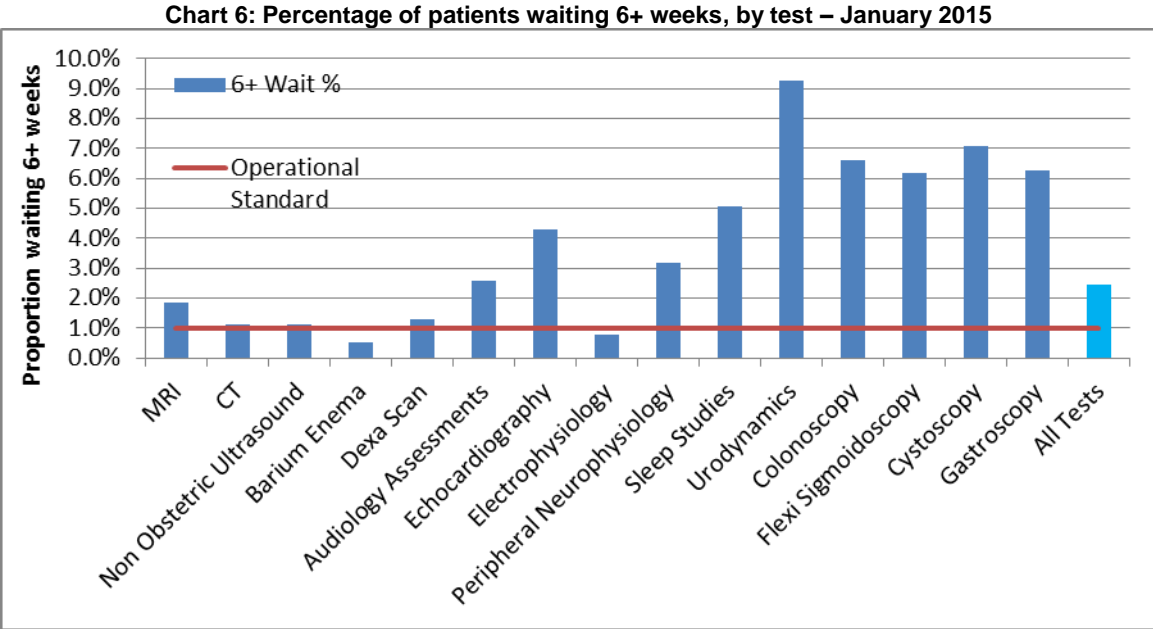
- 4.1.1. At the end of January 2015, there were a total of 18,700 patients waiting 6 weeks or longer from referral for one of the 15 key diagnostic tests. This represents 2.4% of the total number of patients waiting at the end of the month and was the highest number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer in the last 12 months. The number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer has shown an increase of 5,600 from the same period last year. The proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer has increased by 0.6 percentage points from January 2014.
- 4.1.2. Compared to January 2014, Colonoscopy has shown the largest increase in the proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer for a diagnostic test. (4.1 percentage points). DEXA Scan has shown the largest decrease in proportion (1.3 percentage points).

Table 1: Proportion of patients waiting 6+ weeks, by test – January 2014 & January 2015.

	Jan-14	Jan-15	Difference (%age points)
MRI	2.2%	1.9%	-0.3%
CT	0.8%	1.1%	0.4%
Non Obstetric Ultrasound	1.4%	1.1%	-0.3%
Barium Enema	0.2%	0.5%	0.3%
Dexa Scan	2.6%	1.3%	-1.3%
Audiology Assessments	0.9%	2.6%	1.6%
Echocardiography	1.8%	4.3%	2.6%
Electrophysiology	1.4%	0.8%	-0.6%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	2.4%	3.2%	0.8%
Sleep Studies	3.2%	5.1%	1.9%
Urodynamics	7.5%	9.3%	1.8%
Colonoscopy	2.6%	6.6%	4.1%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	2.4%	6.2%	3.7%
Cystoscopy	5.7%	7.1%	1.3%
Gastroscopy	2.3%	6.3%	4.0%
All Tests	1.8%	2.4%	0.6%

Note: Figures may differ due to rounding.

4.1.3. This month, the operational standard that less than 1% of patients should wait 6 weeks or more from referral for a diagnostic test was met in 2 out of 15 tests. The test with the lowest proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer was Barium Enema (0.5%) and the test with the highest proportion was Urodynamics (9.3%). (Chart 6).



4.1.4. In addition to the key diagnostic tests, it’s possible to look at performance across three different test types (Imaging, Physiological Measurement, and Endoscopy). The proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer for a diagnostic test at the end of January 2015 increased in two of the three test types compared to January 2014. Endoscopy tests have shown the largest increase (3.6 percentage points), while Imaging tests have shown a decrease (0.2 percentage points). See section 5.4 for which tests are included under the different test types.

Table 2: Proportion of patients waiting 6+ weeks, by test type – January 2014 & January 2015

	Jan-14	Jan-15	Difference (%age points)
Imaging	1.6%	1.3%	-0.2%
Physiological Measurement	1.9%	3.8%	1.9%
Endoscopy	2.9%	6.5%	3.6%
All Tests	1.8%	2.4%	0.6%

Note: Figures may differ due to rounding.

4.1.5. Out of 155 Acute Trusts that submitted in January 2015, 70 providers (45.2%) failed to meet the 1% operational standard.

4.1.6. Of the 211 CCGs, 128 commissioners (60.7%) failed to meet the 1% operational standard. This is 15 more commissioners than in the previous month, and 31 more than in January 2014.

- 4.1.7. In total 21 area teams failed to meet the 1% operational standard. Bristol, North Somerset, Somerset and South Gloucestershire Area Team reported the highest proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer (6.3%) while Lancashire Area Team and Cheshire, Warrington and Wirral Area Team reported the lowest (0.7%). (Table 3).
- 4.1.8. Feedback from NHS trusts has indicated that variations can exist between different area teams due to a variety of reasons from machines breaking down to staff shortages in trusts that usually only affect one area team.

Table 3: January 2015 Diagnostic Waiting Times and Activity by Area Team, Commissioner based data.

Region	Area Team	Number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer at month end	Percentage of patients waiting 6+ weeks at month end	Total number of patients waiting at month end	Total activity undertaken in month	Median Waiting Time
South	Bristol, North Somerset, Somerset and South Gloucestershire	1,525	6.3%	24,105	49,781	2.0
Midlands & East	East Anglia	1,393	4.2%	32,994	66,924	1.8
Midlands & East	Hertfordshire and The South Midlands	1,369	3.9%	35,233	72,475	1.9
North	Durham, Darlington and Tees	744	3.7%	20,350	41,358	2.0
North	South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw	682	3.6%	18,884	49,343	1.8
Midlands & East	Birmingham and The Black Country	1,129	3.2%	35,398	69,966	2.1
Midlands & East	Leicestershire and Lincolnshire	667	2.9%	22,961	43,111	1.9
North	Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear	888	2.7%	32,967	65,320	1.8
London	London	3,272	2.7%	123,287	254,547	1.7
Midlands & East	Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire	636	2.5%	25,151	56,553	1.5
South	Wessex	837	2.4%	35,284	84,829	1.7
South	Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	564	2.3%	24,113	53,625	1.8
South	Surrey and Sussex	752	2.2%	34,806	81,500	1.7
North	North Yorkshire and Humber	563	2.1%	26,992	52,406	1.8
North	Greater Manchester	848	2.0%	42,187	89,287	1.9
Midlands & East	Arden, Herefordshire and Worcestershire	519	1.9%	27,558	51,189	1.8
South	Thames Valley	390	1.7%	23,150	54,398	1.8
South	Bath, Gloucestershire, Swindon and Wiltshire	373	1.7%	22,473	39,710	1.8
Midlands & East	Shropshire and Staffordshire	323	1.5%	20,910	50,481	1.7
Midlands & East	Essex	226	1.3%	17,966	47,162	1.7
North	Merseyside	209	1.2%	17,979	45,192	1.7
North	West Yorkshire	298	1.0%	30,871	62,808	1.7
South	Kent and Medway	234	0.8%	29,886	60,528	1.8
North	Cheshire, Warrington and Wirral	134	0.7%	18,936	42,229	1.7
North	Lancashire	122	0.7%	18,507	43,066	1.6
England (including all Independent Sector Providers)		18,740	2.4%	766,414	1,641,829	1.8

4.2 Total Waiting List

4.2.1. At the end of January 2015 there were a total of 766,400 patients still waiting for a diagnostic test. This is an increase of 34,000 (4.6%) from January 2014. The test with the largest waiting list was Non-Obstetric Ultrasound (256,268) accounting for 33.4% of all patients waiting. The test with the smallest waiting list was Barium Enema (1,372) accounting for 0.2% of all patients waiting. (Table 4).

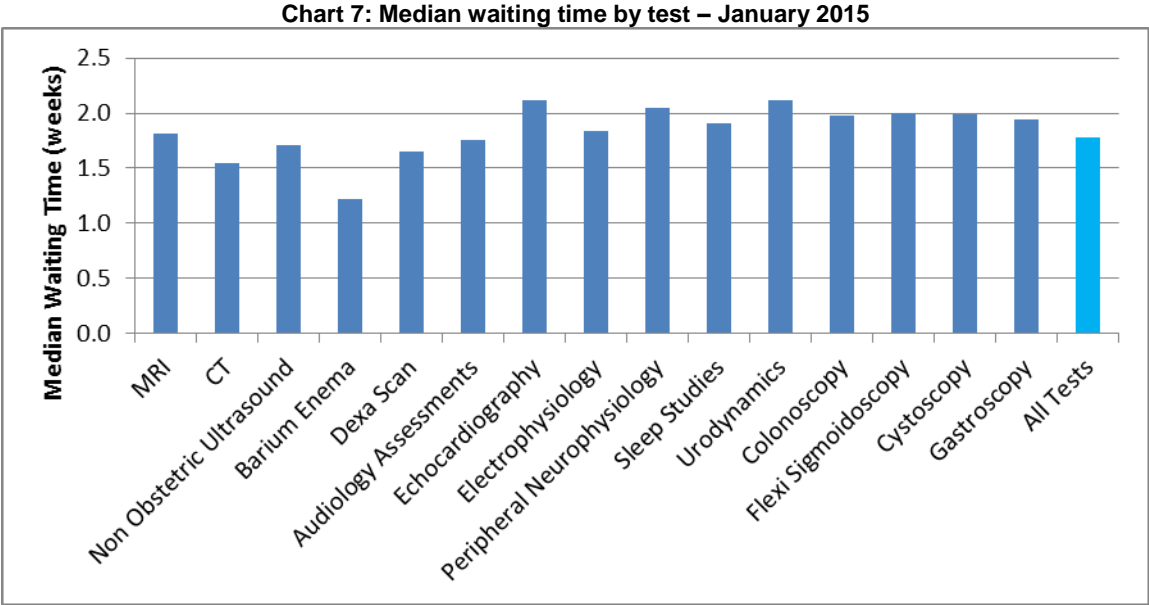
Table 4: Total number of patients waiting at month end, by test – January 2014 & January 2015

	Jan-14	Jan-15	Growth (%age)
MRI	153,044	158,884	3.8%
CT	92,204	101,374	9.9%
Non Obstetric Ultrasound	254,878	256,268	0.5%
Barium Enema	1,505	1,372	-8.8%
Dexa Scan	23,074	21,003	-9.0%
Audiology Assessments	37,556	40,256	7.2%
Echocardiography	49,311	51,968	5.4%
Electrophysiology	2,076	1,515	-27.0%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	15,124	15,599	3.1%
Sleep Studies	5,127	5,847	14.0%
Urodynamics	4,498	4,516	0.4%
Colonoscopy	28,931	34,529	19.3%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	15,148	17,284	14.1%
Cystoscopy	14,072	14,082	0.1%
Gastroscopy	35,869	41,917	16.9%
All Tests	732,417	766,414	4.6%

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 January the estimated median waiting time for all 15 diagnostic tests was 1.8 weeks from time of referral. This is an increase from the previous month, where the median was 2.5 weeks and is in line with season trend. The test with the shortest median waiting time was Barium Enema (1.2 weeks), and the tests with the longest waiting time were Echocardiography, Urodynamics and Peripheral Neurophysiology (2.1 weeks). (Chart 7)



4.3.2. The area team with the shortest median waiting time Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Area Team (1.5 weeks). Birmingham and the Black Country Area Team was the area teams with the longest median waiting time (2.1 weeks). (Table 2)

4.4 Total Activity

- 4.4.1. In total 1,641,800 of the 15 key diagnostic tests were performed during January 2015. This is an increase of 46,600 (2.9%) from the same period last year (Table 5).
- 4.4.2. Non-Obstetric Ultrasound was the test with the highest activity (561,116 tests), accounting for 34.2% of all activity in January 2015. Electrophysiology was the test with the lowest reported activity (2,565 tests) accounting for 0.2% of all activity.

Table 5: Total Activity & Growth by test

	Jan-15	Jan-14	YTD 14/15	YTD 13/14	Growth Jan 15 vs Jan 14	Growth YTD 14/15 vs YTD 13/14	Adjusted Growth Jan 15 vs Jan 14	Adjusted Growth YTD 14/15 vs YTD 13/14
MRI	254,217	236,399	2,419,703	2,204,672	7.5%	9.8%	12.7%	10.8%
CT	409,032	382,129	3,872,917	3,554,928	7.0%	8.9%	12.1%	10.0%
Non Obstetric Ultrasound	561,116	557,069	5,459,413	5,269,758	0.7%	3.6%	5.5%	4.6%
Barium Enema	2,869	3,239	28,946	31,605	-11.4%	-8.4%	-7.2%	-7.5%
Dexa Scan	32,414	33,268	323,729	315,842	-2.6%	2.5%	2.1%	3.5%
Audiology Assessments	102,151	105,036	995,272	1,008,891	-2.7%	-1.3%	1.9%	-0.4%
Echocardiography	109,549	106,643	1,054,406	988,781	2.7%	6.6%	7.6%	7.6%
Electrophysiology	2,565	2,760	25,023	26,895	-7.1%	-7.0%	-2.6%	-6.1%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	17,187	16,399	162,492	153,032	4.8%	6.2%	9.8%	7.2%
Sleep Studies	10,098	9,657	97,205	87,125	4.6%	11.6%	9.5%	12.6%
Urodynamics	6,751	7,386	65,368	70,498	-8.6%	-7.3%	-4.2%	-6.4%
Colonoscopy	37,224	35,791	348,456	332,733	4.0%	4.7%	9.0%	5.7%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	20,878	20,991	197,985	189,644	-0.5%	4.4%	4.2%	5.4%
Cystoscopy	24,796	25,718	245,795	244,096	-3.6%	0.7%	1.0%	1.7%
Gastroscopy	50,982	52,763	501,245	483,742	-3.4%	3.6%	1.2%	4.6%
All Tests	1,641,829	1,595,248	15,797,955	14,962,242	2.9%	5.6%	7.8%	6.6%

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.

5 Revisions

- 5.1. Data was revised for the period April 2014 to December 2014. These revisions have had a slight impact on the national figures as shown in the table below.

Month	Total Waiting List			Total Activity			Total 6+ week waits		
	Original	Revisions	Difference	Original	Revisions	Difference	Original	Revisions	Difference
Apr-14	774,134	774,290	156	1,530,420	1,530,447	27	16,909	16,974	65
May-14	794,901	795,136	235	1,543,610	1,543,737	127	18,631	18,718	87
Jun-14	809,465	809,830	365	1,580,355	1,580,433	78	15,707	15,877	170
Jul-14	777,715	777,954	239	1,643,857	1,644,495	638	13,002	13,191	189
Aug-14	737,863	737,930	67	1,477,167	1,477,414	247	14,297	14,349	52
Sep-14	760,630	760,834	204	1,606,556	1,606,548	-8	11,134	11,298	164
Oct-14	789,184	788,755	-429	1,679,572	1,676,964	-2,608	10,237	10,236	-1
Nov-14	793,354	793,591	237	1,569,751	1,570,212	461	9,700	9,717	17
Dec-14	763,006	762,946	-60	1,525,048	1,525,876	828	15,614	15,608	-6

- 5.2. The revisions have affected national performance in May and June 2014. The revised proportions of patients waiting 6 weeks or more during these months were 2.4% and 2.0% respectively. This is compared to the originally published figures of 2.3% and 1.9%. The proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or more for the other 7 revised months are unchanged, as are the median waiting times for all 9 months (to 1 decimal place).

6 Annex

6.1 Methodology

6.1.1. 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.

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

6.2 Data Revision

6.2.1. 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. For more information on the revision policy please refer to the [Unify2 Revisions Policy Document](#).

6.3 Data Availability

6.3.1. Monthly diagnostic waiting time and activity data is published on a monthly timetable. The next publication of this report and accompanying data will be 8th April 2015. [A full calendar of all statistical publications can be found here](#).

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

6.3.3. [Quarterly census data can be found here](#).

6.3.4. [Annual Imaging and Radiodiagnostics data can be found here](#).

6.4 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.

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.

6.5 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

Alternatively, we welcome your comments via our user feedback form.

Feedback about the user's experiences of using these statistics is available here.

6.6 Additional Information

[Full details of diagnostics data for individual organisations are available here.](#)

For press enquiries please contact the NHS England media team on 0113 825 0958 or 0113 825 0959. Email enquiries should be directed to nhsengland.media@nhs.net

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

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