

## Primary Care Patient Experience - Access to GP Services

January 2021 update

Building upon Healthwatch Ealing’s Annual Review of Access to GP Services (2019), this paper highlights service user’s experiences of accessing GP Services in Ealing, over the last two years.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the Healthwatch Ealing Patient Experience Team have continued to gather feedback from service users, regarding their recent interactions with health and social care services in the borough. This review focuses on service user’s experiences of accessing GP services, from January 2019 to December 2020. The data presented in this review has been drawn from Healthwatch Ealing’s quarterly Patient Experience Reports that were conducted during this period. Specific data sets from these reports have been analysed to highlight any key trends relating to GP service access and explore how the opinions of Ealing residents have changed and developed over time. These data sets include the star ratings (1 star - 5 stars), which indicate service user’s overall satisfaction with access to their GP’s services as well as more qualitative data, which provides insight into the sentiment, themes and sub-themes that have been identified in service user feedback.

The figures in this report are based on the following number of service user reviews collected for GP services, during this period:

**Table 1: The number of reviews for GP surgeries by quarter.**

	Q4 18-19	Q1 19-20	Q2 19-20	Q3 19-20	Q4 19-20	Q1 20-21	Q2 20-21	Q3 20-21
No. of comments	475	412	425	551	303	106	300	328

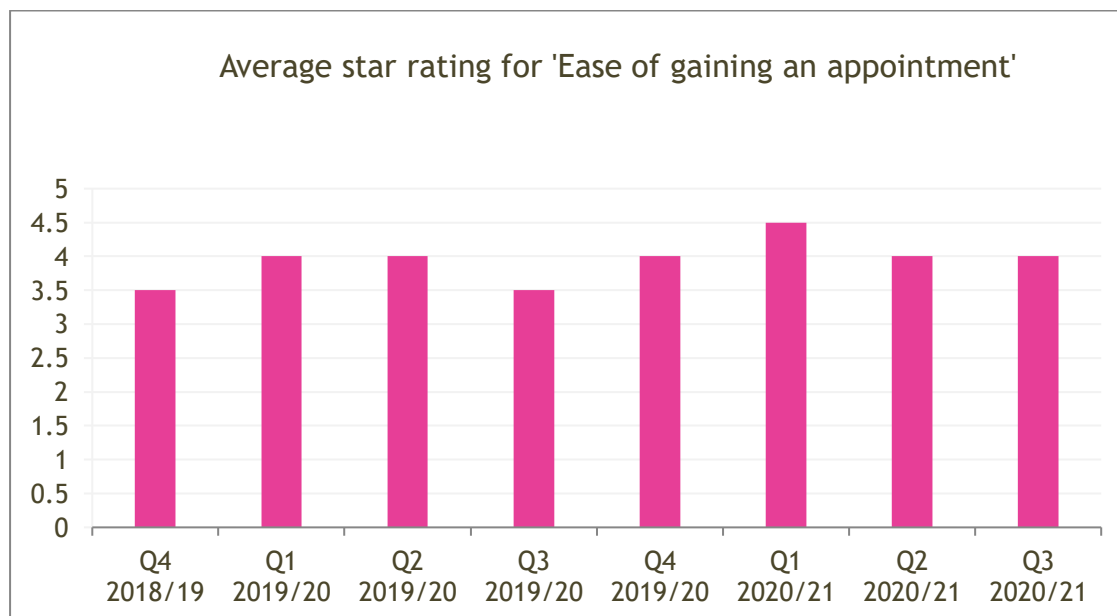
*NB: In the first iteration of the Annual Review of Access to GP Services (2019), there were discrepancies in the sentiment data for Q4, 18-19 and Q1, 19-20. These discrepancies have since been corrected and the data for both these quarters are accurately represented in this review.*

## Star ratings

### Key Findings:

Since January 2019, the average star rating that service users gave in relation to ‘ease of gaining an appointment’ has consistently fallen between 3.5 to 4.5 stars (fig. 1). However, while the average star rating has remained relatively consistent, the findings indicate that work to improve overall access to GP services in Ealing must remain a priority, as the average star ratings for ‘ease of gaining an appointment’ and that of the below ‘waiting time’ are consistently the lowest star ratings areas out of 8 different domain areas we ask for feedback against.

In addition, there was a slight increase above the average star rating in Q1 2020/21. Although the challenges that residents face in accessing GP surgeries during the pandemic are clear, findings from Healthwatch Ealing’s COVID-19 Impact Report indicated that many individuals did in fact find it easier to gain appointments during this time, most likely as a result of the ‘virtual by default’ model that surgeries were forced to adopt. These findings combined, suggest that digital appointments could have contributed to the increase in the average star rating seen in Q1 2020/21 and the consistency of the average star rating, thereafter. On the other hand, it should not be overlooked that there were still residents that did not have access to digital services that will have found it difficult to access GP services during this time.

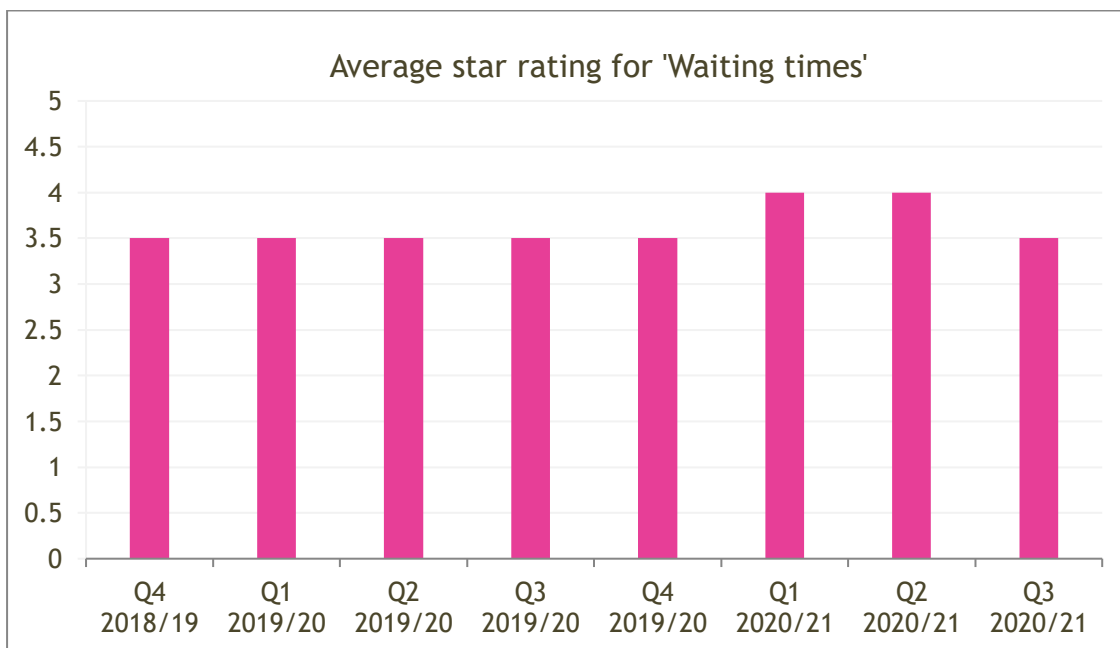


**Figure 1: The bar chart representing the average star rating by quarter**

**Key Findings:**

Figure 2 shows the average star ratings for GP appointment waiting times, across the two-year period. Again, feedback for this domain has remained consistent, falling between 3.5 - 4 stars. The data indicates that Ealing residents were happier with the waiting times during the first two quarters of 2020/21 - the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and national lockdown. Once again, this is supported by the findings from the COVID-19 Impact Report, which found a largely positive sentiment toward the utilisation of online GP appointments and the resulting reduction in appointment waiting times. One other factor that may have contributed to this increased level of satisfaction was that many people stayed away from GPs altogether to both reduce the burden on the NHS and out of fear of catching the virus.

Overall, these findings indicate that the switch to a more ‘digital first’ approach to primary care services during the pandemic is proving beneficial. However, as seen in the Themes and Sub-themes section below, more in-depth analysis of the data seems to contradict these findings and, therefore, improvements can still be made to further reduce appointment waiting times.



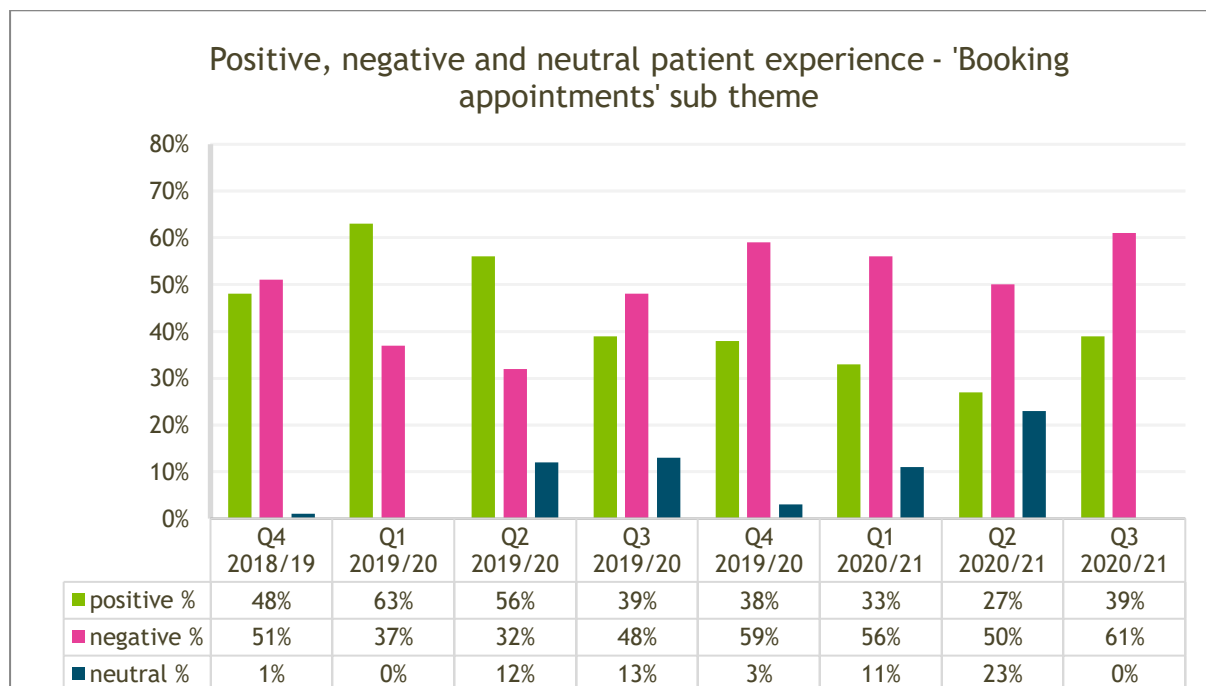
**Figure 2: The bar chart representing the average star rating by quarter**

## Themes & Sub-themes

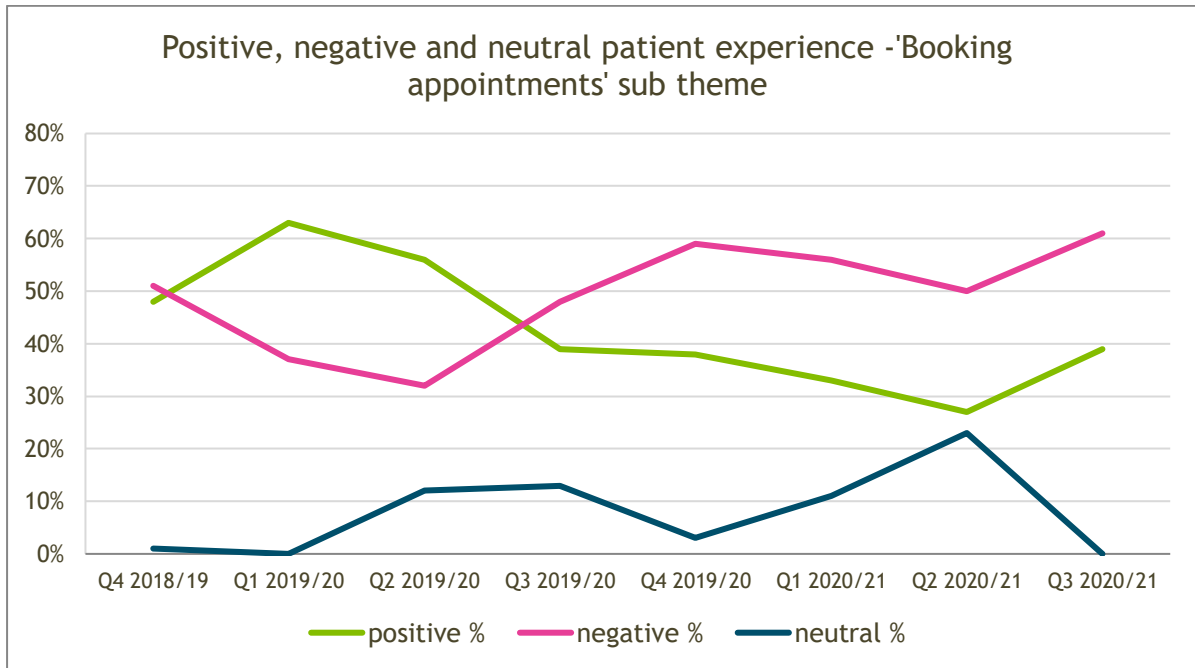
This section explores the sentiment of patient feedback from this period which included the themes and sub-themes of ‘Access’ and ‘Administration’, relating to GP service.

### **Booking Appointments (sub theme of Administration) - Key Findings:**

Figure 3 and Figure 4 show how the number of positive, negative and neutral reviews relating to the sub-theme of ‘Booking Appointments’ has changed, since January 2019. The analysis shows that there has been a significant decrease in the number of positive reviews that contained this sub-theme (63% - 39%), coinciding with an increase in the number of negative (37% - 61%) and neutral (1% - 23%) reviews. The inception of this downward trend in positive experiences when booking GP appointments occurred prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, suggesting that there are other contributory factors that are worth exploring.



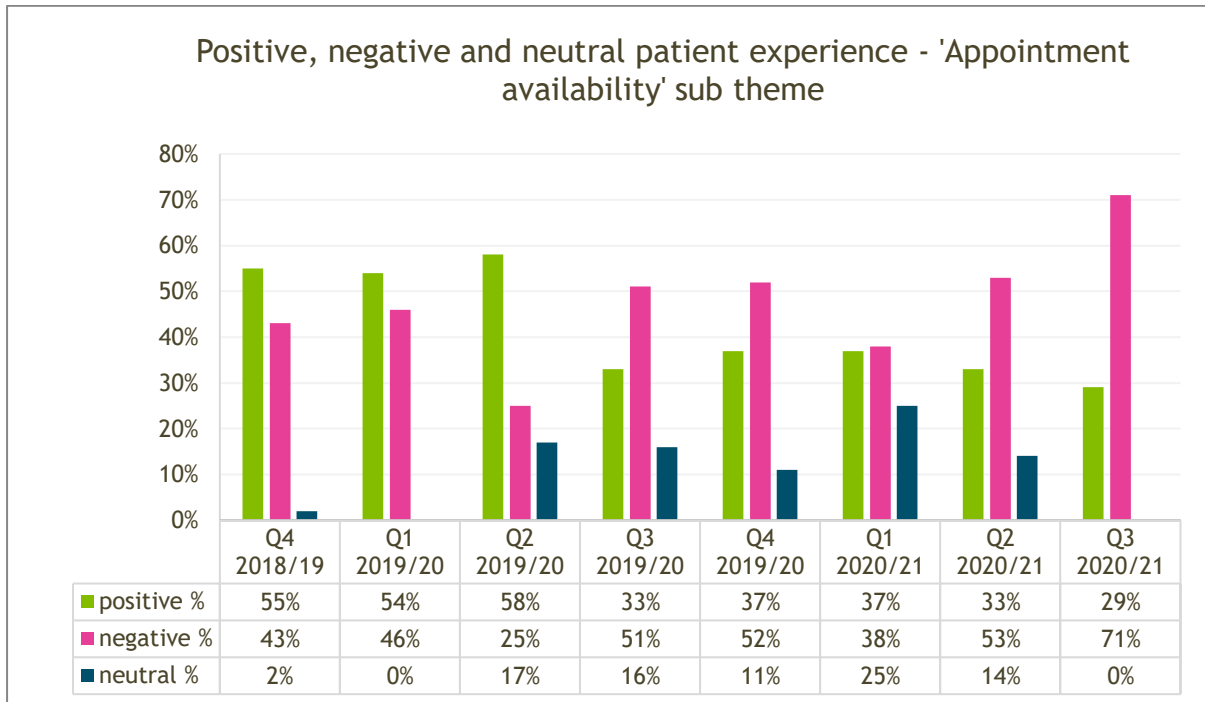
**Figure 3: The bar chart representing the positive, negative and neutral patient experience by quarter**



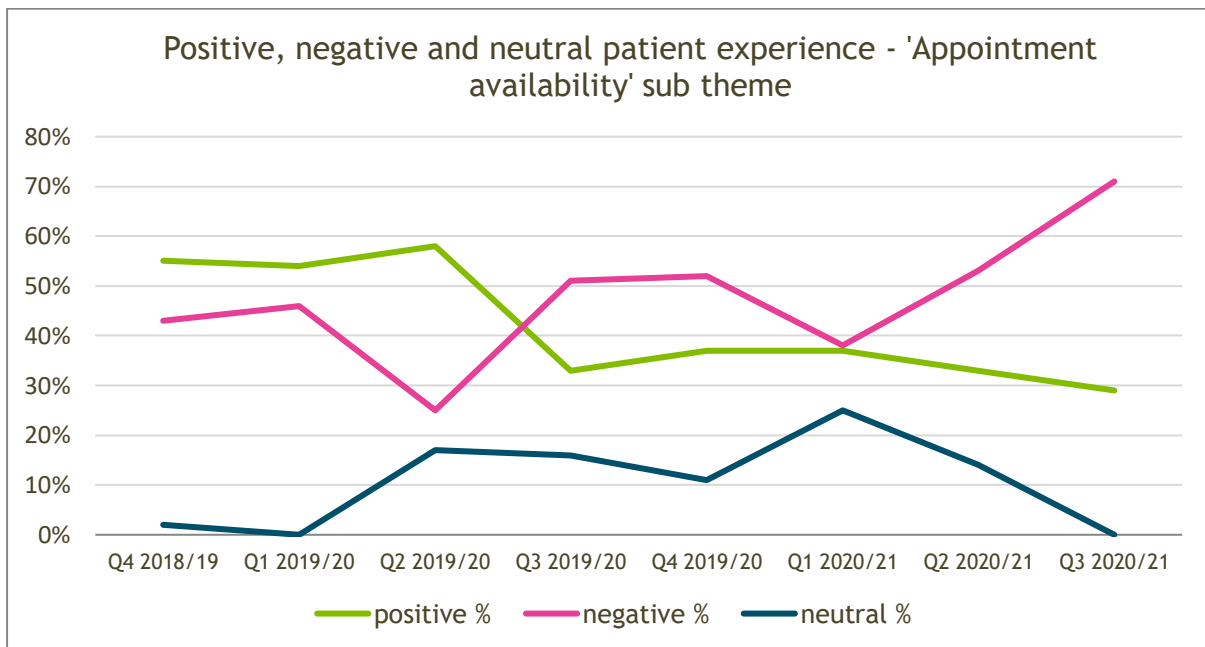
**Figure 4: The line graph representing the positive, negative and neutral patient experience by quarter**

**Appointment Availability (sub theme of Administration) - Key Findings:**

Figure 5 and 6 represent the change in sentiment relating to the sub-theme of ‘Appointment Availability’, since January 2019. Once again, positive sentiment around this sub-theme has decreased (55% - 29%) while negative (43% - 71%) and neutral (2% - 14%) sentiment has increased. This trend indicates that the Ealing residents are facing significantly more difficulties when booking their preferred appointment time. Restrictions on face-to-face appointments and the pressures on GP surgeries to see as many patients as possible via digital means, may have increased demand for specific appointment times and contributed to a lack of appointment availability. However, given that the increase in negative feedback regarding appointment availability coincides with the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic and national lockdown, these findings are somewhat contradictory to the star ratings that indicated that digital appointments had reduced waiting times for GP appointments. This may suggest that while individuals are being seen promptly, it has not been at a time that suits them best.



**Figure 5: The bar chart representing the positive, negative and neutral patient experience by quarter**

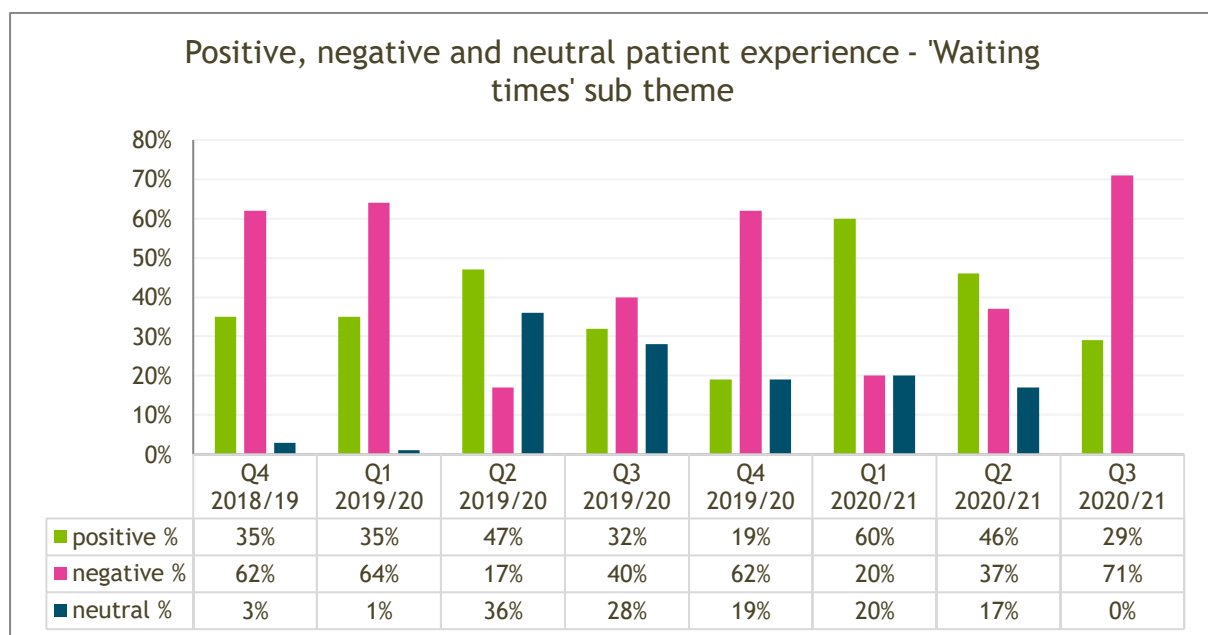


**Figure 6: The line graph representing the positive, negative and neutral patient experience by quarter.**

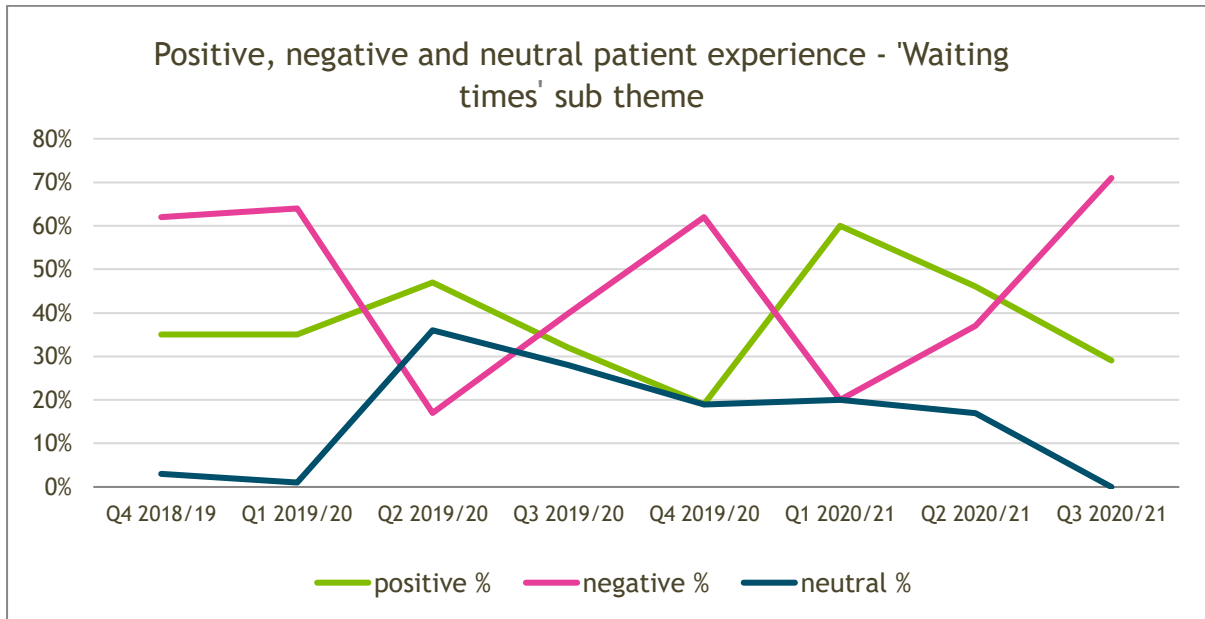
**Waiting Times (sub theme of Access to Services) - Key Findings:**

Figure 7 and 8 show how sentiment around GP service waiting times has changed, since January 2019. The sentiment in this instance is inconsistent. Overall, during this time period, positive (35% - 29%) and neutral (36%- 17%) feedback has decreased while feedback with a negative sentiment has increased (62% - 71%). As shown in the graphs below, this shift in sentiment was most apparent during Q4 2019/2020 and Q1 2020/2021 - the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. While it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions regarding the undulating nature of the feedback sentiment, these findings may suggest that concerted efforts by GP surgeries during 2019/2020 to reduce waiting times, and the shift to a digital first approach to appointments during the national lockdown, may have improved appointment waiting times during that period. However, a consistent increase in negative reviews since then suggests that this is an area that must be addressed in order to ensure that Ealing residents are being provided with the necessary amount of time to consult their doctors.

A clear trend within the themes and sub-themes explored in this review is the increase in negative sentiment from the start of the COVID-19 pandemic (Q1, 2020/21). It is worth noting that, alongside the contributory factors mentioned in this review, our team had to adapt our way of collecting Patient Experience data, moving from face-to-face conversations to direct telephone contact and collecting reviews from reputable online sources, which we know to be more negative in general. This extraneous variable may, therefore, have played a contributory role in the shift in sentiment that the data shows during this particular time.



**Figure 7: The bar chart representing the positive, negative and neutral patient experience by quarter.**

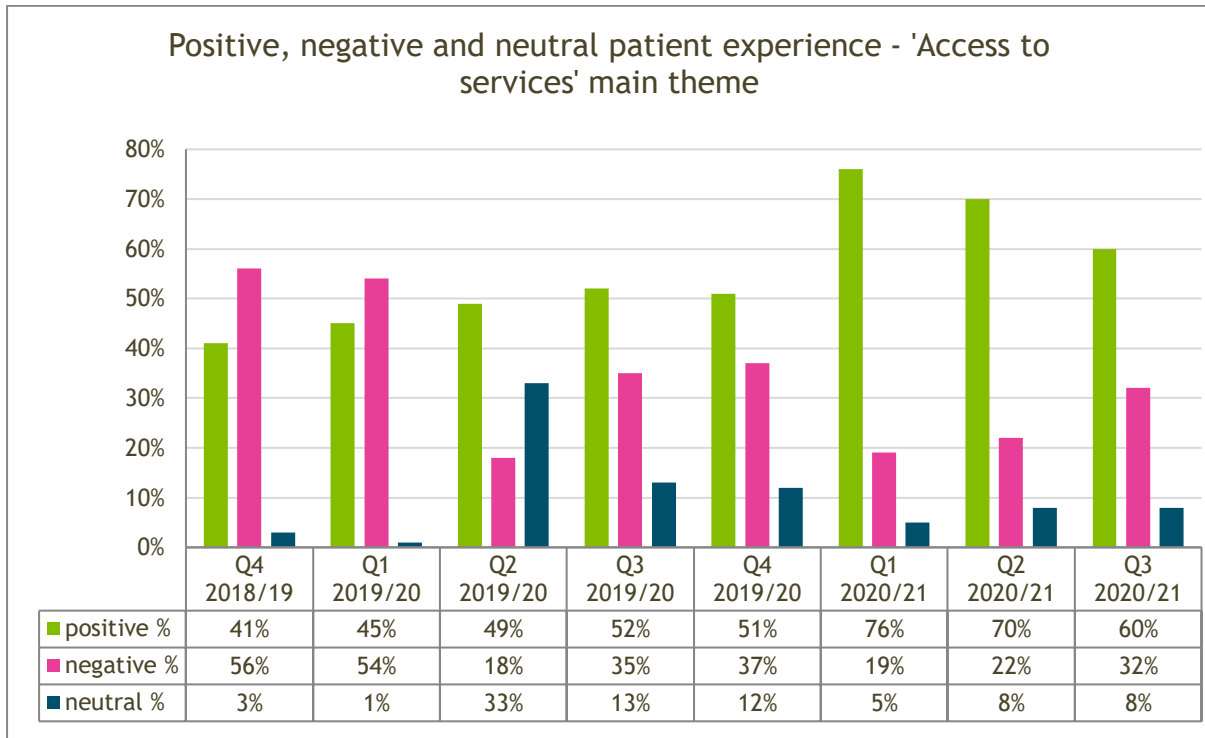


**Figure 8:** The line graph representing the positive, negative and neutral patient experience by quarter.

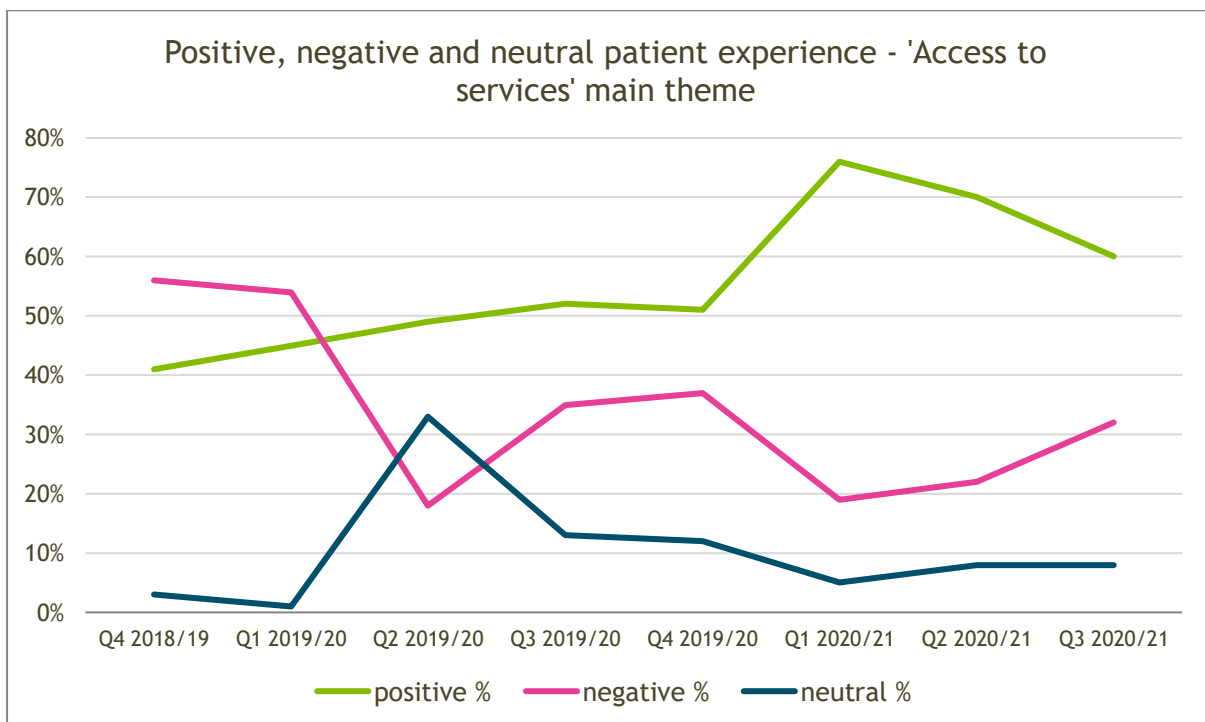
#### Access to Services (main theme) - Key Findings:

Figures 9 and 10 show the change in overall sentiment toward the theme of Access to Services, since January 2019. The number of positive sentiment reviews in which this theme was identified has significantly increased over time (41% - 60%). Neutral sentiment reviews have slightly increased (2% - 8%) and reviews with a negative sentiment toward GP surgery access have reduced, significantly (56% - 32%). This suggests that GP surgeries concerted efforts over the last few years to improve access to their services have had a positive impact on the healthcare experiences of Ealing residents. Furthermore, the data indicates that at the start of the pandemic, positive feedback on access to GP services significantly increased (51% - 76%). This could be indicative of the impact that the shift to the digital first approach had on the ease of access to GP services. However, since Q1 2020/21 there has been a gradual decline in the number of positive reviews and an increase in both neutral and negative reviews. As a result, it could be suggested that stakeholders within the borough should continue to focus their efforts on making GP services more accessible to residents, particularly throughout the pandemic.





**Figure 9: The bar chart representing the positive, negative and neutral patient experience by quarter.**



**Figure 10: The line graph representing the positive, negative and neutral patient experience by quarter.**