



PUBLIC PROSECUTION SERVICE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Statistical Bulletin: **2019/20**

1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020



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Note: All statistics for the current financial year have been finalised.

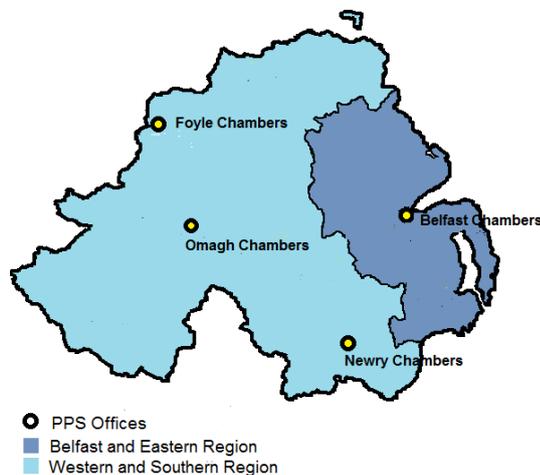
Introduction

The Public Prosecution Service

The Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland (PPS), which is headed by the Director of Public Prosecutions, is the principal prosecuting authority in Northern Ireland. In addition to taking decisions as to prosecution in cases investigated by the police, it also considers cases investigated by other statutory authorities, such as HM Revenue and Customs.

The primary role of the PPS is to reach decisions to prosecute or not to prosecute and to have responsibility for the conduct of criminal proceedings. A range of options is also available for dealing with offenders other than through prosecution. These options include cautions, informed warnings and youth conferencing. Prosecutors may also refer offenders to the National Driver Alertness Scheme or to a Community Restorative Justice Scheme.

PPS Regional Structure



There are two PPS regions. Each of the regions, Belfast and Eastern Region and Western and Southern Region, is headed by an Assistant Director (AD). The AD is responsible for working with the courts and the police to provide a high quality prosecution service in their area. The regions deal with a wide range of cases, from the less serious summary cases, which are heard in the Magistrates' Courts, through to more serious indictable cases which are heard in the Crown Court.

In addition there are four legal sections, based in PPS Headquarters, which are also headed at AD level. These are as follows:

- The Serious Crime Unit which deals with a range of the most serious offences including murder, manslaughter, rape and serious sexual offences and human trafficking.
- Central Casework Section which deals with some of the most high profile and difficult cases in Northern Ireland, including files relating to terrorism and organised crime;
- Fraud and Departmental Section which deals with serious and complex fraud files submitted by the police, as well as files from public bodies; and
- High Court and International Section which deals with a range of specialist legal matters (for example, High Court bail applications, extradition and appeals to the Court of Appeal).

Corporate Services is responsible for the organisation's support services such as Policy and Information, Finance, Resource Management, Communications and ICT, as well as the Victim and Witness Care Unit (VWCU).

About this Bulletin

This bulletin presents key statistics on the activity of the PPS, including caseloads and prosecutorial decisions. It also includes data on the outcomes of prosecutions at court. The report provides information for the 2019/20 financial year (i.e. 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020) and includes comparisons for 2018/19. Where appropriate detailed notes have been provided, which give an explanation of the relevant PPS processes and procedures.

Statistics for the financial year have been finalised.

If you have any feedback, questions or requests for further information about this bulletin, please contact us as follows:

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Summary of Key Points

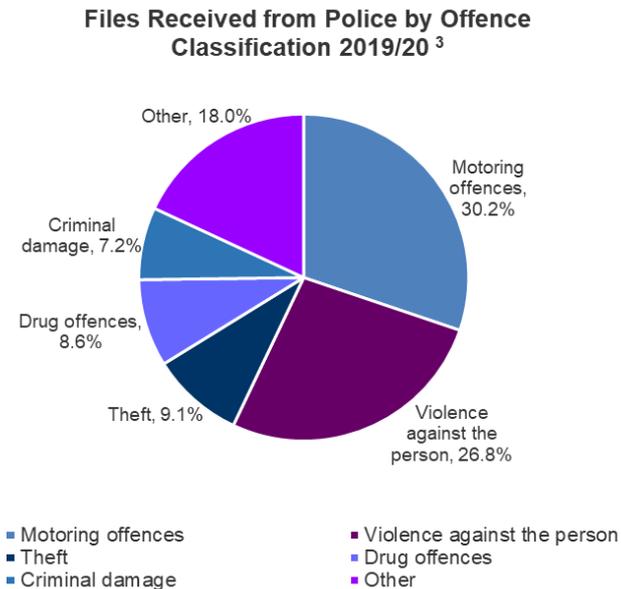
Figures quoted are for the 2019/20 financial year, 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020, unless otherwise stated. This summary should be read together with the explanatory notes and user information provided (see pages 17-21).

Files Received by File Type and PPS Region / Function (Table 1a)

- The PPS received 43,332 files during 2019/20. This was an increase of 0.1% on 2018/19 (43,298)¹.
- Just under half (48.5%) of all files received during the current period related to hybrid offences, 47.0% to summary offences and 4.5% to indictable offences.

Files Received from Police by Offence Classification^{2,3} (Table 1b)

- During this financial year, PPS received a total of 42,383 files from police. This represents a 0.1% increase on the previous financial year (42,324).
- In terms of files received by offence classification, the majority fell into two categories; 'motoring' (30.2%) and 'violence against the person' (26.8%).
- The offence classification that has shown the largest increase in the number of files received compared with 2018/19 was 'drug offences' (+293). The largest decrease in the number of files received was for 'violence against the person' (-406). The largest percentage increase was for 'drugs offences' (+8.7%), while 'fraud and forgery' had the largest percentage decrease in files received (-10.1%).



¹ Please note that the reference period included the first weeks of the COVID 19 pandemic with full lockdown having been implemented in Northern Ireland on 23rd March 2020. While the disruption due to the pandemic affected only a small portion of the 2019/20 financial year, it should be noted that the number of files received in the month of March 2020 was 447 (12.9%) lower than in March 2019.

² 'Police' includes the Police Service of Northern Ireland, Belfast/Londonderry Harbour Police and British Transport Police.

³ The 'Other' category consists of 'Other miscellaneous offences' 5.5%, 'Public order' 3.8%, 'Sexual offences' 3.7%, 'Burglary' 2.0%, 'Possession of weapons' 1.8%, 'Fraud and forgery' 1.0% and 'Robbery' 0.3%.

Files Submitted to PPS by Other Departments / Agencies (Table 1c)

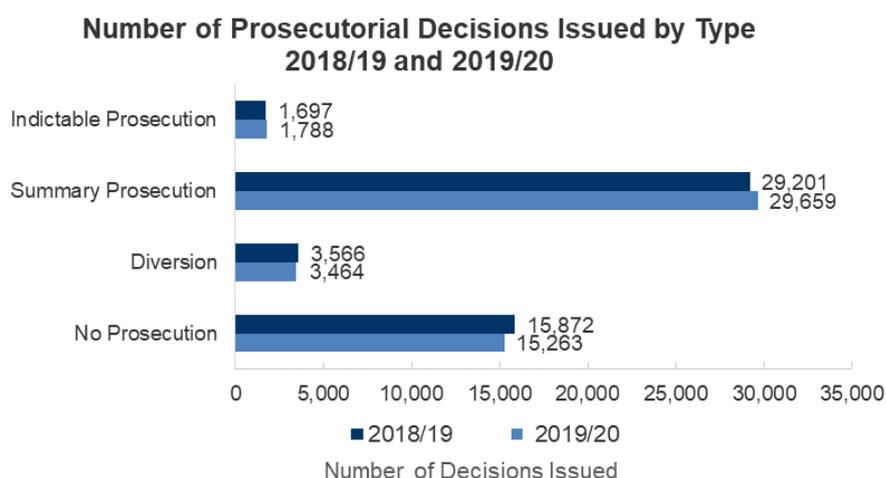
- A total of 949 files were submitted to PPS by departments and agencies during 2019/20, representing a 2.6% decrease on 2018/19 (974).
- During this period, the majority of files were submitted either by the Driver and Vehicle Agency (40.3%) or the Department for Communities (29.2%).

Information Requests Submitted to Police by Request Type and PPS Region / Function (Table 2)

- A total of 30,301 information requests were submitted to police during 2019/20, an increase of 8.3% on the previous financial year (27,974).
- More than half of all requests submitted during the current period were 'Post Decision Information Requests' (56.0%), 29.4% were 'Decision Information Requests' and 14.3% were 'Full File Requests'.

Prosecutorial Decisions Issued by Decision Type and PPS Region / Function (Table 3a)

- During 2019/20, 50,174 prosecutorial decisions were issued by the PPS, a decrease of 0.3% on the total issued during 2018/19 (50,336)⁴.
- The evidential Test for Prosecution was met in the majority of cases considered by public prosecutors during the current period. Of the 50,174 decisions issued, 69.6% were for prosecution (31,447) or for diversion from the courts (3,464). This was relatively unchanged from 2018/19 (68.5%).
- Comparing 2018/19 and 2019/20, there was a 1.8% increase in the number of decisions to prosecute. This comprised of a 5.4% increase in indictable prosecution decisions, while summary prosecution decisions also increased by 1.6%. The number of diversionary decisions fell by 2.9% while no prosecution decisions decreased by 3.8%.



⁴ Please note that the reference period included the first weeks of the COVID 19 pandemic with full lockdown having been implemented in Northern Ireland on 23rd March 2020. While the disruption due to the pandemic affected only a small portion of the 2019/20 financial year, it should be noted that the number of decisions issued in the month of March 2020 was 492 (10.8%) lower than in March 2019.

Prosecutorial Decisions Issued – Reasons for No Prosecution by PPS Region / Function (Table 3b)

- Of the 15,263 no prosecution decisions issued during 2019/20, 96.8% did not pass the evidential test. The remaining 3.2% did not pass the public interest test.

Number of Days Required for the Issue of Prosecutorial Decisions by Decision Type (Median and 80th Percentile)^{5,6,7,8} (Table 3c)

- Median calendar days required for the issue of an indictable prosecution decision decreased during the current period to 148 days, down from 166 days in 2018/19.
- During 2019/20, summary prosecution decisions required a median of 4 days, which is the same as in the previous financial year.
- Cautions required a median of 4 days (the same as 2018/19), informed warnings 3 days (5 days in 2018/19) and youth conferences 3 days (4 days in 2018/19).

Summonses Issued in Police Cases by Service Method and PPS Region (Table 4)

- A total of 31,082 summonses were issued in police cases during 2019/20, a decrease of 2.9% on 2018/19 (32,007)⁹. Comparing 2018/19 and 2019/20, the number of summonses issued via postal service decreased by 3.6% while those issued via personal service decreased by 1.9%.
- During 2019/20, 57.4% of summonses issued were served on the defendant by post (57.9% in 2018/19) and the remaining 42.6% via personal service by police (42.1% in 2018/19).

Defendants Dealt with in the Crown Court by Outcome and PPS Region / Function (Table 5a)

- During 2019/20, 1,576 defendants were dealt with in the Crown Court. This was an increase of 8.1% on 2018/19 (1,458)¹⁰.
- Of the defendants dealt with during the current period, 87.6% were convicted (84.4% in 2018/19) and 11.9% were acquitted (15.0% in 2018/19).
- At 87.6% in 2019/20, the conviction rate represents a 3.1 percentage point increase on 2018/19 (84.4%).

⁵ Timeliness data were previously presented as average (mean) figures. This has now been amended to reflect the values at the median (50th percentile) and 80th percentile (see explanatory notes, page 19). This is in line with the approach taken by the Department of Justice for Northern Ireland. Mean data can be provided on request.

⁶ Reflects police cases only.

⁷ Median and 80th percentile days include time taken for police to respond to decision information requests (see explanatory notes, page 19).

⁸ Please note that the reference period included the first weeks of the COVID 19 pandemic with full lockdown having been implemented in Northern Ireland on 23rd March 2020. While the disruption caused by the pandemic resulted in fewer decisions issued in March 2020 compared with March 2019, overall timeliness figures do not appear to have been impacted. Excluding the month of March 2020 from the analysis of timeliness in the 2019/20 financial year, the median days required for the issue of an indictable decision was 148 days and 4 days for the issue of a summary decision.

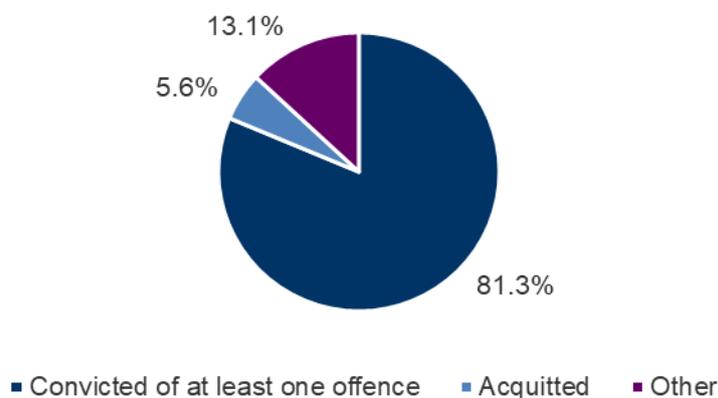
⁹ Please note that the reference period included the first weeks of the COVID 19 pandemic with full lockdown having been implemented in Northern Ireland on 23rd March 2020. While the disruption due to the pandemic was relevant to only a small portion of the 2019/20 financial year it should be noted that the number of summons issued in the month of March 2020 was 1,105 (37.6%) lower than in March 2019. The number of postal summons issued in March 2020 decreased by 777 (43.2%) and the number of personal summons decreased by 328 (28.8%) from March 2019.

¹⁰ Please note that the reference period included the first weeks of the COVID 19 pandemic with full lockdown having been implemented in Northern Ireland on 23rd March 2020. While the disruption due to the pandemic affected only a small portion of the 2019/20 financial year, it should be noted that the number defendants disposed of in the Crown Court in the month of March 2020 was 61 (37.7%) lower than in March 2019.

Defendants Dealt with in the Magistrates' and Youth Courts by Outcome and PPS Region / Function
(Table 5b)

- During 2019/20, 28,936 defendants were dealt with in the Magistrates' and Youth Courts, a decrease of 0.8% on 2018/19 (29,155)¹¹.
- Of the defendants dealt with during the current period, 81.3% were convicted (81.1% in 2018/19), 5.6% were acquitted (6.0% in 2018/19) and 13.1% had an 'other' outcome (12.8% in 2018/19).
- At 81.3% in 2019/20, the conviction rate has increased by 0.1 percentage points from 2018/19 (81.1%).

Defendants Dealt with in the Magistrates' and Youth Courts by Outcome 2019/20



¹¹ Please note that the reference period included the first weeks of the COVID 19 pandemic with full lockdown having been implemented in Northern Ireland on 23rd March 2020. While the disruption due to the pandemic affected only a small portion of the 2019/20 financial year, it should be noted that the number defendants disposed of in the Magistrates' and Youth Court in the month of March 2020 was 760 (30.8%) lower than in March 2019.

Table 1a: Files Received by File Type and PPS Region / Function

2018/19 and 2019/20 ¹

		PPS Region / Function ²					Number of files
		Belfast and Eastern	Western and Southern	Serious Crime Unit	Headquarters	All PPS	
Financial Year	File Type ³	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number	
2019/20	Indictable	714	545	689	22	1,970	
	Hybrid	11,991	8,079	539	389	20,998	
	Summary	10,658	9,246	6	454	20,364	
	All Files	23,363	17,870	1,234	865	43,332	
2018/19	Indictable	716	557	654	31	1,958	
	Hybrid	11,650	8,033	589	370	20,642	
	Summary	10,487	9,684	5	522	20,698	
	All Files	22,853	18,274	1,248	923	43,298	
% Change (Files Received) 2018/19 to 2019/20 ⁴		2.2%	-2.2%	-1.1%	-6.3%	0.1%	

¹ 'Financial year' reflects the period from 1 April to 31 March.

² 'Headquarters' includes Central Casework Section and Fraud and Departmental Section.

³ See explanatory notes, page 17.

⁴ Please note that the reference period included the first weeks of the COVID 19 pandemic with full lockdown having been implemented in Northern Ireland on 23rd March 2020. While the disruption due to the pandemic affected only a small portion of the 2019/20 financial year it should be noted that the number of files received in the month of March 2020 was 447 (12.9%) lower than in March 2019.

Table 1b: Files Received from Police by Offence Classification

2018/19 and 2019/20 ¹

Offence Classification ²	2019/20		2018/19		Number of files Change (2018/19 to 2019/20)	
	Number	% Share	Number	% Share	Number	% Change
Motoring offences	12,813	30.2%	12,777	30.2%	36	0.3%
Violence against the person	11,356	26.8%	11,762	27.8%	-406	-3.5%
Theft	3,865	9.1%	3,940	9.3%	-75	-1.9%
Drugs offences	3,664	8.6%	3,371	8.0%	293	8.7%
Criminal damage	3,040	7.2%	2,836	6.7%	204	7.2%
Public order	1,619	3.8%	1,779	4.2%	-160	-9.0%
Sexual offences	1,562	3.7%	1,483	3.5%	79	5.3%
Burglary	836	2.0%	795	1.9%	41	5.2%
Possession of weapons	748	1.8%	728	1.7%	20	2.7%
Fraud and forgery	426	1.0%	474	1.1%	-48	-10.1%
Robbery	131	0.3%	132	0.3%	-1	-0.8%
Other miscellaneous offences	2,323	5.5%	2,247	5.3%	76	3.4%
All Files	42,383		42,324		59	0.1%

¹ 'Financial year' reflects the period from 1 April to 31 March.

² See explanatory notes, page 17.

Table 1c: Files Submitted to PPS by Other Departments / Agencies

2018/19 and 2019/20 ¹

Department / Agency ²	2019/20		2018/19		Number of files Change (2018/19 to 2019/20)	
	Number	% Share	Number	% Share	Number	% Change ³
Driver and Vehicle Agency	382	40.3%	444	45.6%	-62	-14.0%
Department for Communities	277	29.2%	237	24.3%	40	16.9%
Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland	115	12.1%	117	12.0%	-2	-1.7%
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs ⁴	41	4.3%	40	4.1%	1	N/A
NI Environment Agency	32	3.4%	27	2.8%	5	N/A
HM Revenue and Customs	22	2.3%	16	1.6%	6	N/A
NI Statistics and Research Agency	22	2.3%	19	2.0%	3	N/A
British Airports Authorities	20	2.1%	31	3.2%	-11	N/A
Child Maintenance	12	1.3%	9	0.9%	3	N/A
Department for the Economy	7	0.7%	7	0.7%	0	N/A
Health and Safety Executive	6	0.6%	8	0.8%	-2	N/A
Other	13	1.4%	19	2.0%	-6	N/A
All Departments / Agencies	949		974		-25	-2.6%

¹ 'Financial year' reflects the period from 1 April to 31 March.

² See explanatory notes, page 17.

³ Some percentage changes are stated as 'N/A' due to base number being too small to allow for the calculation of a percentage.

⁴ Figures for NI Environment Agency are presented separately.

Table 2: Information Requests Submitted to Police by Request Type and PPS Region / Function

2018/19 and 2019/20 ¹

		Number of requests				
		PPS Region / Function ²				
		Belfast and Eastern	Western and Southern	Serious Crime Unit	Headquarters	All PPS
Financial Year	Request Type ³	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number
2019/20	Full File Request	2,277	1,929	117	13	4,336
	Decision Information Request	3,256	4,720	852	79	8,907
	Post Decision Information Request	8,384	7,981	567	32	16,964
	No Decision	18	46	29	1	94
	All Requests Submitted	13,935	14,676	1,565	125	30,301
2018/19	Full File Request	1,818	1,927	111	17	3,873
	Decision Information Request	2,815	4,552	563	96	8,026
	Post Decision Information Request	7,934	7,435	623	36	16,028
	No Decision	8	16	20	3	47
	All Requests Submitted	12,575	13,930	1,317	152	27,974
% Change (Requests Submitted) 2018/19 to 2019/20		10.8%	5.4%	18.8%	-17.8%	8.3%

¹ 'Financial year' reflects the period from 1 April to 31 March.

² 'Headquarters' includes Central Casework Section and Fraud and Departmental Section.

³ See explanatory notes, page 18.

Table 3a: Prosecutorial Decisions Issued by Decision Type and PPS Region / Function

2018/19 and 2019/20 ¹

		Number of persons (decisions issued)				
		PPS Region / Function ²				
		Belfast and Eastern	Western and Southern	Serious Crime Unit	Headquarters	All PPS
Financial Year	Type of Decision ³	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number
2019/20	<i>Indictable prosecution</i>	884	549	244	111	1,788
	<i>Summary prosecution</i>	16,321	12,453	65	820	29,659
	Total Prosecution	17,205	13,002	309	931	31,447
	<i>Caution</i>	1,003	925	*	*	1,948
	<i>Informed warning</i>	141	186	*	*	328
	<i>Youth conference</i>	326	243	*	*	575
	<i>Other</i>	227	386	*	*	613
	Total Diversion	1,697	1,740	19	8	3,464
	No Prosecution	7,515	6,556	1,041	151	15,263
	All Decisions Issued	26,417	21,298	1,369	1,090	50,174
	2018/19	<i>Indictable prosecution</i>	679	584	256	178
<i>Summary prosecution</i>		16,006	12,319	82	794	29,201
Total Prosecution		16,685	12,903	338	972	30,898
<i>Caution</i>		1,101	1,033	*	*	2,158
<i>Informed warning</i>		99	172	*	*	274
<i>Youth conference</i>		302	249	*	*	558
<i>Other</i>		215	361	*	*	576
Total Diversion		1,717	1,815	24	10	3,566
No Prosecution		8,153	6,390	1,143	186	15,872
All Decisions Issued		26,555	21,108	1,505	1,168	50,336
% Change (Decisions Issued)						
2018/19 to 2019/20 ⁴		-0.5%	0.9%	-9.0%	-6.7%	-0.3%

¹ 'Financial year' reflects the period from 1 April to 31 March.

² 'Headquarters' includes Central Casework Section and Fraud and Departmental Section.

³ See explanatory notes, page 18.

⁴ Please note that the reference period included the first weeks of the COVID 19 pandemic with full lockdown having been implemented in Northern Ireland on 23rd March 2020. While the disruption due to the pandemic affected only a small portion of the 2019/20 financial year, it should be noted that the number of decisions issued in the month of March 2020 was 492 (10.8%) lower than in March 2019.

*** refers to a category where a detailed breakdown cannot be provided due to small numbers involved.

Table 3b: Prosecutorial Decisions Issued - Reasons for No Prosecution by PPS Region / Function

2018/19 and 2019/20 ¹

		PPS Region / Function ²					Number of persons (decisions issued)
		Belfast and Eastern	Western and Southern	Serious Crime Unit	Headquarters	All PPS	
Financial Year	Reason for no prosecution ³	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number	
2019/20	Did not pass the evidential test	7,184	6,423	1,030	145	14,782	
	Did not pass the public interest test	331	133	11	6	481	
	All no prosecution decisions	7,515	6,556	1,041	151	15,263	
2018/19	Did not pass the evidential test	7,825	6,258	1,119	180	15,382	
	Did not pass the public interest test	328	132	24	6	490	
	All no prosecution decisions	8,153	6,390	1,143	186	15,872	
% Change (No prosecution decisions issued) 2018/19 to 2019/20		-7.8%	2.6%	-8.9%	-18.8%	-3.8%	

¹ 'Financial year' reflects the period from 1 April to 31 March.

² 'Headquarters' includes Central Casework Section and Fraud and Departmental Section.

³ See explanatory notes, page 18 & 19.

Table 3c: Number of Days¹ Required for the Issue of Prosecutorial Decisions by Decision Type (Median and 80th Percentile)^{2,3}

2018/19 and 2019/20⁴

		Calendar days ⁵		
		Median	80 th Percentile	
Financial Year	Type of Decision ⁶	All PPS	All PPS	
2019/20	Prosecution	Indictable prosecution	148	363
		Summary prosecution	4	29
	Diversion	Caution	4	26
		Informed warning	3	12
		Youth conference	3	14
		Other	5	35
	No Prosecution	10	69	
2018/19	Prosecution	Indictable prosecution	166	376
		Summary prosecution	4	36
	Diversion	Caution	4	21
		Informed warning	5	19
		Youth conference	4	19
		Other	5	36
	No Prosecution	11	76	

¹ Please note that the reference period included the first weeks of the COVID 19 pandemic with full lockdown having been implemented in Northern Ireland on 23rd March 2020. While the disruption caused by the pandemic resulted in fewer decisions issued in March 2020 compared with March 2019, overall timeliness figures do not appear to have been impacted. Excluding the month of March 2020 from the analysis of timeliness in the 2019/20 financial year, the median days required for the issue of an indictable decision was 148 days and 4 days for the issue of a summary decision.

² Timeliness data were previously presented as average (mean) figures. This has now been amended to reflect the values at the median (50th percentile) and 80th percentile. This is in line with the approach taken by the Department of Justice (Northern Ireland). Mean data can be provided on request.

³ Reflects police cases only.

⁴ 'Financial year' reflects the period from 1 April to 31 March.

⁵ Median and 80th percentile days include time taken for police to respond to decision information requests (see explanatory notes, page 19).

⁶ See explanatory notes, page 18.

Table 4: Summonses Issued in Police Cases by Service Method and PPS Region

2018/19 and 2019/20 ¹

		PPS Region				Number of summonses
		Belfast and Eastern	Western and Southern	Serious Crime Unit	All Regions	
Financial Year	Service Method ²	Number	Number	Number	Number	
2019/20	Postal Service	9,630	8,183	40	17,853	
	Personal Service	8,994	4,061	174	13,229	
	All Summonses	18,624	12,244	214	31,082	
2018/19	Postal Service	9,828	8,651	49	18,528	
	Personal Service	8,961	4,300	218	13,479	
	All Summonses	18,789	12,951	267	32,007	
% Change (Summonses Issued) 2018/19 to 2019/20 ³		-0.9%	-5.5%	-19.9%	-2.9%	

¹ 'Financial year' reflects the period from 1 April to 31 March.

² See explanatory notes, page 19.

³ Please note that the reference period included the first weeks of the COVID 19 pandemic with full lockdown having been implemented in Northern Ireland on 23rd March 2020. While the disruption due to the pandemic affected only a small portion of the 2019/20 financial year it should be noted that the number of summons issued in the month of March 2020 was 1,105 (37.6%) lower than in March 2019. The number of postal summons issued in March 2020 decreased by 777 (43.2%) and the number of personal summons decreased by 328 (28.8%) from March 2019.

Table 5a: Defendants Dealt with in the Crown Court by Outcome and PPS Region / Function

2018/19 and 2019/20 ¹

		Number of persons (defendants)				
		PPS Region / Function ²				
		Belfast and Eastern	Western and Southern	Serious Crime Unit	Headquarters	All PPS
Financial Year	Outcome ³	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number
2019/20	Convicted of at least one offence	651	476	172	81	1,380
	Acquitted	53	52	63	19	187
	Other	5	1	1	2	9
	All defendants	709	529	236	102	1,576
	Conviction Rate (%) ⁴	91.8%	90.0%	72.9%	79.4%	87.6%
2018/19	Convicted of at least one offence	552	451	126	102	1,231
	Acquitted	62	75	52	29	218
	Other	0	4	4	1	9
	All defendants	614	530	182	132	1,458
	Conviction Rate (%) ⁴	89.9%	85.1%	69.2%	77.3%	84.4%
% Change (Defendants dealt with) 2018/19 to 2019/20 ⁵		15.5%	-0.2%	29.7%	-22.7%	8.1%

¹ 'Financial year' reflects the period from 1 April to 31 March.

² 'Headquarters' includes Central Casework Section and Fraud and Departmental Section.

³ See explanatory notes, page 19.

⁴ See explanatory notes, page 20.

⁵ Please note that the reference period included the first weeks of the COVID 19 pandemic with full lockdown having been implemented in Northern Ireland on 23rd March 2020. While the disruption due to the pandemic affected only a small portion of the 2019/20 financial year, it should be noted that the number defendants disposed of in the Crown Court in the month of March 2020 was 61 (37.7%) lower than in March 2019.

Table 5b: Defendants Dealt with in the Magistrates' and Youth Courts by Outcome and PPS Region / Function

2018/19 and 2019/20 ¹

		Number of persons (defendants)				
		PPS Region / Function ²				
		Belfast and Eastern	Western and Southern	Serious Crime Unit	Headquarters	All PPS
Financial Year	Outcome ³	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number
2019/20	Convicted of at least one offence	13,071	9,755	52	636	23,514
	Acquitted	974	632	2	26	1,634
	Other	2,085	1,582	37	84	3,788
	All defendants	16,130	11,969	91	746	28,936
	Conviction Rate (%) ³	81.0%	81.5%	57.1%	85.3%	81.3%
2018/19	Convicted of at least one offence	12,807	10,170	80	601	23,658
	Acquitted	1,063	638	22	29	1,752
	Other	1,989	1,581	40	135	3,745
	All defendants	15,859	12,389	142	765	29,155
	Conviction Rate (%) ³	80.8%	82.1%	56.3%	78.6%	81.1%
% Change (Defendants dealt with) 2018/19 to 2019/20 ⁴		1.7%	-3.4%	-35.9%	-2.5%	-0.8%

¹ 'Financial year' reflects the period from 1 April to 31 March.

² 'Headquarters' includes Central Casework Section and Fraud and Departmental Section.

³ See explanatory notes, page 20.

⁴ Please note that the reference period included the first weeks of the COVID 19 pandemic with full lockdown having been implemented in Northern Ireland on 23rd March 2020. While the disruption due to the pandemic was relevant to only a small portion of the 2019/20 financial year it should be noted that the number defendants disposed of in the Magistrates' and Youth Court in the month of March 2020 was 760 (30.8%) lower than in March 2019.

Explanatory Notes

Table 1a

A file may refer to one or more individuals. 'File type' is based on the 'primary' offence (generally the most serious offence in terms of the potential penalties in law) in each case at the time the file is submitted to PPS. In general, *summary offences* relate to less serious criminal behaviour and are tried in the Magistrates' Court before a District Judge. *Indictable offences* relate to more serious criminal behaviour and are tried at the Crown Court before a judge, and in most cases, a jury. There are a number of *hybrid offences* which may be tried at either the Magistrates' or Crown Court, for example: theft; assault occasioning actual bodily harm, etc. For these offences, on taking a decision to prosecute, the Public Prosecutor must also decide whether the defendant should be tried in the Magistrates' Court or the Crown Court. In making this decision the prosecutor will consider whether the Magistrates' Court is the appropriate venue in that it has sufficient sentencing powers in relation to the gravity of the offence. For a range of offences, the defendant may also elect for trial in the Crown Court.

The figures include all files submitted by police (Police Service of Northern Ireland, Belfast / Londonderry Harbour Police and British Transport Police), the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland and a range of statutory authorities, for example the Driver and Vehicle Agency and HM Revenue and Customs. It should be noted that files submitted by the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland may be considered by prosecutors in the regional offices or Headquarters.

Table 1b

The Offence Classifications used are standardised across the criminal justice organisations in Northern Ireland. While current classifications continue to mirror the Home Office Recorded Crime Offence Categories, there may be some variation in the offences included within each category. Therefore, data published on Recorded Crime Offence Groups prior to 2014/15 will not be directly comparable with the Offence Classifications.

In January 2019 a review of Offence Classifications was undertaken to ensure continued alignment with Department of Justice Northern Ireland. As a result, some revisions were made to the Offence Classifications in the Statistical publication for Quarters 1-3 2018-19. For example, miscellaneous sexual offences have been moved from 'Sexual offences' to 'Other miscellaneous offences'. It should be noted that data published prior to 2017/18 will not be directly comparable with the updated Offence Classifications.

Files have been assigned to the respective categories on the basis of the 'primary' offence (see above) in each case at the time the file is submitted to PPS from police.

'Police' includes the Police Service of Northern Ireland, Belfast / Londonderry Harbour Police and British Transport Police. Files received by the PPS Regions / Headquarters from the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland are included in Table 1c.

Table 1c

As of 'Statistical Bulletin Quarters 1-3 2018/19' Table 1c was amended to include all files submitted to the Public Prosecution Service from Departments or Agencies (excluding Police) rather than files submitted to Departmental section only. Therefore, it should be noted that data published prior to 2017/18 will not be directly comparable with data published since.

Table 2

The various types of request are defined as follows:

- *Full file requests* are designed to allow the PPS to ask the PSNI for a full file as defined in the relevant protocols.
- A *decision information request (DIR)* is issued by PPS to police where the evidence and information contained in an investigation file is incomplete and a further written report or action is required before a prosecutorial decision can be taken.
- *Post decision information requests* are designed to allow the PPS to ask the PSNI to gather additional evidential material or provide other information required at some further stage in the prosecution process (e.g. for trial).
- Finally a *'no decision' decision information request* may issue when, on the evidence submitted by police in an investigation file, it is not possible to take a prosecution decision and it is not reasonable to issue a detailed DIR having regard to the number or type of deficiencies in the file.

Table 3a

More than one prosecutorial decision may be recorded against any individual within a case. Therefore 'type of decision' refers to the most serious decision issued, in the following order: Indictable prosecution; summary prosecution; diversion; and no prosecution. A number of types of prosecutorial decision are available to the prosecutor, as follows:

- *Indictable prosecution* applies in the more serious offences which may be heard in the Crown Court.
- *Summary prosecution* applies to cases which may be heard in the Magistrates' Courts.
- A *caution* is a formal reprimand administered by the police. Whilst it is not a conviction it is recorded on a person's criminal record.
- An *informed warning* is also a formal reprimand administered by police and is recorded on a person's criminal record.
- A *diversionary youth conference* is an alternative to prosecution in court and may be used in cases where the defendant is a youth. This type of restorative conference may involve a number of parties, including the defendant, the victim and police. A youth conference is a formal process, and although not a conviction, is recorded on a person's criminal record.
- '*Other' diversionary options* include referrals to the NI Driver Improvement Scheme or to a Community Restorative Justice Scheme.
- It should be noted that diversionary options are only available to prosecutors if the defendant admits that he/she has committed the offence and agrees to accept and participate in the diversionary option.
- A *decision for no prosecution* will be taken if the prosecutor decides that in any case being considered there is insufficient evidence or that it is not in the public interest to prosecute (see note regarding the Test for Prosecution below).

Table 3b

Prosecutions are initiated where the prosecutor is satisfied that the Test for Prosecution is met. There are two aspects to the Test:

- a) Whether the evidence which can be offered in court is sufficient to provide a reasonable prospect of conviction (the evidential test); and
- b) Whether prosecution is required in the public interest (the public interest test).

Each of these stages must be separately considered but a decision whether or not a prosecution is in the public interest can only arise when the evidential test has been satisfied.

Table 3c

Timeliness data was previously presented as average (mean) figures. This has now been amended to reflect the values at the median (50th percentile) and 80th percentile. This is in line with the approach taken by the Department of Justice (Northern Ireland). Mean data can be provided on request.

As mentioned in note to Table 3a, more than one prosecutorial decision may be recorded against any individual within a case. Therefore these figures are based on the first decision issued. Monitoring covers the period in calendar days from date initial papers (charge cases only) or full file is received by the PPS to the date the prosecutorial decision is issued. This excludes defendants for whom a warrant has been issued but includes any time taken for police to respond to decision information requests (see note to Table 2 above).

Median days is the number of days at which 50% of those persons included under counting rules have had a first decision issued. Eightieth percentile is the number of days at which 80% of those persons included under counting rules have had a first decision issued. Median and eightieth percentile days for indictable prosecution decisions include the time taken for the prosecutor's decision and for case preparation (i.e. where appropriate, ensuring that the case is ready for court). They also include time taken for response from police to any decision information requests. In indictable cases case preparation includes time required for the preparation of committal papers which contain the evidence, such as statements, exhibits etc., to be presented to the Crown Court. It may also include consideration of duties of disclosure by the prosecutor and applications to be made to the court. Data in this table is based on police files only.

Table 4

Information refers to police cases only. A summons may be served on a defendant either by post, or via a personal summons served by the police. The defendant will be required to attend court on the date stated on the summons. Following the commencement of Rule 2(6) of the Magistrates' Courts (Amendment No. 2) Rules 2009, in early 2010, the large majority of offences can now be dealt with by way of a postal summons. The only exceptions relate to corporate defendants, vulnerable defendants and those defendants who have not responded to a postal summons.

More than one summons may be issued in respect of an individual defendant in a case. For example, if the defendant does not attend court on the day stated on an initial postal summons, this will generally be followed up by a personal summons served by police.

Table 5a

Includes all defendants dealt with in the Crown Court during the period, based on results data supplied by the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (via the Causeway Data Sharing Mechanism). Proceedings in the Crown Court generally follow the issue of a decision by PPS to prosecute on indictment. The category 'acquitted' includes the following outcomes: acquittals, acquittals by direction, No Bills, no evidence offered – defendant acquitted, left on books, proceedings stayed, unfit to plead – but found that he/she did not do the act, no case to answer - granted. 'Other' Includes defendant deceased, withdrawal – all charges, bound over for not having shown cause, bound over where charge withdrawn, withdrawn due to diversionary route. It should be noted that if an individual is involved in more than one case which is resulted during this period, they will be counted as a separate defendant on each occasion.

Table 5b

Includes all defendants dealt with in the Magistrates' and Youth Courts during the period, based on results data supplied by the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (via the Causeway Data Sharing Mechanism). Data reflect the number of persons where PPS has taken a decision to prosecute summarily; i.e. defendants against whom charges were withdrawn prior to decision are excluded. The category 'acquitted' includes the following outcomes: dismissed; no case to answer granted; and proceedings stayed. 'Other' includes: defendant deceased; withdrawal – all charges; bound over for not having shown cause; bound over where charge withdrawn; withdrawn due to diversionary route. Excludes persons returned for trial in the Crown Court. It should be noted that if an individual is involved in more than one case which is resulted during this period, they will be counted as a separate defendant on each occasion.

Tables 5a and 5b

Conviction rates are calculated on the basis of the number of persons convicted as a percentage of all persons dealt with during the period.

The Department of Justice publish conviction data on an annual basis; however this may not be directly comparable with data included in this report due to variations in data quality validations and counting rules.

User Information

Data sources and validations

The information presented in this bulletin is derived from the Case Management System (CMS), the main operational system in use within the PPS. This is a 'live' system with data being input on a daily basis.

It should be noted that the CMS is also linked to the CJSNI's Causeway data sharing mechanism. The first phase of Causeway ('DSM 0'), introduced in 2005/06, allowed police to submit files to the PPS electronically. The most recent phase ('DSM 1') was launched at the end of November 2009 and broadened the portfolio of information shared electronically. For example PPS are now supplied with court results by the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service which feed into the PPS Case Management System via Causeway.

The information is extracted using Business Objects. It is then validated and quality assured to ensure that the data is reliable and robust for use. Any inconsistencies are reported back to operational staff or to the PPS Information and Communications Technology Branch. If required, any necessary amendments are then made to the data.

Rounding conventions

Percentages have been rounded to one decimal place and may not always sum to 100%. Where a base number is less than 50, percentages are not provided.

Disclosure control

Where small numbers (less than 3) within the tables have the potential to disclose sensitive information, disclosure controls have been applied and numbers less than three have been suppressed (see notes to individual tables).

Official Statistics

These are 'Official Statistics' as defined in Section 6 of the Statistics and Registration Services Act 2007. Statisticians from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency are seconded to the PPS and are responsible for ensuring that the statistics produced comply with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

The PPS would value any feedback on this report and welcome recommendations on the future addition of data that may be of interest to readers. Contact details are provided overleaf.

Future publications

The next Annual Statistical Bulletin covering the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 is due June 2021. The Quarterly Statistical Bulletin is temporarily suspended pending review.

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