

Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland

Perceptions of the Public Prosecution Service

Findings of the PPS Module of the Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey
April – May 2016



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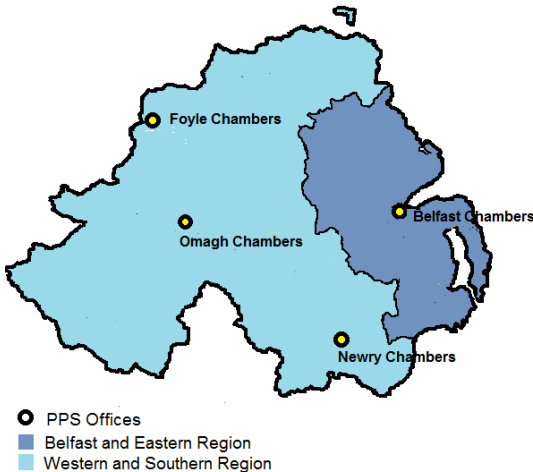
Introduction

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 restorative cautioning, informed warnings and youth conferencing. Prosecutors may also refer offenders to the NI Driver Improvement Scheme or to a Community Restorative Justice Scheme.

PPS Regional Structure



A revised organisational structure was introduced in January 2016 as a result of the PPS Transformation Programme. This included the implementation of a two region model, reducing from the four regions in place previously. 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.

A new Serious Crime Unit (SCU) was also implemented in January 2016. The SCU, which is headed by an AD, deals with a range of the most serious offences including murder, manslaughter, rape and serious sexual offences, human trafficking, prostitution and related offences. Prior to January, cases of this type would typically have been dealt with by the regions.

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

- 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
- Appeals 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).

The Omnibus Survey

The Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey is a regular sample survey carried out by the Central Survey Unit (CSU) of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. It is designed to provide a snapshot of the behaviour, lifestyle and views of a representative sample of people in Northern Ireland, and is used to inform Government policy in a range of areas. The survey comprises two distinct parts: core questions about the respondents and their individual circumstances, and a variety of questions commissioned by clients, which seek the views of the public on a range of matters, including criminal justice.

The PPS has commissioned questions for inclusion in the Omnibus Survey on an annual basis since 2006. A total of six questions were included in the April 2016 survey in order to gauge the following:

- Public awareness of the PPS and its role (Questions 1, 2, and 6).
- Views as to the PPS's effectiveness (Question 3).
- Public perceptions of the Service's independence, fairness and impartiality (Questions 4 and 5).

Questions 3, 4 and 5 relate only to those respondents who had heard of the PPS (i.e. respondents who had answered 'yes' at question 2). Questions 1, 2 and 6 were asked of all respondents.

It should be noted that Questions 1 and 6 were asked for first time in January 2015.

The information gathered via the survey is used by the PPS for a variety of purposes, such as informing the development of policy and assessing the effectiveness of the Service's communication. Data in respect of the PPS's effectiveness and its fairness and impartiality are also used as key performance indicators for the Service.

Detailed notes have been supplied, which provide an account of the technical aspects of the survey, including the origin of the sample, response rates and its representativeness (see 'User Information', page 12).

About this Report

This report provides information in respect of the 2016 survey and includes comparisons with 2015. Where appropriate, information from earlier years has also been provided (see tables at Annex A for details). All figures refer to 2016 unless otherwise stated.

Analysis of each of the Service's questions is available across ten key variables, as follows: Age-group, gender, religion, marital status, disability status, dependant status, socio-economic group, employment status, qualification level and PPS Region. For the purposes of this report, the analysis has been limited to gender and religion. However data in respect of any of the remaining variables can be provided on request (see contact details below).

It should be noted that percentages in the accompanying tables may not add to 100% due to rounding or because more than one answer may be given by a respondent.

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Survey Findings

Question 1

The criminal justice system in Northern Ireland is made up of a number of different agencies. Which of the following agencies do you think is responsible for making decisions as to whether or not people accused of committing a crime should be prosecuted at court?

Almost two thirds (66%) of respondents thought that the PPS was responsible for making decisions as to whether or not people should be prosecuted at court. Other agencies mentioned included the Police Service of Northern Ireland (28%), the Department of Justice for Northern Ireland (25%) and the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (19%).

More men than women (70% and 62% respectively) thought that the PPS was responsible for making prosecution decisions (Table 1). A higher proportion of Protestant than Catholic respondents (70% and 60% respectively) thought that the PPS was responsible for such decisions (Table 2).

Table 1:
Which of the following agencies do you think is responsible for making decisions as to whether or not people accused of committing a crime should be prosecuted at court? *Analysis by gender 2015 and 2016*

Response	2015			2016		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
Department of Justice for NI	25	25	25	23	27	25
NI Courts and Tribunals Service	27	21	24	15	22	19
Police Service of NI	30	31	31	26	29	28
Public Prosecution Service	67	65	66	70	62	66
Youth Justice Agency of NI	6	8	7	6	7	7
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0
Don't know	2	4	3	4	7	6

Note: Percentages add to more than 100% due to the inclusion of multiple responses.

Table 2:
Which of the following agencies do you think is responsible for making decisions as to whether or not people accused of committing a crime should be prosecuted at court? *Analysis by religion 2015 and 2016*

Response	2015			2016		
	Catholic	Protestant	All	Catholic	Protestant	All
Department of Justice for NI	30	22	25	22	27	25
NI Courts and Tribunals Service	23	24	24	19	17	19
Police Service of NI	30	32	31	29	26	28
Public Prosecution Service	62	66	66	60	70	66
Youth Justice Agency of NI	6	8	7	7	7	7
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0
Don't know	4	3	3	7	5	6

Note: Percentages add to more than 100% due to the inclusion of multiple responses.

Comparing 2015 and 2016, the percentage of respondents who thought that the PPS was responsible for making prosecution decisions was unchanged at 66%.

Question 2

Have you heard of the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland, “the PPS”?

Just under four-fifths (79%) of respondents in the 2016 survey stated that they had heard of the PPS. This compared with 75% in 2015.

More men than women (84% and 75% respectively) had heard of the PPS (Table 3). Eighty-two percent of Protestant respondents had heard of the PPS, compared with 76% of Catholics (Table 4).

Table 3:
Have you heard of the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland, “the PPS”?
Analysis by gender 2015 and 2016

Response	2015			2016		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
Yes	79	72	75	84	75	79
No	21	28	25	16	25	21

Percentage of Respondents

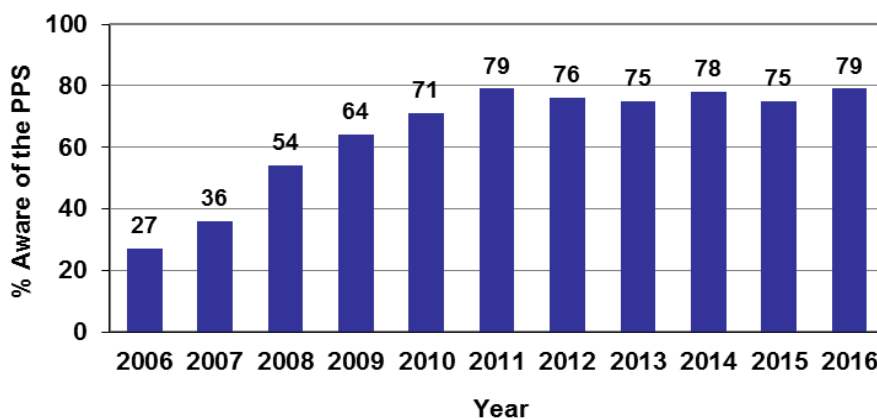
Table 4:
Have you heard of the Public Prosecution Service, “the PPS”?
Analysis by religion 2015 and 2016

Response	2015			2016		
	Catholic	Protestant	All	Catholic	Protestant	All
Yes	73	78	75	76	82	79
No	27	22	25	24	17	21

Percentage of Respondents

Figure 1 (below) presents the findings in respect of this question since it was first asked in 2006. Levels of awareness of the PPS rose steadily over the first six years of the survey, from an initial low of 27% to 79% in 2011.

Figure 1: Awareness of the PPS 2006 - 2016



Question 3

How confident are you that the PPS is effective at prosecuting people accused of committing a crime?

Nearly two-thirds (65%) of respondents in the latest survey were very or fairly confident that the PPS was effective at prosecuting people accused of committing a crime. This was marginally lower than in 2015 (67%).

More men (69%) than women (61%) were very or fairly confident in the PPS's effectiveness, reversing the position from the 2015 survey (65% and 69% respectively – see Table 5).

Ratings from Catholic and Protestant respondents were similar, with 64% of Catholics stating that they were very or fairly confident, compared with 65% of Protestants. The equivalent figures for 2015 were 69% and 66% respectively (Table 6).

Table 5:
How confident are you that the PPS is effective at prosecuting people accused of committing a crime? *Analysis by gender 2015 and 2016*

Response	2015			2016		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
Very / fairly confident	65	69	67	69	61	65
Not very confident	26	20	23	23	26	25
Not at all confident	6	7	7	6	7	7
Don't know	3	3	3	2	6	4

Table 6:
How confident are you that the PPS is effective at prosecuting people accused of committing a crime? *Analysis by religion 2015 and 2016*

Response	2015			2016		
	Catholic	Protestant	All	Catholic	Protestant	All
Very / fairly confident	69	66	67	64	65	65
Not very confident	20	26	23	23	26	25
Not at all confident	7	7	7	7	6	7
Don't know	4	1	3	6	3	4

Question 4

How confident are you that the PPS provides a fair and impartial prosecution service?

Overall 71% of respondents in the latest survey were very or fairly confident in the fairness and impartiality of the PPS, representing a decrease on 2015 (74%).

There was a difference between male and female respondents in this regard; 75% of men were very or fairly confident, compared with 68% of women (Table 7). Confidence levels were slightly lower for Catholic respondents than for Protestants (71% and 73% respectively - see Table 8).

Table 7:
How confident are you that the PPS provides a fair and impartial prosecution service?
Analysis by gender 2015 and 2016

Percentage of Respondents

Response	2015			2016		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
Very / fairly confident	75	74	74	75	68	71
Not very confident	16	15	16	16	21	19
Not at all confident	6	7	7	6	5	5
Don't know	2	4	3	3	6	4

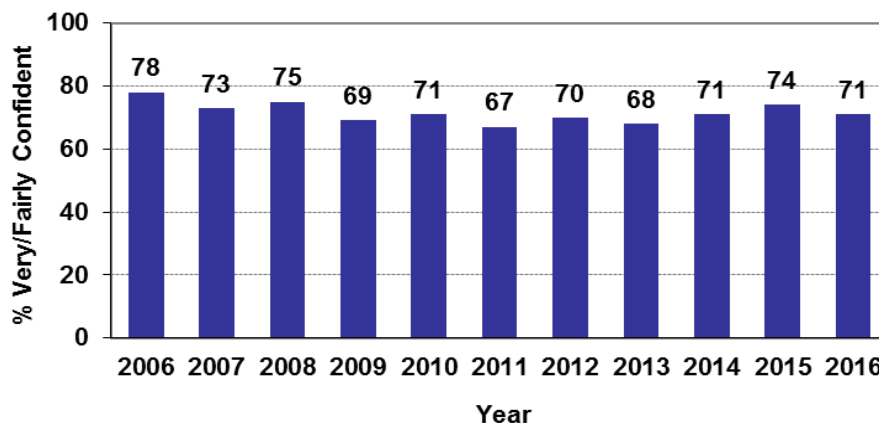
Table 8:
How confident are you that the PPS provides a fair and impartial prosecution service?
Analysis by religion 2015 and 2016

Percentage of Respondents

Response	2015			2016		
	Catholic	Protestant	All	Catholic	Protestant	All
Very / fairly confident	78	73	74	71	73	71
Not very confident	15	16	16	18	19	19
Not at all confident	5	8	7	5	5	5
Don't know	3	3	3	5	2	4

This is a core question in the Omnibus Survey and has been asked each year in which the PPS module has been conducted. In the 2006 survey, almost four-fifths of respondents (78%) reported that they were very or fairly confident in the fairness and impartiality of the Service. This was followed by an outcome of 73% in 2007 and 75% in 2008. Since 2009, results have remained relatively consistent; the figure of 69% for that year compared with the 2016 figure of 71% (see Figure 2, below).

Figure 2: Confidence in the Fairness and Impartiality of the PPS 2006 - 2016



Question 5

How confident are you that the PPS takes its prosecution decisions independently? (that is, independent of police, Government or any other body)

Overall 67% of respondents in the latest survey were very or fairly confident that the PPS takes its decisions independently of any other body.

Just over seven-tenths (71%) of men were very or fairly confident, compared with 62% of women (Table 9). Confidence levels were higher among Protestants than Catholics (71% and 63% respectively - see Table 10).

Table 9:
How confident are you that the PPS takes its prosecution decisions independently?
Analysis by gender 2015 and 2016

Response	2015			2016		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
Very / fairly confident	67	62	64	71	62	67
Not very confident	21	23	22	20	26	23
Not at all confident	9	7	8	5	6	6
Don't know	3	7	5	4	6	5

Percentage of Respondents

Table 10:
How confident are you that the PPS takes its prosecution decisions independently?
Analysis by religion 2015 and 2016

Response	2015			2016		
	Catholic	Protestant	All	Catholic	Protestant	All
Very / fairly confident	62	66	64	63	71	67
Not very confident	24	20	22	24	22	23
Not at all confident	6	9	8	5	4	6
Don't know	7	4	5	7	3	5

Percentage of Respondents

Question 6

Would you agree or disagree with the following statement?

It is important for people to know about what the PPS does and its role within the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland.

Eighty-three per cent of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that it is important to know about what the PPS does and the role it performs. The same percentage of men and women (83%) strongly agreed or agreed on this point (Table 11). Eighty-seven percent of Protestants strongly agreed or agreed compared with 79% of Catholics (Table 12).

Table 11:
Would you agree or disagree with the following statement?
It is important for people to know about what the Public Prosecution Service does and its role within the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland.
Analysis by gender 2015 and 2016

Response	2015			2016		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
Strongly agree	38	41	39	35	32	33
Agree	50	47	48	48	51	50
Neither agree nor disagree	11	9	10	13	14	13
Disagree	2	2	2	3	2	3
Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0	1	1
Don't know	0	1	0	1	0	1

Percentage of Respondents

Table 12:

Would you agree or disagree with the following statement?

It is important for people to know about what the Public Prosecution Service does and its role within the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland.

Analysis by religion 2015 and 2016

Percentage of Respondents

Response	2015			2016		
	Catholic	Protestant	All	Catholic	Protestant	All
Strongly agree	40	39	39	28	35	33
Agree	49	49	48	51	52	50
Neither agree nor disagree	8	10	10	17	10	13
Disagree	2	2	2	4	2	3
Strongly disagree	0	0	0	1	0	1
Don't know	1	0	0	0	1	1

Comparing 2015 and 2016, percentage agreement with this statement dropped from 87% to 83%. Over this period, there was a decline of 10 percentage points in the level agreement for Catholic respondents (from 89% to 79%).

Annex A: Results from previous modules of the Omnibus Survey

Question 2

Have you heard of the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland, “the PPS”?
2006 - 2016

Percentage of Respondents

Response	Year										
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Yes	27	36	54	64	71	79	76	75	78	75	79
No	73	64	46	36	29	21	23	25	22	25	21
Don't know	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
No. of Respondents	1,122	1,211	1,238	1,126	1,217	1,109	1,141	1,154	1,217	1,114	1,020

Question 3

How confident are you that the PPS is effective at prosecuting people accused of committing a crime? 2011 - 2016

Percentage of Respondents

Response	Year										
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Very / fairly confident	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	57	67	65	67	67	65
Not very confident	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	32	24	27	23	23	25
Not at all confident	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	7	6	6	6	7	7
Don't know	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	3	4	2	4	3	4
No. of Respondents	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	862	869	876	944	855	817

Note: This question was first asked in 2011.

Question 4

How confident are you that the PPS provides a fair and impartial prosecution service?
2006 - 2016

Percentage of Respondents

Response	Year										
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Very / fairly confident	78	73	75	69	71	67	70	68	71	74	71
Not very confident	13	14	16	18	19	22	19	23	18	16	19
Not at all confident	5	3	2	5	5	7	5	5	5	7	5
Don't know	5	10	6	8	5	3	4	4	5	3	4
No. of Respondents	305	432	668	725	858	862	869	876	944	855	817

User Information

The sample

The sample for the 2016 Omnibus survey comprised of 2,200 addresses drawn at random from lists supplied by the Land and Property Services Agency. At each address one person aged 16 or over was selected for interview. From an eligible sample of 1,918 individuals, 1,020 interviews were achieved, giving a response rate of 53%.

Interviews were conducted between 4 - 30 April and 3 - 29 May 2016.

How Representative is the Sample?

In any survey there is the possibility of non-response bias. Non response bias occurs if the characteristics of non-respondents differ from those of respondents in such a way that they are reflected in the responses given in the survey. Estimates of non-response bias can be obtained by comparing the characteristics of the achieved sample with the distribution of the same characteristics in the general population at the time of sampling. To assess how accurately the Omnibus Survey sample reflects the population of Northern Ireland, CSU compared the sample to the Mid-Year Population Estimates from 2014 in respect of both age-group and gender (see below).

Comparison of Omnibus Survey Sample and 2014 Mid-Year Population Estimates

Categories	Percentage of Sample / Population	
	Omnibus (Selected Respondent)	Mid-Year Population Estimates 2014
Age:		
16-24	10	15
25-34	13	17
35-49	25	26
50-64	28	23
65 and over	24	19
Gender:		
Male	46	49
Female	54	51
Base = 100%	1,020	1,456,715

Sampling Error

No sample is likely to reflect precisely the population from which it is drawn. The margin of error varies with the size of the sample and the size of the percentage for a particular response.

An estimate of the amount of error due to the sampling process can be calculated. For a simple random sample design, in which every member of the sampled population has an equal and independent chance of inclusion, the sampling error of any percentage, p , can be calculated by the following formula:

$$s.e. (p) = \sqrt{p*(100-p)/n}$$

where n is the number of respondents on which the percentage is based. The sample for the NI Omnibus Survey is drawn as a random sample, and therefore this formula can be used to calculate the sampling error for any percentage estimate from this survey.

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.

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