

Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland

Perceptions of the Public Prosecution Service

Findings of the PPS Module of the Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey
January 2014



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Introduction

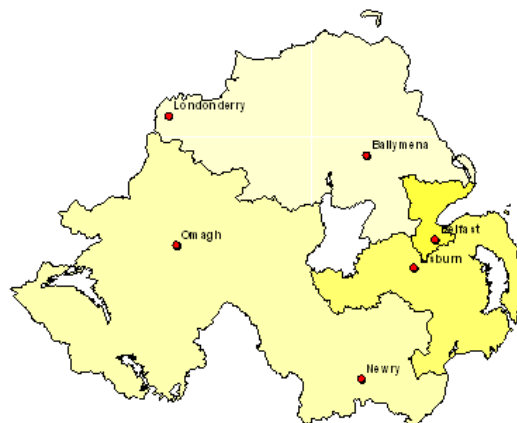
The Public Prosecution Service

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. The Service was established on 13 June 2005 by the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002.

In addition to taking decisions as to prosecution in cases investigated by the police, the PPS 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 diversionary 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 Office Locations



The PPS is a regionally based organisation. There are four regions, each of which is headed by a Regional Prosecutor. The Regional Prosecutor has overall responsibility for decisions as to prosecution in that region, with the exception of those cases which are considered by prosecutors in Headquarters. Headquarters Sections deal with specialised areas of work and include Central Prosecutions, Fraud and Departmental Prosecutions, Policy Section and High Court and International Matters.

The aim of the PPS is to provide the people of Northern Ireland with an independent, fair and effective prosecution service.

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 seven questions were included in the January 2014 survey in order to gauge the following: public awareness of the PPS and its role; public perceptions of the Service's independence, fairness and impartiality; views as to PPS effectiveness; views on the use of 'diversionary' options by PPS; and the categories of crime of greatest concern to the public in Northern Ireland.

It should be noted that questions 2, 3, 4, 5a and 5b relate only to those respondents who had heard of the PPS (i.e. respondents who had answered 'yes' at question 1). Question 6, which dealt with perceptions of crime of concern to the public, was asked of all respondents.

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 and Outreach Strategies. Data in respect of the PPS's effectiveness and its fairness and impartiality are also used as key performance indicators for the Service.¹

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 15).

About this Report

This report provides information in respect of the 2014 survey and includes comparisons with 2013. Where appropriate, information from earlier years has also been provided (see tables at Annex A for full details). All figures refer to 2014 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 the remaining variables can be provided on request (see contact details below).

¹ See PPS Annual Business Plan for 2014-15.

It should be noted that percentages in the accompanying tables may not add to 100% due to rounding. A hyphen ('-') is used in the tables to indicate where a category result was based on less than 100 responses.

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

Central Management Unit
Public Prosecution Service
Linum Chambers
2 Bedford Square
Bedford Street
Belfast BT2 7ES

Tel: 02890 897100
Text Phone: 02890 897011
Fax: 02890 897030
Email: info@ppsni.qsi.gov.uk
Website: www.ppsni.gov.uk

Survey Findings

Question 1

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

In January 2014, over three-quarters (78%) of respondents stated that they had heard of the PPS. This compared to the finding of 75% in January 2013. More men than women (82% and 74% respectively) had heard of the PPS (Table 1). A higher proportion of Protestant (82%) than Catholic (74%) respondents had heard of the PPS (Table 2)

Table 1:

Have you heard of the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland, “the PPS”? Analysis by gender 2013 and 2014

Response	Percentage of Respondents					
	January 2013			January 2014		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
Yes	78	72	75	82	74	78
No	22	28	25	18	26	22

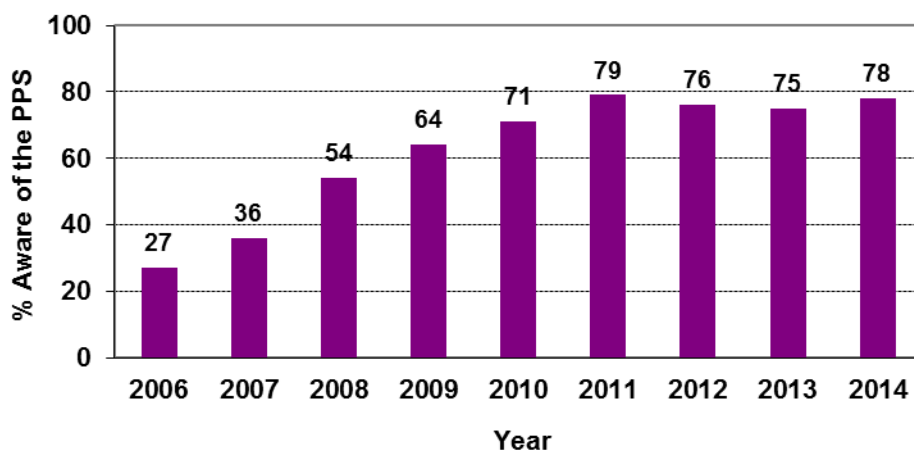
Table 2:

Have you heard of the Public Prosecution Service, “the PPS”? Analysis by religion 2013 and 2014

Response	Percentage of Respondents							
	January 2013				January 2014			
	Cath	Prot	Oth	All	Cath	Prot	Oth	All
Yes	71	79	-	75	74	82	-	78
No	29	21	-	25	26	18	-	22

Figure 1 (below) presents the findings in respect of this question since 2006. Levels of awareness of the PPS rose steadily after it was established in 2005, from a low of 27% in 2006 to a peak of 79% in 2011.

Figure 1: Awareness of the PPS 2006 - 2014



Question 2

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

In January 2014, two-thirds (67%) of respondents were very or fairly confident that the PPS was effective at prosecuting people accused of committing a crime. This compared with 65% in 2013.

While more women (69%) than men (65%) were very or fairly confident in the PPS's effectiveness, the difference was less pronounced than in 2013 (69% and 62% respectively – see Table 3).

Ratings from Catholic and Protestant respondents were at a similar level, with 67% of Catholics stating that they were very or fairly confident, compared with 66% of Protestants. The equivalent figures for 2013 were 68% and 63% respectively (see Table 4).

Table 3:
How confident are you that the PPS is effective at prosecuting people accused of committing a crime? Analysis by gender 2013 and 2014

Rating	Percentage of Respondents					
	January 2013			January 2014		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
Very/fairly confident	62	69	65	65	69	67
Not very confident	30	23	27	25	22	23
Not at all confident	7	5	6	6	5	6
Don't know	1	3	2	4	4	4

Table 4:
How confident are you that the PPS is effective at prosecuting people accused of committing a crime? Analysis by religion 2013 and 2014

Rating	Percentage of Respondents							
	January 2013				January 2014			
	Cath	Prot	Oth	All	Cath	Prot	Oth	All
Very/fairly confident	68	63	-	65	67	66	-	67
Not very confident	24	29	-	27	23	24	-	23
Not at all confident	4	6	-	6	6	6	-	6
Don't know	3	2	-	2	5	4	-	4

Question 3 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 an increase on 2013 (68%).

There was no difference between male and female respondents in this regard; 72% of both women and men were very or fairly confident (Table 5). Confidence levels among Catholic and Protestant respondents were at similar levels (71% and 72% respectively - see Table 6).

Table 5:
How confident are you that the PPS provides a fair and impartial prosecution service?
Analysis by gender 2013 and 2014

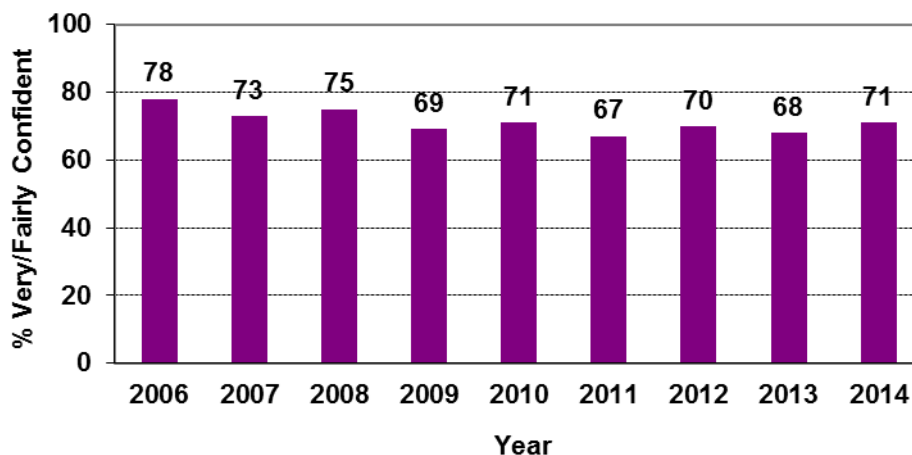
Rating	Percentage of Respondents					
	January 2013			January 2014		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
Very/fairly confident	64	71	68	72	72	71
Not very confident	25	21	23	19	17	18
Not at all confident	7	4	5	5	5	5
Don't know	3	5	4	5	5	5

Table 6:
How confident are you that the PPS provides a fair and impartial prosecution service?
Analysis by religion 2013 and 2014

Rating	Percentage of Respondents							
	January 2013				January 2014			
	Cath	Prot	Oth	All	Cath	Prot	Oth	All
Very / fairly confident	68	68	-	68	71	72	-	71
Not very confident	23	22	-	23	19	18	-	18
Not at all confident	6	5	-	5	4	6	-	5
Don't know	4	4	-	4	6	5	-	5

This is a core question in the 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 consistent; the figure of 69% for that year compared with the 2014 figure of 71% (see Figure 2, below).

Figure 2: Confidence in the Fairness and Impartiality of the PPS 2006 - 2014



Question 4

Do you think that the PPS is part of the police or an independent organisation?

Just under three-quarters (73%) of the 2014 survey respondents thought that the PPS was an independent organisation, distinct from police. This was a similar finding to that in 2013 (74%).

More than three-quarters (77%) of men thought that the PPS was independent of police compared with seven-tenths (70%) of women (Table 7). There was a small difference between Protestant and Catholic respondents on this issue; 75% of Protestants thought that PPS was independent of police compared with 71% of Catholics (Table 8).

Table 7:
Do you think the PPS is part of the police or an independent organisation?
Analysis by gender 2013 and 2014

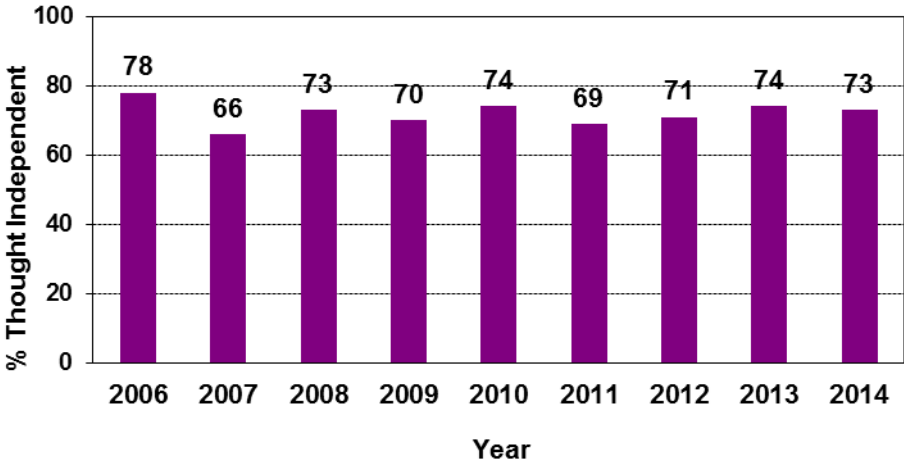
Response	Percentage of Respondents					
	January 2013			January 2014		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
Independent	74	75	74	77	70	73
Part of police	20	19	20	19	22	21
Don't know	5	7	6	4	8	6

Table 8:
Do you think the PPS is part of the police or an independent organisation?
Analysis by religion 2013 and 2014

Response	Percentage of Respondents							
	January 2013				January 2014			
	Cath	Prot	Oth	All	Cath	Prot	Oth	All
Independent	69	77	-	74	71	75	-	73
Part of police	24	18	-	20	24	19	-	21
Don't know	7	5	-	6	6	6	-	6

Data in respect of previous modules since 2006 are presented at Figure 3 (below). In 2006, almost four-fifths (78%) of respondents thought that the PPS was independent of police. Results since then have invariably been lower than this baseline figure.

Figure 3: Independence of the PPS 2006 - 2014



Question 5a

Have you heard that the PPS makes use of 'diversionary options'? ²

Question 5b

Do you agree or disagree with the PPS using 'diversionary options'? (that is, alternative ways of dealing with offenders that do not involve going through the courts)?

Forty six per cent of respondents in 2014 were aware that the PPS made use of 'diversionary options', compared with 44% in 2013. A larger proportion of respondents (62%) agreed with the PPS use of these options. This represented a small increase on 2013 (60%).

In terms of the awareness of the use of these options, there was a small difference between male and female respondents (48% and 44% respectively – see Table 9). The same proportion of men and women agreed with their use (63% - see Table 10). There was also little divergence between Catholic and Protestant respondents on these issues: The percentage of Catholics and Protestants aware of the use of diversions was the same, at 44%, while 63% of Catholic and 61% of Protestants agreed with their use (Tables 11 and 12).

**Table 9:
Have you heard that the PPS makes use of 'diversionary options'?
Analysis by gender 2013 and 2014**

Response	Percentage of Respondents					
	January 2013			January 2014		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
Yes	45	42	44	48	44	46
No	54	57	56	52	55	54
Don't know	0	1	0	0	1	0

**Table 10:
Do you agree or disagree with the PPS using 'diversionary options'?
Analysis by gender 2013 and 2014**

Rating	Percentage of Respondents					
	January 2013			January 2014		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
Strongly agree/agree	59	59	60	63	63	62
Neither agree nor disagree	21	24	22	18	19	19
Disagree/strongly disagree	18	14	17	17	17	17
Don't know	1	2	2	1	2	1

**Table 11:
Have you heard that the PPS makes use of 'diversionary options'?
Analysis by religion 2013 and 2014**

Response	Percentage of Respondents							
	January 2013				January 2014			
	Cath	Prot	Oth	All	Cath	Prot	Oth	All
Yes	38	49	-	44	44	44	-	46
No	62	50	-	56	55	55	-	54
Don't know	0	0	-	0	1	0	-	0

² Include restorative cautions, informed warnings, diversionary youth conferences and other options (see 'Explanatory Notes', page 14).

Table 12:
Do you agree or disagree with the PPS using 'diversionary options'?
Analysis by religion 2013 and 2014

Rating	Percentage of Respondents							
	January 2013				January 2014			
	Cath	Prot	Oth	All	Cath	Prot	Oth	All
Strongly agree/agree	60	60	-	60	63	61	-	62
Neither agree nor disagree	23	22	-	22	21	17	-	19
Disagree/strongly disagree	15	16	-	17	15	20	-	17
Don't know	1	1	-	2	1	1	-	1

Question 6

Please list the main categories of crime which you feel are of greatest public concern in NI today

Respondents were asked to identify (from a list of fourteen offence categories) the five categories of crime of greatest public concern in Northern Ireland today. Table 13 (below) presents a summary of the findings for 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014. Taking all five mentions by each respondent into account, the issues of most concern in 2014 were: offences against children (61%); drug offences (55%); offences involving violence (53%); sexual offences (52%); and offences against the elderly (50%).

Looking across the four years, there has been a relatively consistent pattern, with drug offences, offences against the elderly, offences against children, offences involving violence, and sexual offences among the categories most commonly mentioned each year. There has been a marked rise in the category 'offences against children' which received the greatest number of mentions in 2014; the current figure of 61% compared with 47% in 2013.

Table 13:
Categories of crime of greatest public concern in Northern Ireland today (All mentions)
2011 - 2014

Category of Offence (Alphabetical Order)	Percentage of Respondents			
	Year			
	2011	2012	2013	2014
Burglary	40	44	44	39
Crimes committed by youths	25	30	25	20
Drug offences	52	61	62	55
Domestic violence	27	25	26	29
Hate crime	39	39	45	43
Offences against children	63	54	47	61
Offences against the elderly	60	58	56	50
Offences involving violence, incl. murder	55	43	48	53
Organised crime	28	35	38	30
Robbery	18	19	22	19
Serious road traffic offences	12	12	10	14
Sexual offences	54	39	41	52
Theft	11	11	16	11
Vehicle crime	11	13	13	13

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

An analysis of these findings for 2014 by gender and religion is provided at Annex B.

Annex A: Results from previous modules of the Omnibus Survey 2006 – 2014

Question 1

Have you heard of the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland, “the PPS”?
2006 - 2014

Response	Percentage of Respondents								
	Year								
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Yes	27	36	54	64	71	79	76	75	78
No	73	64	46	36	29	21	23	25	22
Don't know	0	0	1	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

Question 2

How confident are you that the PPS is effective at prosecuting people accused of committing a crime? 2011 - 2014

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

Note: This question was first asked in 2011.

Question 3

How confident are you that the PPS provides a fair and impartial prosecution service?
2006 - 2014

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

Annex A

Results from previous modules of the Omnibus Survey 2006 – 2014 (Continued)

Question 4

Do you think the PPS is part of the police or an independent organisation? 2006 - 2014

Rating	Percentage of Respondents								
	Year								
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Independent	78	66	73	70	74	69	71	74	73
Part of police	17	25	22	25	22	26	23	20	21
Don't know	6	9	5	4	4	4	5	6	6
No. of Respondents	305	432	668	725	858	862	869	876	944

Question 5a

Have you heard that the PPS makes use of 'diversionary options'? 2006 - 2014

Rating	Percentage of Respondents								
	Year								
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Yes	35	32	35	32	40	41	41	44	46
No	64	66	63	67	59	58	59	56	54
Don't know	1	2	1	1	1	0	1	0	0
No. of Respondents	305	432	668	725	858	862	869	876	944

Question 5b

Do you agree or disagree with the PPS using 'diversionary options'? 2006 - 2014

Rating	Percentage of Respondents								
	Year								
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Strongly agree / agree	52	54	51	48	47	57	58	60	62
Neither agree nor disagree	24	24	27	28	28	19	22	22	19
Disagree/ strongly disagree	20	19	16	19	23	22	18	17	17
Don't know	4	4	6	4	3	2	2	2	1
No. of Respondents	305	432	668	725	858	862	869	876	944

Annex B

Categories of crime of greatest public concern in NI: Analysis by gender and religion 2014

Question 6

Categories of crime of greatest public concern in Northern Ireland today: All mentions by respondents (Analysis by gender, 2014)

Category of Offence (Alphabetical Order)	Percentage of Respondents		
	Male	Female	All
Burglary	42	36	39
Crimes committed by Youths	21	19	20
Drug offences	56	55	55
Domestic violence	22	34	29
Hate crime	46	42	43
Offences against children	60	62	61
Offences against the elderly	48	52	50
Offences involving violence, incl. murder	52	53	53
Organised crime	36	26	30
Robbery	20	18	19
Serious road traffic offences	15	14	14
Sexual offences	50	54	52
Theft	13	10	11
Vehicle crime	13	13	13

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

Question 6

Categories of crime of greatest public concern in Northern Ireland today: All mentions by respondents (Analysis by religion, 2014)

Category of Crime (Alphabetical Order)	Percentage of Respondents			
	Cath	Prot	Oth	All
Burglary	40	38	-	39
Crimes committed by Youths	19	20	-	20
Drug offences	57	57	-	55
Domestic violence	28	28	-	29
Hate crime	45	40	-	43
Offences against children	61	61	-	61
Offences against the elderly	51	51	-	50
Offences involving violence, incl. murder	49	54	-	53
Organised crime	28	32	-	30
Robbery	21	18	-	19
Serious road traffic offences	14	16	-	14
Sexual offences	53	52	-	52
Theft	11	11	-	11
Vehicle crime	14	12	-	13

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

Explanatory Notes

Use of Diversions by the PPS

The diversionary options available to prosecutors are as follows:

- 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 for a period of 30 months for youths and 5 years for adults.
- An *informed warning* is also a formal reprimand administered by police and is recorded on a person's criminal record for a period of 12 months.
- 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 for a period of 30 months.
- 'Other' diversionary options include referrals to *the NI Driver Improvement Scheme* or to a *Community Restorative Justice Scheme*.

Diversions are only available to prosecutors where the defendant admits that he/she has committed the offence(s) and agrees to accept and participate in the diversionary option.

User Information

The sample

The sample for the 2014 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 1,890 individuals, 1,217 interviews were achieved, giving a response rate of 64%.

Interviews were conducted between 6 January 2014 and 8 February 2014.

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 2010 in respect of both age-group and gender (see below).

Comparison of Omnibus Survey Sample and 2010 Mid-Year Population Estimates

Categories	Percentage of Sample / Population	
	Omnibus (Selected Respondent)	Mid-Year Population Estimates 2010
Age:		
16-24	11	16
25-34	15	17
35-49	30	27
50-64	21	21
65 and over	23	18
Gender:		
Male	45	49
Female	55	51
Base = 100%	1,217	1,417,370

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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**Public Prosecution Service
for Northern Ireland
Belfast Chambers
93 Chichester Street
Belfast BT1 3JR**

www.ppsni.gov.uk

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