

Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland

# Perceptions of the Public Prosecution Service

Findings of the PPS Module of the Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey  
January 2015



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# Introduction

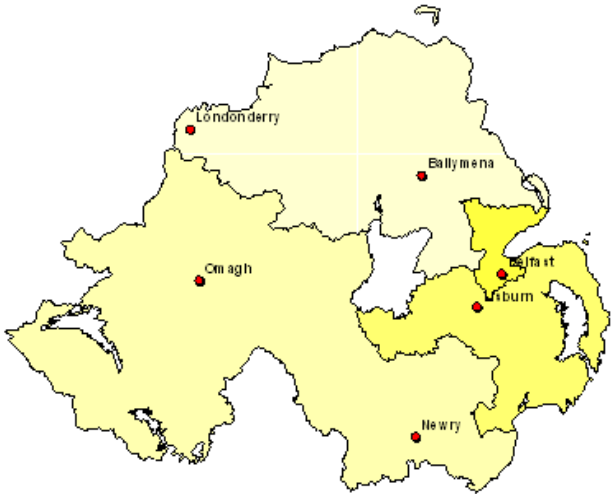
## The Public Prosecution Service

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 2015 survey in order to gauge the following:

- Public awareness of the PPS and its role (Questions 1, 2, 6a and 6b).
- 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, 6a and 6b were asked of all respondents.

It should be noted that Questions 1, 5, 6a and 6b were new to the survey, 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 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.

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 13).

## About this Report

This report provides information in respect of the 2015 survey and includes comparisons with 2014. Where appropriate, information from earlier years has also been provided (see tables at Annex A for full details). All figures refer to 2015 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. 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:

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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 (31%), the Department of Justice for Northern Ireland (25%) and the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (24%).

Slightly more men than women (67% and 65% respectively) thought that the PPS was responsible for making prosecution decisions (Table 1). A higher proportion of Protestant than Catholic respondents (66% and 62% 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**

Response	Percentage of Respondents		
	January 2015		
	Male	Female	All
Department of Justice for Northern Ireland	25	25	25
Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service	27	21	24
Police Service of Northern Ireland	30	31	31
Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland	67	65	66
Youth Justice Agency of Northern Ireland	6	8	7
Other	0	0	0
Don't know	2	4	3

**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**

Response	Percentage of Respondents			
	January 2015			
	Cath	Prot	Other	All
Department of Justice for Northern Ireland	30	22	-	25
Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service	23	24	-	24
Police Service of Northern Ireland	30	32	-	31
Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland	62	66	-	66
Youth Justice Agency of Northern Ireland	6	8	-	7
Other	0	0	-	0
Don't know	4	3	-	3

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

## Question 2

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

In January 2015, three-quarters (75%) of respondents stated that they had heard of the PPS. This compared with 78% in January 2014.

More men than women (79% and 72% respectively) had heard of the PPS (Table 3). Seventy-eight percent of Protestant respondents had heard of the PPS, compared with 73% of Catholics (Table 4).

**Table 3:**  
**Have you heard of the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland, “the PPS”?**  
**Analysis by gender 2014 and 2015**

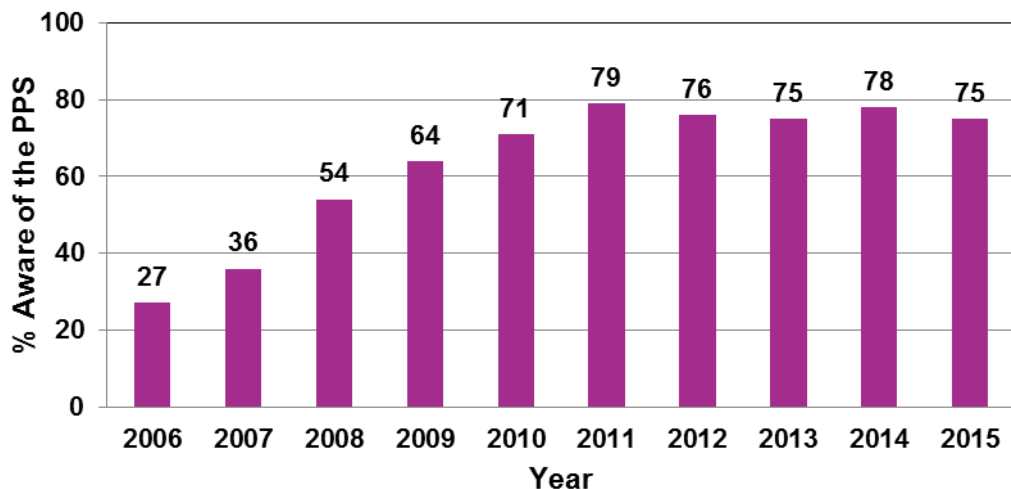
Response	Percentage of Respondents					
	January 2014			January 2015		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
<b>Yes</b>	82	74	<b>78</b>	79	72	<b>75</b>
<b>No</b>	18	26	<b>22</b>	21	28	<b>25</b>

**Table 4:**  
**Have you heard of the Public Prosecution Service, “the PPS”?**  
**Analysis by religion 2014 and 2015**

Response	Percentage of Respondents							
	January 2014				January 2015			
	Cath	Prot	Oth	All	Cath	Prot	Oth	All
<b>Yes</b>	74	82	-	<b>78</b>	73	78	-	<b>75</b>
<b>No</b>	26	18	-	<b>22</b>	27	22	-	<b>25</b>

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 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 - 2015**



### Question 3

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

In January 2015, two-thirds (67%) of respondents were very or fairly confident that the PPS was effective at prosecuting people accused of committing a crime. This was the same outcome as in 2014.

More women (69%) than men (65%) were very or fairly confident in the PPS's effectiveness. These figures were identical to 2014 (Table 5).

Ratings from Catholic respondents were higher than those from Protestants, with 69% of Catholics stating that they were very or fairly confident, compared with 66% of Protestants. The equivalent figures for 2014 were 67% 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 2014 and 2015

Rating	Percentage of Respondents					
	January 2014			January 2015		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
Very/fairly confident	65	69	<b>67</b>	65	69	<b>67</b>
Not very confident	25	22	<b>23</b>	26	20	<b>23</b>
Not at all confident	6	5	<b>6</b>	6	7	<b>7</b>
Don't know	4	4	<b>4</b>	3	3	<b>3</b>

**Table 6:**

#### How confident are you that the PPS is effective at prosecuting people accused of committing a crime? Analysis by religion 2014 and 2015

Rating	Percentage of Respondents							
	January 2014				January 2015			
	Cath	Prot	Oth	All	Cath	Prot	Oth	All
Very/fairly confident	67	66	-	<b>67</b>	69	66	-	<b>67</b>
Not very confident	23	24	-	<b>23</b>	20	26	-	<b>23</b>
Not at all confident	6	6	-	<b>6</b>	7	7	-	<b>7</b>
Don't know	5	4	-	<b>4</b>	4	1	-	<b>3</b>

### Question 4

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

Overall 74% of respondents in the latest survey were very or fairly confident in the fairness and impartiality of the PPS, representing an increase on 2014 (71%).

There was little difference between male and female respondents in this regard; 75% of men were very or fairly confident, compared with 74% of women (Table 7). Confidence levels were higher for Catholic respondents than for Protestants (78% 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 2014 and 2015**

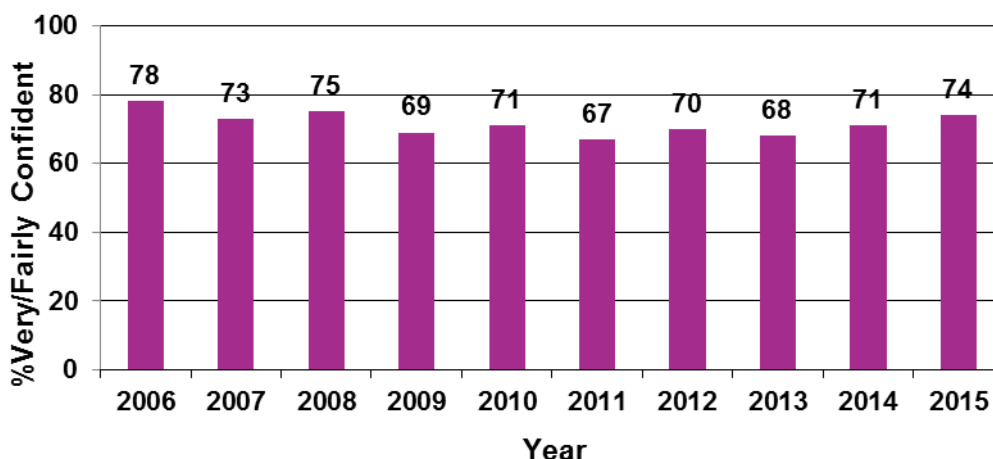
	<i>Percentage of Respondents</i>					
	January 2014			January 2015		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
Very/fairly confident	72	72	<b>71</b>	75	74	<b>74</b>
Not very confident	19	17	<b>18</b>	16	15	<b>16</b>
Not at all confident	5	5	<b>5</b>	6	7	<b>7</b>
Don't know	5	5	<b>5</b>	2	4	<b>3</b>

**Table 8:**  
**How confident are you that the PPS provides a fair and impartial prosecution service?**  
**Analysis by religion 2014 and 2015**

Rating	<i>Percentage of Respondents</i>							
	January 2014				January 2015			
	Cath	Prot	Oth	All	Cath	Prot	Oth	All
Very / fairly confident	71	72	-	<b>71</b>	78	73	-	<b>74</b>
Not very confident	19	18	-	<b>18</b>	15	16	-	<b>16</b>
Not at all confident	4	6	-	<b>5</b>	5	8	-	<b>7</b>
Don't know	6	5	-	<b>5</b>	3	3	-	<b>3</b>

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. From 2009 results remained relatively consistent; the figure of 69% for that year compared with the 2014 figure of 71%. The finding of 74% for 2015 is the highest outcome since 2008 (see Figure 2, below).

**Figure 2: Confidence in the Fairness and Impartiality of the PPS 2006 - 2015**



### 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 64% of respondents in the latest survey were very or fairly confident that the PPS takes its decisions independently.

Two-thirds (67%) of men were very or fairly confident, compared with 62% of women (Table 9). Confidence levels were higher among Protestants than Catholics (66% and 62% respectively - see Table 10).

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

Response	Percentage of Respondents		
	January 2015		
	Male	Female	All
Very / fairly confident	67	62	64
Not very confident	21	23	22
Not at all confident	9	7	8
Don't know	3	7	5

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

Response	Percentage of Respondents			
	January 2015			
	Cath	Prot	Other	All
Very / fairly confident	62	66	-	64
Not very confident	24	20	-	22
Not at all confident	6	9	-	8
Don't know	7	4	-	5

### Question 6a

**The PPS is developing a new Communication Strategy. One of the aims of the Strategy is to increase the public's understanding of the PPS's role. In your opinion, which of the following would be most useful in helping you to find out more about the prosecution service?**

Over half (54%) of respondents in 2015 stated that television programmes or items would be most useful in helping them to find out more about the PPS, followed by access to information via the PPS website (44%) and newspaper or magazine articles (37%).

The findings for males and females were broadly similar. Television programmes or items were found to be the most useful (54% for both males and females), followed by access to information via the PPS website (43% for males and 44% for females) and newspaper or magazine articles (38% for males and 36% for females - see Table 11).

There was also little divergence between Catholic and Protestant respondents on this issue. Television programmes or items were found to be the most useful (53% for Catholics and 57% for Protestants), followed by access to information via the PPS website (41% for Catholics and 43% for Protestants) and newspaper or magazine articles (36% for Catholics and 38% for Protestants - see Table 12).

**Table 11:**  
**In your opinion, which of the following would be most useful in helping you to find out more about the prosecution service?**  
**Analysis by gender 2015**

Response	Percentage of Respondents		
	January 2015		
	Male	Female	All
Access to information via the PPS website	43	44	44
Information days or other events organised by PPS	10	14	12
Newspaper or magazine articles	38	36	37
Television programmes or items	54	54	54
Updates using social media sites (for example, Twitter)	20	22	21
Other	2	3	2
Don't know	0	1	1

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

**Table 12:**  
**In your opinion, which of the following would be most useful in helping you to find out more about the prosecution service?**  
**Analysis by religion 2015**

Response	Percentage of Respondents			
	January 2015			
	Cath	Prot	Other	All
Access to information via the PPS website	41	43	-	44
Information days or other events organised by PPS	13	11	-	12
Newspaper or magazine articles	36	38	-	37
Television programmes or items	53	57	-	54
Updates using social media sites (for example, Twitter)	21	21	-	21
Other	3	2	-	2
Don't know	1	0	-	1

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

### Question 6b

**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-seven 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 (88%) strongly agreed or agreed on this point (Table 13), while a similar proportion of Catholics and Protestants (89% and 88% respectively) strongly agreed or agreed (Table 14).

**Table 13:**

**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**

Response	Percentage of Respondents		
	January 2015		
	Male	Female	All
Strongly agree	38	41	39
Agree	50	47	48
Neither agree nor disagree	11	9	10
Disagree	2	2	2
Strongly disagree	0	0	0
Don't know	0	1	0

**Table 14:**

**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**

Response	Percentage of Respondents			
	January 2015			
	Cath	Prot	Other	All
Strongly agree	40	39	-	39
Agree	49	49	-	48
Neither agree nor disagree	8	10	-	10
Disagree	2	2	-	2
Strongly disagree	0	0	-	0
Don't know	1	0	-	0

## 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 - 2015

Response	Percentage of Respondents									
	Year									
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Yes	27	36	54	64	71	79	76	75	78	75
No	73	64	46	36	29	21	23	25	22	25
Don't know	0	0	1	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

### Question 3

How confident are you that the PPS is effective at prosecuting people accused of committing a crime? 2011 - 2015

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

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 - 2015

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

# User Information

## The sample

The sample for the 2015 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 1,861 individuals, 1,114 interviews were achieved, giving a response rate of 60%.

Interviews were conducted between 5 January 2015 and 9 February 2015.

## 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 2013 in respect of both age-group and gender (see below).

### Comparison of Omnibus Survey Sample and 2013 Mid-Year Population Estimates

Categories	Percentage of Sample / Population	
	Omnibus (Selected Respondent)	Mid-Year Population Estimates 2013
<b>Age:</b> 16-24	11	15
25-34	14	17
35-49	25	26
50-64	26	22
65 and over	24	19
<b>Gender:</b> Male	47	48
Female	53	52
<b>Base = 100%</b>	1,114	1,447,118

## 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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