

# Case Processing Time For Criminal Cases Dealt With at Courts In Northern Ireland Background Quality Report



## Background Quality Assessment

This section provides information about the quality of the data used to produce this publication, and any statistics derived from these data.

Dimension	Assessment by the author
<b>Introduction:-</b>	<p>The publication entitled Case Processing Time For Criminal Cases Dealt With at Courts In Northern Ireland is produced annually by the Analytical Services Group (ASG) a branch of statisticians from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) located within the Department of Justice (DoJ), and has been published since 2016/17. The reports are available to download from the <a href="#">DoJ website (opens in a new window)</a> and are published in line with the ASG Customer Service and Engagement Statement, <a href="#">Policy 6 in the Code of Practice for Statistics – Policies and Statements PDF (536 KB) (opens in a new window)</a>.</p> <p>This report presents data on the average case processing time for criminal cases dealt with in the Crown Court and in magistrates' courts in Northern Ireland, along with trend information over the last five years.</p> <p>The statistics are produced using administrative data sourced from the Causeway Data Sharing Mechanism (DSM1). They were primarily based on records contained on the Criminal Records Viewer (CRV), held on Causeway. CRV utilises data which originated in the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), Public Prosecution Service (PPS) and from Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS). Causeway is an interconnected information system, launched as a joint undertaking by the Criminal Justice Organisations (CJO) in Northern Ireland. Information is based on data extracted at July each year, for example data covering 2019/20 i.e. 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 were extracted at July 2020.</p>

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<p><b>Relevance:-</b> <i>The degree to which the statistical product meets user needs in both coverage and content.</i></p>	<p>The publication shows the impact on performance over time of key ‘speeding up justice’ initiatives put in place through law reform and through administrative and practice improvements. It aims to provide an overview of the time taken for a case to be dealt with at court, from the date that the case began its journey through the criminal justice system, based on a start point where the date the offence was reported to, or detected by, the police.</p> <p>The median time taken for a case to be dealt with at court, is a population indicator (Indicator 38 within Outcome 7 – we have a safe community where we respect the law and each other) included within the Programme for Government. Comparisons are drawn against the baseline which was the median time taken in 2014/15.</p> <p>Analysis is also provided in relation to case type, i.e., whether it was a charge or summons case, in relation to the type of court in which the case was dealt with, i.e., Crown Court, adult magistrates’ courts or youth magistrates’ courts and in relation to offence type.</p> <p>Some comparisons with figures for the previous four financial years are also included.</p> <p>User needs were identified through an <a href="#">online customer survey undertaken in June 2020 PDF (946 KB) (opens in a new window)</a>.</p> <p>Statistical coverage is restricted to those criminal prosecutions which were brought on behalf of the PSNI, the NCA, the Airport Constabulary or Harbour Police. Cases relating to breaches of court orders previously imposed are not included, nor are cases that end in an out of court disposal. Further, prosecutions brought by government departments, public bodies and private individuals are not included, as their prosecution is beyond the remit of the DoJ.</p> <p>Where an offender has been charged with, or accused of several offences on the same occasion, only one offence, the principal offence, is counted. The basis for selection of the principal offence is laid down in rules issued by the Home Office and generally is the most serious offence in terms of the potential penalties in law and is set in each case at the time the file is submitted to PPS from police.</p>

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<p><b>Accuracy and reliability:-</b>  <i>The proximity between an estimate and the unknown true value.</i></p>	<p>The data included in the bulletin are based on cases resulted in court, whether there was a conviction or not and where the case did not end in a subsequent diversion, and which were recorded as completed in Northern Ireland between 1st April and 31st March for the year of interest.</p> <p>These statistics are sourced from administrative systems that encompass data originating from PSNI, PPS and NICTS. It is not a sample but a complete data set. Each CJO involved records information relevant to them in relation to each case on their own information systems, to allow the processing of that case through that stage of the criminal justice process.</p> <p>Where records have been updated on the systems retrospectively, these updates may be missed if the data were downloaded too early. To minimise the impact of this, the data are extracted around 12 weeks after the end of the reporting period; this allows for the updating and completion of records across the systems concerned.</p> <p>There is no absolute means of verifying if CJOs have entered information incorrectly, or not at all. However, as Causeway is the main source of information used to manage day to day business within PSNI, PPS and NICTS and also to communicate important information between these organisations it needs to be highly accurate. In addition, identified discrepancies are checked against information held in the Integrated Court Operation System (ICOS) and the CRV.</p> <p>Numerous validation checks are carried out during the course of each year, by a number of parties, including NISRA statisticians, to ensure the data are fit for purpose. In relation to potential sources of bias and error, further details can also be found in the QAAD report.</p> <p>The median is used as a measure of average in this report in relation to time taken from the date the young person was charged, or informed they were to be prosecuted, to the date the case was completed at court, as a relatively small number of cases may have taken a significantly long time. Using the median to find the midpoint in the series avoids any possible skew caused by outlying, longer cases.</p>

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<p><b>Accuracy and reliability continued:-</b></p>	<p>Users should however, bear in mind that the statistics originate from various administrative data sources which have different purposes, aims and objectives and are kept for non statistical purposes e.g. reviewing and vetting individuals' criminal records.</p> <p>Users should note that some published figures may not add to the totals due to rounding.</p>										
<p><b>Timeliness and punctuality:-</b> <i>Timeliness refers to the time gap between publication and the reference period. Punctuality refers to the gap between planned and actual publication dates.</i></p>	<p>The annual datasets cover the financial year (1st April to 31st March). The processes used in producing this report are continually being streamlined, while at the same time maintaining or improving the accuracy of the data. The gap between the reference date and the publication date is due to the time allowed for the updating of administrative records and the time it took to resolve various data quality issues.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="537 711 1097 963"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="537 711 865 753">Report Year</th> <th data-bbox="865 711 1097 753">Publication Date</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="537 753 865 811">2019/20</td> <td data-bbox="865 753 1097 811">16/09/20</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="537 811 865 868">2018/19</td> <td data-bbox="865 811 1097 868">04/09/19</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="537 868 865 925">2017/18</td> <td data-bbox="865 868 1097 925">28/09/18</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="537 925 865 963">2016/17</td> <td data-bbox="865 925 1097 963">24/01/18</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Report Year	Publication Date	2019/20	16/09/20	2018/19	04/09/19	2017/18	28/09/18	2016/17	24/01/18
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<p><b>Accessibility and clarity:-</b> Accessibility is the ease with which users are able to access the data, also reflecting the format in which the data are available and the availability of supporting information. Clarity refers to the quality and sufficiency of metadata, illustrations and accompanying advice.</p>	<p>Accessibility to the statistics for this publication are in line with those detailed in the ASG Customer Service and Engagement Statement, <a href="#">Policy 6 in the Code of Practice for Statistics – Policies and Statements PDF (536 KB) (opens in a new window)</a>.</p> <p>Issues relating to accessibility (specifically ease of finding on the DoJ website) identified during a <a href="#">Customer Survey undertaken in June 2020 PDF (946 KB) (opens in a new window)</a> have been subsequently addressed. No issues relating to clarity were identified.</p> <p>The report contains contact details for further information and is available to download from the <a href="#">DoJ website (opens in a new window)</a>, along with reports from previous years.</p> <p>The data presented in the report are also available in Open Document Spreadsheet (ODS) format on the <a href="#">DoJ website (opens in a new window)</a>.</p> <p>Explanatory information including sources, discontinuities and missing data have been included.</p>
<p><b>Coherence and comparability:-</b> Coherence is the degree to which data that are derived from different sources or methods, but refer to the same topic, are similar. Comparability is the degree to which data can be compared over time and domain.</p>	<p>The court structure of Northern Ireland does not equate to that in England, Wales, Scotland or the Republic of Ireland. Figures for Northern Ireland relate to the number of days taken from the date an alleged offence was reported to, or detected by, police, to the date of a final decision in court. Figures for England and Wales relate to the number of days taken from the date an alleged offence was committed to the date of a final decision in court. Figures for Scotland relate to the period from caution and charge to verdict. Direct comparisons between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK and Ireland therefore cannot be made.</p> <p>There have been slight changes to the measurement systems since we developed these stats, in that cases dealt with at Crown Court resulting in a diversionary disposal have been included since 2018/19. These numbers are minimal each year though.</p>

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<p><b>Assessment of user needs and perceptions:-</b>  <i>The process for finding out about users and uses, and their views on the statistical products.</i></p>	<p>The ASG Customer Service and Engagement details ASGs customer engagement policy and can be found at <a href="#">Policy 6 in the Code of Practice for Statistics – Policies and Statements PDF (536 KB) (opens in a new window)</a>.</p> <p>An <a href="#">online customer survey was undertaken in June 2020 PDF (946 KB) (opens in a new window)</a>. Almost all the respondents (93%) worked for The Northern Ireland Civil Service or other Agency; the remainder were other non-NICS public sector employees or from academia. The most frequently stated reason for using the publication was policy making/policy monitoring followed by performance monitoring, media related/public interest and to facilitate academic research.</p> <p>The vast majority (89%) of respondents said that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the publication overall; the remaining respondents were neutral. All respondents (100%) said that the statistics fully or mostly met their needs. Suggested improvements are documented in the <a href="#">customer survey report PDF (946 KB) (opens in a new window)</a>.</p> <p>Regular meetings also take place with key users within the DoJ.</p>
<p><b>Trade-offs between output and quality components:-</b></p>	<p>No trade-offs applied.</p>
<p><b>Performance, cost and respondent burden:-</b> <i>The effectiveness, efficiency and economy of the statistical output.</i></p>	<p>There is no respondent burden, since the data are held on an administrative system, and data on new cases are automatically collected as part of the Criminal Justice process.</p> <p>The annual operational cost (staff time) of producing the report is approximately 30 days.</p>

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<p><b>Confidentiality, transparency and security:-</b> <i>The procedures and policy used to ensure sound confidentiality, security and transparent practices.</i></p>	<p>The ASG Confidentiality and Protection Arrangements statement, <a href="#">Policy 2 in ASGs Policies and Statements PDF (536 KB) (opens in a new window)</a>, sets out ASG's arrangement for maintaining the confidentiality of the statistical data used in this publication.</p> <p>All staff involved are trained on the protocols for protecting and maintaining the confidentiality of the data. NISRA follows the 'National Statistician's Guidance: Confidentiality of Official Statistics' in the collection and dissemination of this report. The guidance can be found on the <a href="#">GSS website (opens in a new window)</a>.</p> <p>Data are held on a network that is only accessible to the few statisticians who need access. Printouts containing individual records or small cell sizes are locked away and shredded as soon as possible.</p> <p>Standard disclosure control methodology is applied to the data. This ensures that information attributable to an individual is not identifiable in any published outputs and that the outputs are only seen by authorised staff prior to their publication.</p> <p>When appropriate, suppression is applied where the number of individuals in a cell is less than three. Suppression is also applied, where necessary, to the next lowest valued cell in order that identification by subtraction is not possible.</p>