

# Court Prosecutions, Convictions and Out of Court Disposals for Northern Ireland Background Quality Report



Department of  
**Justice**

An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt  
Máinnstríe O tha Laa

**Updated  
March 2021**

## Background Quality Assessment

This report provides information about the quality of the data used to produce the Court Prosecutions, Convictions and Out of Court Disposals publication, and any statistics derived from these data.

Dimension	Assessment by the author
<b>Introduction:-</b>	<p>The publication entitled Court, Prosecutions, Convictions and Out of Court Disposals 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 done so since 2013. 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 number of prosecutions and convictions for magistrates' courts and the Crown Court in Northern Ireland for the calendar year, along with comparative information for the previous four years. It also provides data on the number of out of court disposals.</p> <p>The statistics are produced using administrative data sourced from the Causeway Data Sharing Mechanism (DSM1). They were extracted 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 March each year, for example data covering 2019/20 i.e. 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 was extracted at March 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 data included in the publication are based on those for whom court proceedings were completed, or who had an out of court disposal recorded in Northern Ireland during the calendar year. The information is used to inform policy decisions within DoJ, as well as to inform requests from other Government organisations and to answer NI Assembly questions and queries from the general public.</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>Analysis is provided by gender, age, court type, offence classification and disposal type i.e. if the offence was dealt with by imprisonment, suspended sentence, community service, monetary penalty, discharge or diversion. Data for the youth court, a special magistrates' court which deals with proceedings against juveniles between the ages of 10 and 17, are included in the report with data for magistrates' courts.</p> <p>Some comparisons with figures for the previous four years are also included.</p> <p>Statistical coverage includes criminal prosecutions brought by the PPS on behalf of the PSNI, the NCA, the Airport Constabulary or Harbour Police and breaches of community sentences brought by the Probation Board for Northern Ireland. Some prosecutions brought on behalf of the UK Border Agency are also included. Prosecutions brought by government departments, other public bodies and private individuals are not included.</p> <p>Within the report out of court disposals are broken into –</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) those which result in a criminal record (diversionary disposals i.e. offender is subject to a caution, informed warning, a youth conference plan or community based restorative justice scheme); and</li> <li>2) those which do not (Penalty Notices for Disorder (PND)).</li> </ol> <p>PNDs are a fixed penalty designed to tackle low-level, anti-social and nuisance offending for offenders aged 18 and over and are issued for a range of minor offences. They were introduced in</p>

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<b>Relevance continued:-</b>	<p>Northern Ireland on the 6th June 2012 as a result of the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. PNDs provide police with a swift financial punishment to deal with misbehaviour and a practical deterrent to future re-offending. However, they do not require an admission of guilt and do not form part of an individual's criminal record. Further information on PNDs can be accessed on the <a href="#">NI Direct website (opens in a new window)</a>.</p> <p>Where an offender has had an out of court disposal imposed or been prosecuted for, or convicted 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 The Department of Justice has developed a methodology applicable to Northern Ireland based on these. In summary, where there is a disposal, the offence which receives the most severe penalty is counted. Other factors which may be considered in selection of the principal offence are the potential sentence that may be imposed in relation to an offence and the perceived seriousness of an offence. Principal offence methodology may be viewed on the <a href="#">DoJ website (opens in a new window)</a>.</p> <p>For cases brought before a court, the offence counted and used in the compilation of figures in this report is the one on which the court took its final decision. For diversionary disposals, the offence counted is the one recorded at the time the diversionary disposal was issued and, where applicable, subsequently recorded as completed with the PPS. In relation to convictions, the principal offence counted is normally the one that draws the most severe disposal at conviction. Offences for which a defendant is convicted are not necessarily the same as those for which the defendant was initially proceeded against, as charges may be amended during the course of a case. The decision recorded is that reached by the court and takes no account of any subsequent appeal to a higher court.</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>These statistics are sourced from administrative systems that encompass data originating from PSNI, PPS and NICTS. The information is not a sample, but a complete data set of all relevant cases recorded within the time period reported on. 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, these particular data are extracted around eight 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 in 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 is fit for purpose. In relation to potential sources of bias and error, further details can also be found in the QAAD report.</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>

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<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 calendar year. 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 it took to resolve various data quality issues.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="537 396 1097 868"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="537 396 865 432">Report Year</th> <th data-bbox="865 396 1097 432">Publication Date</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="537 432 865 496">2019</td> <td data-bbox="865 432 1097 496">24/06/20</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="537 496 865 554">2018</td> <td data-bbox="865 496 1097 554">05/06/19</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="537 554 865 611">2017</td> <td data-bbox="865 554 1097 611">19/06/18</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="537 611 865 668">2016</td> <td data-bbox="865 611 1097 668">28/06/17</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="537 668 865 725">2015</td> <td data-bbox="865 668 1097 725">11/08/16</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="537 725 865 782">2014</td> <td data-bbox="865 725 1097 782">10/07/15</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="537 782 865 839">2013</td> <td data-bbox="865 782 1097 839">21/11/14</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="537 839 865 868">2010 – 2012</td> <td data-bbox="865 839 1097 868">30/09/14</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Statistics in their current format were first published in 2014, relating to the years from 2010 onwards. Prior to that, data on Convictions at courts were published from 2007 onwards. These reports are available to download from the <a href="#">DoJ website (opens in a new window)</a>.</p>	Report Year	Publication Date	2019	24/06/20	2018	05/06/19	2017	19/06/18	2016	28/06/17	2015	11/08/16	2014	10/07/15	2013	21/11/14	2010 – 2012	30/09/14
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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, nor does the process for, or the range of out of court disposals available. Direct comparisons between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK and Ireland therefore cannot be made.</p> <p>There have been no substantive changes to the measurement systems since these statistics were developed, though extra figures, in relation to reporting of data on Penalty Notices for Disorder have been included since 2012. Additionally, a review of offence categories introduced in 2019 statistics meant the reclassification of a small number of offences into different groups.</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 Policy 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 media related/public interest, facilitating academic research, performance monitoring and informing public marketing campaigns.</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. Almost all respondents (89%) said that the statistics fully or mostly met their needs; remaining respondents said it partially 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 60 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 necessary, 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>