

First Time Entrants to the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland, 2018/19

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Key Findings

This bulletin presents information on first time entrants to the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland for the year 1 April 2018 – 31 March 2019. As well as details on the demographic makeup of these first time offenders, the bulletin presents some analysis on the disposals they received.

SUMMARY

- In 2018/19, a total of 29,153 offences were recorded as dealt with by conviction or diversion in the justice system in Northern Ireland. Of these, 7,925 (27.2%) were first offences and 21,228 were further offences. The proportion of offences in 2017/18 which were first offences was 29.3%.
- Of first offences, 30.1% (2,388) were dealt with by way of formal diversionary disposal, compared to 69.9% (5,537) which were dealt with by conviction.

AGE GROUP and GENDER

- Of all first time entrants to the criminal justice system in 2018/19, 8.4% (664) were in the 10 – 17 year old age group and 27.4% (2,173) were in the 18 – 24 year old age group.
- First offences accounted for 55.7% (2,388) of all instances where a diversionary disposal was issued in 2018/19. Those in the 10 – 17 year old age group were most likely (86.6%, 575) to receive a diversion for a first offence.
- Of all offences dealt with by conviction or diversion, 23.9% (5,654) by males¹ were first offences, compared to 41.7% (2,271) by females.

¹ Figures for Males also include organisations, transgender and gender not specified.

OFFENCE TYPE and DISPOSALS RECEIVED

Over half, 58.0% (4,593) of all first offences in 2018/19 were for motoring offences. Of all instances where a conviction or diversion was issued for offences in that category in 2018/19, 37.9% were for first offences.

Monetary disposals made up 57.0% (4,521) of all disposals for first offences in 2018/19. First offences accounted for 32.3% of all instances where a monetary penalty was imposed in relation to a conviction or diversion.

Of all instances where imprisonment was imposed as a penalty in 2018/19, first offences accounted for only 5.5% (163 out of 2,964).

55.7% (2,388) of all cases dealt with by diversion were for first offences. Of first offences dealt with by diversion, 77.1% (1,842) were dealt with by way of caution. However, while 56.0% of all cautions were for first offences, 85.4% (251) of all informed warnings issued were for first offences.

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Introduction

In the 2011-16 Programme for Government, the Minister outlined a commitment to reduce the level of serious crime by reshaping the approach used to tackle factors leading to criminal behaviours within Northern Ireland. A commitment was given to monitor the number of young people entering the criminal justice system for the first time.

This bulletin presents data on first time entrants to the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland for the year 1 April 2018 – 31 March 2019. It aims to provide an overview of the structure of the known offending population in 2018/19, with information on the breakdown of offences committed by new offenders and the disposals received. Findings for the 2018/19 year will also allow some comparison with figures published previously for 2017/18. The information upon which the publication is based is used to inform policy decisions within the Department of Justice (DoJ), as well as to inform requests from other Government organisations, answers to NI Assembly questions and queries from the general public. Details of methodology, data coverage and quality are detailed in Appendix 1.

Data in all tables and charts in the bulletin, along with supplementary data, are available from the Department of Justice website in the accompanying [spreadsheet](#).

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Main Findings

2.1 Overview

In 2018/19, a total of 29,153 (first and further) offences were recorded as dealt with by conviction or diversion in the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland, 1,098 more than the total number of offences (28,055) recorded as dealt with in this way through the criminal justice system in 2017/18. Of these, 7,925 (27.2%) were first offences and 21,228 (72.8%) were further offences. As detailed in the counting rules, the number of first offences equates directly to the number of first time entrants to the justice system, so the number of first time entrants (first offences) to the criminal justice system in 2018/19 was 7,925 (27.2% of all offences in 2018/19), a reduction of 3.5% (285) on the number of first offences in 2017/18, when the number of first offences was 8,210 (29.3% of all offences in 2017/18).

Of all offences dealt with by diversion or conviction, 14.7% (4,290) were dealt with by way of diversion, compared to 85.3% (24,863) dealt with by way of conviction. Of all first offences, 30.1% (2,388) were dealt with by way of diversionary disposal, compared to 69.9% (5,537) which were dealt with by conviction.

Over the period 2014/15 – 2018/19, there has been a slight decrease in the proportion of first time entrants to the justice system disposed through the courts or via out of court diversionary disposals (in relation to all offenders), falling from a recent high of 30.4% in 2014/15 to 27.2% in 2018/19.

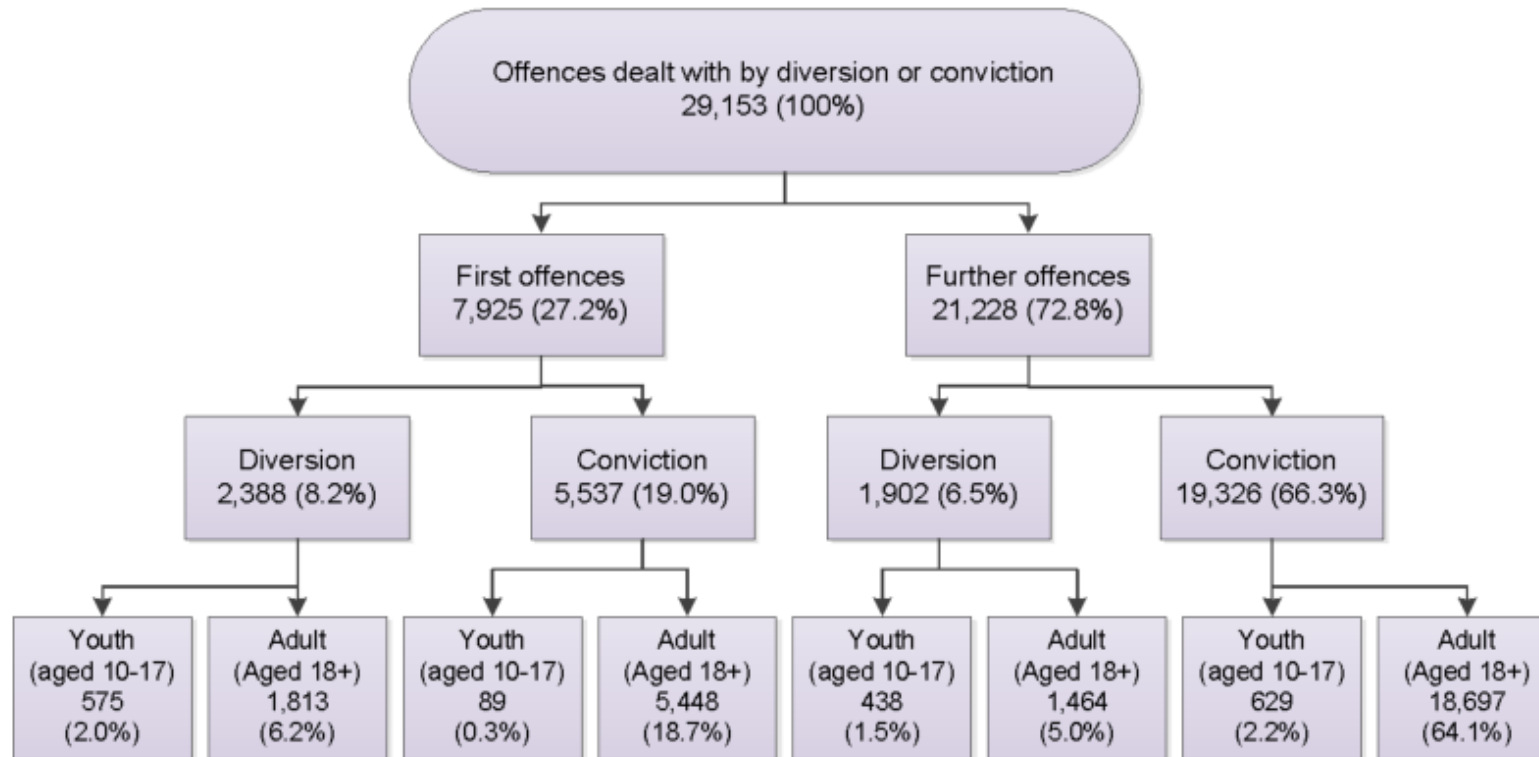
Figure 1: First time offenders as percentage of all offenders dealt with at court or by formal diversionary disposal, 2014/15 – 2018/19

| Year | 2014/15 | 2015/16 | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 |
|---------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Percentage first time offenders | 30.4% | 30.4% | 29.8% | 29.3% | 27.2% |

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Main Findings

Figure 2: First offences and further offences of all offenders in Northern Ireland, 2018/19



Note:

1. The percentages shown in the diagram relate to the total number of offences committed in the top box in the figure.

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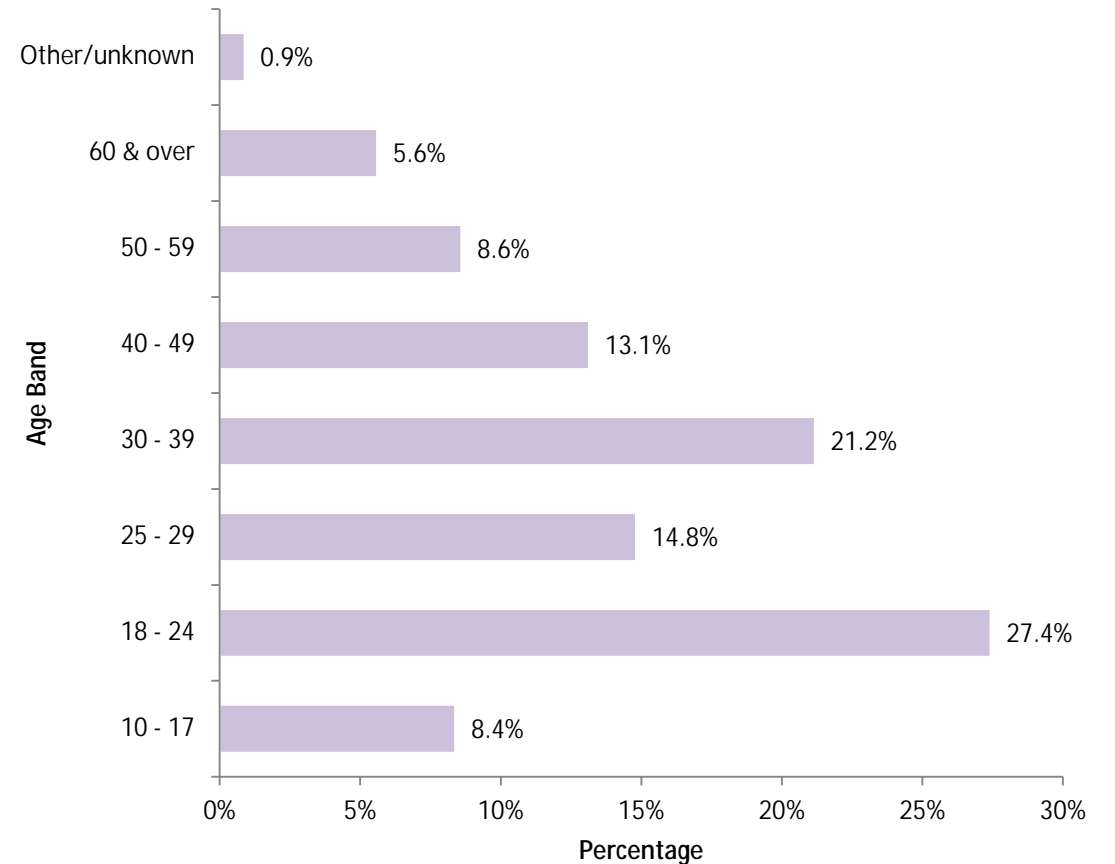
Main Findings

2.2 Age Group of Offenders

In 2018/19, 8.4% of all first offences (664 out of 7,925 first offences) were committed by young people in the 10 – 17 year old age group, compared with 5.0% of all further offences (1,067 out of 21,228 further offences). Of all proven convictions and diversions for the 10 – 17 year old age group, 38.4% (664) were first offences (Table 1a in accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

Young people in the 10 – 17 year old age group received 23.6% (1,013) of all diversionary disposals (24.1% (575) of all diversions for first offences), compared to 2.9% (718) of all convictions (1.6% (89) of convictions for first offences) (Tables 1c and 1d in accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

Figure 3: First offences by age band of offender, 2018/19



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Main Findings

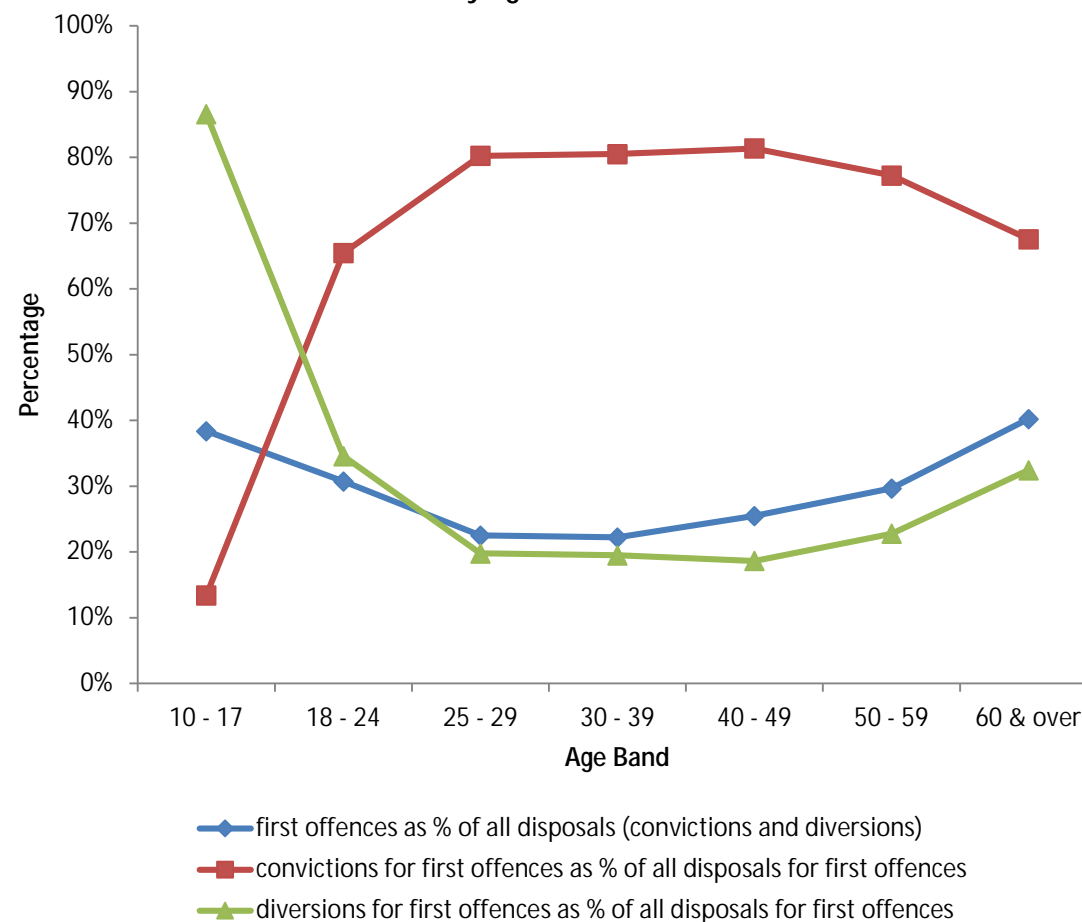
In 2018/19, 27.4% (2,173) of first offences were by people in the 18 – 24 year old age group. Of these, 34.6% (751) were dealt with by way of diversion and 59.9% of all diversions for 18 – 24 year olds were for first offences. First offences dealt with by conviction made up 33.6% (300) of convictions for those aged 60 and over in 2018/19, but only 5.4% of all convictions for first offences in 2018/19 (Tables 1c and 1d in accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

The rate of first convictions in 2018/19, whether or not it was for a first offence, was 26.9% (6,695) overall (compared with 28.6% in 2017/18). This compares to a rate of 22.3% (5,537) for convictions for first offences only (down slightly from the rate of 24.0% in 2017/18).

For those in the 10 - 17 year old age group, the rate of first convictions overall was 25.8% (185), up from 18.7% in 2017/18. For first offences, the rate of conviction for 10 – 17 year olds was 12.4% (89), higher than the rate of 7.6% for 2017/18.

People in the 10 – 17 year old age group were most likely (86.6%, 575 out of 664) to receive a diversion for a first offence in 2018/19 (Tables 1a, 1b, 1c and 1d in accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

Figure 4: First offences as percentage of first/all convictions and diversions by age band of offender, 2018/19



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MAIN FINDINGS

2.3 Gender of Offenders

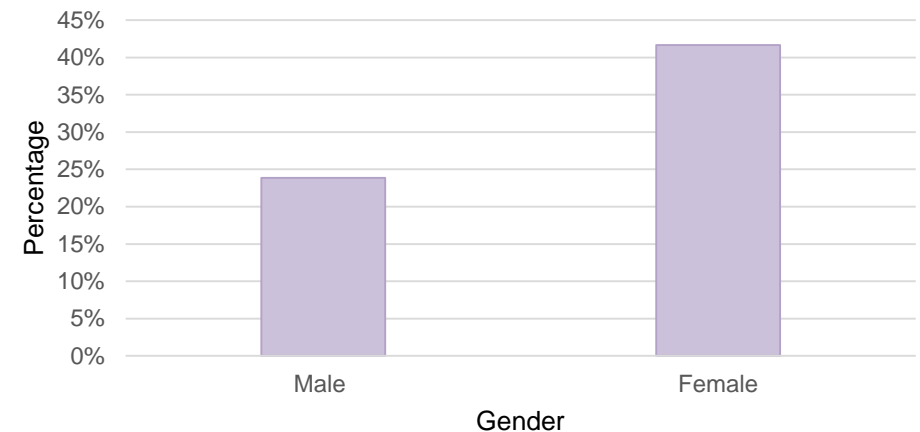
In 2018/19, 23.9% (5,654) of all offences by males¹ dealt with by conviction or diversion were first offences, compared to 41.7% (2,271) by females. Of all first offences dealt with by diversion or conviction, 71.3% were by males, compared to 28.7% by females (Table 2a in accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

In 2018/19, 52.2% (1,690) of all diversions issued to males¹ were for first offences, while 19.4% (3,964) of all convictions handed down to males in 2018/19 were for first offences. The rate of first convictions in 2018/19, whether or not it was for a first offence, was 23.9% (4,899) for males (Tables 2b, 2c and 2d in accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

For females, 66.2% (698) of all diversions were for first offences and 35.8% (1,573) of all convictions were for first offences. The rate of first convictions in 2018/19, whether or not it was for a first offence, was 40.9% (1,796) for females (Tables 2b, 2c and 2d in accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

¹Figures for males also include organisations, transgender and gender not specified.

Figure 5: First offences as percentage of all convictions and diversions by gender 2018/19



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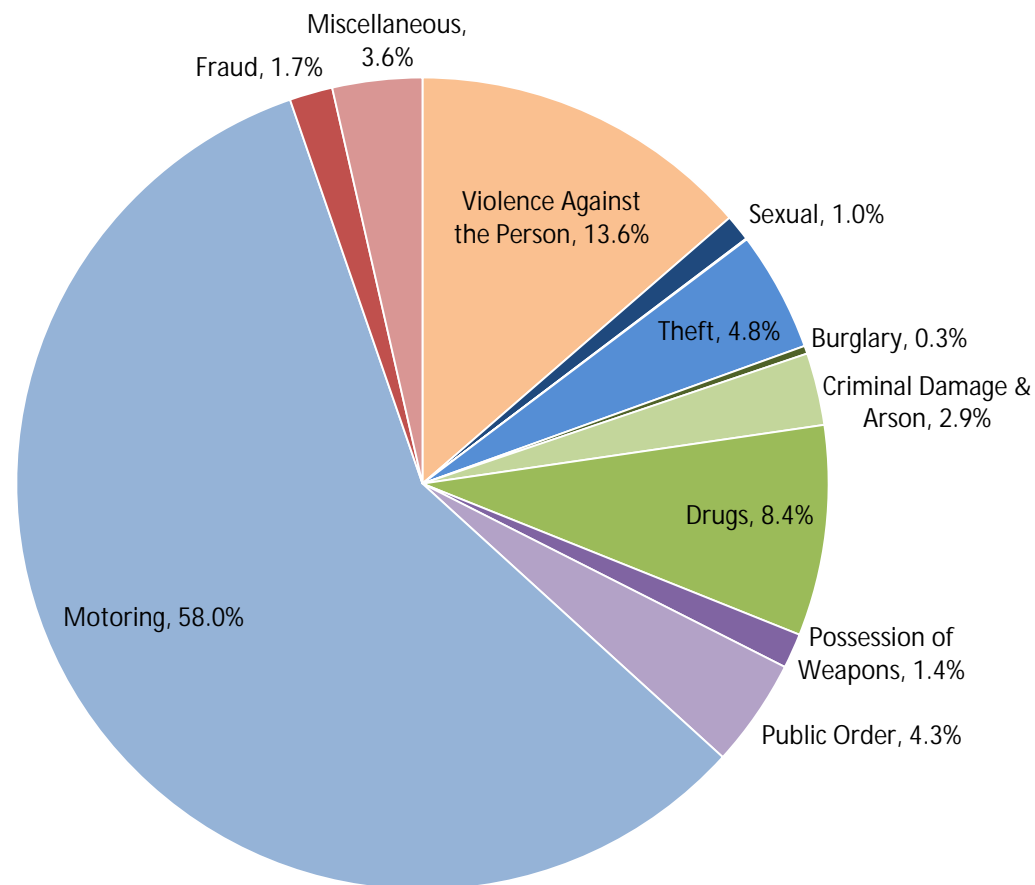
Main Findings

2.4 Offence Classification

Of all first offences dealt with by way of diversion or conviction, 58.0% (4,593) were for motoring offences, while 13.6% (1,081) were for violence against the person offences (VAP), 8.4% (664) were for drugs and 4.8% (378) were for offences in the theft category (Table 3a in accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

Of all offence classifications, sexual offences (45.4%, 83), motoring offences (37.9%, 4,593) and miscellaneous offences (29.6%, 283) were the offence classifications where first offences made up the largest proportion of the total convictions and diversions for offences in those individual categories in 2018/19 (Table 3a in accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

Figure 6: First offences by offence classification, 2018/19¹

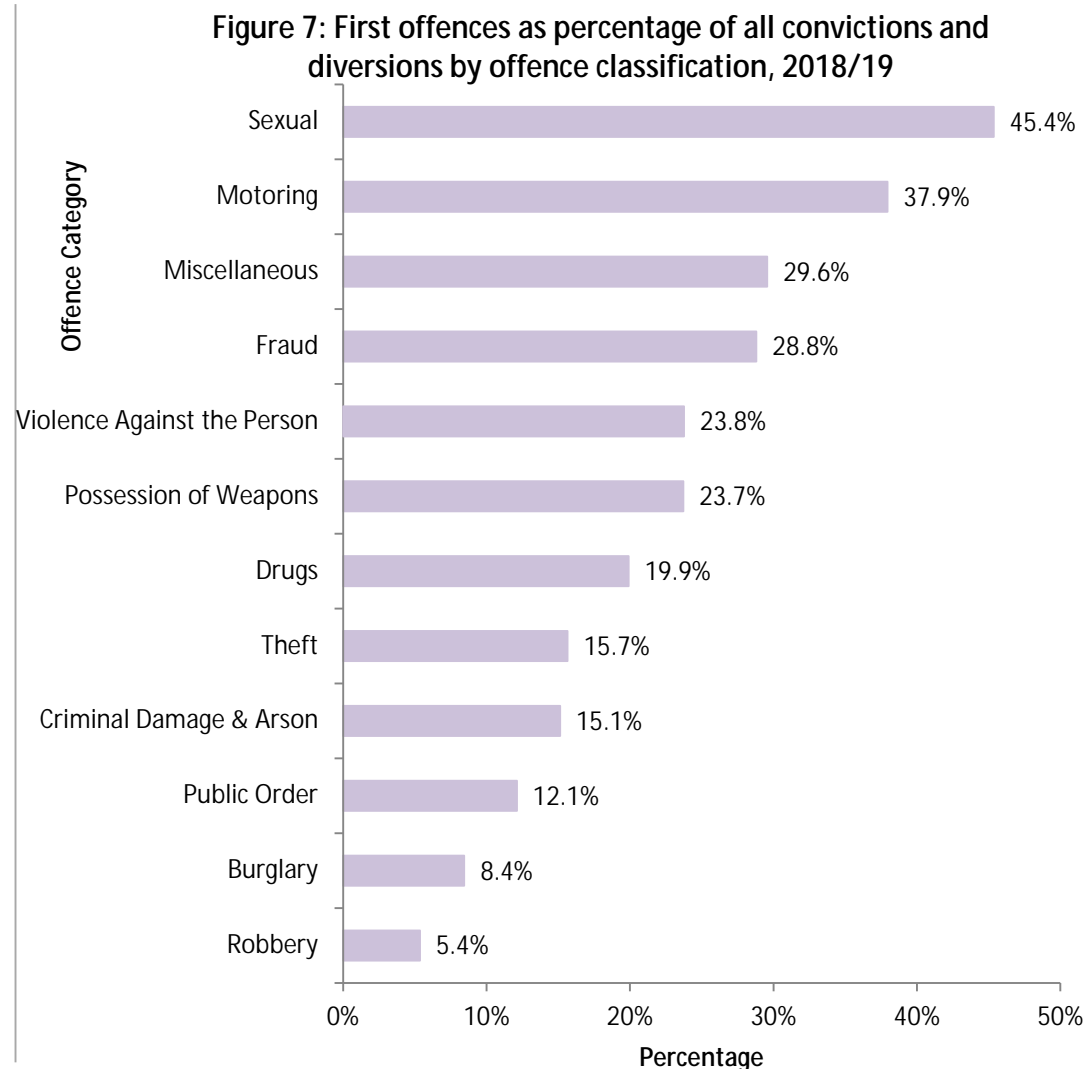


¹ Does not include robbery as < 0.3%.

2 | Main Findings

As was the case in 2017/18, robbery (5.4%, 3 cases) and burglary (8.4%, 25) were the offence classifications where first offences made up the smallest proportion of the total convictions or diversions for offences in those categories. For criminal damage and arson offences 15.1%, (228) were first offences and, for public order offences, 12.1%, (341) were first offences (Table 3a in accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

The offence categories where first offences were dealt with mainly by diversion in 2018/19 were drugs (74.1%, 492), possession of weapons (71.8%, 79) and public order (68.9%, 235). Conversely, first offences in the robbery (100.0%, 3), motoring (90.9%, 4,175), sexual (86.7%, 72) and fraud (71.3%, 97) categories were mostly dealt with by conviction in 2018/19 (Table 3e in accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).



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Main Findings

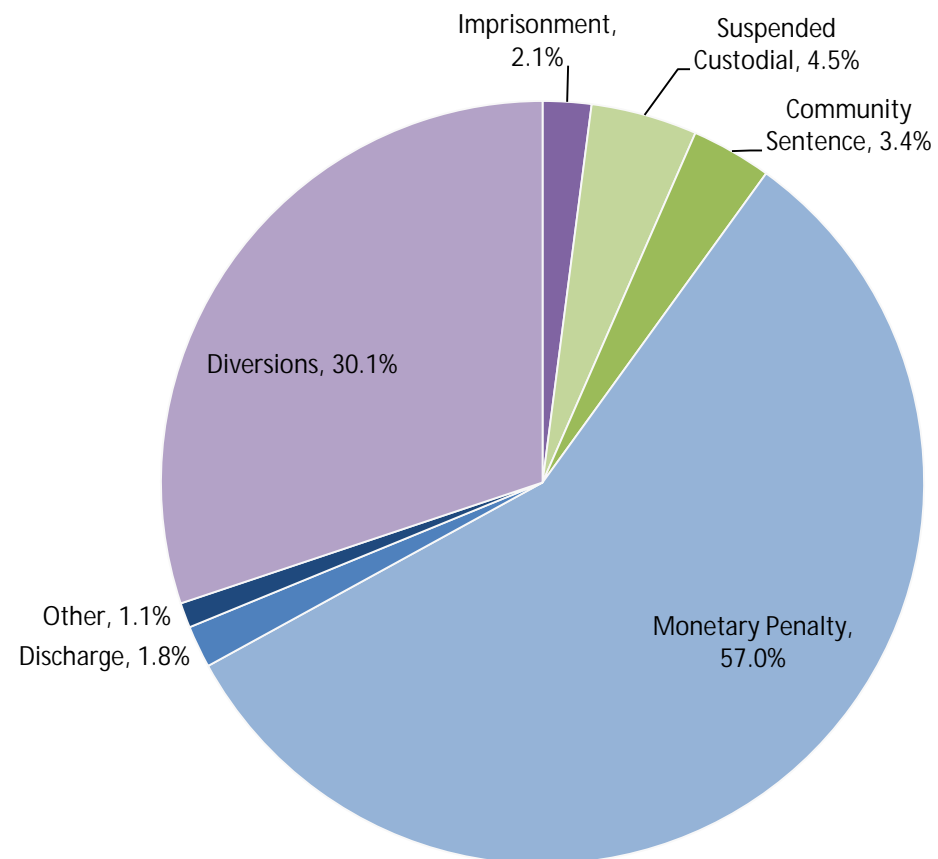
2.5 Disposal Type

Of all first offences in 2018/19, 30.1% (2,388) were dealt with by way of diversion, compared to 31.3% (2,568) in 2017/18. First offences dealt with by way of diversion accounted for 8.2% of all disposals in 2018/19, whether for first offences or further offences dealt with by diversion or conviction (Table 4a in accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

Monetary penalties were imposed for 57.0% (4,521) of first offences and first offences accounted for 32.3% of those receiving a monetary penalty upon conviction, compared to 34.9% recorded in 2017/18. Imprisonment disposals were the outcome in relation to only 2.1% (163) of all first offences. In fact, only 5.5% of all imprisonment disposals in 2018/19 were for first offences (Table 4a in accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

Suspended custodial disposals were imposed in relation to 4.5% (357) of all first offences, though of those offences for which a suspended custodial disposal was the outcome, 9.1% were for first offences. Community sentences were imposed in 3.4% (270) of disposals for first offences and, of those offences for which a community sentence was the outcome, 8.9% were for first offences in 2018/19 (Table 4a in accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

Figure 8: First offences by disposal type, 2018/19



Appendix 1

Methodology and Counting Rules

1.1 Who are first time entrants to the criminal justice system?

For the sake of this publication, first time entrants to the criminal justice system are those who are recorded by the criminal justice system as having committed a proven first offence, whether it was dealt with by way of diversionary disposal or by conviction. The term 'first time entrants' equates directly to that of 'first offence', the phraseology used to describe data presented within this document. In order to calculate the proportion of first time entrants, information is also provided for 'further offences'. Note that, under counting rules for this publication, 'further offences' do not relate directly to the number of offenders who have committed further offences, as an offender may have had more than one further conviction or diversionary disposal within the time period covered by the report.

1.2 What counts as a first or further offence?

An offence is defined as a 'first offence' if it results in the offender receiving their first diversion, warning, caution or conviction – i.e., they have no previous criminal record in Northern Ireland. Offences resulting in further diversions, warnings, cautions or convictions are known as 'further offences', since the offender already has a recorded criminal history.

Where an offender has had a diversion imposed, been warned, cautioned or convicted of several offences on the same occasion, only one offence, the principal offence, is counted (whether this is in relation to a first offence or, for the purposes of this bulletin, to a further offence). The basis for selection of the principal offence is laid down in rules issued by the Home Office. In summary, these stipulate that only offences with an admission or finding of guilty are included and, the principal offence is usually taken as that for which the greatest penalty was imposed.

Appendix 1

Methodology and Counting Rules

The offence counted and used in the compilation of figures in this bulletin is the one on which the court took its final decision, or for which a diversionary disposal was issued and recorded as completed with the Public Prosecution Service (PPS). In relation to convictions, this is not necessarily the same offence as that for which the defendant was initially proceeded against. The decision recorded is that reached by the court and takes no account of any subsequent appeal to a higher court.

Out of court disposals not taken into account in this bulletin are Penalty Notices for Disorder (PNDs). 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 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 at <http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/police-issued-penalty-notices>.

1.3 Data source

The data used in this bulletin were taken from the Causeway Data Sharing Mechanism (DSM1). They were extracted primarily based on records contained on the Criminal Records Viewer (CRV). The CRV is held on Causeway and utilises data which originated in the Police Service of Northern Ireland, Public Prosecution Service and from Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service. Causeway is an interconnected information system, launched as a joint undertaking by the Criminal Justice Organisations (CJOs) in Northern Ireland.

Appendix 1

Methodology and Counting Rules

1.4 Data quality and validation

While the source data used for this publication are taken from the main management information systems of the relevant CJOs and they will therefore have a vested interest in their accuracy, the purpose of the quality assurance/validation procedures conducted is to ensure the data extracted are accurate and complete, for the statistical purposes for which they are to be used. Both automated and manual checks are carried out, at individual offence level, and data corrected to ensure that:

- all key fields are complete and logical;
- a general check of the data as a whole suggests no other anomalies.

Any discrepancies identified are checked against the Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS) and the Criminal Records Viewer. Issues are resolved on an individual offence related basis.

Statistics for first time entrants to the justice system are based on records lifted from prosecutions, convictions and out of court disposals datasets which are updated each year. A number of validations are carried out in updating of that dataset each year. Examples of some of the changes made to that dataset as part of the validation process for 2019, included: the removal of 152 cases incorrectly listed as withdrawn at magistrates' courts, as they were dealt with at Crown Court, 211 cases where a fine had been imposed but no amount had been listed and 24 duplicate entries in relation to diversionary disposals handed down for the same offence.

Nevertheless, users should be aware that the statistics contained in this publication originate from various administrative data sources, which have different purposes, aims and objectives and are kept for non-statistical purposes, e.g., Criminal Record Viewer (CRV) is maintained for reviewing and vetting individuals' criminal records.

Appendix 1

Methodology and Counting Rules

1.5 Interpreting the data

Figures for first time entrants to the justice system in Northern Ireland, as reported in this bulletin, are based on those who have had a conviction at any time since 1960 and those who had either a conviction or a diversionary disposal since the implementation of the Causeway system DSM1, in December 2009. This means that the reported rate of first offences may be slightly higher than the actuality, as, in some cases, first offences would have been dealt with by means of diversionary disposal, information on which is not available prior to the introduction of DSM1. However, any likely impact of this statistical effect should lessen with the passing of time. Reoffending statistics suggest that, in most crime categories, persons who commit a proven re-offence do so within one year. As a result, the first year when it might be considered that the effect of diversions data being unavailable for the period prior to 2010 might be reduced is 2011/12 and data are available, as part of this series, from that point forward.

In this publication, first offences dealt with by conviction are distinct from those instances counted as a first conviction. This is because an individual receiving a first conviction may have previously been dealt with within the justice system by way of diversion. The following table compares first offences where a conviction has been imposed in 2018/19 with those cases of first convictions where diversions previously received have not been taken into consideration. The difference between the two rates is explained by the inclusion of diversions information for those cases where a diversion was an offender's first true contact with the justice system.

First convictions and first offences dealt with by conviction, 2018/19

| First convictions | First offence dealt with by conviction | All convictions | First convictions as % all convictions | First offences as % all convictions |
|-------------------|--|-----------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| 6,695 | 5,537 | 24,863 | 26.9% | 22.3% |

Appendix 1

Methodology and Counting Rules

1.6 Statistical coverage

The data included in the bulletin are based on those who were convicted in a court, or who had a diversionary disposal recorded as completed in Northern Ireland for the year 1 April 2018 – 31 March 2019. Statistical coverage is restricted to those criminal prosecutions which were brought by PPS on behalf of the PSNI, the NCA, the Airport Constabulary or Harbour Police. Cases relating to prosecutions brought by government departments, public bodies and private individuals are not included, as their prosecution is beyond the remit of the Department of Justice.

The court structure of Northern Ireland does not equate to the court structures of England and Wales, Scotland or the Republic of Ireland, and therefore no comparisons have been made between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK and Ireland.

1.7 Analysis and Presentation of Statistics

The data used in this report are validated, maintained and analysed using IBM SPSS, which is a statistical package commonly used within social science.

For ease of use, figures in tables and charts are given as whole numbers, whereas percentages throughout the text and tables are reported to one decimal place. Whilst tables of information have been included in Appendix 1, the tables are also published alongside this bulletin in Microsoft Excel and OpenDocument Spreadsheet format, for ease of use.

Appendix 1

Methodology and Counting Rules

1.8 Future publications

The next Statistical Bulletin on First Time Entrants to the Justice System, covering the 2019/20 financial year (1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020), will be published in early summer 2021.

1.9 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 DoJ and are responsible for ensuring that the statistics produced comply with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

The DoJ 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 on the Contents page.