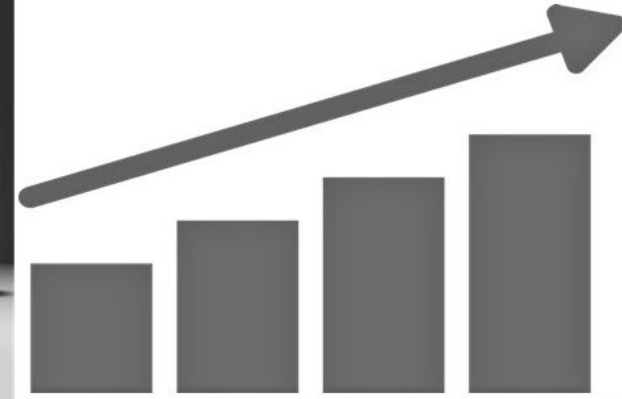


YOUTH ENGAGEMENT STATISTICS FOR NORTHERN IRELAND APRIL 2021 TO MARCH 2022

I Graham
December 2022



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1 | Key Findings

1.1 About this bulletin

This bulletin presents data on cases relating to young people (aged 10 to 17 years) coming into formal contact with the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland for the year 1 April 2021 – 31 March 2022. It provides some detail on those referred for the Youth Engagement process, alongside information on the time taken for that process to complete and the subsequent outcomes. The first bulletin in the series was produced for the year to April 2019. Like the rest of the justice system, the Youth Engagement process was impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and that is reflected in the numbers reported in this publication.



1 | Key Findings

1.2 Overall

- There were 2,487 cases relating to young people coming into formal contact with the criminal justice system in 2021-22. This is an increase of 220 (9.7%) from 2020-21.
- The Public Prosecution Service (PPS) assessed 40.9% (1,016) of cases suitable for resolution through the Youth Engagement process and 53.5% (1,330) as not suitable.
- Of those assessed by PPS as not suitable for Youth Engagement, 41.0% (545) were deemed suitable for prosecution and 58.3% (775) were assessed as requiring no further action.

1.3 Age Group and Gender

- The majority (75.3%, 1,873) of young people coming into formal contact with the justice system in 2021-22 were male¹.
- Almost half, (49.9%, 1,242) of cases in 2021-22 were in relation to those aged 16 or 17 at the time of their offence. The remaining 50.1 % (1,245) were aged 10 to 15 at the time of their offence.

1.4 Youth Engagement Process

- The most frequent outcome of those completing the youth engagement process, 41.3% (420), was a Youth Conference.
- Almost all of the cases (89.0%, 81) removed from the Youth Engagement process were returned to the PPS for a further decision on how the case was to be progressed.
- The median time for a case to be dealt with through the Youth Engagement process in 2021-22 was 66 days, a decrease of 12 days from the median time recorded in 2020-21.
- Legal representation, while offered to individuals, was declined in the majority (83.0%, 599) of cases by the family.
- Of those who participated in a Youth Engagement clinic and responded to the survey question, 98.9% (258) of young people stated the clinic 'helped them understand the choices available to them'.

1. Figures for males include young people who identified as transgender or whose gender is unknown, due to the small numbers involved.

2 | Context

2.1 What is Youth Engagement?

Young people coming into contact with the criminal justice system may; go through the formal court process, be dealt with through an out-of-court diversionary disposal; or have no further action taken. The Public Prosecution Service (PPS) decide which route may be appropriate for each young person dependent upon the circumstances of the case and the seriousness of any offence involved. Those deemed suitable to be dealt with by an out-of-court diversionary disposal may be progressed through a process called Youth Engagement (YE). In most cases, where PPS decides that a young person's case can be dealt with outside the court system, the young person will be asked to attend a YE clinic. The aim of the clinic is to make sure that young people have all the information they need to help them decide what to do.

At the clinic, the young person, their parent(s)/guardian(s) and solicitor meet with youth justice workers from the Youth Justice Agency (YJA) and the police (PSNI). They let the young person know what the PPS has decided in their case, what it means and the options available to them. A solicitor can help guide the young person through the process and explain things like the crime they have been accused of and the nature of any relevant evidence in the case.

2.2 Youth Engagement Process

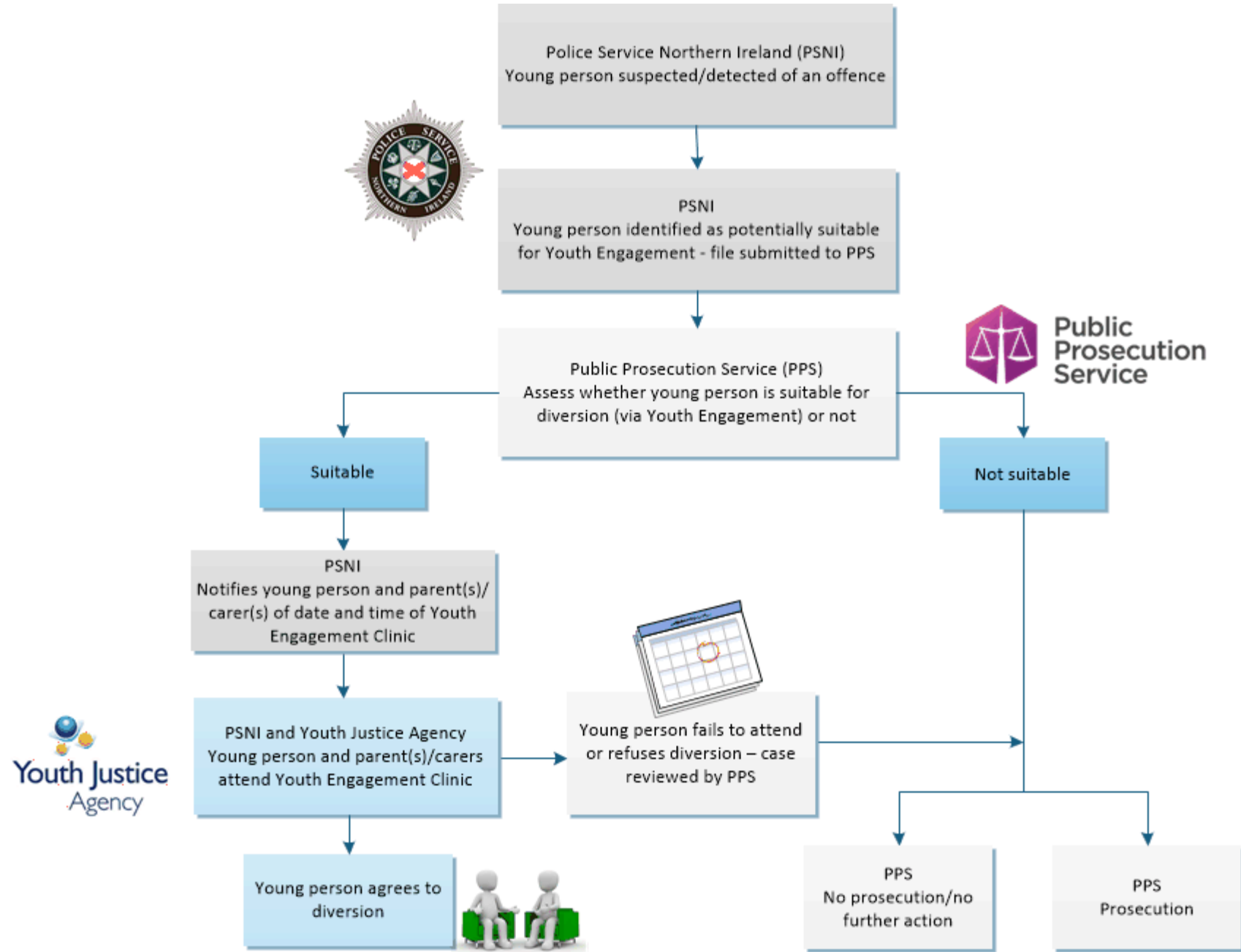
The flowchart at Figure 1 shows the YE process from the point PSNI identify the young person suspected/detected of an offence. Once this has happened, PSNI will assess whether the young person is suitable for YE. If they are assessed as suitable, a file is submitted to PPS with this recommendation.

The PPS will assess whether the young person is suitable for diversion or not. At this point, if they are regarded as not suitable, the young person will follow one of two paths:

1. the PPS will decide there should be no prosecution and therefore no further action or;
2. the PPS decide to pursue prosecution at court.

Should PPS decide the young person is suitable for the YE process, then PSNI will notify the young person and parent/carer of the date and time of a Youth Engagement Clinic. PSNI and YJA meet with the young person at the clinic. A diversion can be agreed at this point. However, if the young person fails to attend or refuses the diversion, the case is returned to PPS to be reviewed. The case may then be processed for prosecution or, upon further reflection, no further action may be taken.

2 | Context



2 | Context

2.3 Youth Engagement Objectives

Youth Engagement was introduced following the conclusion of a pilot exercise in 2013. It is a tripartite initiative across Northern Ireland, involving PSNI, PPS and YJA and its objectives are to:

1. assist with the diversion away from court, of young people who admit to low-level offences, into a reparative or diversionary process, with the option of support or intervention at an earlier stage;
2. support young people accused of a crime to make better informed decisions;
3. enhance the rehabilitative and restorative benefits of the disposal, by ensuring that youth cases are resolved as swiftly as possible;
4. improve processing times for youth cases that are unsuitable for diversionary action.

2.4 Timely Resolution

Overall, these objectives contribute to speeding up the criminal justice system. This has been a priority for the Department of Justice (DoJ) since the devolution of responsibility for policing and justice in April 2010, both for cases resulting in out-of-court diversionary disposals and for cases dealt with at court.

The efficiency of the criminal justice system is important for victims, witnesses, their families and communities, in terms of building confidence, as well as demonstrating legitimacy of the rule of law. Additionally, early resolution of cases can also help offenders understand the implications of their actions. The timely completion of cases, commensurate with the principles of a fair and just process, contributes to delivery of an effective and efficient justice system.

The Covid-19 pandemic however, has impacted on the levels of Youth Engagement clinics that could be held, as well as on other parts of the justice system. This has meant that, for a large part of 2020-21, cases were not able to proceed through the system at a rate they might otherwise have done. The impact of this may be seen in the figures reported for 2021-22.

2 | Context

2.5 About this Report

This bulletin, published annually, presents data on cases relating to young people coming into formal contact with the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland during the year 1 April 2021 – 31 March 2022. It provides detail on those referred for the YE process, alongside information on the time taken for that process to complete and on subsequent outcomes. Detail on the structure of the population concerned is also included. Some comparison has been made with figures from the other years for which this information has been available.

Details of data coverage, quality and methodology are detailed in Appendix 1. Data in all tables and charts in the bulletin, along with supplementary data, are available from the DOJ website in the accompanying spreadsheet.

The next update, covering the 12 months to 31 March 2023, will be published in December 2023. A full [publication schedule](#) is available on the DOJ website.

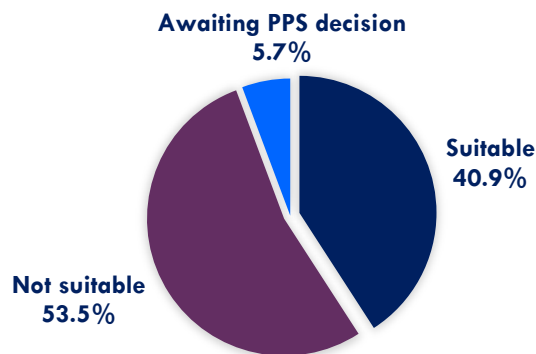
3 Findings

3.1 Overview

There were 2,487 cases relating to young people coming into formal contact with the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland during the year 1 April 2021 – 31 March 2022. The total number of referrals increased by 9.7% from 2,267 in 2020-21.

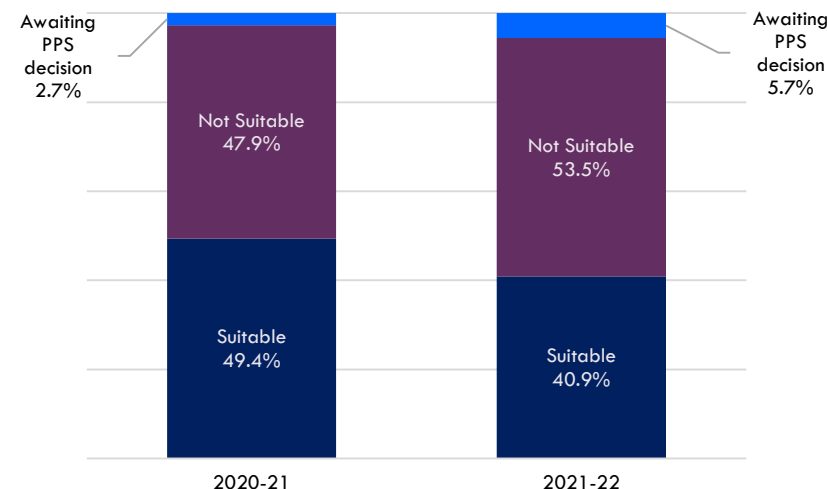
In 2021-22, PPS assessed 40.9% (1,016) of cases involving young people that were referred to them as suitable for resolution through the YE process and 53.5% (1,330) as not suitable. The figures for 2020-21 were 49.4% (1,121) and 47.9% (1,085) respectively.

Figure 1: Cases assessed as suitable/not suitable for Youth Engagement



At the end of September 2022, when data for 2021-22 were reviewed, 5.7% (141) of cases were still awaiting a decision by PPS on whether they were suitable for YE. This is a three percentage point increase in the numbers awaiting PPS decision, comparing 2020-21 to 2021-22. (Figures 1 and 2 and Table 1 in accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

Figure 2: Cases assessed as suitable/not suitable for Youth Engagement by year



3 Findings

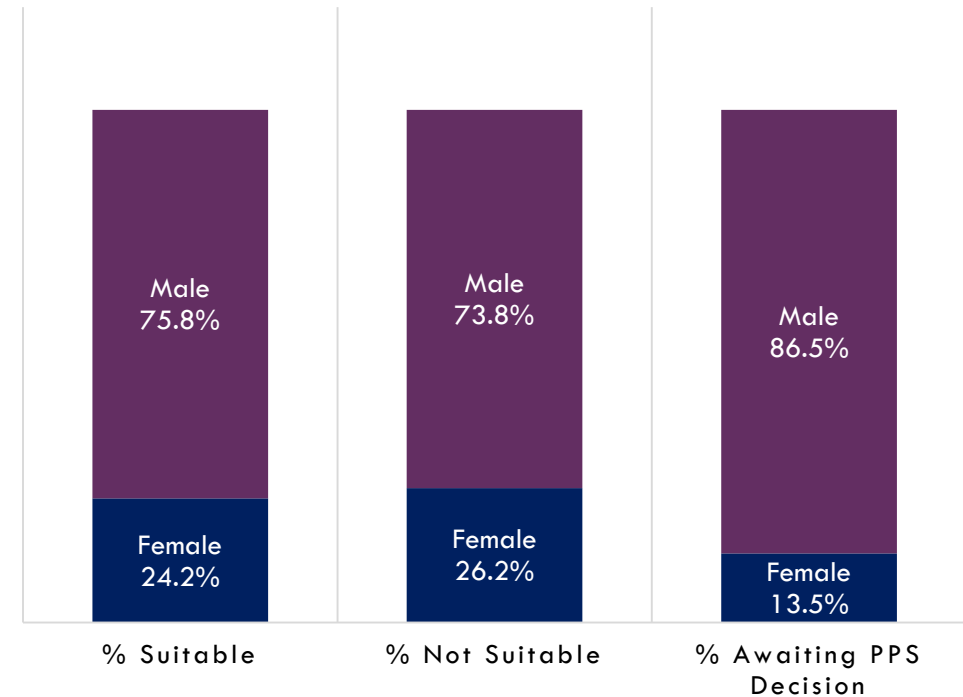
3.2 Numbers of Referrals by Gender

The majority of young people (75.3%, 1,873) coming into formal contact with the justice system in 2021-22 were male¹ and 24.7% (614) were female. Of all those adjudged suitable for the YE process, males made up 75.8% (770) while females made up 24.2% (246). The proportion of males adjudged not suitable for the YE process was slightly lower, at 73.8% (981) whilst 26.2% (349) of females were adjudged not suitable for YE. (Figure 3 and Table 2 in the accompanying spreadsheet).

Proportionately, females were more likely (56.8%, 349), to be assessed as not suitable for YE, in 2021-22 compared to males (52.4%, 981). The proportion of females (40.1%, 246) assessed as suitable for YE was slightly lower in 2021-22 than that for males (41.1%, 770).

At the end of September 2022, when data for 2021-22 were reviewed, males made up 86.5% (122 out of a total of 141) cases where PPS had yet to issue a decision on how these cases were to proceed.

Figure 3: Youth Engagement referrals by gender



¹. Figures for males include young people who identified as transgender or whose gender is unknown, due to the small numbers involved.

3 Findings

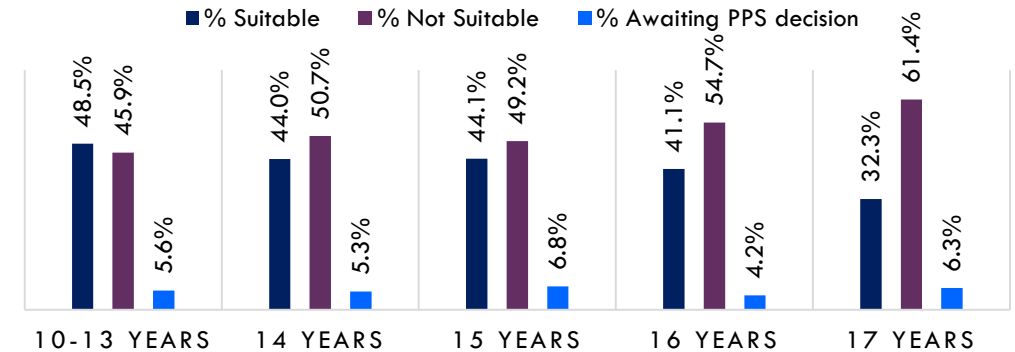
3.3 Numbers of Referrals by Age

Just under half (49.9%, 1,242) of cases in 2021-22 involved young people aged 16 or 17 at the time of their offence (21.8% and 28.1% respectively). The remaining 50.1% (1,245) of cases were made up of those aged from 10 to 15 years. (Figure 4 and Table 3a, 3b and 3c in the accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

Young people aged 16 and 17 at date of offence, made up 44.2% (449) of all cases assessed as suitable for YE. They also made up the majority of cases assessed as not suitable 54.6% (726).

Where a decision as to suitability for YE had been taken by PPS, under 16s were more likely to be assessed as suitable for the YE process, than those aged 16 or 17, with 48.4% (567) of young people in the lower age group being assessed as suitable for YE. Conversely, only 38.2% (449) of young people aged 16 to 17 at date of offence were assessed as suitable for YE. Young people aged 17 made up the largest proportion overall of those assessed as not suitable (429, 32.3%).

Figure 4: Youth Engagement referrals by age



3.4 Cases assessed as not suitable by PPS

Of the 1,330 of cases assessed by PPS as not suitable for progression through the YE process, 41.0% (545) were sent forward for prosecution at court, whereas in 58.3% (775) of the cases, PPS decided that there should be no further action. Additionally, 0.8% (10) of cases were assessed as not suitable for YE for other reasons, such as the young person agreeing to participate in the Northern Ireland Driver Improvement Scheme. (Table 4 in the accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

3 Findings

3.5 Outcomes of Youth Engagement Clinics

In 2021-22, 41.3% (420) of the 1,016 cases assessed by PPS as suitable for YE, resulted in a youth conference plan. A further 21.9% (222) of cases resulted in an informed warning and 16.8% (171) of cases resulted in a restorative caution being issued. The corresponding percentages for these outcomes in 2020-21 were 41.2%, 19.7% and 13.2% respectively.

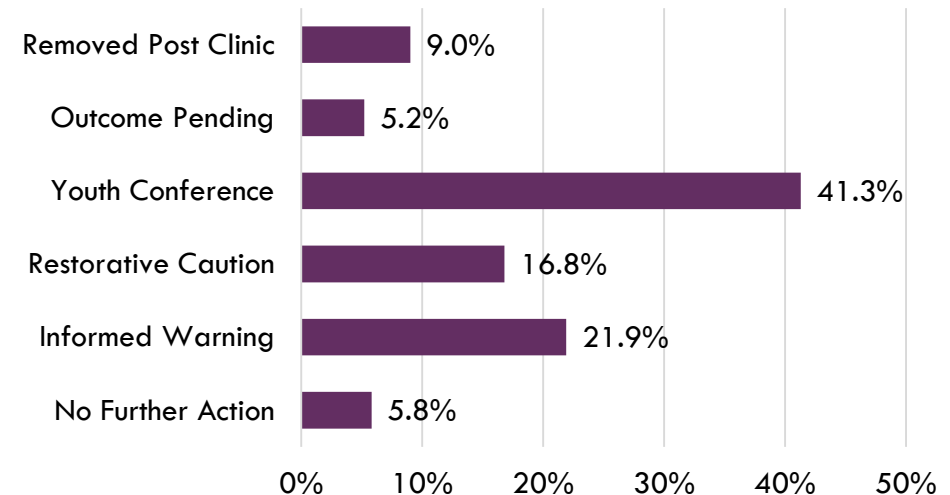
The remainder of the cases, those which did not result in a youth conference plan, restorative caution or informed warning, were either returned to PPS for further consideration post-clinic (9.0%, 91) or resulted in a decision of no further action being taken (5.8%, 59). This latter figure decreased from 15.3% (172) in 2020-21, though that proportion may have been higher than normal due to the impact of the Covid pandemic on the conducting of processes in the normal manner.

The number of cases where an outcome of the YE clinic was pending rose to 75 cases (6.1% of the total) in 2019-20 but has fallen in the current year to 53 cases (5.2%). The figure for 2018-19 clinic outcome pending was 2 cases (0.2%). The higher than usual figure for 2021-22 is likely due to the

continuing effect of the delay introduced to the justice system as a result of the lockdown which occurred due to the Covid-19 pandemic. (Figure 5 and Table 5 in the accompanying [spreadsheet](#))

Of the 91 cases returned to PPS post-clinic, 81 (89.0%) were recorded as returned to PPS for further decision regarding either prosecution or no further action, while in 6 cases the young person did not attend the clinic and in 4 cases the diversion had been refused. (Table 8 in the accompanying [spreadsheet](#))

Figure 5: Outcomes of Youth Engagement Clinics



3 Findings

A youth conference plan was the most common outcome for both males and females as a result of participation in the YE process, with 42.6% (328) of males and 37.4% (92) of females receiving this outcome in 2021-22. The second most common outcome for both males and females was an informed warning, with 21.2% (163) of males and 24.0% (59) of females receiving this outcome. A restorative caution was the outcome for 17.1% (132) of males and 15.9% (39) of females, as a result of participation in the YE process in 2021-22. No further action was the outcome for 4.8% (37) of males compared to 8.9% (22) of females in 2021-22.

Regardless of age, the most common outcome for young people going through the YE process is a youth conference plan, an outcome associated with 41.3% (420) of all cases in 2021-22. This was the outcome for 30.5% (61) of 10-13 year-olds and 49.3% (110) of 16 year-olds. Informed warnings were received in 21.9%

(222) of all cases, ranging from 15.9% (36) for 17 year-olds to 29.0% (58) for 10-13 year-olds. While a restorative caution was the outcome in 16.8% (171) of all cases in 2021-22, the proportion varied across age groups, with this being the outcome for 12.7% (20) of 14 year olds, compared to 27.9% (63) of 17 year olds.

No further action was the outcome for 6.5% (13) of cases involving 10-13 year olds but for only 4.5% (10) of cases involving 16 year olds in 2021-22.

Additionally, 6.6% (15) of cases involving 17 year olds were removed for the YE process post-clinic, in comparison to 13.5% (27) of cases involving 10-13 year olds. (Table 6 to 7 in the accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

3 Findings

3.6 Time Taken for Completion of YE Process

While it is important to examine outcomes for young people coming into formal contact with the justice system, the length of time taken for cases to process through the system, in a sense the efficiency of the criminal justice system, is also important for victims, witnesses, their families and communities, in terms of building confidence, as well as demonstrating legitimacy of the rule of law. Additionally, early resolution of cases can also help young people understand the implications of their actions.

For the above reasons, this report includes information on the time taken for cases to complete the YE process, as well as in relation to the individual constituent stages. For a variety of reasons cases can take differing times to complete and because of this, it was decided to report both the time taken to process 50% (the median point) and the point at which 80% of cases have been completed.

In 2021-22, the median time taken for cases, i.e. the time for half of such cases, to complete the YE process, from the date an individual was charged or informed to the Youth Engagement first clinic date, was 66 days (78 days in 2020-21). While 80% of cases were completed within 139 days (138 days in 2020-21), the longest time taken for a case to complete the YE process in 2021-22 was 483 days. Additionally, the median number of days has fallen slightly from that recorded in 2020-21 but it is still higher than the median recorded in 2019/20 the year before the pandemic (49 days). (Figures 6a and 6b and Table 9a to 9c in the accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

Stages of Process

Stage 1 – Date accused informed to date file submitted to PPS

Stage 2 – Date file submitted to PPS to date of PPS decision

Stage 3 – Date of PPS decision to date of clinic (1st appointment)

End to End – Date ‘accused informed’ to date of clinic (1st appointment)

3 Findings

Figure 6a: Median Time (days) from accused informed to date of clinic by Stage

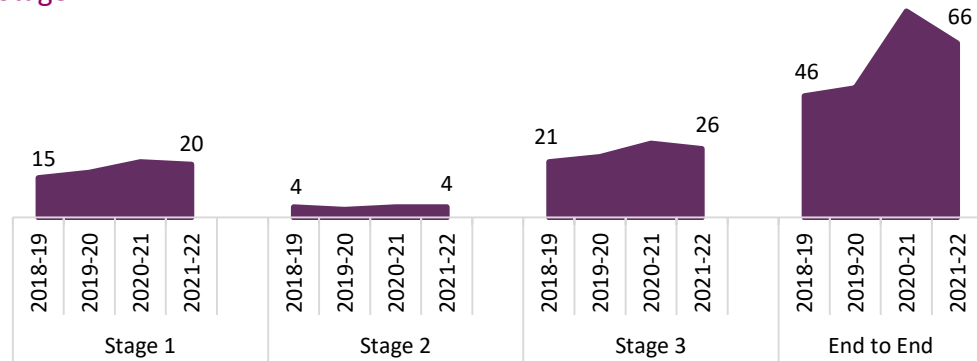
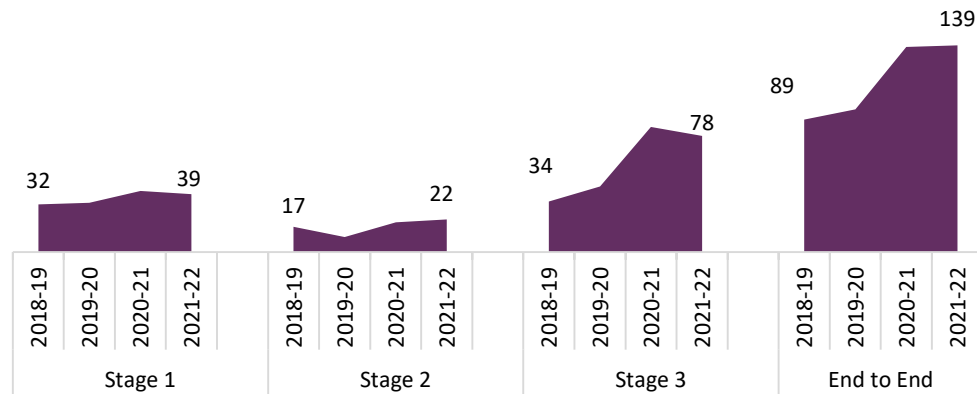


Figure 6b: Time (days) from accused informed to date of clinic by Stage (80th Percentile)

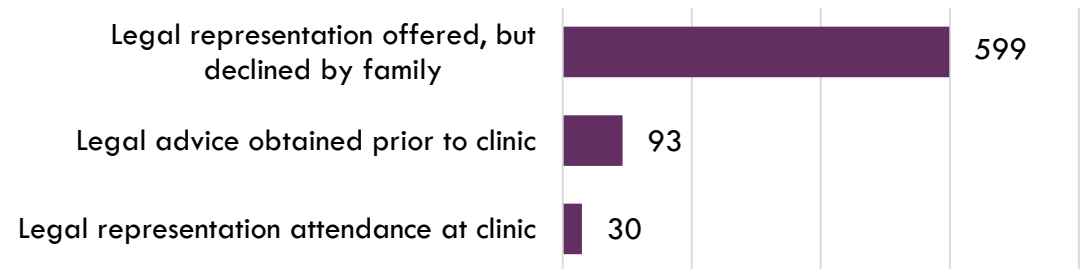


3.7 Legal Representation at YE Clinics

As part of the YE process, all young people are offered legal representation, to help guide them through the process and explain things such as the crime they have been accused of and the evidence that can be used against them.

During the year 2021-22, legal representation, while offered, was declined by the young person or their family in 83.0% (599) of cases (2020-21, 83.3%). Legal advice was obtained prior to the clinic in 12.9% (93) of cases (12.0% in 2020-21) and in the remaining 4.2% (30) of cases (4.7% in 2020-21) the young person had legal representation present at the YE clinic. (Figure 7 and Table 10 in the accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

Figure 7: Number of cases with legal representation at clinics



3 Findings

3.8 Victim Involvement

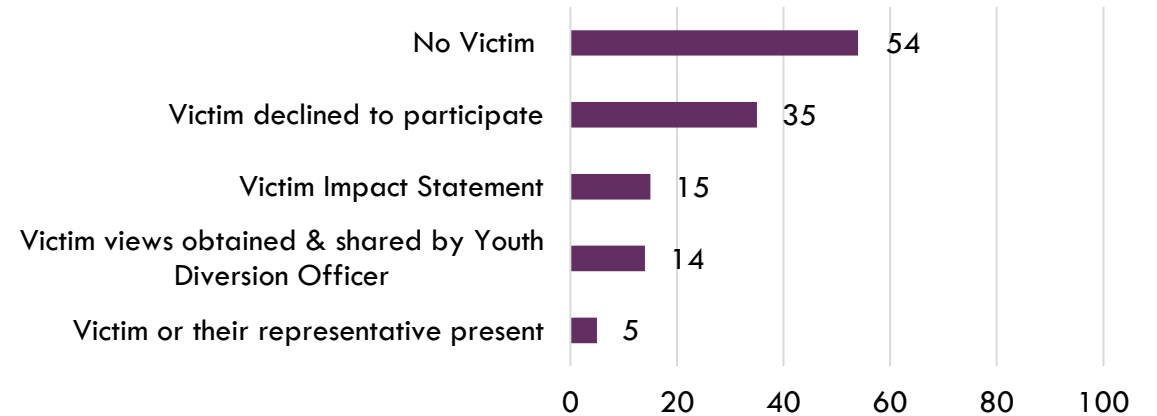
Where the outcome of a YE clinic is a restorative caution, there is an opportunity for the young person and their parents to meet with the victim and anyone else who has been affected by the crime. Everyone is given a chance to talk about the impact the crime has had on them. There is a signed written record of the meeting, with the young person agreeing to apologise, take part in work to make amends to the victim or community, or go to classes to address their offending behaviour.

In 2021-22, for clinics where the outcome was a restorative caution, there were 69 cases (86 in 2020-21) where a victim was associated with the offence committed. In 7.2% (5) of these cases, the victim or their representative was present. This is an increase of 3 cases from 2020-21 when 2.3% (2) of cases had a victim or their representative present. There was a decrease in the number of cases where the victim's views were obtained and shared with the young person involved by the Youth Diversion Officer (YDO); 14 (20.3%) cases in 2021-22 compared to 27 (31.4%) cases in 2020-21.

In 15 (21.7%) cases, a victim impact statement was shared with the young person concerned, an increase from the 11 (12.8%) recorded in 2020-21. There was a decrease in the number and proportion of cases in which the victim declined to participate in the YE process, from 46 (53.5%) cases in 2020-21 to 35 (50.7%) cases in 2021-22.

The remaining 54 cases in 2021-22 related to offences where there was no victim. (Figure 8 and Table 11 in the accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

Figure 8: Cases with victim/representative involvement (Restorative Cautions only)



4 Youth Justice Agency Youth Engagement Survey

4.1 About the survey

Youth Justice Agency complete a Youth Engagement Clinic Satisfaction Survey for both the young people attending the clinics and the parents/carers of the young people. During 2021-22 there were 261 responses from young people and 257 from parent/carers. Those surveyed may not have provided answers to all questions and figures are therefore based on the number of responses for each individual question.

4.2 Young People Survey 2021-22

Of the 261 who responded to the question, 98.9% (258) of young people stated the YE Clinic “helped them understand the choices available following the meeting”. There was one response stating ‘No’ in answer to the question, with two stating they were ‘Not sure’. (Figure 9 and Table 12 in the accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

Of the 257 who responded to the question, 100.0% (257) parents/carers stated the YE Clinic helped them “understand the choices available to the young person concerned following the meeting”. (Figure 10 and Table 13 in the accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

Figure 9: It (YEC) helped me understand the choices available following the meeting

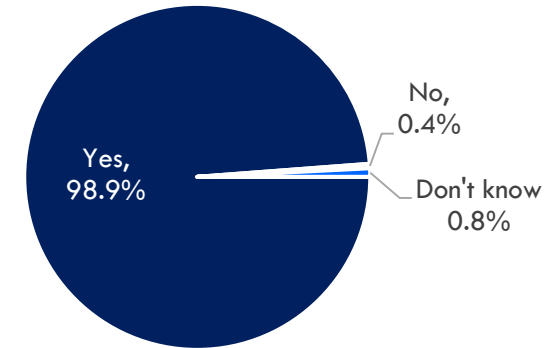
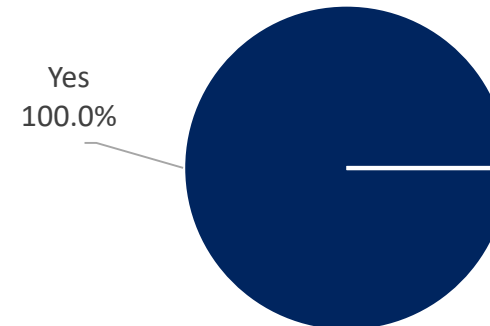


Figure 10: It (YEC) helped the young person understand the choices available following the meeting



5 | Appendix 1 – Methodology and Counting Rules

What are we counting?

The figures reported in Tables 1–9 of this bulletin relate to cases prosecuted by the PPS on behalf of PSNI, Harbour Police, Airport Constabulary or the National Crime Agency (NCA). The period covered by this bulletin is based on the date of charge (for charge cases) or date accused informed (for summons cases). The data relate to young people aged under 18 at time of offence.

Tables 10 and 11 are based on Youth Engagement clinics which happened within the year 2021-22. After the Youth Justice Agency has engaged with children via a Youth Engagement Clinic, they conduct a satisfaction survey in order to monitor their services. The survey is issued to both the children and their parents/carers by telephone, post, and in person. The analysis within Tables 12 and 13 of this publication is based on survey responses (not the date of the clinic) collected between April 2021 to March 2022 and completion of the survey is optional.

All tables relate to young people aged under 18 at time of offence. 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 principal offence is generally 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.

This bulletin does not include cases where young people coming into contact with the police are dealt with by way of an informal out-of-court community resolution. These resolutions allow officers to use their professional judgement and discretion in managing low level and local crimes and are therefore dealt with differently. Information on numbers of community resolution notices issued are published separately by PSNI.

5 | Appendix 1 – Methodology and Counting Rules

Data source and coverage

The data for Tables 1–9 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 originates in the PSNI, 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 (CJOs) in Northern Ireland.

Data relating to Youth Engagement clinic dates and outcomes, sourced from the YJA Management Information System, are matched with the information from Causeway, to complete the dataset. Information in relation to legal representation at clinics, as well as in relation to victim involvement, reported in Tables 10 and 11, is sourced from PSNI. Information on satisfaction with the Youth Engagement process, reported in Tables 12 and 13, is sourced from the YJA.

Full details of data relevance, accuracy, timeliness, accessibility, coherence, user need, cost and confidentiality is available in the [accompanying background quality](#) report. Details of the data quality checks and processes that DoJ has in place are available in the [Quality Assurance of Administrative Data \(QAAD\)](#) document on the DoJ website.

5 | Appendix 1 – Methodology and Counting Rules

Data strengths and limitations

Strengths

- Causeway is an integrated messaging system specifically designed to support information sharing between the five main NI Criminal Justice organisations. The information recorded within the individual organisations is used to manage day to day business and to communicate between the other organisations so needs to be highly accurate.
- The system works well and is trusted by the staff who use it. It is reliable and needs minimal maintenance.
- The recording of data on and use of the Youth Justice Case Management System is conducted on an ongoing basis by YJA staff and underpins their case management, so it is important that a high degree of accuracy is maintained.
- The data are sourced from administrative data systems and are a complete record of all relevant cases (i.e. are not based on a sample of cases).
- Processes and systems have been developed and refined over the years to address any quality concerns that emerged and the statisticians have developed a complex and detailed series of validation checks which are applied to the data to ensure any anomalies are corrected.

Limitations

- The system depends on staff within relevant Criminal Justice organisations inputting details and updating records on their own systems. While there is the potential for problems to occur if details aren't updated on a timely basis or if input errors occur, the nature of the information make accuracy critical.
- Youth Justice Agency records sit outside Causeway, which may leave some potential for inaccuracy or delay in updating records between the YJA case management system and Causeway.

5 | Appendix 1 – Methodology and Counting Rules

Interpreting the data

Figures reported relate primarily to the numbers of young people coming into the justice system: whether they are deemed suitable or not suitable for Youth Engagement and the reason why. For those assessed as suitable, some analysis is provided on the outcomes of subsequent Youth Engagement clinics held, alongside a breakdown on the time taken for relevant stages within the process to complete.

The figures reported are based on individual cases however, some young people may, legitimately, be counted more than once in the figures reported. For example, in 2021-22, the 2,487 cases reported relate to 1,598 young people. Where a young person comes into contact with the justice system on more than one occasion, in relation to separate cases, these have been counted separately.

For the purposes of this publication, scheduled clinic dates are taken as those on which the clinic occurred or which were scheduled but on which the defendant did not attend. They do not include dates which were scheduled but were listed as postponed.

Figures reported in Table 9 relate primarily to the average time taken from the date the young person was charged, or informed they were to be prosecuted, to first date set for the Youth Engagement clinic. The form of average reported on in this bulletin is the median, or the value at which 50 percent of cases were completed. Figures for the time taken to deal with cases at the 80th percentile (the time in which 80% of cases were dealt with) are also reported. The median is used as a measure of average in this report 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.