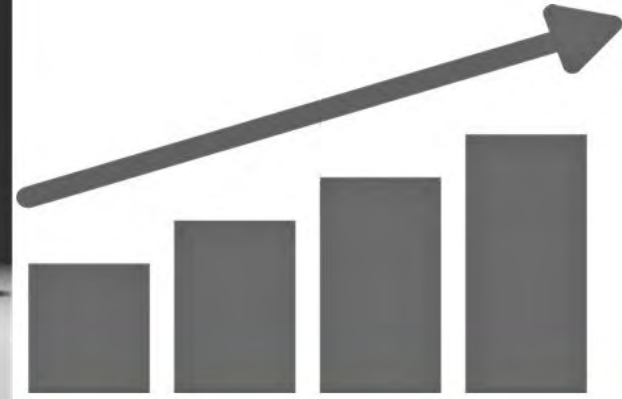


YOUTH ENGAGEMENT STATISTICS FOR NORTHERN IRELAND APRIL 2023 TO MARCH 2024

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November 2024



Contents

Table of Contents

	Page
1. Key Findings	1
2. Context	3
3. Findings	7
4. Youth Justice Agency Youth Engagement Survey	15
5. Appendix 1 – Methodology and Counting Rules	16

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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 2023 to 31 March 2024. 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 3,356 cases relating to young people coming into formal contact with the criminal justice system in 2023-24. This is a decrease of 397 (10.6%) from 2022-23.
- The Public Prosecution Service (PPS) assessed 35.4% (1,189) of cases suitable for resolution through the Youth Engagement process and 59.6% (1,999) as not suitable.
- Of those assessed by PPS as not suitable for Youth Engagement, 43.7% (873) were deemed suitable for prosecution and 55.3% (1,105) were assessed as requiring no further action.

1.3 Age Group and Gender

- The majority (74.2%, 2,491) of young people coming into formal contact with the justice system in 2023-24 were male¹.
- Over two fifths, (43.5%, 1,460) of cases in 2023-24 were in relation to those aged 16 or 17 at the time of their offence. The remaining 56.5% (1,896) 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, 45.8% (545), was a Youth Conference.
- Almost all of the cases (88.5%, 85) 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 2023-24 was 67 days, the same as the median time recorded in 2022-23.
- Legal representation, while offered to individuals, was declined in the majority (75.6%, 649) of cases by the family.
- Of those who participated in a Youth Engagement clinic and responded to the survey question, 98.9% (260) 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.

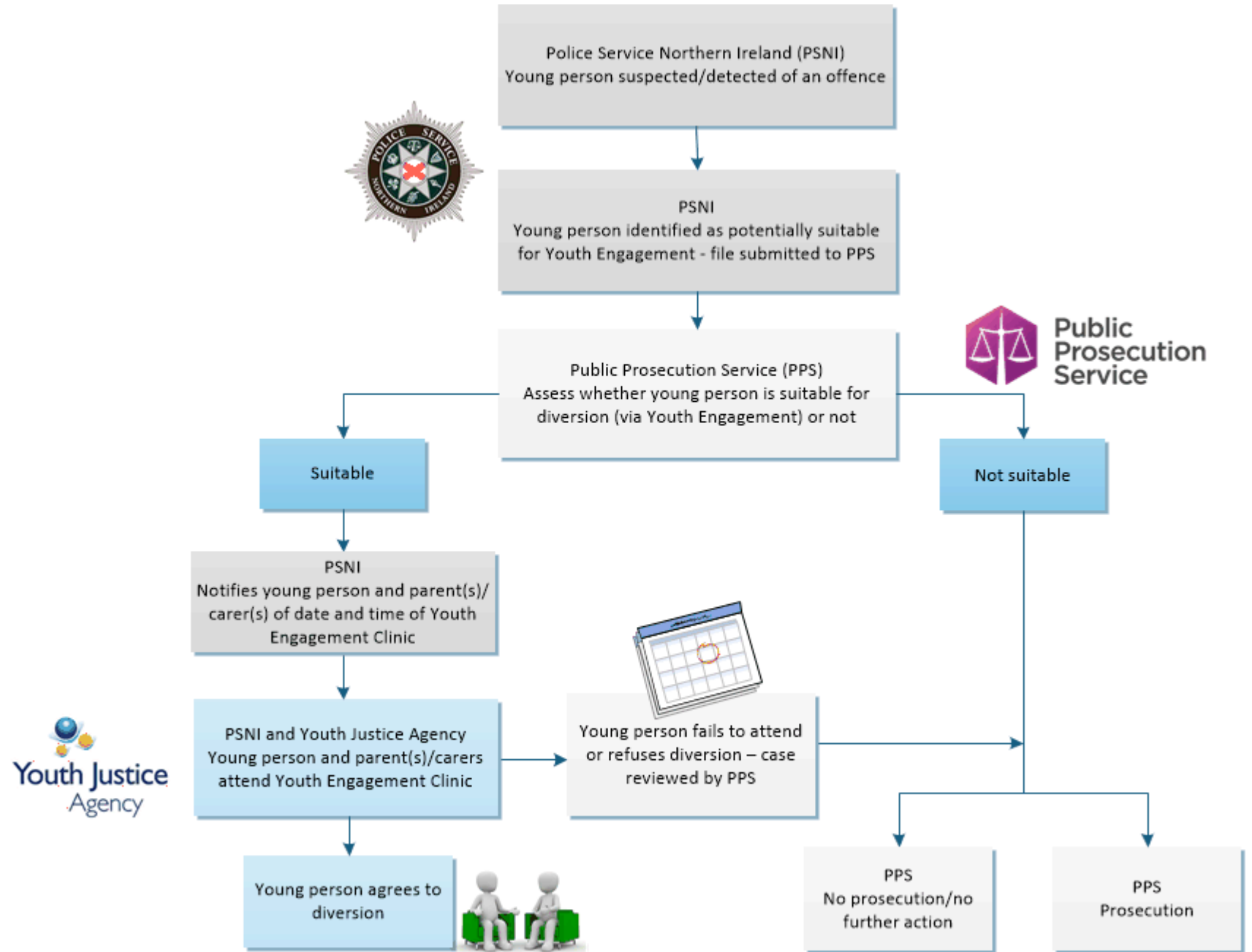
The PPS will assess whether the young person is suitable for diversion or not. At this point, if they are regarded as not suitable, the young person will follow one of two paths:

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

Figure 1: Simplified Youth Engagement Process



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, impacted on the levels of Youth Engagement clinics that could be held, as well as on other parts of the justice system. Figures for 2023-24 still show some evidence of the legacy of the delay introduced into the system during that period.

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 2023 to 31 March 2024. 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 2025, will be published in November 2025. A full [publication schedule](#) is available on the DoJ website.

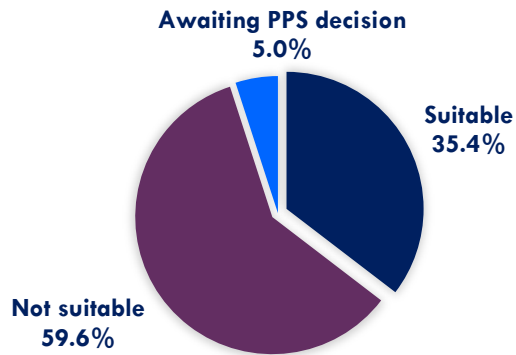
3 Findings

3.1 Overview

There were 3,356 cases relating to young people coming into formal contact with the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland during the year 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, a decrease of 10.6% from 3,753 in 2022-23.

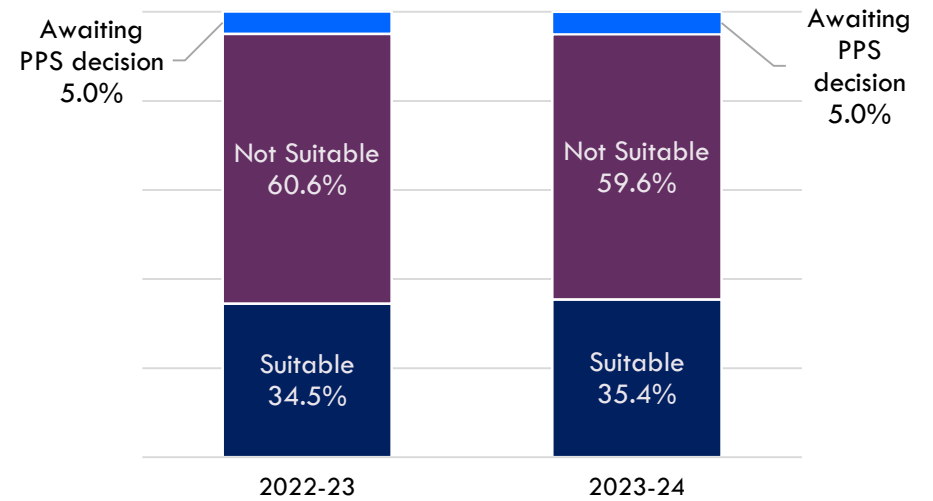
In 2023-24, PPS assessed 35.4% (1,189) of cases involving young people that were referred to them as suitable for resolution through the YE process and 59.6% (1,999) as not suitable. The figures for 2022-23 were 34.5% (1,293) and 60.6% (2,273) respectively.

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



At the end of September 2024, when data for 2023-24 were reviewed, 5.0% (168) of cases were still awaiting a decision by PPS on whether they were suitable for YE. This was the same proportion as in the previous year. (Figures 1 and 2 and Table 1 in accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

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



Note: Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding.

3 Findings

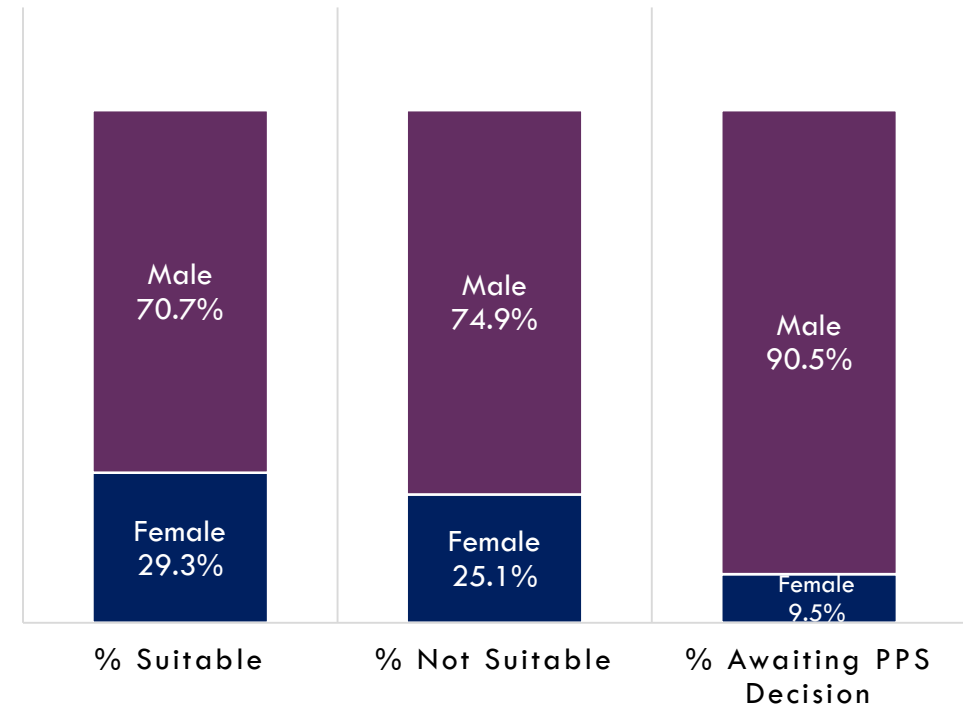
3.2 Numbers of Referrals by Gender

The majority of young people (74.2%, 2,491) coming into formal contact with the justice system in 2023-24 were male¹; 25.8% (865) were female. Of all those adjudged suitable for the YE process, males made up 70.7% (841) and females 29.3% (348). Of those adjudged not suitable for YE, males accounted for 74.9% (1,498) and females for 25.1% (501). (Figure 3 and Table 2 in the accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

Where a decision as to suitability for YE had been reached, females (41.0%, 348) were proportionately more likely than males (36.0%, 841) to be assessed as suitable. The proportion of females (41.0%, 348) assessed as not suitable was 59.0% (501) and for males 64.0% (1,498).

At the end of September 2024, when data for 2023-24 were reviewed, males made up 90.5% (152 out of a total of 168) of 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

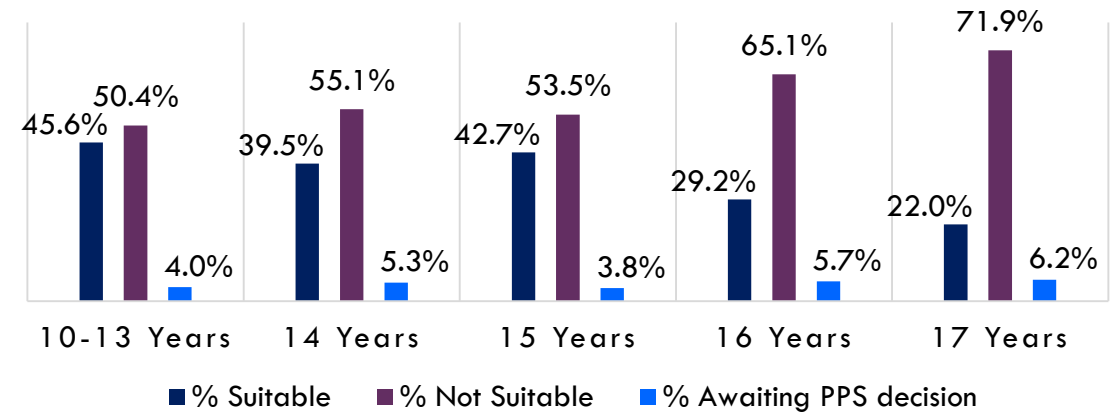
3.3 Numbers of Referrals by Age

Over two fifths (43.5%, 1,460) of cases in 2023-24 involved young people aged 16 or 17 at the time of their offence (20.3% and 23.2% respectively). The remaining 56.5% (1,896) 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](#)).

Where a decision as to suitability for YE had been taken by PPS, under 16s (45.1%; 819) were more likely to be assessed as suitable for the YE process, than those aged 16 or 17 (26.9%; 370).

In terms of being assessed as not suitable, those aged 16 or 17 made up half of cases (50.2%; 1,003), with 17 year olds making up the largest proportion overall (559, 28.0%).

Figure 4: Youth Engagement referrals by age



3.4 Cases assessed as not suitable by PPS

Of the 1,999 cases assessed by PPS as not suitable for progression through the YE process, 43.7% (873) were sent forward for prosecution at court, whereas in 55.3% (1,105) of the cases, PPS decided that there should be no further action. The remaining 1.1% (21) of cases were assessed as not suitable for YE for reasons unknown or 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

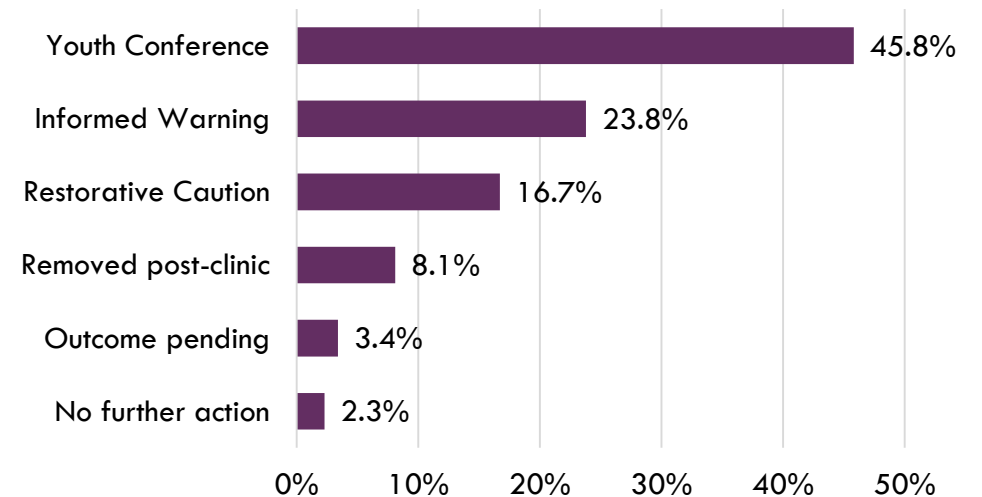
In 2023-24, 45.8% (545) of the 1,189 cases assessed by PPS as suitable for YE, resulted in a youth conference plan. A further 23.8% (283) of cases resulted in an informed warning and 16.7% (198) in a restorative caution being issued. The comparative figures for these outcomes in 2022-23 were 47.6%, 21.1% and 17.9% respectively.

The remainder of the cases, were either returned to PPS for further consideration post-clinic (8.1%, 96) or resulted in a decision of no further action being taken (2.3%, 27).

For a further 40 cases (3.4%) the outcome of the YE clinic was pending. The equivalent figure for 2022-23 was 59, (4.6%). (Figure 5 and Table 5 in the accompanying [spreadsheet](#))

Of the 96 cases returned to PPS post-clinic, 85 (88.5%) were recorded as returned to PPS for further decision regarding either prosecution or no further action; in 8 cases (8.3%) the diversion was refused and in 3 (3.1%) the young person did not attend the clinic. (Table 8 in the accompanying [spreadsheet](#))

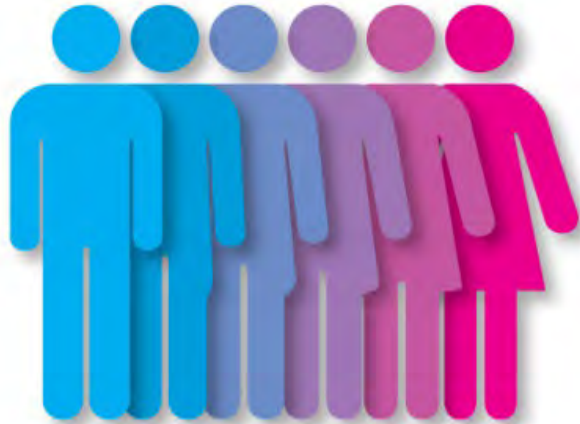
Figure 5: Outcomes of Youth Engagement Clinics



3 Findings

Youth conference plans (males, 46.1%; females, 45.1%), informed warnings (males, 24.0%; females, 23.3%) and restorative cautions (males, 17.5%; females, 14.7%) were the most common outcomes for both males and females as a result of participation in the YE process in 2023-24.

No further action was the outcome for 2.3% (19) of males, the same proportion as for females (2.3%, 8) in 2023-24.



Regardless of age, the most common outcome for young people going through the YE process in 2023-24 was a youth conference plan (45.8% (545) of all cases). Informed warnings and restorative cautions were the second and third most common outcomes for all age groups except for 17 year-olds; restorative cautions and informed warnings were the second and third most common outcomes for this group.

Overall, 8.1% (96) of cases were removed from the YE process post-clinic. Cases involving 14 year olds had the lowest proportion (7.0%, 13) being removed and 17 year olds the highest (9.4%, 16).

No further action was the outcome for 7 cases or less for each of the age groups in 2023-24. Proportionally this ranged from 1.6% (4) of cases involving 15 year olds to 3.8% (7) involving 14 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, detailed opposite. 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 2023-24, 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 67 days. Whilst the median number of days has fallen from 78 in 2020-21 and remained largely unchanged over the past 3 years (67 days in both 2023-24 and 2022-23, and 66 in 2021-22) it is still higher than that recorded in 2019-20 (49 days), the year before the pandemic.

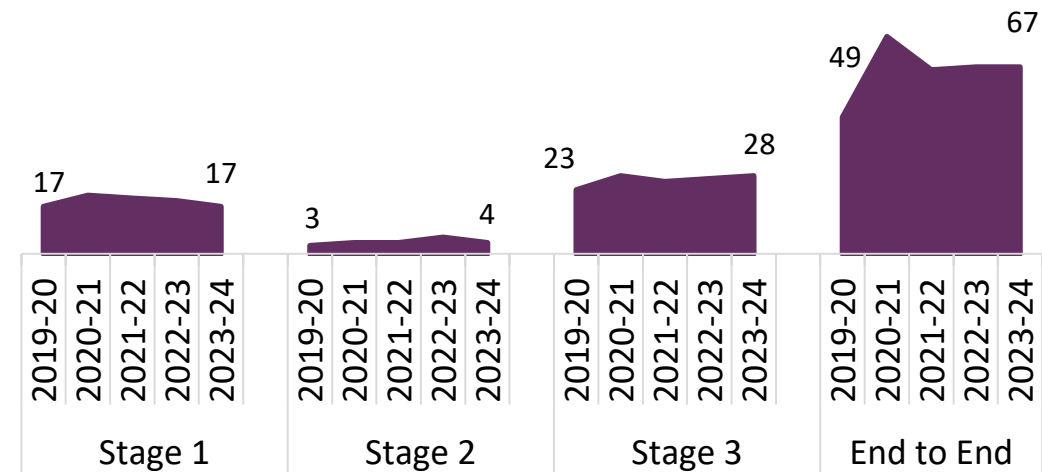
Stages of Process

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)

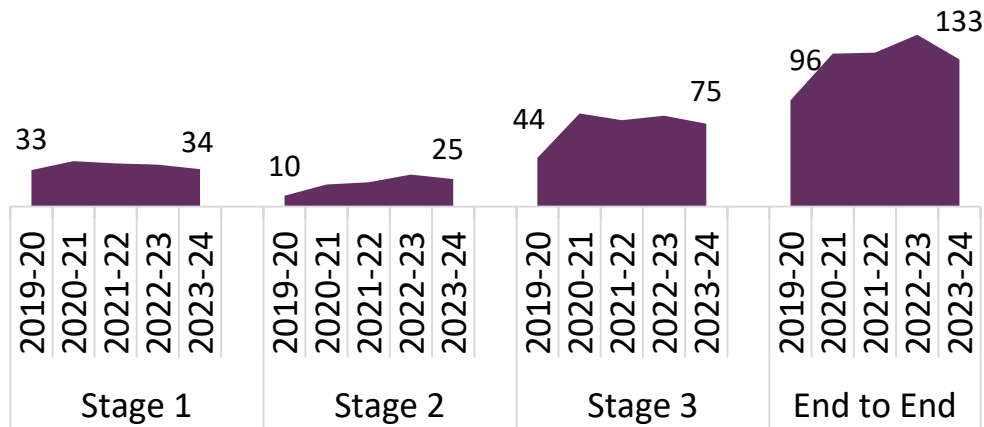
End to End – Date ‘accused informed’ to date of clinic (1st appointment)



3 Findings

In 2023-24, 80% of cases were completed within 133 days (155 days in 2022-23), however, the longest time taken for a case to complete the YE process in this period was 541 days. (Figures 6a and 6b and Table 9a to 9c in the accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

Figure 6b: Time in days for stages of the Youth Engagement process (80th Percentile)

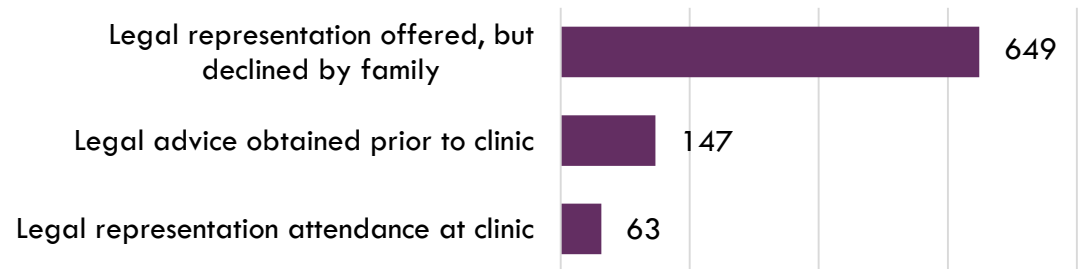


3.7 Legal Representation at YE Clinics

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 2023-24, legal representation, while offered, was declined by the young person or their family in 75.6% (649) of cases (2022-23, 77.1%). Legal advice was obtained prior to the clinic in 17.1% (147) of cases (16.9% in 2022-23) and in the remaining 7.3% (63) of cases (6.0% in 2022-23) 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

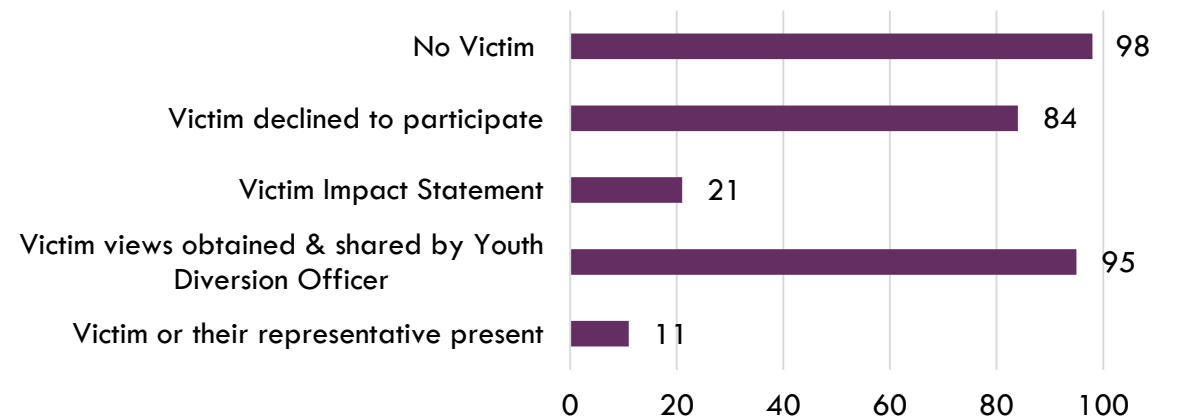
Where the outcome of a YE clinic is a restorative caution, there is an opportunity for the young person and their parents to meet with the victim and anyone else who has been affected by the crime. Everyone is given a chance to talk about the impact the crime has had on them. There is a signed written 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 2023-24, for clinics where the outcome was a restorative caution, there were 211 cases (115 in 2022-23) where a victim was associated with the offence committed. In 5.2% (11) of these cases, the victim or their representative was present. This is a decrease of 2 cases from 2022-23 when 11.3% (13) of cases had a victim or their representative present. There was an increase 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); 95 (45.0%) cases in 2023-24 compared to 51 (44.3%) cases in 2022-23.

In 21 (10.0%) cases, a victim impact statement was shared with the young person concerned, 2 fewer than in 2022-23 (23; 20.0%). There was an increase in the number and proportion of cases in which the victim declined to participate in the YE process, from 28 (24.3%) cases in 2022-23 to 84 (39.8%) cases in 2023-24.

The remaining 98 cases in 2023-24 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 2023-24 there were 263 responses from young people and 259 from parent/carers. Those surveyed may not have provided answers to all questions, figures are therefore based on the number of responses for each individual question.

4.2 Young People Survey 2023-24

Of the 263 who responded to the question, 98.9% (260) of young people stated the YE Clinic “helped them understand the choices available following the meeting”. (Figure 9 and Table 12 in the accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

Of the 259 who responded to the question, 100.0% (259) of 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

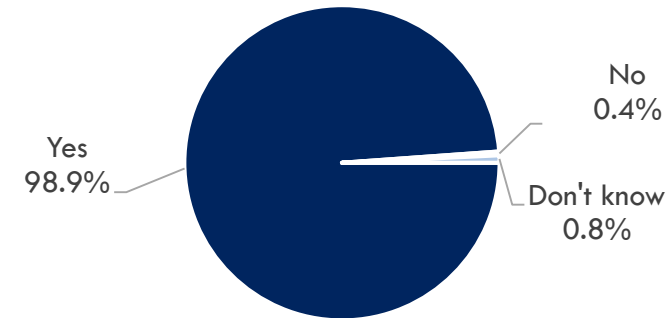
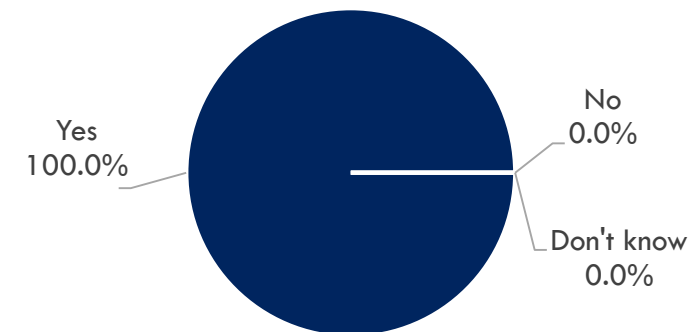


Figure 10: It (YEC) helped the young person understand the choices available following the meeting



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 2023-24. 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 2023 to March 2024 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.
- Our statistical practice is regulated by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR). OSR sets the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the Code of Practice for Statistics that all producers of official statistics should adhere to. You are welcome to contact us directly with any comments about how we meet these standards. Alternatively, you can contact OSR by emailing regulation@statistics.gov.uk or via the OSR website.

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 2023-24, the 3,356 cases reported relate to 2,015 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.