



Department of
Justice

www.dojni.gov.uk

Analytical Services Group

County Court Bulletin

October to December 2015

Research and Statistical Bulletin 06/2016

Provisional quarterly figures

R Redmond

12 February 2016

Produced by Analytical Services Group,
Department of Justice.

For further information write to:

**Analytical Services Group,
NI Courts and Tribunals Service,
4th Floor, Laganside House,
23-27 Oxford Street,
Belfast BT1 3LA**

Telephone: 028 9072 8920

Email: rodney.redmond@courtsni.gov.uk

This bulletin is available on the Internet at:

www.courtsni.gov.uk

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This bulletin provides information on throughput at County Courts in Northern Ireland during the period October to December 2015 and commentary on trends observed for this quarter in each year from 2007. During the period October to December 2015.
- There were 1,829 civil bills with a notice of intention to defend (NID) received, an 11% decrease on the same quarter last year (2,054). In total, 2,519 civil bills were disposed, a decrease of 3% on the number disposed during the same period in 2014 (2,607). There were 1,911 outstanding civil bills with a Certificate of Readiness (COR) at the end of the quarter, up 9% on the corresponding figure last year (1,761), and the highest number at the end of the October to December quarter since the time series began in 2007.
- 34 equity cases were received during October to December 2015, two less than the 36 received during the period October to December 2014, while the number of equity cases disposed increased from 26 during the same period last year, to 28 this quarter.
- A total of 223 ejectment cases were received, down 6% on the 236 cases received during October to December 2014, with the number of ejectment cases disposed increasing by 15%, from 179 in the same quarter last year to 205 this quarter.
- 2,604 small claims were received, up 2% on the 2,558 received during the same quarter last year. The number of small claims cases disposed increased by 2% from 2,474 during October to December 2014 to 2,533 this quarter.
- Two criminal damage cases were received, with four cases being disposed during the quarter. This compares with five cases received and ten cases disposed during the same quarter in 2014.
- A total of 377 divorce decrees were granted in the county court, up 58% on the 238 granted during the same period last year.
- County Court and District Judges sat a total of 1,101 sitting days during the quarter, down 5% on the 1,160 sitting days recorded during the period October to December 2014. Some 50% of time was spent on criminal business with 33% spent on civil business and 18% on family business (compared to 57%, 29% and 14% respectively during October to December 2014). While the proportion of time spent on criminal business has decreased each October to December quarter since 2013, the decision of a number of solicitors and counsel to withdraw their representation from a number of Crown Court cases has impacted upon the time spent on criminal business this quarter, the lowest amount since the time series began in 2007. This action was in response to the introduction, in May 2015, of new rules in relation to legal aid remuneration.

CONTENTS

Contents	Page
1. Introduction	1
2. Methodology	2
3. Findings	4
3.1 Ordinary civil bills	
3.2 Equity	
3.3 Ejectment	
3.4 Small claims	
3.5 Criminal damage	
3.6 Divorces	
3.7 Licences	
3.8 Sittings	
Appendix 1 – Tables	12
Appendix 2 – Explanatory Notes	25

Figure	Page
Figure 1: Civil bills with NID received: October - December 2007 to October - December 2015	4
Figure 2: Outstanding civil bills with Certificate of Readiness, by Judicial Level: October - December 2007 to October - December 2015	5
Figure 3: Ejectment cases received and disposed: October - December 2007 to October - December 2015	6
Figure 4: Small claims cases disposed, by type of disposal: October - December 2007 to October - December 2015	7
Figure 5: Criminal Damage cases received and disposed: October - December 2007 to October - December 2015	8
Figure 6: Divorce petitions by number of decrees granted, by type: October - December 2007 to October - December 2015	9
Figure 7: County Court Sitting Days by Business Type: October - December 2015	10
Figure 8: County Court Sitting Days by Business Type: October - December 2007 to October - December 2015	11

Table	Page
Table 1: Number of ordinary civil bill cases and applications received	12
Table 2: Number of ordinary civil bill cases with NID received by Judicial Level	12
Table 3: Number of ordinary civil bill cases and applications disposed	13
Table 4: Number of ordinary civil bill cases by amount awarded	13
Table 5: Outstanding civil bills with NID but no COR	13
Table 6: Outstanding civil bills with COR	14
Table 7: Time intervals in weeks for civil bill cases	14

<u>Table 8: Time intervals in weeks for civil bill applications</u>	14
<u>Table 9: Equity cases and applications received</u>	15
<u>Table 10: Equity cases and applications disposed</u>	15
<u>Table 11: Outstanding equity cases</u>	16
<u>Table 12: Time intervals in weeks for equity</u>	16
<u>Table 13: Ejectment cases received</u>	16
<u>Table 14: Ejectment cases disposed</u>	17
<u>Table 15: Outstanding ejectment cases with NID</u>	17
<u>Table 16: Time intervals in weeks for ejectment</u>	17
<u>Table 17: Number of small claims cases and applications received</u>	18
<u>Table 18: Number of small claims cases with NOD received</u>	18
<u>Table 19: Number of small claims cases and applications disposed</u>	19
<u>Table 20: Outstanding claims with NOD</u>	19
<u>Table 21: Time intervals in weeks for small claims</u>	20
<u>Table 22: Number of criminal damage cases and applications received</u>	20
<u>Table 23: Number of criminal damage cases and applications disposed</u>	20
<u>Table 24: Outstanding criminal damage cases</u>	21
<u>Table 25: Time intervals in weeks for criminal damage</u>	21
<u>Table 26: Divorce petitions by number of decrees granted</u>	21
<u>Table 27: Divorce petitions by number of decrees absolute issued</u>	22
<u>Table 28: Matrimonial applications received</u>	22
<u>Table 29: Matrimonial applications disposed</u>	22
<u>Table 30: Time intervals in weeks for divorce petitions</u>	23
<u>Table 31: Time intervals in weeks for divorce applications</u>	23
<u>Table 32: Licences received and disposed</u>	23
<u>Table 33: County Court Judge & District Judge Sitting Days</u>	24

1. INTRODUCTION

In Northern Ireland, there are seven county court divisions with seventeen county court judges and four district judges. Civil cases are commenced in the county court if the value of the case is less than £30,000. The financial limit in the County Court increased from £15,000 to £30,000 on the 25 February 2013. However, for claims concerning matrimonial property or compensation for criminal injuries or criminal damage to property, there is no financial limit. The county court also has jurisdiction to hear applications for adoptions and undefended divorces. Applications for intoxicating liquor licences and certificates of registration for clubs are also made to the county court. In addition to its original civil jurisdiction the county court hears appeals under a number of statutory provisions from the magistrates' courts or from other tribunals.

County courts can deal with a wide range of cases, but the most common ones are:-

- landlord and tenant disputes, for example, possession (eviction), rent arrears, repairs
- consumer disputes, for example, faulty goods or services
- personal injury claims (injuries caused by negligence), for example, traffic accidents, falling into holes in the pavement, accidents at work
- undefended divorce cases, but only in some county courts
- some domestic violence cases, but these may also be heard in the magistrates court
- race and sex discrimination cases
- debt problems, for example, a creditor seeking payment
- employment problems, for example, wages or salary owing or pay in lieu of notice.

The county court also deals with small claims. In general, a small claim is one where the value of the claim is not more than £3,000. This limit was increased from £2,000 in May 2011.

The most common types of claim dealt with in the small claims court are:

- compensation for faulty services provided, for example, by builders, dry cleaners and garages
- compensation for faulty goods, for example, televisions or washing machines which go wrong
- disputes between landlords and tenants, for example, rent arrears or compensation for not doing repairs
- wages owed or money in lieu of notice.

All claims arising from regulated credit agreements must be started in the county court, whatever their value.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Data sources

Data contained in Tables 1 to 31 and Table 33 use data that are inputted onto the Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS). This system was implemented across the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) over a two year period from 2005 to 2007. While ICOS was introduced in the County Court during 2005, data derived from ICOS has been used as the source for official government statistics since 2007, when the implementation of ICOS across all court tiers was completed. ICOS is a live operating system used in each court tier to process every part of court business, from receipt of payments through to the production of final orders made. The data are input into this system on a daily basis by court clerks, and this information is checked and confirmed by another member of staff to ensure the data entries are correct. As data on licence applications received and disposed are not recorded on ICOS, these data are compiled manually by each county court office and submitted on a quarterly basis.

2.2 Methodology for generating data

Analytical Service Group (ASG) Statisticians based within the NICTS take a download of county court information from ICOS on a monthly basis. The information is downloaded using a package called Oracle Discoverer which extracts all the relevant data from ICOS into text files which are refreshed with up to date information each weekend. The text files are downloaded onto a secure internal facility that only specified statistical personnel have access to. The data contained in the files are identified only by numbers and names and addresses are not held. These statistical files are not transmitted outside the NICTS statistical team. ASG statisticians based in the NICTS import these data into the Statistics Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). SPSS is then used to perform extensive data validations to identify potential errors in the data and to ensure the data are reliable and robust.

2.3 Baseline and Time period

Data contained within this bulletin relate to the time series 2007, when ICOS was adopted as the source of county court data, to the current calendar year 2015.

2.4 Data quality and validation

ASG statisticians based in the NICTS have invested significant time and effort creating and extensive computer programme within SPSS to validate the information downloaded from ICOS. The programme includes over 100 checks against downloaded court data to: (i) check consistency over time and between variables; (ii) assess the reliability of data using logic checks; (iii) check that variables fall within accepted ranges; and (iv) check with the ICOS Support Team in the event of any major discrepancies that have occurred since the last download. The validation program produces user friendly tables highlighting the potential problems which are circulated to each county court venue as a validation report.

Each court division has a Case Progression Officer who is responsible for: monitoring accuracy levels on ICOS, by carrying out sample checks on data entry and court resulting; ensuring all validations on ICOS and manual statistics returns are completed in a timely manner; providing advice and identifying training needs; monitoring the confirmation of ICOS court resulting, including the inputting of adjournment codes; and promoting awareness of the impact error can have, its wide ranging consequences and the negative impact on the reliability of management information.

The Case Progression Officer is given a two week period from the date the validation report issues until all records are amended on ICOS. This ensures that the corrections are updated before the next download of files. After the files have been refreshed each weekend, all the data are then downloaded again, with the new download reflecting amendments made as a result of the validation reports. If any errors have not been corrected, they will continue to appear in the validation reports until the necessary amendments are made on ICOS.

The NICTS statistics team then ensure that all validations relating to the reporting period are amended prior to publication. Once these amendments have been checked, SPSS syntax programming is then used to generate the tables in the publication.

2.5 Counting rules

Receipts are counted from the date the case is entered onto ICOS and the fees are receipted. Disposals are counted from the result date that a final order was made against the case changing the case status to dealt with.

2.6 Interpreting trends

Care should be taken when comparing data trends before and after 2005, when ICOS was introduced as the source for the majority of county court data. Additionally, due to on-going changes to the legal jurisdiction of the county court, users should be cautious of comparing trends in small claims and ordinary civil bills. Changes made to the upper limit of small claims in May 2011 (from £2,000 to £3,000) will have resulted in some claims that would have previously been ordinary civil bills becoming small claims. Also, changes to jurisdiction to increase the upper limit of ordinary civil bills during February 2013 (from £15,000 to £30,000) will have resulted in some cases that were previously High Court writs becoming ordinary civil bills. For further advice on differences in data between years, please contact the statistician responsible for this bulletin.

2.7 Revisions

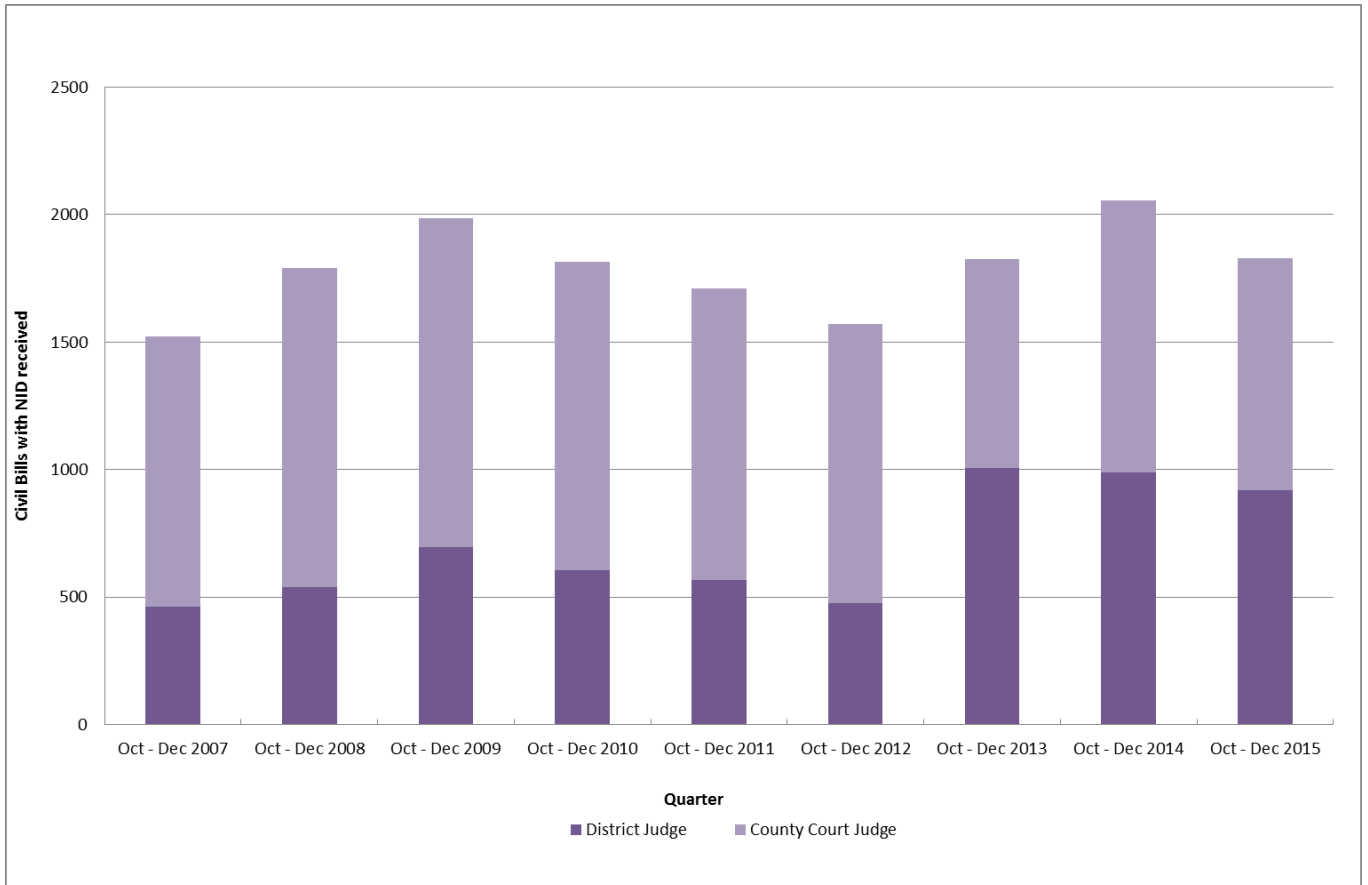
Any revision to data will be applied in light of the ASG (NICTS) Statistical Note 'Policy Statement on Revisions' which can be found on the Statistics and Research page of the Services section on the NICTS website (www.courtsni.gov.uk). Incorrect figures of changes to this publication will be published on the web in a formal Statistical Notice.

3. FINDINGS

3.1 Ordinary civil bills

There were 1,829 civil bills with a notice of intention to defend (NID) received, an 11% decrease on the same quarter last year (2,054) (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Civil bills with NID received: October – December 2007 to October – December 2015

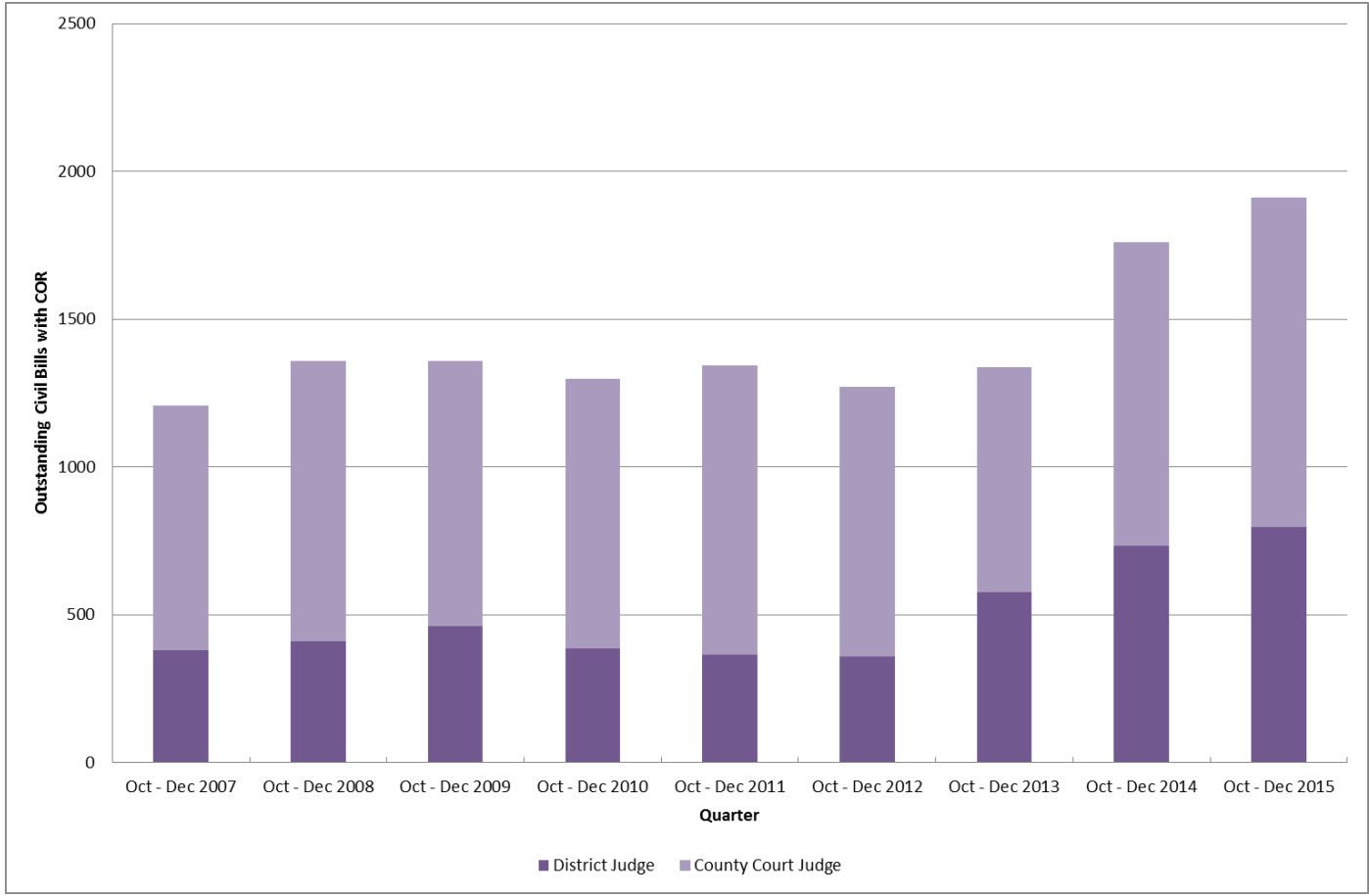


In total, 2,519 civil bills were disposed, a decrease of 3% on the number disposed during the same period in 2014 (2,607).

There were 1,911 outstanding civil bills with a Certificate of Readiness (COR) at the end of the quarter, up 9% on the corresponding figure last year (1,761), and the highest number at the end of the October to December quarter since the time series began in 2007. The number of outstanding civil bills with a Certificate of Readiness (COR) remained relatively constant at the end of the October to December quarter from 2007 to 2013, but has increased since then, with a 43% increase being observed between the end of December 2013 and the end of December 2015 (Figure 2).

Of the 1,911 outstanding civil bills with a certificate of readiness, 1,113 (58%) were County Court Judge cases, similar to the 1,029 (58%) County Court Judge cases outstanding at the same stage last year (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Outstanding civil bills with Certificate of Readiness, by Judicial Level: October – December 2007 to October – December 2015



The average time taken from issue to disposal of a civil bill was 55 weeks, compared to the 48 weeks reported for the same quarter in 2014.

3.2 Equity

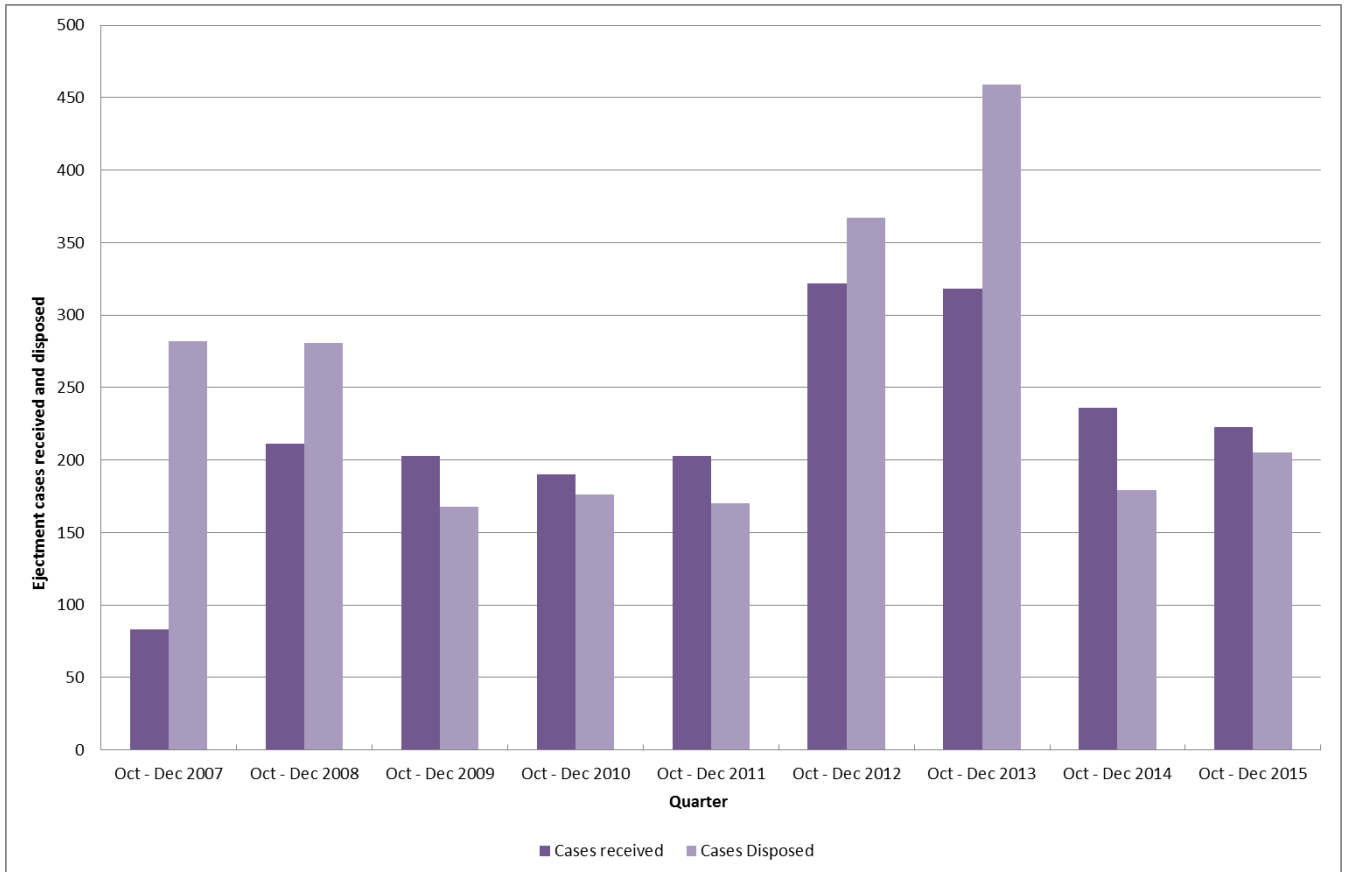
A total of 34 equity cases were received during October to December 2015, two less than the 36 cases received during the period October to December 2014, while the number of equity cases disposed increased slightly from 26 during the period October to December 2014, to 28 this quarter.

The average time taken from issue to disposal of equity cases was 108 weeks, up from 68 weeks during the same period last year. The relatively small number of equity cases disposed each quarter can lead to significant changes in average times observed from issue to disposal.

3.3 Ejectment

A total of 223 ejectment cases were received, down 6% on the 236 cases received during October to December 2014, with the number of ejectment cases disposed increasing by 15%, from 179 in the same quarter last year to 205 this quarter (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Ejectment cases received and disposed: October – December 2007 to October – December 2015



The number of outstanding ejectment cases with a Notice of Intention to Defend at the end of the quarter decreased by 23% compared with the end of December 2014 (from 43 to 33).

The overall trend in ejectment cases received since 2007 is similar to the number of mortgage cases received in the High Court over the same time and is likely to be due to the economic conditions of this period.

The average time taken from issue to disposal for ejectment cases was 16 weeks, compared to 19 weeks during the October to December quarter in 2014.

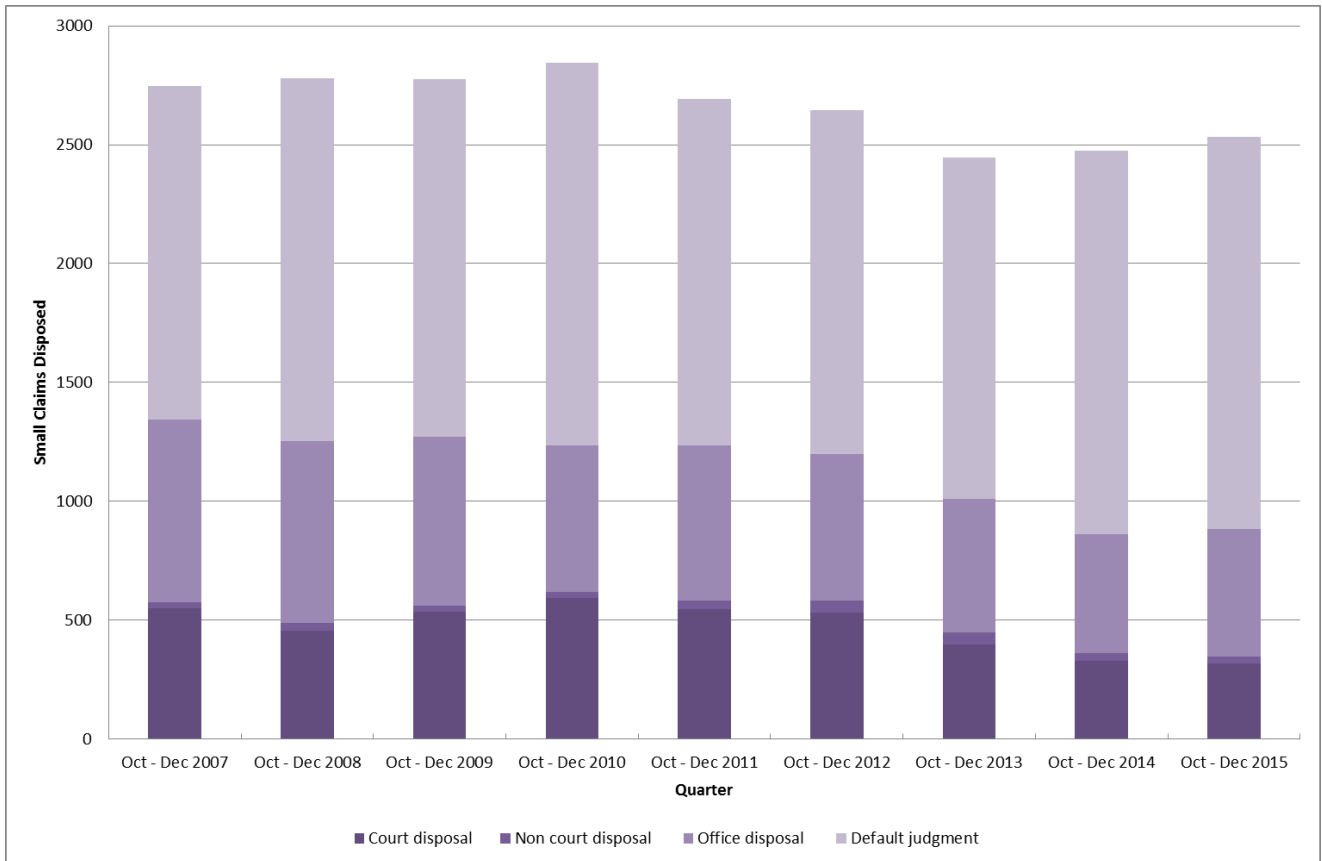
3.4 Small claims

2,604 small claims were received, up 2% on the 2,558, received during the same quarter last year.

The number of small claims cases disposed increased by 2% from 2,474 during October to December 2014 to 2,533 this quarter, while the number of outstanding small claims with a Notice of Dispute decreased by 18% from 626 at the end of December 2014 to 511 at the end of December 2015.

Of the 2,533 small claims disposed during the quarter, the majority (65%) were disposed by way of default judgment, a situation observed during each of the October to December quarters since the beginning of the time series in 2007, with a marked increase in the proportion disposed by this method over the last two quarters in the series (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Small claims cases disposed, by type of disposal: October – December 2007 to October – December 2015

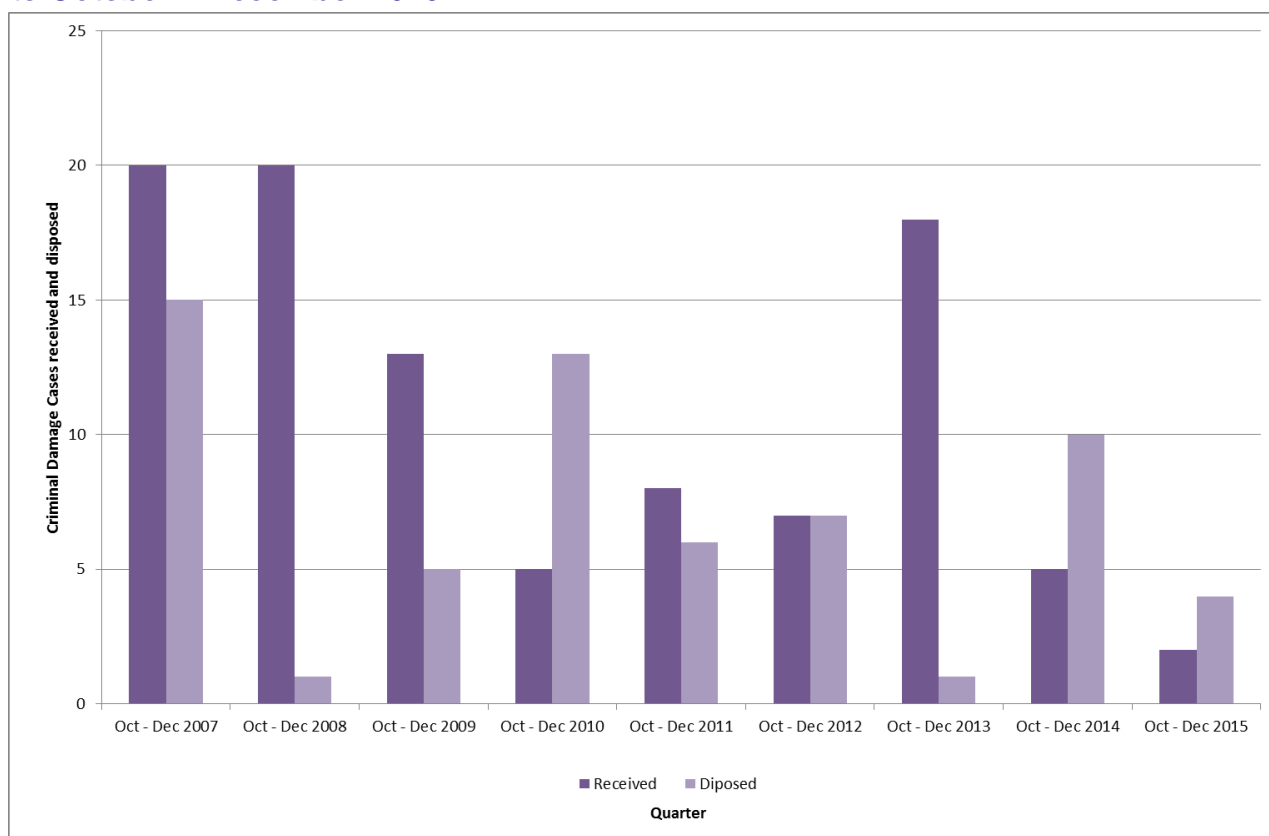


The average number of weeks from issue to disposal for small claims cases was 22 weeks, slightly lower than the 23 weeks reported last year.

3.5 Criminal damage

Two criminal damage cases were received, with four cases being disposed during the quarter. This compares with five cases received and ten cases disposed during the same quarter in 2014 (Figure 5), while the number of outstanding criminal damage cases has decreased from 71 at the end of the December 2014, to 61 at the end of this quarter.

Figure 5: Criminal Damage cases received and disposed: October – December 2007 to October – December 2015



The average time taken in weeks from issue to disposal of Criminal Damage cases was 136 weeks, down from 185 weeks during the same period last year. The relatively small number of cases disposed each quarter can lead to significant changes in average times observed from issue to disposal.

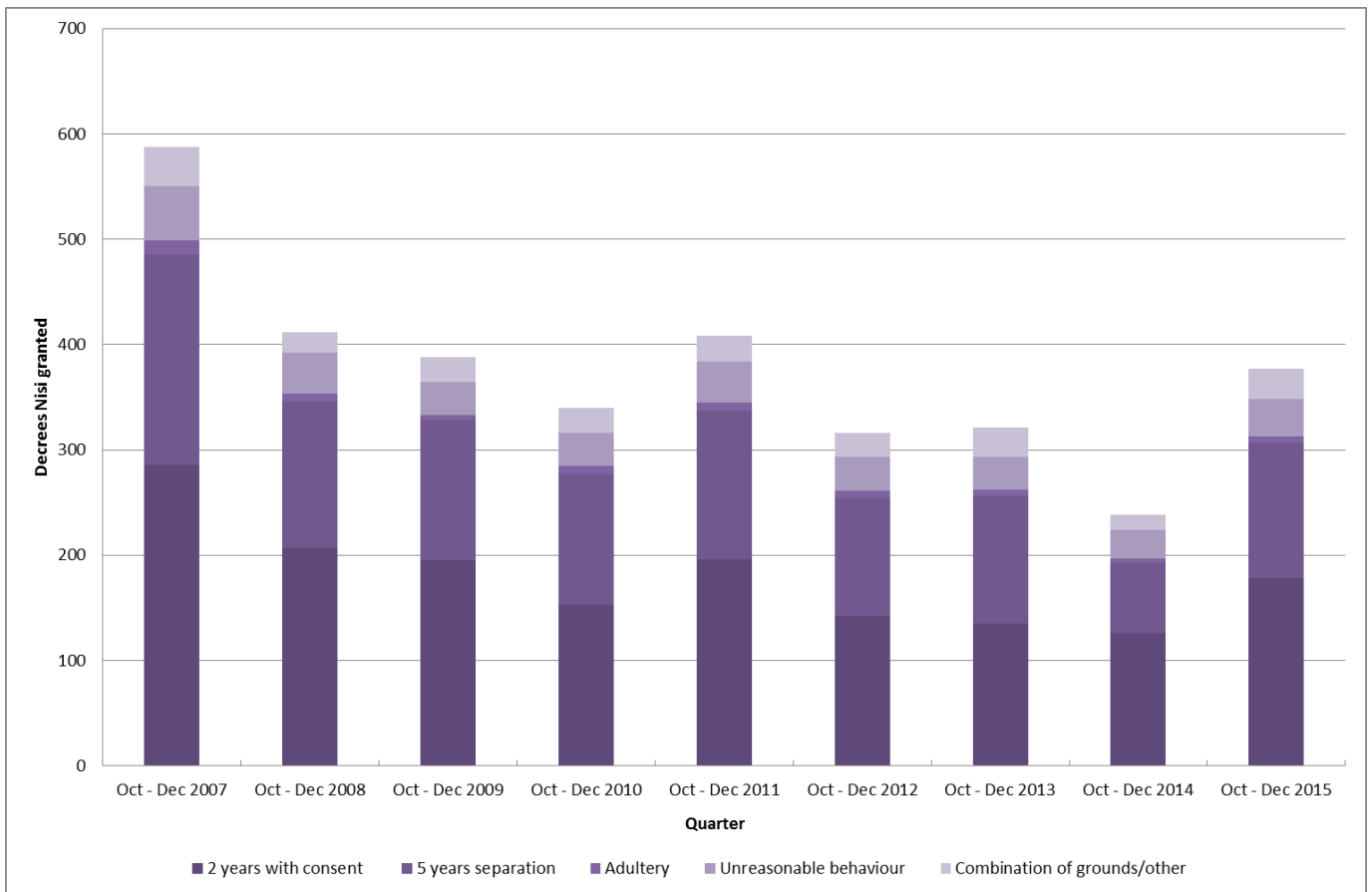
3.6 Divorces

While all divorces are received in the High Court, divorce decrees are granted and decrees absolute issued in the County Court for less contentious and undefended cases.

A total of 377 divorce decrees were granted in the county court, up 58% on the 238 granted during the same period last year.

The main type of divorce decree granted was ‘2 years with consent’ accounting for 47% of decrees (178), followed by ‘5 years separation’, 34% (129) of decrees (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Divorce petitions by number of decrees granted, by type: October – December 2007 to October – December 2015



A total of 511 decrees absolute were issued in the county court, an increase of 51% on the 339 issued during the period October to December 2014. Again the most common type of decree absolute was ‘2 years with consent’, accounting for 47% (242) of cases.

The average time taken from issue to the date a divorce decree was granted was 30 weeks, with an average of eight weeks from the date the decree was granted until the date the decree absolute was issued. This compares to 32 weeks and nine weeks during the same period last year.

3.7 Licences

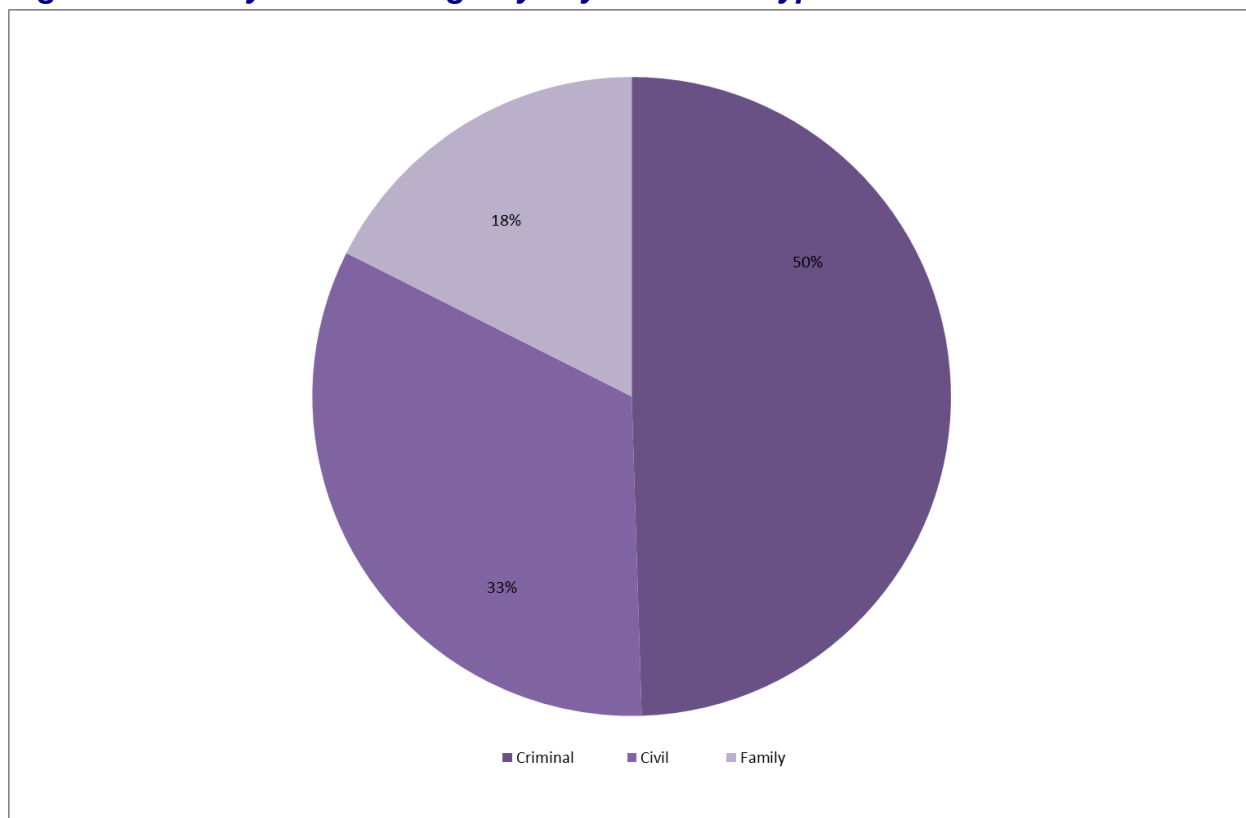
There were 58 licence applications received and 42 disposed, compared to the 73 received and 70 disposed during the same quarter last year.

3.8 Sitting Days

County Court and District Judges sat a total of 1,101 sitting days during the quarter, down 5% on the 1,160 sitting days recorded during the period October to December 2014.

Within these 1,101 sitting days, 50% of time was spent on criminal business, 33% of time was spent on civil business and 18% of time was spent on family business (Figure 7).

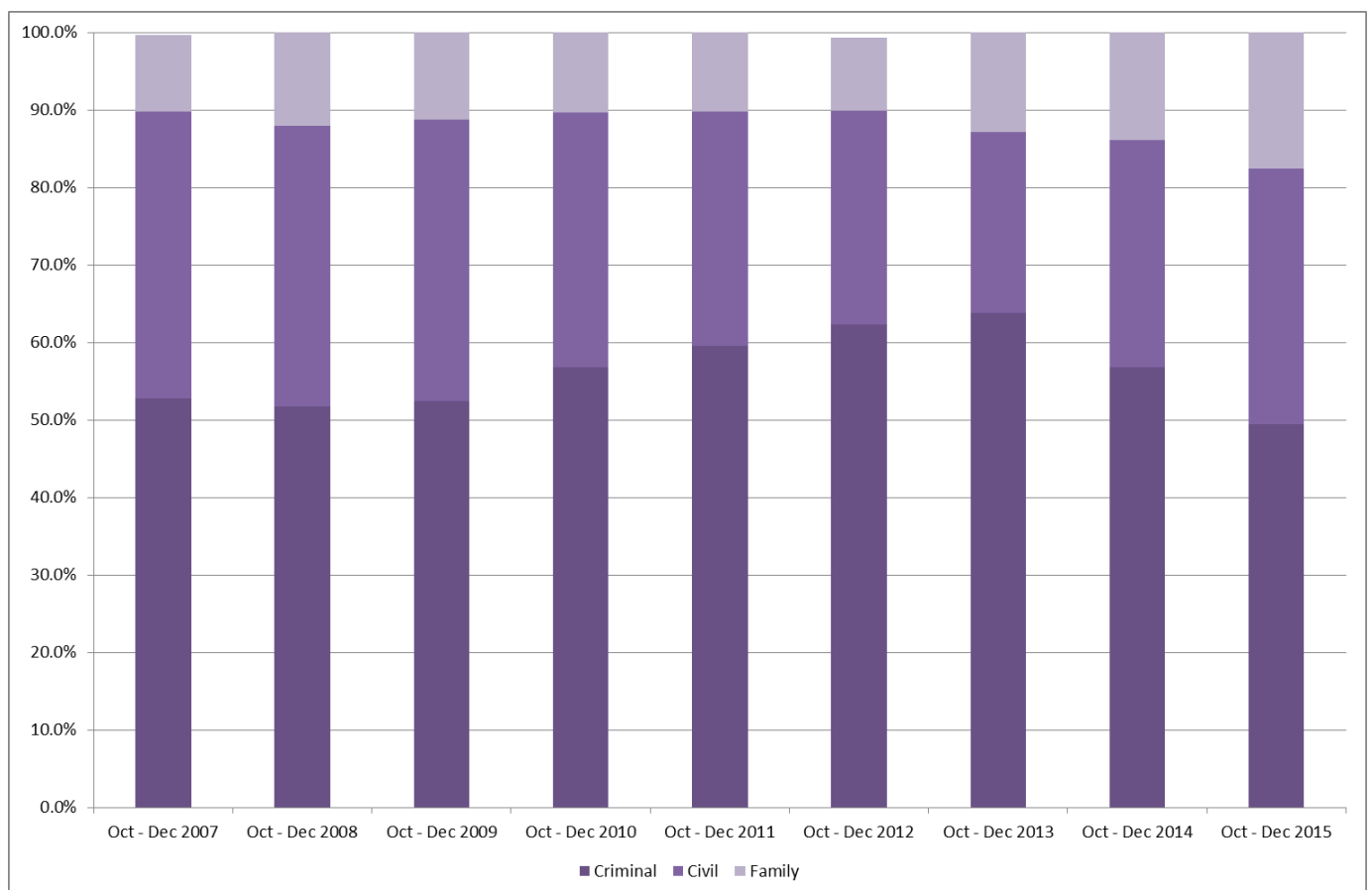
Figure 7: County Court Sitting Days by Business Type: October – December 2015



The proportion of time spent on criminal business has displayed a steady increase from 53% during October to December 2007 to 64% during the quarter October to December 2013. This is largely reflective of County Court Judges dealing with increased volumes of cases in the Crown Court over the period. Since then, the proportion of time spent on criminal business has decreased each quarter, down to 57% during October to December 2014 and then 50% this quarter, with time spent on criminal business this quarter being at its lowest since the time series began in 2007.

While this was initially due to an increase in civil and family business, the decrease over the last year is likely to have been an impact of the reduction in criminal business undertaken by County Court Judges as a consequence of a number of solicitors and counsel withdrawing their representation from a number of Crown Court cases. This action was in response to the introduction, in May 2015, of new rules in relation to legal aid remuneration. The reduction in criminal business as a consequence of the legal aid dispute has also resulted in the deployment of some County Court Judges to other business areas, such as High Court Bails, resulting in County Court Judges spending eleven sitting days this quarter on High Court Bail business in the Queen’s Bench Division of the High Court.

Figure 8: County Court Sitting Days by Business Type: October – December 2007 to October – December 2015



APPENDIX 1

Civil Bills

Table 1: Number of ordinary civil bill cases and applications received

Case	Antrim	161
	Ards	185
	Armagh and South Down	121
	Belfast	1597
	Craigavon	150
	Fermanagh and Tyrone	112
	Londonderry	106
	Total	2432
Application	Antrim	87
	Ards	142
	Armagh and South Down	93
	Belfast	728
	Craigavon	138
	Fermanagh and Tyrone	98
	Londonderry	77
	Total	1363

Table 2: Number of ordinary civil bill cases with NIDs received by judicial level

	County court judge	District judge	Total
Antrim	80	100	180
Ards	45	133	178
Armagh and South Down	55	87	142
Belfast	560	363	923
Craigavon	65	88	153
Fermanagh and Tyrone	69	69	138
Londonderry	37	78	115
Total	911	918	1829

Table 3: Number of ordinary civil bills cases and applications disposed

		Court result - CCJ	Court result - DJ	Non court disposals	Default judgement	Office disposal	Total
Case	Antrim	45	91	68	5	14	223
	Ards	60	136	69	4	24	293
	Armagh and South Down	25	107	53	2	19	206
	Belfast	532	235	184	8	60	1019
	Civil Processing Centre	0	0	15	243	14	272
	Craigavon	101	16	58	6	21	202
	Fermanagh and Tyrone	59	75	32	5	9	180
	Londonderry	20	62	27	2	13	124
	Total	842	722	506	275	174	2519
Application	Antrim	15	15	23	0	0	53
	Ards	15	19	30	0	0	64
	Armagh and South Down	12	12	29	0	0	53
	Belfast	15	67	180	0	0	262
	Civil Processing Centre	0	0	5	0	0	5
	Craigavon	18	2	48	0	0	68
	Fermanagh and Tyrone	10	9	31	0	0	50
	Londonderry	5	17	23	0	0	45
	Total	90	141	369	0	0	600

Table 4: Number of ordinary civil bills cases by amount awarded¹

		No value	Less than £1000	£1000-2999	£3000-4999	Over £5000	Total
Case	Antrim	33	7	30	25	41	136
	Ards	40	8	37	52	59	196
	Armagh and South Down	27	8	31	29	37	132
	Belfast	493	23	75	70	106	767
	Craigavon	27	12	23	22	33	117
	Fermanagh and Tyrone	31	11	36	17	39	134
	Londonderry	28	8	16	9	21	82
	Total	679	77	248	224	336	1564

¹Excludes cases that were adjourned generally, default judgements or had office disposals

Table 5: Outstanding civil bills with NID but no COR

	County court judge	District judge	Total
Antrim	193	182	375
Ards	89	186	275
Armagh and South Down	159	168	327
Belfast	2087	860	2947
Craigavon	149	172	321
Fermanagh and Tyrone	237	229	466
Londonderry	136	167	303
Total	3050	1964	5014

Table 6: Outstanding civil bills with COR

	County court judge	District judge	Total
Antrim	54	67	121
Ards	37	56	93
Armagh and South Down	41	58	99
Belfast	807	416	1223
Craigavon	53	80	133
Fermanagh and Tyrone	89	70	159
Londonderry	32	51	83
Total	1113	798	1911

Table 7: Time intervals in weeks for civil bill cases²

Case	Issue to disposal
Antrim	44
Ards	34
Armagh and South Down	51
Belfast	63
Craigavon	45
Fermanagh and Tyrone	71
Londonderry	53
Total	55

²Excludes default judgements and office disposals

Table 8: Time intervals in weeks for civil bill applications²

Application	Issue to disposal
Antrim	9
Ards	6
Armagh and South Down	24
Belfast	12
Craigavon	19
Fermanagh and Tyrone	9
Londonderry	5
Total	12

²Excludes default judgements and office disposals

Equity

Table 9: Equity cases and applications received

Case	Antrim	4
	Ards	3
	Armagh and South Down	5
	Belfast	12
	Craigavon	4
	Fermanagh and Tyrone	5
	Londonderry	1
	Total	34
Application	Antrim	2
	Ards	2
	Armagh and South Down	2
	Belfast	2
	Craigavon	1
	Fermanagh and Tyrone	4
	Londonderry	2
	Total	15

Table 10: Equity cases and applications disposed

		Court result - CCJ	Court result - DJ	Non court disposals	Total
Case	Antrim	0	3	0	3
	Ards	1	0	1	2
	Armagh and South Down	1	0	0	1
	Belfast	11	0	0	11
	Craigavon	2	0	0	2
	Fermanagh and Tyrone	6	0	2	8
	Londonderry	1	0	0	1
	Total	22	3	3	28
Application	Ards	1	0	0	1
	Armagh and South Down	3	1	0	4
	Belfast	1	0	0	1
	Fermanagh and Tyrone	6	0	0	6
	Londonderry	0	0	1	1
	Total	11	1	1	13

Table 11: Outstanding equity cases

Case	Antrim	20
	Ards	25
	Armagh and South Down	36
	Belfast	47
	Craigavon	13
	Fermanagh and Tyrone	46
	Londonderry	15
Total		202

Table 12: Time intervals in weeks for equity

		Issue to disposal
Case	Antrim	130
	Ards	172
	Armagh and South Down	19
	Belfast	64
	Craigavon	77
	Fermanagh and Tyrone	196
	Londonderry	95
	Total	108
Application	Antrim	0
	Ards	2
	Armagh and South Down	12
	Belfast	0
	Craigavon	0
	Fermanagh and Tyrone	13
	Londonderry	0
	Total	11

Ejectment

Table 13: Ejectment cases received

Case	Antrim	5
	Ards	31
	Armagh and South Down	11
	Belfast	145
	Craigavon	15
	Fermanagh and Tyrone	4
	Londonderry	12
	Total	223

Table 14: Ejectment cases disposed

		Court result - CCJ	Court result - DJ	Non court disposals	Total
Case	Antrim	14	0	1	15
	Ards	3	27	0	30
	Armagh and South Down	10	0	0	10
	Belfast	8	105	0	113
	Craigavon	1	22	0	23
	Fermanagh and Tyrone	5	0	0	5
	Londonderry	7	0	2	9
	Total	48	154	3	205

Table 15: Outstanding ejectment cases with NID

Case	Antrim	2
	Ards	4
	Armagh and South Down	4
	Belfast	8
	Craigavon	4
	Fermanagh and Tyrone	6
	Londonderry	5
Total	33	

Table 16: Time intervals in weeks for ejectment³

		Issue to disposal
Case	Antrim	12
	Ards	17
	Armagh and South Down	21
	Belfast	16
	Craigavon	13
	Fermanagh and Tyrone	35
	Londonderry	11
Total	16	

³Excludes default judgements, non-court disposals and office disposals

Small Claims

Table 17: Number of small claims cases and applications received

Case	Antrim	44
	Ards	50
	Armagh and South Down	32
	Belfast	2397
	Craigavon	27
	Fermanagh and Tyrone	30
	Londonderry	24
	Total	2604
Application	Antrim	5
	Ards	3
	Armagh and South Down	2
	Belfast	29
	Craigavon	7
	Fermanagh and Tyrone	4
	Londonderry	5
	Total	55

Table 18: Number of small claims cases with NOD received

Case	Antrim	47
	Ards	51
	Armagh and South Down	34
	Belfast	155
	Craigavon	21
	Fermanagh and Tyrone	38
	Londonderry	28
Total	374	

Table 19: Number of small claims cases and applications disposed

		Court disposal	Non court disposal	Office disposal	Default judgement	Total
Case	Antrim	30	7	5	1	43
	Ards	41	7	8	0	56
	Armagh and South Down	34	0	3	0	37
	Belfast	122	12	507	1645	2286
	Craigavon	29	0	10	1	40
	Fermanagh and Tyrone	33	0	3	3	39
	Londonderry	30	1	1	0	32
	Total	319	27	537	1650	2533
Application	Antrim	2	1	0	0	3
	Ards	4	1	0	0	5
	Armagh and South Down	3	0	0	0	3
	Belfast	14	2	0	0	16
	Craigavon	7	1	0	0	8
	Fermanagh and Tyrone	2	1	0	0	3
	Londonderry	4	0	0	0	4
	Total	36	6	0	0	42

Table 20: Outstanding small claims with NOD

Antrim	51
Ards	46
Armagh and South Down	46
Belfast	256
Craigavon	23
Fermanagh and Tyrone	52
Londonderry	37
Total	511

Table 21: Time intervals in weeks for small claims³

		Issue to disposal
Case	Antrim	17
	Ards	24
	Armagh and South Down	23
	Belfast	20
	Craigavon	20
	Fermanagh and Tyrone	25
	Londonderry	28
	Total	22
Application	Antrim	5
	Ards	6
	Armagh and South Down	8
	Belfast	5
	Craigavon	10
	Fermanagh and Tyrone	7
	Londonderry	7
	Total	6

³Excludes default judgements, non-court disposals and office disposals

Criminal Damage

Table 22: Number of criminal damage cases and applications received

Case	Belfast	2
	Total	2
Application	Antrim	3
	Londonderry	1
	Total	4

Table 23: Number of criminal damage cases and applications disposed

		Court disposal	Non court disposal	Total
Case	Belfast	3	0	3
	Fermanagh and Tyrone	1	0	1
	Total	4	0	4
Application	Antrim	0	3	3
	Londonderry	0	1	1
	Total	0	4	4

Table 24: Outstanding criminal damage cases

Antrim	2
Ards	2
Armagh and South Down	5
Belfast	22
Craigavon	9
Fermanagh and Tyrone	15
Londonderry	6
Total	61

Table 25: Time intervals in weeks for criminal damage²

		Issue to disposal
Case	Belfast	155
	Fermanagh and Tyrone	79
	Total	136
Application	Antrim	0
	Londonderry	0
	Total	0

²Excludes default judgements and office disposals

Divorces

Table 26: Divorce petitions by number of decrees granted

	2 years with consent	5 years separation	Adultery	Unreasonable behaviour	Combination of grounds/other	Total
Antrim	38	31	1	11	9	90
Ards	27	16	1	3	3	50
Armagh and South Down	16	8	0	4	3	31
Belfast	41	31	3	8	5	88
Craigavon	26	16	1	4	6	53
Fermanagh and Tyrone	11	14	0	3	2	30
Londonderry	19	13	0	2	1	35
Total	178	129	6	35	29	377

Table 27: Divorce petitions by number of absolutes issued

	2 years with consent	5 years separation	Adultery	Unreasonable behaviour	Combination of grounds/other	Total
Antrim	43	38	1	4	6	92
Ards	48	26	1	3	7	85
Armagh and South Down	14	15	2	6	3	40
Belfast	80	47	2	9	12	150
Craigavon	27	25	1	6	6	65
Fermanagh and Tyrone	14	7	0	2	6	29
Londonderry	16	19	0	8	7	50
Total	242	177	7	38	47	511

Table 28: Matrimonial applications received

	Ancillary relief	Matrimonial application to a master	Other	Total
Antrim	11	0	1	12
Ards	5	0	0	5
Armagh and South Down	13	0	1	14
Belfast	4	1	29	34
Craigavon	8	0	1	9
Fermanagh and Tyrone	4	0	0	4
Londonderry	4	0	0	4
Total	49	1	32	82

Table 29: Matrimonial applications disposed

	Ancillary relief	Matrimonial application to a master	Other	Total
Antrim	8	0	0	8
Ards	2	0	0	2
Armagh and South Down	6	0	0	6
Belfast	4	0	0	4
Craigavon	2	1	0	3
Fermanagh and Tyrone	6	0	1	7
Londonderry	1	0	0	1
Total	29	1	1	31

Table 30: Time intervals in weeks for divorce petitions

	Issue to date decree granted	Date decree granted to date absolute issued
Antrim	28	8
Ards	37	8
Armagh and South Down	26	8
Belfast	27	8
Craigavon	37	8
Fermanagh and Tyrone	28	9
Londonderry	28	8
Total	30	8

Table 31: Time intervals in weeks for divorce applications⁴

	Issue to disposal
Antrim	17
Ards	18
Armagh and South Down	22
Belfast	16
Craigavon	4
Fermanagh and Tyrone	42
Londonderry	58
Total	23

⁴Excludes non-court disposals

Licences

Table 32: Licences received and disposed

	Licences Received	Licences Disposed
Antrim	4	0
Ards	13	6
Armagh and South Down	4	9
Belfast	23	16
Craigavon	5	5
Fermanagh and Tyrone	2	3
Londonderry	7	3
Total	58	42

County Court Judge and District Judge Sitting Days

Table 33: County Court Judge & District Judge Sitting Days^{5,6}

	Total time			Total criminal time	Total civil time	Total family time
	Number of sitting days	Average sitting	Total time			
Antrim	135	2:40:49	361:52:00	225:59:00	119:12:00	16:41:00
Ards	87	2:10:24	189:05:00	84:17:00	100:48:00	4:00:00
Armagh and South Down	141	3:13:39	455:06:00	327:02:00	121:23:00	6:41:00
Belfast	368	2:24:45	887:53:00	230:31:00	365:22:00	292:00:00
Craigavon	118	2:51:30	337:18:00	162:37:00	90:38:00	84:03:00
Fermanagh and Tyrone	138	3:24:14	469:45:00	291:16:00	114:20:00	64:09:00
Londonderry	103	2:39:33	273:55:00	141:02:00	73:48:00	59:05:00
Queen's Bench Division	11	1:48:10	19:50:00	19:50:00	0:00:00	0:00:00
Total	1101	2:43:12	2994:44:00	1482:34:00	985:31:00	526:39:00

⁵A court sitting day is counted as any day where the judiciary sit in court. It does not include time in chambers or days where the judiciary are sitting in chambers

⁶During the quarter, a number of High Court Bail applications were heard by County Court Judges in the Queen's Bench Division of the High Court

APPENDIX 2 - EXPLANATORY NOTES

Amount awarded

This relates to the monetary value awarded in cases such as small claims and ordinary civil bills. On occasion the amount awarded may be unliquidated which means that the claim was not made for a specific amount of money, but rather, for example, damage caused to a property, for repairs for damage caused or for faulty workmanship.

Application

The act of applying to a civil court to ask it to do something, for example to start proceedings or make an order.

Case

The proceedings, arguments and evidence in court and the court hearing.

Certificate of Readiness (COR)

When a small claim or civil bill is contested by the respondent, the matter will proceed to the county court for judgment. Before the case can be heard, both parties must contribute to the completion of a Certificate of Readiness (COR) which informs the court that the case is ready to be heard and can therefore be listed by the court for hearing.

County Court Judge (CCJ)

This is a judge who sits in the County Court and the Crown Court. In the County Court, they will sit on business such as ordinary civil bills (with a value over £10,000 and up to £30,000), criminal damage, licences, equity, ejectment and divorces.

Court Disposal

Includes all cases issued with a final order by County Court Judge or District Judge.

Criminal Damage

These are cases in which there is an allegation that a property has been destroyed or damaged or where a person is alleged to have made threats, had intent, or was found to have anything on their property with intent to cause damage to another property.

Default Judgment

This is a judgment in favour of one party due to some failure to take action by the other party. In most cases this will be a judgment in favour of the applicant due to the failure of the respondent to contest the claim brought against them. The failure to take action is the default. The default judgment is the relief requested in the party's original petition.

Disposed

The date a case is finally dealt with via a court or non-court result and the case is no longer in the court process.

District Judge (DJ)

This is a judge who sits in the County Court or Magistrates' Court. In the County Court they will sit on business such as small claims and ordinary civil bills (with a value up to £10,000).

Divorces

These are proceedings initiated in order to dissolve a marriage. Dissolutions of civil partnerships are also included within these figures. Following the issue of a divorce petition in the High Court, if it is a defended case it will be heard in the High Court and if it is an undefended case it may be heard either in the High Court or the County Court (depending on the choice of the individuals involved). Initially a Decree Nisi, judicial separation or nullity is granted, which is an initial order for divorce. Providing that no reason is provided to the court to challenge the nisi, a Decree Absolute, which is a final order for divorce that dissolves a marriage and permits an individual party to remarry, is made. A defended divorce is a proceeding in which an individual (the petitioner) applies for a divorce and the other party (the respondent) indicates that they wish to contest a divorce being granted at all, or on the reasons stated by the petitioner.

Equity

Any type of proceeding which seeks a court judgement on disputes relating to property disputes i.e. who owns it, and should damages be paid.

Ejectment

A legal document which seeks to recover possession of land and/or a dwelling house (e.g. where a tenant has stopped paying rent). Similar matters relating to properties owned with a mortgage are dealt with through proceedings within the Chancery Division of the High Court.

Issue

This is the process by which a complaint or claim is lodged with the court. It can also be described as the 'Received Date'.

Licences

These are applications for intoxicating liquor licences and certificates of registration for public houses and clubs, enabling their legal operation.

Matrimonial Application

These are applications attached to divorce proceedings such as Ancillary Relief applications that relate to financial relief to one or both parties following a petition for divorce, for example, maintenance and the division of property/finances.

Notice of Dispute (NOD)

When a small claim is taken by an applicant against a respondent, the respondent may contest the claim and signal their intention to dispute the claim through a Notice of Dispute. This means that the case will then be listed before a judge in court for resolution.

Non court disposal

Includes all disposals not completed in court, for example settlements or withdrawals.

Notice of Intention to Defend (NID)

When a civil bill is taken by an applicant against a respondent, the respondent may contest the claim and signal their intention to dispute the claim through a Notice of Intention to Defend. This means that the case will then be listed before a judge in court for resolution.

Ordinary civil bills

A legal document which seeks to recover damages for (i) personal injury claims (injuries caused by negligence), for example, traffic accidents, falls on pavements and accidents at work and (ii) consumer disputes, for example, faulty goods or services. There have been a number of changes in the threshold for ordinary civil bills in recent years. Until 25 February 2013 ordinary civil bills related to cases seeking damages between £3,000 and £15,000 (prior to May 2011, the lower limit was £2,000). Following changes made on 25 February 2013, the upper limit for civil bills was extended to include cases seeking damages between £3,000 and £30,000.

Outstanding case

A case that is currently active within the County Court system, for example, live cases not yet disposed.

Received

The date the papers are lodged with the court and the fees receipted.

Sitting Days

A court sitting day is counted as any day where the judiciary sit in court. It is a period of work by a judge on a single day. Multiple sittings on one calendar date will be aggregated into one sitting day based on the Judicial officer, venue and sitting date. Several types of business may be heard within one sitting day. Days are classified on the basis of the majority business undertaken, except for the Magistrates court, when it is based in the first instance, on the earliest scheduled sitting. Where the start time for two or more sittings is the same, the days are classified on the majority of business undertaken. It does not include time in chambers or days where the judiciary are sitting in chambers.

Small claims

Small claims allow certain types of claims to be decided informally by the county court, usually without the need of a solicitor or barrister. In general a small claim is one where the value to be claimed is not more than £3,000 (before May 2011 the upper limit was £2,000). Examples of small claims are (i) compensation for faulty services by, for example, builders, dry cleaners and garages (ii) compensation for faulty goods such as electrical goods (iii) disputes between landlords and tenants for rent arrears or compensation for not doing repairs and (iv) debts or wages owed or money in lieu of notice.

Time intervals

This is the time taken (in weeks) between the case, application or claim being received by the court and the date it is finally resolved, by either the court, an arrangement between parties out of court or by being withdrawn by the applicant.

Analytical Services Group,
Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service,

Department of Justice

4th Floor, Laganside House

23-27 Oxford Street,

Belfast BT1 3LA

Email: Rodney.redmond@courtsni.gov.uk

Telephone: 028 9072 8920

www.courtsni.gov.uk