



**Analytical Services Group**  
**Crown Court Bulletin**

**April to June 2016**

**Research and Statistical Bulletin 17/2016**

**Provisional Figures**

**C Darragh**

**5 August 2016**

---

Produced by Analytical Services Group,  
Department of Justice.

For further information write to:

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

**Telephone: 028 9072 8927**

**Email: [caroline.darragh@courtsni.gov.uk](mailto:caroline.darragh@courtsni.gov.uk)**

This bulletin is available on the Internet at:

**[www.courtsni.gov.uk](http://www.courtsni.gov.uk)**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- This bulletin provides information on throughput at Crown Courts in Northern Ireland during the period April to June 2016 and commentary on trends observed for this quarter in each year from 2007. During the period April to June 2016:
- **The introduction of new rules in May 2015 in relation to legal aid remuneration resulted in a number of solicitors and counsel withdrawing their representation from a range of court cases. This has affected defendants' access to legal aid representation and this may have had an impact on disposals and delay within the Crown Court process during the period. The dispute ended on 11th February 2016.**
- There were 402 Crown cases received during April to June 2016. This was a 4% increase on the 386 received during April to June 2015. The number of cases disposed has increased by 82% from 380 during April to June 2015, to 690 for the same period in 2016. Caution should be taken when interpreting this increase in disposals as additional sittings were scheduled during the period to address the backlog of cases resulting from the legal aid dispute. The number of cases received and disposed for the April to June quarter over the last ten years is outlined in Figure 1.
- There were 491 defendants received in the Crown Court during April to June 2016 (a 9% increase since the same period last year, when 452 defendants were received). 844 defendants were disposed during April to June 2016 (an increase of 76% against the same period last year, when 479 defendants were dealt with). As highlighted above, please treat this increase in disposals with caution.
- The average time from committal to hearing for April to June 2016 was 168 days, compared with 90 days for the same period in 2015. The average time from conviction to disposal was 51 days, compared with 53 days for the equivalent period in 2015. The average waiting times for defendants disposed in the April to June quarter over the last ten years is outlined in Figure 2.
- County Court Judges disposed of 99% of defendants (834) and during the same quarter last year they also disposed of 99% (472) defendants. 10% of defendants were charged solely with offences against the person while 42% of defendants had a combination of charges. During the same period last year 13% of defendants were charged solely with offences against the person, and 45% of defendants had a combination of charges. The charge types for defendants disposed during April to June 2016, are outlined in Figure 3.
- Of the 844 defendants disposed during April to June 2016, 324 (38%) pleaded guilty to all charges, compared with 151 (32%) during April to June 2015.
- In total there were 852 Crown Court sittings for April to June 2016 compared with 649 for April to June 2015 (an increase of 31%), with a total time of 2,329 hours sat compared with 1,750 hours sat during the same period last year.

## CONTENTS

Contents	Page
1. <a href="#">Introduction</a>	1
2. <a href="#">Methodology</a>	2
3. <a href="#">Findings</a>	4
<a href="#">3.1 Receipts &amp; Disposals</a>	
<a href="#">3.2 Waiting times</a>	
<a href="#">3.3 Disposals by Judge Type</a>	
<a href="#">3.4 Disposals by Charge Type</a>	
<a href="#">3.5 Outcome of Defendants</a>	
<a href="#">3.6 Sitings</a>	
<a href="#">Appendix 1 - Tables</a>	8
<a href="#">Appendix 2 - Explanatory Notes</a>	12

Figure	Page
<a href="#">Figure 1: <u>Crown Court cases received and disposed: April - June 2007 to April - June 2016</u></a>	4
<a href="#">Figure 2: <u>Crown Court waiting times in days: April - June 2007 to April - June 2016</u></a>	5
<a href="#">Figure 3: <u>Crown Court defendants disposed by charge type: April - June 2016</u></a>	6

Table	Page
<a href="#">Table 1 <u>Crown Court cases received</u></a>	8
<a href="#">Table 2 <u>Crown Court cases disposed</u></a>	8
<a href="#">Table 3 <u>Crown Court defendants received</u></a>	8
<a href="#">Table 4 <u>Crown Court defendants disposed</u></a>	9
<a href="#">Table 5 <u>Waiting times in days</u></a>	9
<a href="#">Table 6 <u>Crown Court defendants disposed by judge type</u></a>	9
<a href="#">Table 7 <u>Crown Court defendants disposed by charge type</u></a>	10
<a href="#">Table 8 <u>Outcome of Crown Court defendants</u></a>	10
<a href="#">Table 9 <u>Crown Court sitting times</u></a>	11

## INTRODUCTION

The Crown Court has exclusive jurisdiction to try offences charged on indictment. Offences tried on indictment are more serious offences. The Lord Chief Justice is President of the Crown Court and the Lords Justices of Appeal, High Court Judges and county court judges all sit in the Crown Court.

Trial on indictment in the Crown Court follows after the accused has been returned for trial at committal proceedings in a magistrates' court. The Public Prosecution Service is responsible for preparing a formal document called an indictment, stating the charges which the accused will face. The matters are then tried before a judge sitting with a jury.

The Crown Court normally sits at seven different venues throughout Northern Ireland and the trial of non-scheduled offences takes place at the sitting of the Crown Court determined by the District Judge who committed the accused. This is usually the Crown Court acting for the county court division in which the offence is alleged to have been committed.

Appeal from the Crown Court is to the Court of Appeal. If a person wishes to appeal against conviction on a question of fact, the permission of either the Crown Court Judge or the Court of Appeal is required. To appeal against sentence he or she needs the leave of the Court of Appeal.

All persons convicted of a scheduled offence tried on indictment can appeal against conviction to the Court of Appeal on any grounds and without leave. This automatic right of appeal is a safeguard built into the system because in these cases there is no jury.

The prosecution has no right to appeal against the acquittal of a defendant who has been tried on indictment. The Attorney-General can refer a point of law to the Court of Appeal for its opinion, but even if the Court of Appeal considers that the trial judge made an error of law resulting in an acquittal, the acquittal still stands. The reference and subsequent ruling is useful in guiding the prosecution of future trials.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Data sources

Data contained in the Tables 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 Crown Court during 2006, 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

Statisticians based within the NICTS take a download of Crown 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. The statisticians based in the NICTS then 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 Crown Court data, to the current calendar year 2016.

### 2.4 Data quality and validation

Statisticians based in the NICTS have invested significant time and effort creating an extensive computer programme within SPSS to validate the information downloaded from ICOS. The programme includes over 100 checks against downloaded Crown Court data to: (i) check consistency over time and between variables; (ii) reliability of data using logic checks; (iii) checking that variables fall within accepted ranges; and (iv) checking 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 criminal 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 committed to the Crown Court from the Magistrates court. 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 2007, when ICOS was introduced as the source for Crown Court data. For further advice on differences in data between years, please contact the statistician responsible for this bulletin.

## **2.7 Revisions**

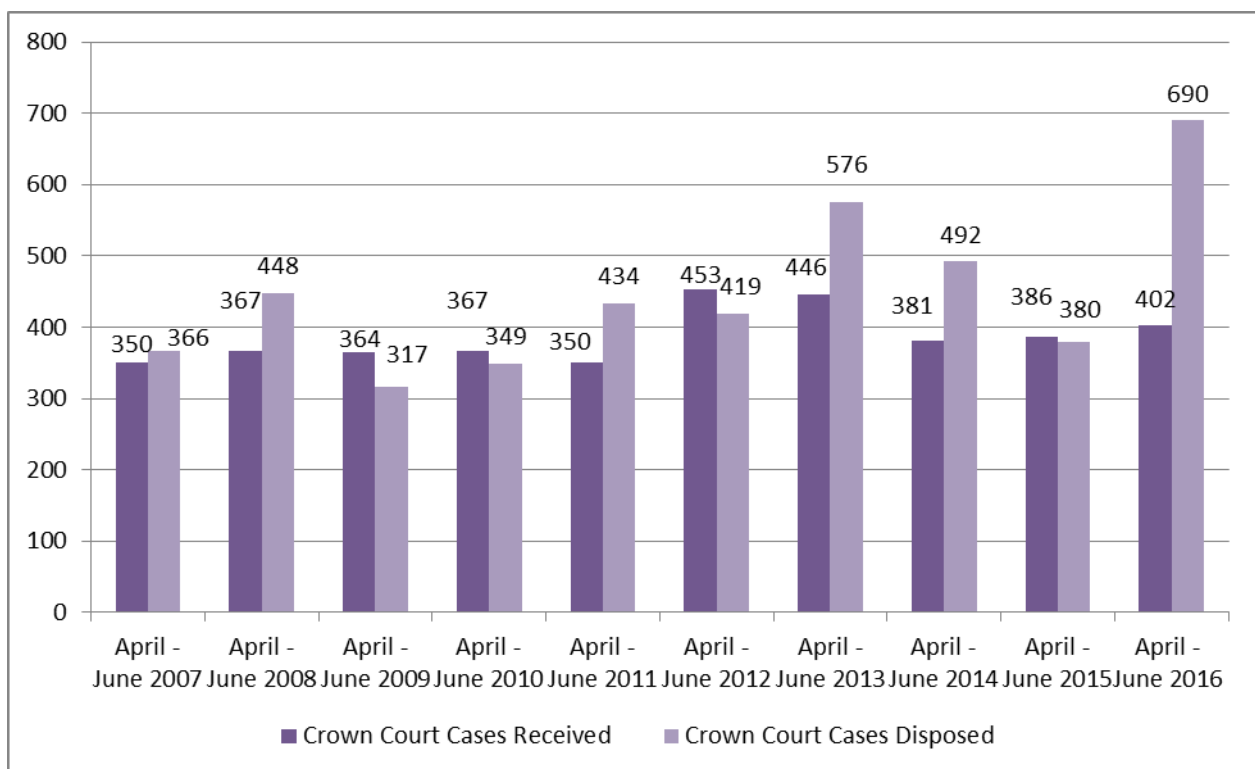
Any revision to data will be applied in light of the ASG (NICTS) Statistical Note 'Policy Statement on Revisions' which can be found on the Statistics and Research page of the Services section on the NICTS website ([www.courtsni.gov.uk](http://www.courtsni.gov.uk)). Incorrect figures or changes to this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

### 3 FINDINGS

#### 3.1 Receipts & Disposals

There were 402 Crown cases received during April to June 2016 (Table 1). This was a 4% increase on the 386 received during April to June 2015. The number of cases disposed has increased by 82% from 380 during April to June 2015, to 690 for the same period in 2016 (Table 2). The number of cases received and disposed for the April to June quarter over the last ten years is outlined in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Crown Court Cases Received and Disposed: April – June 2007 to April – June 2016**



The trend in Crown Court cases received in the April to June quarter fluctuated between 2007 and 2016, peaking at 453 in 2012. The trend in cases disposed fluctuated between 2007 and 2013, before decreasing by 34% between 2013 and 2015. Cases disposed then rose by 82% in 2016 compared to 2015, however this increase should be treated with caution as additional sittings were scheduled during the quarter to address the backlog of Crown Court cases which were stymied as result of the legal aid dispute. The dispute ended on 11<sup>th</sup> February 2016.

As shown in figure 1, in 2013 and 2014 there was a marked difference in the number of cases disposed than received, with 29% more cases being disposed than received, in both these quarters. This was partly due to an extra County Court Judge being introduced into



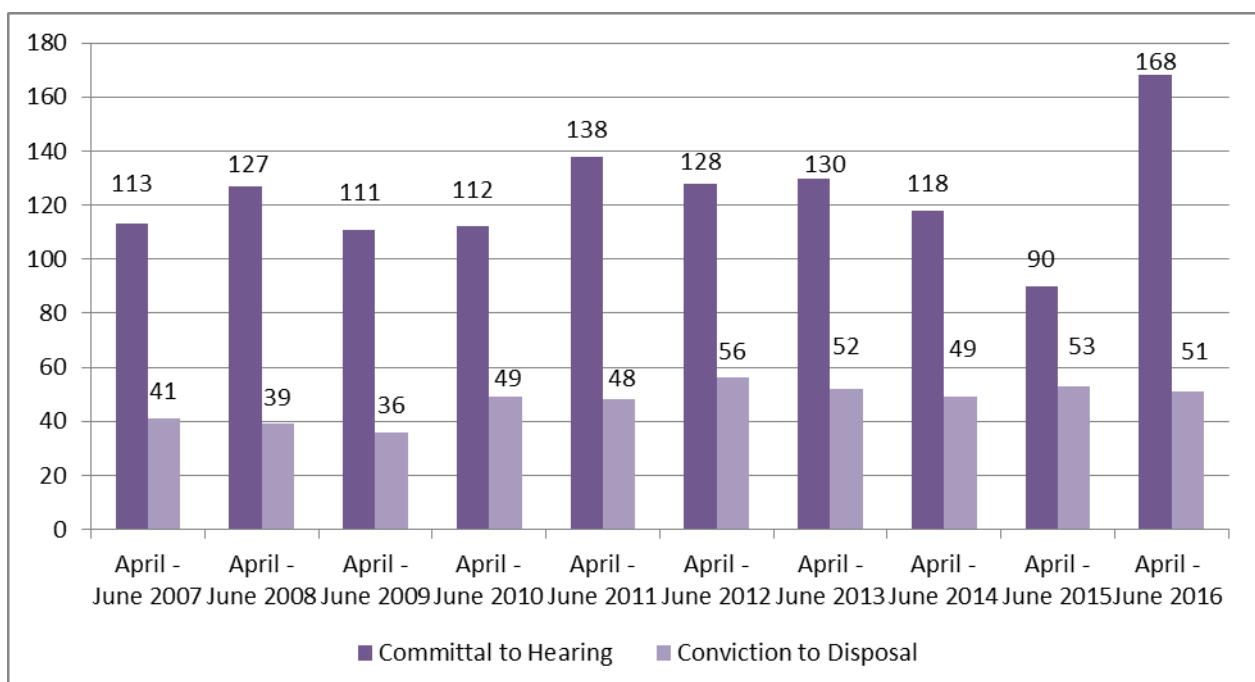
Belfast Crown Court to tackle outstanding legacy cases. However this trend was reversed in 2015, with 2% more cases being received than disposed. This is partly due to the re-assignment of the extra County Court Judge to civil and family business. In 2016, the trend reverted back to the number cases disposed exceeding receipts in the period, however again caution should be exercised due to the extra sittings scheduled to address the backlog of cases during the period.

There were 491 defendants received in the Crown Court during April to June 2016 (a 9% increase since the same period last year, when 452 defendants were received). 844 defendants were disposed during April to June 2016 (an increase of 76% against the same period last year, when 479 defendants were dealt with). The trend in defendants received and disposed fluctuated between 2007 and 2016 with receipts peaking in 2012 and disposals peaking in 2016 (Tables 3 and 4).

### 3.2 Waiting times

The average time from committal to hearing for April to June 2016 was 168 days, compared with 90 days for the same period in 2015. The average time from conviction to disposal was 51 days, compared with 53 days for the equivalent period in 2015. Average waiting times from committal to hearing have fluctuated over the last eight years peaking in 2011 at 138 days, and then again in 2016 at 168 days (Figure 2). The average waiting times from conviction to disposal have remained relatively stable over the last ten years ranging between 36 and 56 days. Caution should be taken when comparing average waiting time figures for 2016 against previous years, as a number of defendants dealt with during the period may have had their cases delayed as a result of the legal aid dispute which commenced in May 2015 and ended in February 2016.

**Figure 2: Crown Court waiting times in days: April - June 2007 to April - June 2016**



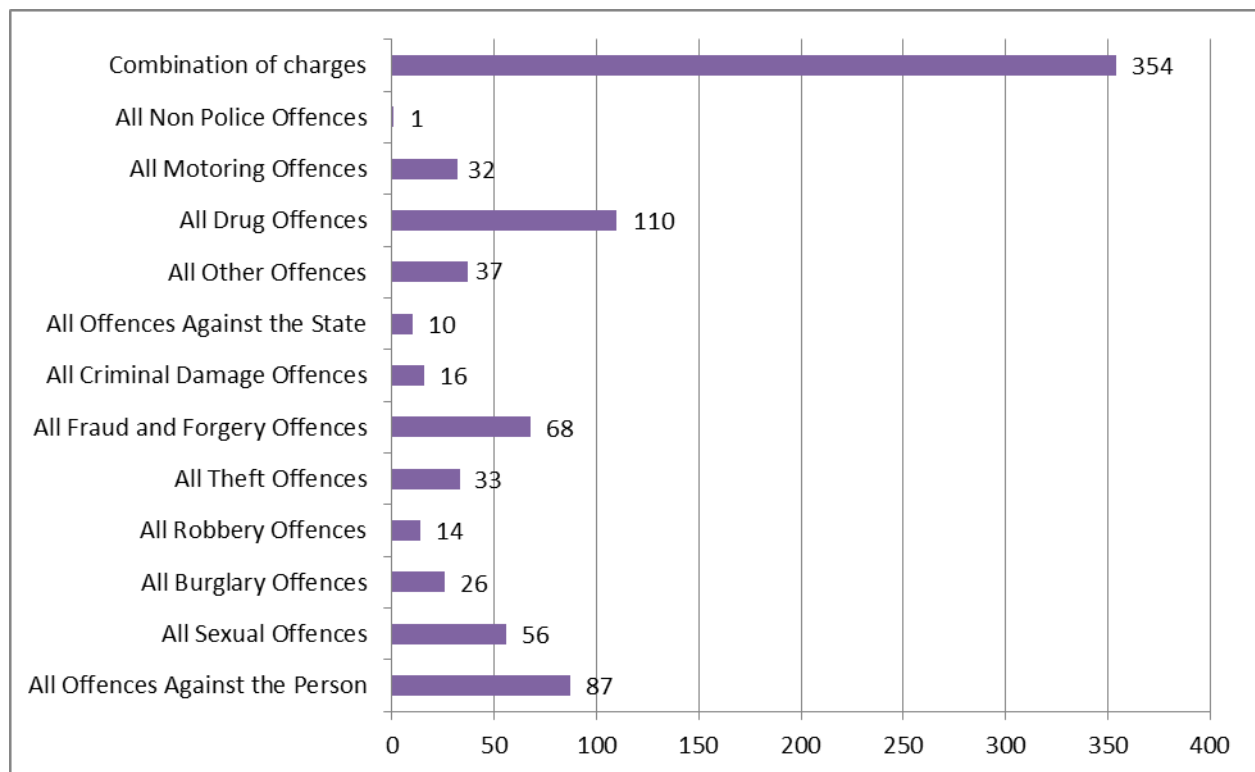
### 3.3 Disposals by Judge Type

County Court Judges disposed of 99% of defendants (834) and during the same quarter last year they also disposed of 99% (472) defendants. The percentage of defendants disposed of by County Court Judges has remained relatively stable over the time series, ranging between 91% and 99%.

### 3.4 Disposals by Charge Type

Between April to June 2016, 10% of defendants were charged solely with offences against the person while 42% of defendants had a combination of charges (Figure 3). During the same period last year 13% of defendants were charged solely with offences against the person, and 45% of defendants had a combination of charges. Throughout the time series the majority of defendants disposed of each year have been charged with a combination of offences. Defendants charged solely with offences against the person account for the next largest offence category, ranging from 10% to 19% for the April to June quarter between 2007 and 2016.

**Figure 3: Crown Court defendants disposed by charge type: April - June 2016**



### **3.5 Outcome of Defendants**

Of the 844 defendants disposed of during April to June 2016, 324 (38%) pleaded guilty to all charges, compared with 151 (32%) during April to June 2015. In total 88% of defendants pleaded guilty or were found guilty of at least one offence between April to June 2016. Across the ten year time series, this percentage ranged between 82% and 93%.

### **3.6 Sittings**

In total there were 852 Crown Court sittings for April to June 2016 compared with 649 for April to June 2015 (an increase of 31%), with a total time of 2,329 hours sat compared with 1,750 hours sat during the same period last year. Please note that additional Crown Court sittings were scheduled during the period to address a backlog of cases which developed as a result of the legal aid dispute.

## APPENDIX 1

Table 1 - Crown Court cases received

	Total
Belfast	118
Londonderry	42
Antrim	56
Fermanagh and Tyrone	50
Armagh and South Down	40
Ards	46
Craigavon	50
Total	402

Table 2 - Crown Court cases disposed

	Total
Belfast	164
Londonderry	85
Antrim	79
Fermanagh and Tyrone	80
Armagh and South Down	71
Ards	111
Craigavon	100
Total	690

Table 3 - Crown Court defendants received

	Total
Belfast	140
Londonderry	52
Antrim	69
Fermanagh and Tyrone	56
Armagh and South Down	55
Ards	57
Craigavon	62
Total	491

Table 4 - Crown Court defendants disposed

	Total
Belfast	196
Londonderry	95
Antrim	90
Fermanagh and Tyrone	95
Armagh and South Down	109
Ards	137
Craigavon	122
Total	844

Table 5 - Waiting times in days

	Committal to hearing - days	Conviction to disposal - days	Total defendants disposed
Belfast	167	60	187
Londonderry	151	41	94
Antrim	191	54	87
Fermanagh and Tyrone	179	41	88
Armagh and South Down	164	36	105
Ards	172	61	132
Craigavon	158	51	120
Total	168	51	813

[1] Excludes defendants who had a bench warrant or deferred sentence

Table 6 - Crown Court defendants disposed by judge type

	Judicial Level		Total
	County Court Judge	High Court Judge	
Belfast	186	10	196
Londonderry	95	0	95
Antrim	90	0	90
Fermanagh and Tyrone	95	0	95
Armagh and South Down	109	0	109
Ards	137	0	137
Craigavon	122	0	122
Total	834	10	844

**Table 7 - Crown Court defendants disposed  
by charge type**

<b>All Offences Against the Person</b>	87
<b>All Sexual Offences</b>	56
<b>All Burglary Offences</b>	26
<b>All Robbery Offences</b>	14
<b>All Theft Offences</b>	33
<b>All Fraud and Forgery Offences</b>	68
<b>All Criminal Damage Offences</b>	16
<b>All Offences Against the State</b>	10
<b>All Other Offences</b>	37
<b>All Drug Offences</b>	110
<b>All Motoring Offences</b>	32
<b>All Non-Police Offences</b>	1
<b>Combination of charges</b>	354
<b>Total</b>	844

**Table 8 - Outcome of Crown Court Defendants**

	<b>Plea of guilty on all charges</b>	<b>Plea of not guilty on at least one charge - found guilty on at least one charge</b>	<b>Plea of not guilty - acquitted on all charges</b>	<b>All charges withdrawn</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Belfast</b>	75	96	25	0	196
<b>Londonderry</b>	42	43	10	0	95
<b>Antrim</b>	25	45	19	1	90
<b>Fermanagh and Tyrone</b>	42	37	16	0	95
<b>Armagh and South Down</b>	25	72	12	0	109
<b>Ards</b>	63	67	7	0	137
<b>Craigavon</b>	52	59	11	0	122
<b>Total</b>	324	419	100	1	844

Table 9 - Crown Court sitting times

		<b>Number of sittings</b>	<b>Total time</b>
	<b>Belfast</b>	241	645:54
	<b>Londonderry</b>	86	190:58
	<b>Antrim</b>	101	334:07
	<b>Fermanagh and Tyrone</b>	96	309:38
	<b>Armagh and South Down</b>	115	313:20
	<b>Ards</b>	114	326:09
	<b>Craigavon</b>	99	208:48
<b>Total</b>		852	2328:54

## APPENDIX 2 - EXPLANATORY NOTES

### Acquittal

A judgement or verdict that a person is not guilty of the crime with which they have been charged

### Arraignment

The procedure by which the defendant has criminal charges formally put to him before the judge at the Crown Court and he enters his plea of guilty

### Committal

The procedure by which a person is returned for trial to the Crown Court by the magistrates' court, if the magistrates' court is satisfied that there is a case to answer.

### County court judge

A judge who sits in the county court and the Crown Court.

### Day sat

This is a day on which a judge sat to hear court business. The information is organised into the various types of court business that a judge hears. The judge's day may consist of one or more sittings, at one or more court venues.

### Disposed

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

### High Court Judge

A judge who sits in the High Court and the Crown Court to hear and determine civil, family, and criminal business.

### Hybrid charge

This is also referred to as a 'triable-either-way' offence. A criminal offence that may be prosecuted either summarily (in the magistrates' court) or on indictment (in the Crown Court). In the majority of cases, the prosecution decides how the offence is tried depending on the seriousness of the offence.

### Indictable charge

A serious criminal offence where the defendant is usually tried in the Crown Court.

### Indictable triable summarily charge

A serious criminal offence where a defendant can be tried in the Crown Court but may in some instances be tried in a magistrates' court.

### Justice & Security Act 2007

Legislation which replaced the Terrorism Act 2000 which makes provision for non-jury trials.

### Plea

The response a defendant gives after criminal charges have been put to him e.g. "guilty" or "not guilty."

### Scheduled

A scheduled offence is one which is listed in Schedule 9 of the Terrorism Act 2000 and which, if it is tried on indictment, will be heard by a judge sitting without a jury. This has been replaced by



the Justice and Security Act 2007.

**Sitting**

This is a period of work by a judge in a single courtroom on a single day. Several types of business may be heard at one sitting. Business heard in different courtrooms, whether at the same venue or elsewhere, is counted as separate sittings.

**Withdrawn**

An order which removes a case from court, for a variety of reasons. The court action then ceases.

Analytical Services Group,

Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service,

**Department of Justice**

4<sup>th</sup> Floor, Laganside House

23-27 Oxford Street,

Belfast BT1 3LA

Email: [caroline.darragh@courtsni.gov.uk](mailto:caroline.darragh@courtsni.gov.uk)

Telephone: 028 9072 8927

**Research and Statistical Bulletin 17/2016**