

PUBLIC PROSECUTION SERVICE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Statistical Bulletin 2021/22 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022

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Introduction

The Public Prosecution Service

The Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland (PPS), which is headed by the Director of Public Prosecutions, is the principal prosecuting authority in Northern Ireland. In addition to taking decisions as to prosecution in cases investigated by the police, it also considers cases investigated by other statutory authorities, such as HM Revenue and Customs.

The primary role of the PPS is to reach decisions to prosecute or not to prosecute and to have responsibility for the conduct of criminal proceedings. A range of options is also available for dealing with offenders other than through prosecution. These options include cautions, informed warnings, and youth conferencing. Prosecutors may also refer offenders to the National Driver Alertness Scheme or to a Community Restorative Justice Scheme.

For further information on the role and structure of the PPS please visit www.ppsni.gov.uk.

About this Bulletin

This bulletin presents key statistics on the activity of the PPS, including caseloads and prosecutorial decisions. It also includes data on the outcomes of prosecutions at court. The report provides information for the 2021/22 financial year (i.e., 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022) and includes comparisons for 2020/21. Where appropriate detailed notes have been provided, which give an explanation of the relevant PPS processes and procedures. Please see Glossary, User Notes and tables for further information.

Statistics for the financial year have been finalised.

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

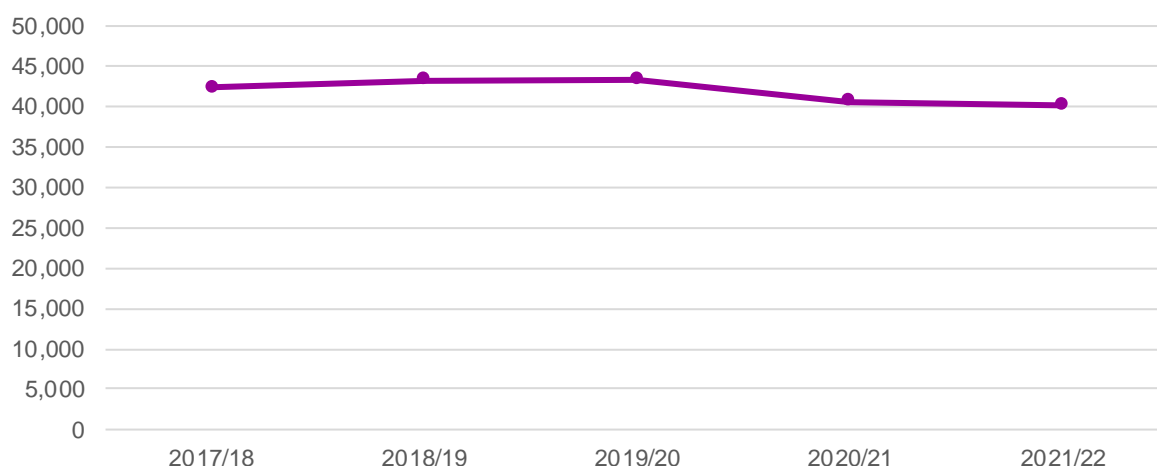
Please note that the figures contained within this report reflect a period in which the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was felt across the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland. For example, the 2020/21 financial year saw reduced levels of crime generally, as evidenced by police recorded crime statistics. The volume of business carried out in the criminal courts was also severely affected by the pandemic. During the early months of the emergency, all court business was restricted to only four main court 'hubs' in Belfast, Lisburn, Dungannon and Londonderry, with only urgent matters being dealt with. As a result, the PPS was constrained in terms of the numbers of new cases that could be listed in the Crown, Magistrates' and Youth Courts.

Summary of key points

- The PPS received a total of 40,168 files, a decrease of 1% on 2020/21 (40,656). Of these, 39,605 were received from Police.
- The majority of files received from Police were within two offence classifications: 31% related to 'violence against the person' (12,236) and 29% related to 'motoring offences' (11,494). The classification 'burglary' saw the biggest relative decrease with a fall of 19% on the previous year.
- A total of 45,193 prosecutorial decisions were issued by the PPS. The Test for Prosecution was met in the majority of cases considered by public prosecutors during the current period. Of the 45,193 decisions issued, 69% were for prosecution (28,361) or for diversion (2,911) from the courts.
- Of the 13,921 decisions for no prosecution, the vast majority (97%) did not pass the evidential test. The remaining 3% did not pass the public interest test.
- Median calendar days required for the issue of an indictable prosecution decision (prosecution in the Crown Court) was 209 days, similar to 2020/21 (208 days). Summary prosecution decisions (prosecution in the Magistrates' or Youth Court) required a median of 4 days, which is the same as in the previous financial year.
- There were 1,608 defendants dealt with in the Crown Court. This was an increase of 49% on the previous financial year (1,077). The overall conviction rate in the Crown Court was 88% compared with 92% in 2020/21.
- A total of 28,740 defendants were dealt with in the Magistrates' and Youth Courts, an increase of 35% on 2020/21 (21,315). The conviction rate in the Magistrates' and Youth Courts was 80%, similar to 2020/21 (81%).

Number of files received by the PPS

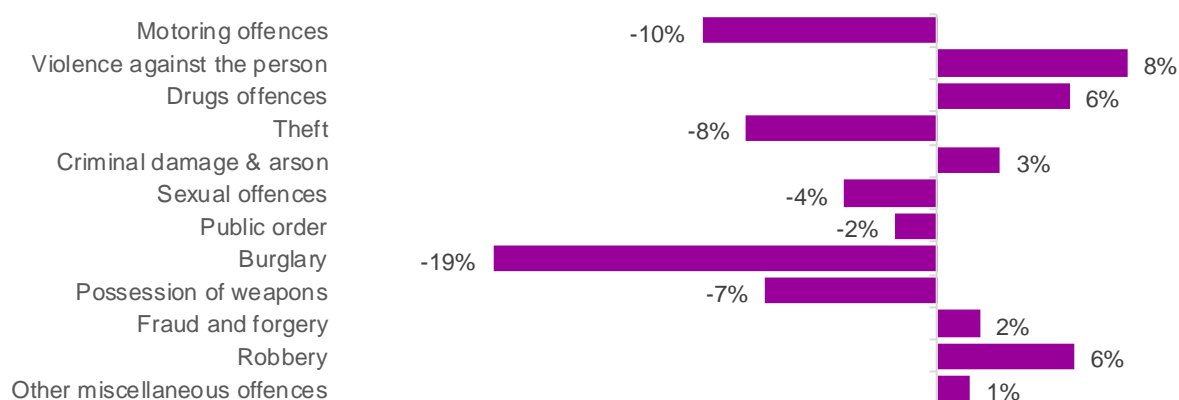
Figure 1: Files Received Overall, 2017/18 to 2021/22



Source: Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland Statistical Bulletin 2021/22, Table 1a Files Received by File Type and PPS Region / Function

The PPS received 40,168 files during 2021/22. This was a decrease of 1% on 2020/21 (40,656). Just under half (48%) of all files received during the current period related to summary offences, 47% to hybrid offences and 5% to indictable offences.

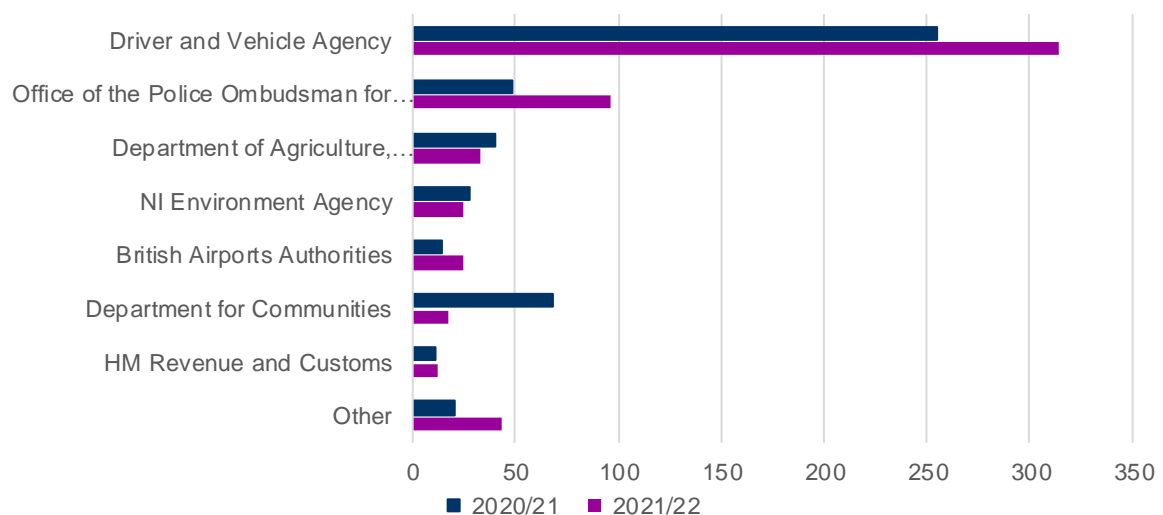
Figure 2: Percentage Change in the Number of Files Received from Police by Offence Classification, 2020/21 to 2021/22



Source: Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland Statistical Bulletin 2021/22, Table 1b Files Received from Police by Offence Classification

During this financial year, PPS received a total of 39,605 files from police. This represents a 1% decrease on the previous financial year (40,172). In terms of files received by offence classification, the majority fell into two categories: ‘violence against the person’ (31%) and ‘motoring’ (29%). The largest decrease in the number of files received was for ‘motoring offences’ (1,273 decrease). The classification of ‘burglary’ had the largest percentage decrease in files received (19%).

Figure 3: Files Submitted to PPS by Other Departments / Agencies, 2020/21 to 2021/22

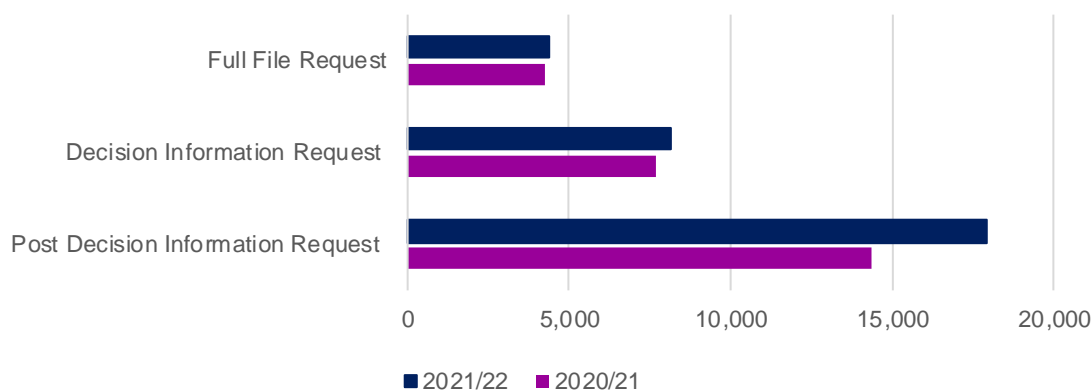


Source: Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland Statistical Bulletin 2021/22, Table 1c Files Submitted to PPS by Other Departments / Agencies

A total of 565 files were submitted to PPS by departments and agencies during 2021/22, representing a 17% increase on 2020/21 (484). During this period, the majority of files were submitted either by the Driver and Vehicle Agency (56%) or the Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland (17%).

Requests to police for further information

Figure 4: Information Requests Submitted to Police by Request Type¹, 2020/21 to 2021/22



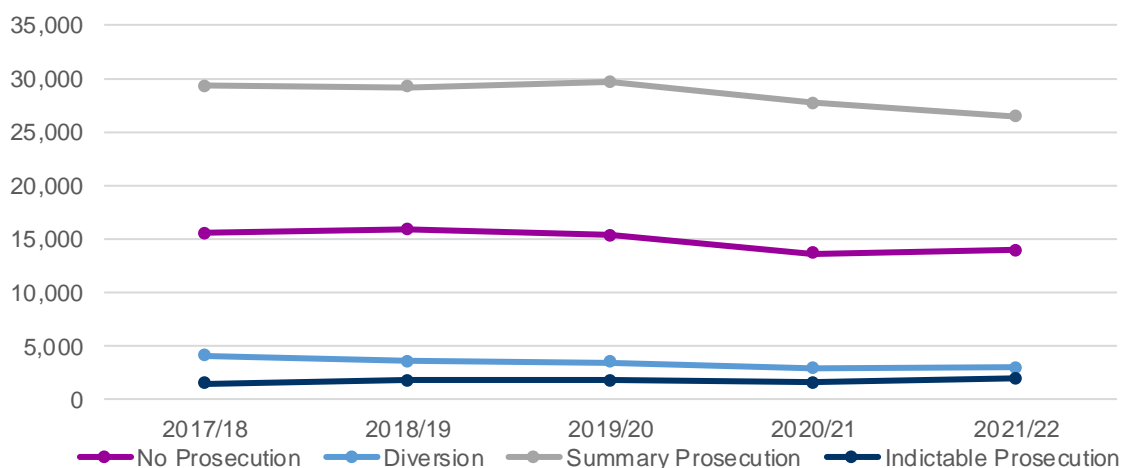
¹No decision results are not shown to prevent disclosure of small figures

Source: Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland Statistical Bulletin 2021/22, Table 2 Information Requests Submitted to Police by Request Type and PPS Region / Function

A total of 30,502 information requests were submitted to police during 2021/22, an increase of 16% on the previous financial year (26,387). More than half of all requests submitted during the current period were 'Post Decision Information Requests' (59%), 27% were 'Decision Information Requests' and 14% were 'Full File Requests'.

Number and type of prosecutorial decisions issued

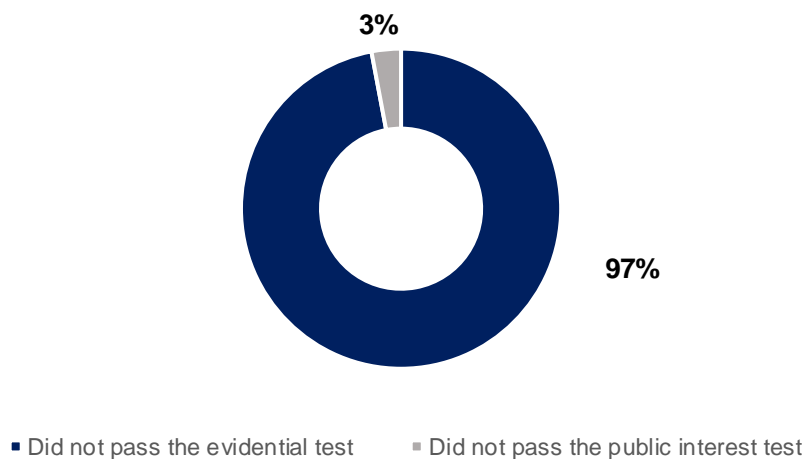
Figure 5: Prosecutorial Decisions Issued by Decision Type, 2017/18 to 2021/22



Source: Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland Statistical Bulletin 2021/22, Table 3a Prosecutorial Decisions Issued by Decision Type and PPS Region / Function

During 2021/22, 45,193 prosecutorial decisions were issued by the PPS, a decrease of 1% on the total issued during 2020/21 (45,628). The Test for Prosecution was met in the majority of cases considered by public prosecutors during the current period. Of the 45,193 decisions issued, 69% were for prosecution (28,361) or for diversion from the courts (2,911). This was similar to 2020/21 (70%). Comparing 2020/21 and 2021/22, there was a 3% decrease in the number of decisions to prosecute. This comprised of a 26% increase in indictable prosecution decisions (to 1,942), while summary prosecution decisions decreased by 4% (to 26,419). The number of diversionary decisions rose by 1% (to 2,911) while no prosecution decisions increased by 3% (to 13,921).

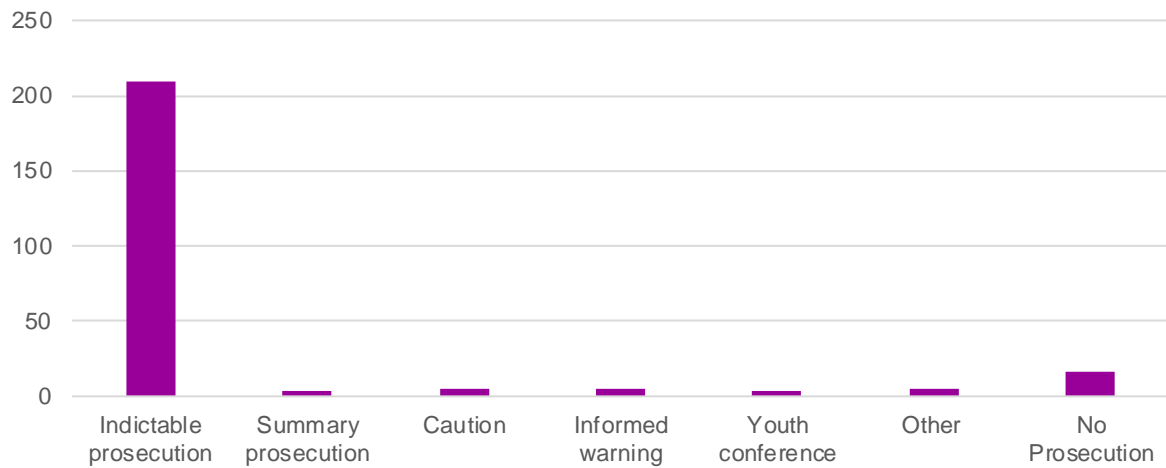
Figure 6: Prosecutorial Decisions Issued – Reasons for No Prosecution in 2021/22



Source: Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland Statistical Bulletin 2021/22, Table 3b Prosecutorial Decisions Issued - Reasons for No Prosecution by PPS Region / Function

Of the 13,921 no prosecution decisions issued during 2021/22, 97% did not pass the evidential test. The remaining 3% did not pass the public interest test.

Figure 7: Median Number of Days Required for the Issue of Prosecutorial Decisions by Decision Type in 2021/22

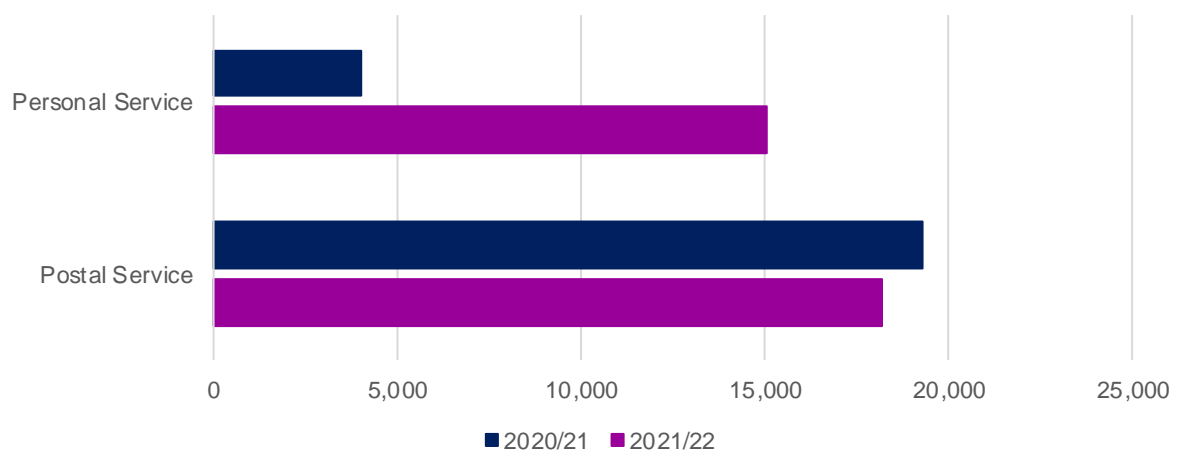


Source: Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland Statistical Bulletin 2021/22, Table 3c Number of Days Required for the Issue of Prosecutorial Decisions by Decision Type (Median and 80th Percentile)

Median calendar days required for the issue of an indictable prosecution decision increased by 1 day during the current period to 209 days, up from 208 days in 2020/21. During 2021/22, summary prosecution decisions required a median of 4 days, which is the same as in the previous financial year. Cautions required a median of 5 days (4 days in 2020/21), informed warnings 5 days (the same as 2020/21) and youth conferences 4 days, (3 days in 2020/21).

Summonses

Figure 8: Summonses Issued in Police Cases by Service Method, 2020/21 to 2021/22

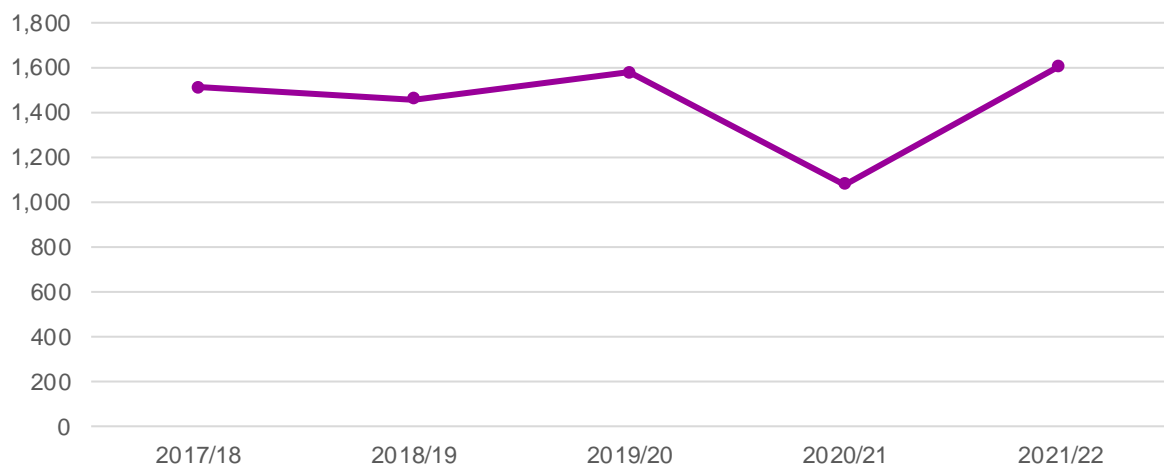


Source: Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland Statistical Bulletin 2021/22, Table 4 Summonses Issued in Police Cases by Service Method and PPS Region

A total of 33,291 summonses were issued in police cases during 2021/22, an increase of 43% on 2020/21 (23,308). Comparing 2020/21 and 2021/22, the number of summonses issued via postal service decreased by 6% while those issued via personal service increased by 28%. During 2021/22, just over half (55%) of summonses issued were served on the defendant by post (83% in 2020/21) and the remaining 45% via personal service by police (17% in 2020/21).

Defendants and convictions

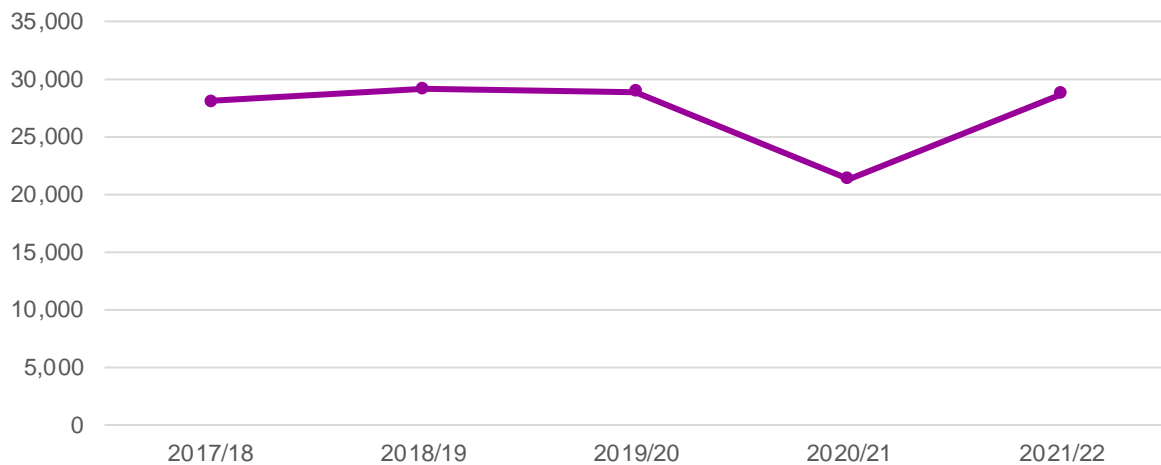
Figure 9: Defendants Dealt with in the Crown Court, 2017/18 to 2021/22



Source: Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland Statistical Bulletin 2021/22, Table 5a Defendants Dealt with in the Crown Court by Outcome and PPS Region / Function

During 2021/22, 1,608 defendants were dealt with in the Crown Court. This was an increase of 49% on 2020/21 (1,077). Of the defendants dealt with during the current period, 88% were convicted (92% in 2020/21) and 11% were acquitted (7% in 2020/21).

Figure 10: Defendants Dealt with in the Magistrates' and Youth Courts 2017/18 to 2021/22

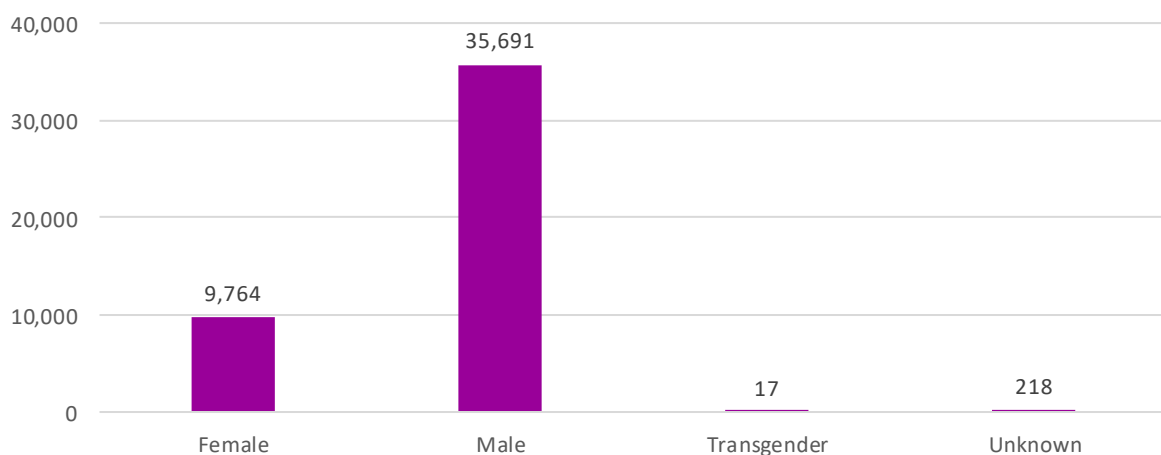


Source: Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland Statistical Bulletin 2021/22, Table 5b Defendants Dealt with in the Magistrates' and Youth Courts by Outcome and PPS Region / Function

During 2021/22, 28,740 defendants were dealt with in the Magistrates' and Youth Courts, an increase of 35% on 2020/21 (21,315). Of the defendants dealt with during the current period, 80% were convicted (81% in 2020/21), 7% were acquitted (5% in 2020/21) and 13% had an 'other' outcome (15% in 2020/21). At 80% in 2021/22, the conviction rate is similar to that in 2020/21 (81%).

Age and gender analysis

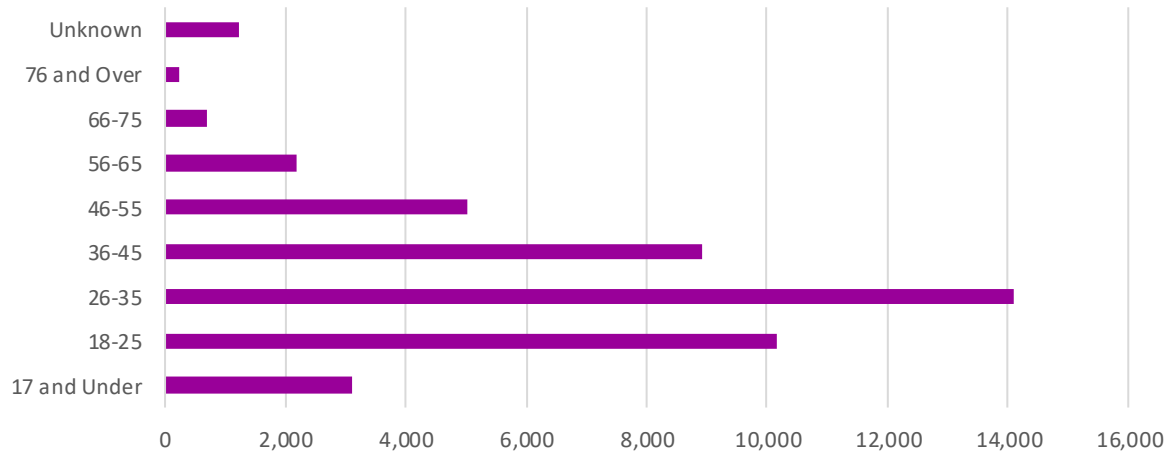
Figure 11: Gender of Suspects on Files Received by PPS in 2021/22



Source: Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland Statistical Bulletin 2021/22, Table 6a Files Received by Gender and Age of Suspects

During 2021/22 of 45,690 suspects on files received, almost four in five (78%) were recorded as male.

Figure 12: Age of Suspects on Files Received by PPS in 2021-22



Source: Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland Statistical Bulletin 2021/22, Table 6a Files Received by Gender and Age of Suspects

The largest proportion (31%) of suspects on files received by PPS were in the 26-35 age category. Almost three-quarters (73%) of suspects were between the ages of 18 and 45.

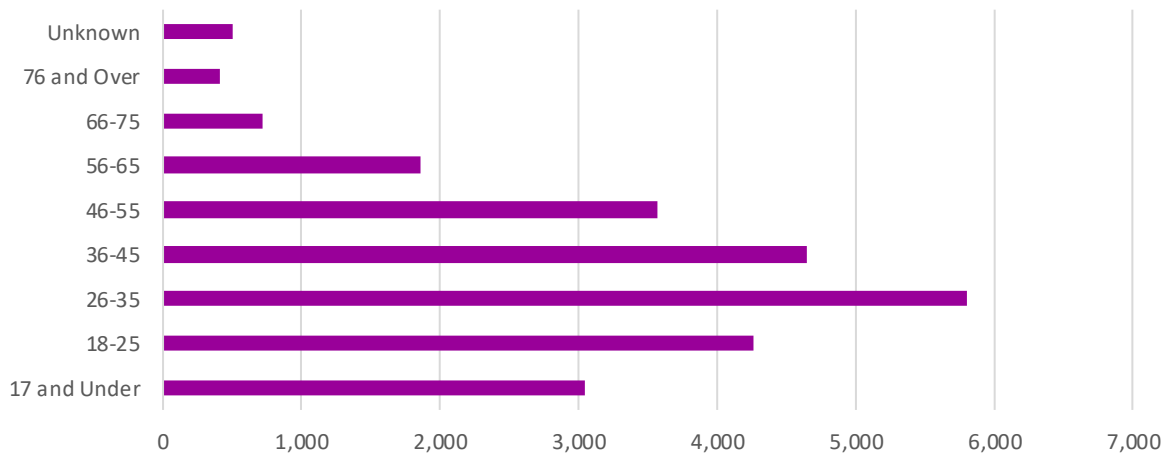
Figure 13: Gender of Victims on Files Received by PPS in 2021-22



Source: Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland Statistical Bulletin 2021/22, Table 6b Files Received by Gender and Age of Victims

During 2021/22 of 24,830 victims on files received, over half (57%) were recorded as female.

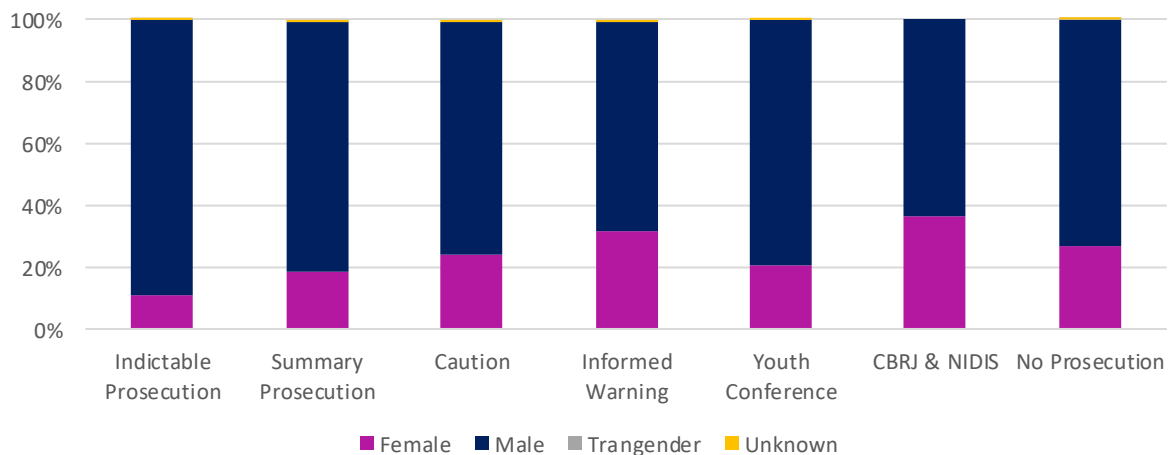
Figure 14: Age of Victims on Files Received by PPS in 2021-22



Source: Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland Statistical Bulletin 2021/22, Table 6b Files Received by Gender and Age of Victims

The largest proportion (23%) of victims on files received by PPS were recorded as being in the 26-35 age category. Almost three-quarters (74%) of victims were between the ages of 18 and 55.

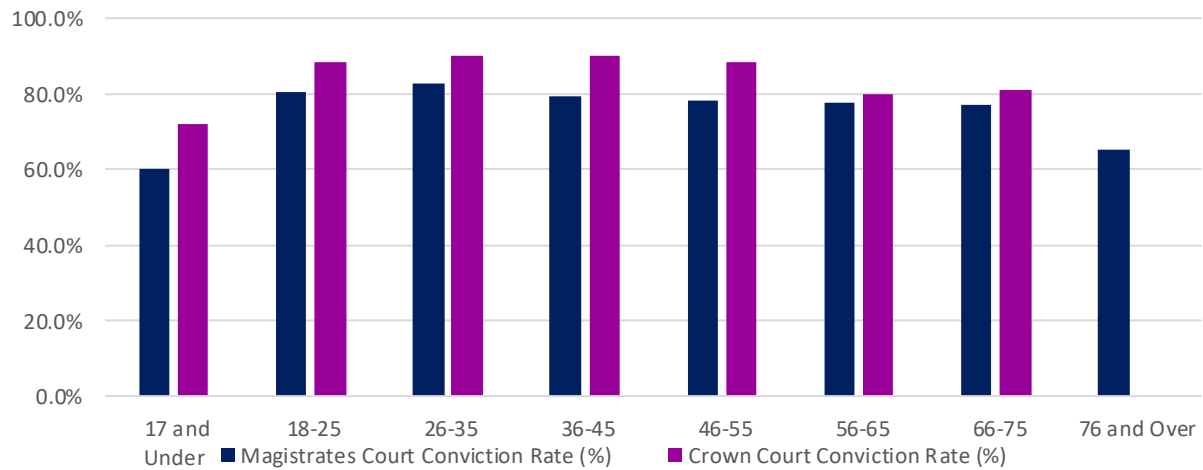
Figure 15: Gender Proportion of all Suspects by Decision Type in 2021-22



Source: Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland Statistical Bulletin 2021/22, Table 6c Prosecutorial Decisions Issued by Decision Type and Gender

From a total of 45,193 decisions issued in 2021-22, 78% were issued in respect of a male suspect.

Figure 16: Conviction Rates by Age Group in Crown Court and Magistrates' / Youth Court in 2021-22



Source: Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland Statistical Bulletin 2021/22, Table 6f Defendants Dealt with in the Crown Court by Outcome and Age, and Table 6h Defendants Dealt with in the Magistrates' and Youth Courts by Age

The conviction rate in Crown Court cases was relatively lower in the 17 and under group (72%) than the overall figure of 88%. This was largely mirrored in Magistrates' / Youth Court cases where the conviction rate was also lower in the 17 and under group (60%) than the overall rate of 80%.

User notes

Data sources and validations

The information presented in this bulletin is derived from the Case Management System (CMS), the main operational system in use within the PPS. This is a 'live' system with data being input on a daily basis.

It should be noted that the CMS is also linked to the CJSNI's Causeway data sharing mechanism. The first phase of Causeway ('DSM 0'), introduced in 2005/06, allowed police to submit files to the PPS electronically. The most recent phase ('DSM 1') was launched at the end of November 2009 and broadened the portfolio of information shared electronically. For example, PPS are now supplied with court results by the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service which feed into the PPS Case Management System via Causeway.

The information is extracted using Business Objects. It is then validated, and quality assured to ensure that the data is reliable and robust for use. Any inconsistencies are reported back to operational staff or to the PPS Information and Communications Technology Branch. If required, any necessary amendments are then made to the data.

Rounding conventions

Percentages have been rounded to one whole number and may not always sum to 100%. Where a base number is less than 50, percentages are not provided.

Disclosure control

Where small numbers (less than 3) within the tables have the potential to disclose sensitive information, disclosure controls have been applied and numbers less than three have been suppressed (see notes to individual tables).

Official Statistics

These are 'Official Statistics' as defined in Section 6 of the Statistics and Registration Services Act 2007. Statisticians from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency are seconded to the PPS and are responsible for ensuring that the statistics produced comply with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

The PPS would value any feedback on this report and welcome recommendations on the future addition of data that may be of interest to readers. Contact details are provided overleaf.

Future publications

The quarterly release of the Statistical Bulletin was suspended in November 2019. Since then, it has been released on an annual basis. A user engagement exercise in March 2022 regarding PPS Official Statistics has indicated minimal impact of this change in frequency on users. The Statistical Bulletin will therefore continue to be published on an annual basis. The next Annual Statistical Bulletin for 2022/23 is due in Summer 2023.

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Changes to this release

In June 2022, this publication was revised with the data tables removed from the statistical report to improve user functionality. Tables can be found in the accompanying Excel document. Clarity has been increased by introducing additional charts and graphs, compliant with accessibility guidelines, and by displaying selected figures over a 5-year trend. Additional breakdowns of age and gender have also been provided within the data tables and the release. This decision was based on user feedback.

Further information

If you have any feedback, questions or requests for further information about this bulletin, please contact us as follows

**Statistics and Research
Policy and Information Unit
Public Prosecution Service
for Northern Ireland
Belfast Chambers
93 Chichester Street
Belfast BT1 3JR**

Tel: 02890 897100

Deaf / hard of hearing (SMS): 07795 675528

Email: info@ppsni.gov.uk

Website: www.ppsni.gov.uk

Glossary

Caution: A *caution* is a formal reprimand administered by the police. Whilst it is not a conviction it is recorded on a person's criminal record.

Conviction rates: Conviction rates are calculated on the basis of the number of persons convicted as a percentage of all persons dealt with during the period.

Crown Court outcomes: The category '*acquitted*' includes the following outcomes: acquittals, acquittals by direction, No Bills, no evidence offered – defendant acquitted, left on books, proceedings stayed, unfit to plead – but found that he/she did not do the act, no case to answer - granted. '*Other*' Includes defendant deceased, withdrawal – all charges, bound over for not having shown cause, bound over where charge withdrawn, withdrawn due to diversionary route. It should be noted that if an individual is involved in more than one case which is resulted during this period, they will be counted as a separate defendant on each occasion.

Decision information request (DIR): A *decision information request (DIR)* is issued by PPS to police where the evidence and information contained in an investigation file is incomplete and a further written report or action is required before a prosecutorial decision can be taken.

Diversionary options: Diversionary options are only available to prosecutors if the defendant admits that he/she has committed the offence and agrees to accept and participate in the diversionary option. '*Other*' *diversionary options* include referrals to the NI Driver Improvement Scheme or to a Community Restorative Justice Scheme.

Diversionary youth conference: A *diversionary youth conference* is an alternative to prosecution in court and may be used in cases where the defendant is a youth. This type of restorative conference may involve a number of parties, including the defendant, the victim and police. A youth conference is a formal process, and although not a conviction, is recorded on a person's criminal record.

Eightieth percentile: *Eightieth percentile* is the number of days at which 80% of those persons included under counting rules have had a first decision issued. Eightieth percentile days for indictable prosecution decisions includes the time taken for the prosecutor's decision and for case preparation (i.e., where appropriate, ensuring that the case is ready for court) and include time taken for response from police to any decision information requests. In indictable cases case preparation includes time required for the preparation of committal papers which contain the evidence, such as statements, exhibits etc., to be presented to the Crown Court. It may also include consideration of duties of disclosure by the prosecutor and applications to be made to the court.

File: A file may refer to one or more individuals

File Type: *File type* is based on the 'primary' offence in each case at the time the file is submitted to PPS.

Full file requests: *Full file requests* are designed to allow the PPS to ask the PSNI for a full file as defined in the relevant protocols.

Hybrid offence: *Hybrid offences* which may be tried at either the Magistrates' or Crown Court.

Indictable offence: *Indictable offences* relate to more serious criminal behaviour and are tried at the Crown Court before a judge, and in most cases, a jury.

Indictable prosecution: *Indictable prosecution* applies in the more serious offences which may be heard in the Crown Court.

Informed warning: *An informed warning* is a formal reprimand administered by police and is recorded on a person's criminal record.

Magistrates' and Youth Court outcomes: Data reflect the number of persons where PPS has taken a decision to prosecute summarily, i.e., defendants against whom charges were withdrawn prior to decision are excluded. The category '*acquitted*' includes the following outcomes: dismissed; no case to answer granted; and proceedings stayed. '*Other*' includes: defendant deceased; withdrawal – all charges; bound over for not having shown cause; bound over where charge withdrawn; withdrawn due to diversionary route. Excludes persons returned for trial in the Crown Court. It should be noted that if an individual is involved in more than one case which is resulted during this period, they will be counted as a separate defendant on each occasion.

Median days: *Median days* is the number of days at which 50% of those persons included under counting rules have had a first decision issued. Median days for indictable prosecution decisions includes the time taken for the prosecutor's decision and for case preparation (i.e., where appropriate, ensuring that the case is ready for court) and include time taken for response from police to any decision information requests. In indictable cases case preparation includes time required for the preparation of committal papers which contain the evidence, such as statements, exhibits etc., to be presented to the Crown Court. It may also include consideration of duties of disclosure by the prosecutor and applications to be made to the court.

No Decision DIR: *A no decision DIR* may issue when, on the evidence submitted by police in an investigation file, it is not possible to take a prosecution decision and it is not reasonable to issue a detailed DIR having regard to the number or type of deficiencies in the file.

No prosecution: *A decision for no prosecution* will be taken if the prosecutor decides that in any case being considered there is insufficient evidence or that it is not in the public interest to prosecute (see note regarding the Test for Prosecution below).

Offence classifications: The Offence Classifications used are standardised across the criminal justice organisations in Northern Ireland. Files have been assigned to the respective categories on the basis of the 'primary' offence.

Police: includes the Police Service of Northern Ireland, Belfast/Londonderry Harbour Police, and British Transport Police.

Post decision information request: *Post decision information requests* are designed to allow the PPS to ask the PSNI to gather additional evidential material or provide other information required at some further stage in the prosecution process (e.g., for trial).

Primary offence: Generally, the most serious offence in terms of the potential penalties in law.

Prosecutorial decision: More than one prosecutorial decision may be recorded against any individual within a case. Therefore 'type of decision' refers to the most serious decision issued, in the following order: Indictable prosecution; summary prosecution; diversion; and no prosecution.

Summary offence: In general, *summary offences* relate to less serious criminal behaviour and are tried in the Magistrates' Court before a District Judge

Summary prosecution: *Summary prosecution* applies to cases which may be heard in the Magistrates' Courts.

Summons: A summons may be served on a defendant either by post, or via a personal summons served by the police. The defendant will be required to attend court on the date stated on the summons. The large majority of offences can now be dealt with by way of a postal summons. The only exceptions relate to corporate defendants, vulnerable defendants and those defendants who have not responded to a postal summons.

More than one summons may be issued in respect of an individual defendant in a case. For example, if the defendant does not attend court on the day stated on an initial postal summons, this will generally be followed up by a personal summons served by police.

Test for Prosecution: Prosecutions are initiated where the prosecutor is satisfied that the Test for Prosecution is met. There are two aspects to the Test:

- a) Whether the evidence which can be offered in court is sufficient to provide a reasonable prospect of conviction (the evidential test); and
- b) Whether prosecution is required in the public interest (the public interest test).

Each of these stages must be separately considered but a decision whether or not a prosecution is in the public interest can only arise when the evidential test has been satisfied.