

Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service Provisional Figures

January to March 2023

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1

Key Findings

This report provides an overview of Children Order and County, Crown, High and Magistrates' Courts business during January to March 2023 and how it compares with the comparative figures for the same quarter in the previous year. The headline findings are summarised below -

- During the quarter there were 524 Children Order sittings (1,289 total hours sat), 1,096 Children Order Applications received and 991 disposed. In terms of orders made, 461 were own motion, 2,278 were interim and 1,369 were final orders.
 - County Court and District Judges sat a total of 1,370 days within the County Court. In terms of cases 36 equity, 254 ejectment, 2,205 small claims and one criminal damage cases were received; 45 equity, 169 ejectment, 1,812 small claims and two criminal damage cases were disposed.
 - In terms of Crown Court business there were 837 sittings with 360 cases and 453 defendants received and 413 cases and 516 defendants disposed.
- There were 642 High Court sitting days. The highest proportion of these was spent on Judicial Reviews business (21%) with 869 writs and originating summons received and 1,044 disposed.
 - Within the 1,121 Magistrates' sitting days during the quarter, 72% were adult criminal, 6% youth criminal and 22% civil and family days. There were 1,050 civil and family applications and 9,556 adult and 307 youth defendants received. Corresponding figures for disposals were 897 civil and family, 9,795 adult and 242 youth defendants.

2 | Introduction

About this report

This bulletin is produced in accordance with the pillars and principles set out in the Code of Practice for Statistics. It presents the following statistics for the Northern Ireland Court and Tribunals Service for the quarter January to March 2023 –

- The number of Children Order applications received and disposed at Family Proceedings Courts, Family Care Centres and the High Court, together with waiting times from lodgment to disposal (section 3);
- Civil and family business received and disposed, waiting times and sitting days in County Courts (section 4);
- The number of cases and defendants received and disposed, waiting times, pleas and findings and sittings at the Crown Court (section 5);
- Business received and disposed, waiting times and sitting days in the Chancery, Queen’s Bench and Family Divisions of the High Court (section 6); and
- The number of youth and adult defendants received and disposed, charges and outcomes, sittings, civil applications received and disposed and waiting times at Magistrates’ Courts (section 7).

Comparative information for the same quarter in the previous year is also provided, along with an indication of whether any change is higher or lower.

Background information about the Children Order and the County, Crown, High and Magistrates’ Courts along with methodological information and a glossary is available in the accompanying user guide. Data in the bulletin, along with trend information, are available from the DoJ website in the accompanying spreadsheet.

The next update covering the quarter to 30 June 2023 will be published in August 2023. A full [publication schedule](#) is available on the DoJ website.

2 | Introduction

It is important to note court activity during the quarter covered in this report has been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. While the courts continue to make more use of remote audio and video technology, the impact of COVID-19 can be seen in the figures. It is expected that the limited operation of the courts during the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to have an impact on many of the published figures in this and future releases.

Administrative case management reviews were introduced by the Lord Chief Justice as part of the coronavirus contingency arrangements. This has resulted in Judges investing significant time reviewing cases and making directions or orders administratively (where appropriate), and this has continued even as courts have resumed to support business recovery. This extra time is not recorded on the courts operating system (Integrated Court Operations System known as ICOS), and therefore is not reflected within the sittings times published within this report.

3

Children Order

Children Order Quarterly Business

- Table 1 on the following page shows that during the quarter there were 524 sittings (1,289 hours), 1,096 Children Order Applications received and 991 disposed.
- A total of 1,491 children were involved in the applications disposed. Gender and age breakdowns of the children were 52:48 male:female and 28% 0-4 years, 30% 5-8 years, 26% 9-12 years and 16% 13-16 years.
- Like each of the last five years, the most common reason for transferring Children Order applications during the quarter was Complexity (69%, 123 of 179 reasons). This was followed by Consolidation (22), Jurisdiction (19), Convenience (8), Return to Lower Court (4), Point of Law (2) and Gravity (1).
- In terms of orders made –
 - 461 were own motion orders.
 - 2,278 were interim orders.
 - 1,369 were final orders.
- The average waiting time for applications disposed was 57.6 weeks for public and 34.1 weeks for private law.
- Table 1 shows that applications received and applications disposed both decreased. The waiting times for disposal for public law were higher and private law were lower than the comparative figures for the same quarter in the previous year.

3

Children Order

Table 1: Children Order Business – January to March 2023 compared with January to March 2022

	Quarter 2023	Quarter 2022	% change from 2022
Sittings	524	539	3% ↓
Hours sat	1,289	1,507	14% ↓
Applications received	1,096	1,145	4% ↓
Applications disposed	991	1,143	13% ↓
Number of children involved in applications disposed	1,491	1,634	9% ↓
Own motion orders made	461	401	15% ↑
Interim orders made	2,278	2,296	1% ↓
Final orders made	1,369	1,511	9% ↓
Average waiting time for disposal for public law (weeks)	57.6	53.9	7% ↑
Average waiting time for disposal for private law (weeks)	34.1	38.1	10% ↓

Supplementary data are available from the DoJ website in the accompanying spreadsheet.

4

County Court

County Court Quarterly Business

- Table 2 on the following pages shows that County Court and District Judges sat a total of 1,370 sitting days during the quarter. Within those days 60% of time was spent on criminal business, 23% on civil business and 17% on family business.
- During the quarter –
 - 1,967 Civil bills with notice of intention to defend (NID) were received and 2,523 disposed.
 - In terms of cases 36 equity, 254 ejectment, 2,205 small claims and 1 criminal damage case were received; 45 equity, 169 ejectment, 1,812 small claims and two criminal damage cases were disposed.
 - 366 divorce decrees were granted, 427 decrees absolute issued.
 - 71 licence applications were received and 71 disposed.
- Table 2 shows a decrease in waiting times across most areas of business compared to the same quarter in the previous year.

4 | County Court

Table 2: County Court Business – January to March 2023 compared with January to March 2022

	Quarter 2023	Quarter 2022	% change from 2022
Sitting days	1,370	1,456	6%↓
Civil bills with NID received	1,967	1,738	13%↑
Civil bills disposed	2,523	2,276	11%↑
Average time taken from issue to disposal of civil bill (weeks)	61	70	13%↓
Equity cases received	36	46	22%↓
Equity cases disposed	45	25	80%↑
Average time taken from issue to disposal of equity cases (weeks)	73	91	20%↓
Ejectment cases received	254	186	37%↑
Ejectment cases disposed	169	86	97%↑
Average time taken from issue to disposal of ejectment cases (weeks)	36	43	16%↓

Supplementary data are available from the DoJ website in the accompanying spreadsheet.

4 | County Court

Table 2 continued: County Court Business – January to March 2023 compared with January to March 2022

	Quarter 2023	Quarter 2022	% change from 2022
Small claims received	2,205	2,374	7%↓
Small claims disposed	1,812	1,728	5%↑
Average time taken from issue to disposal of small claims cases (weeks)	26	40	35%↓
Criminal damage cases received	1	0	100%↑
Criminal damage cases disposed	2	3	33%↓
Divorce decrees granted	366	529	31%↓
Decree absolute issued	427	384	11%↑
Average time taken from issue to date divorce decree granted (weeks)	42	40	5%↑
Licences applications received	71	42	69%↑
Licences applications disposed	71	44	61%↑

Supplementary data are available from the DoJ website in the accompanying spreadsheet.

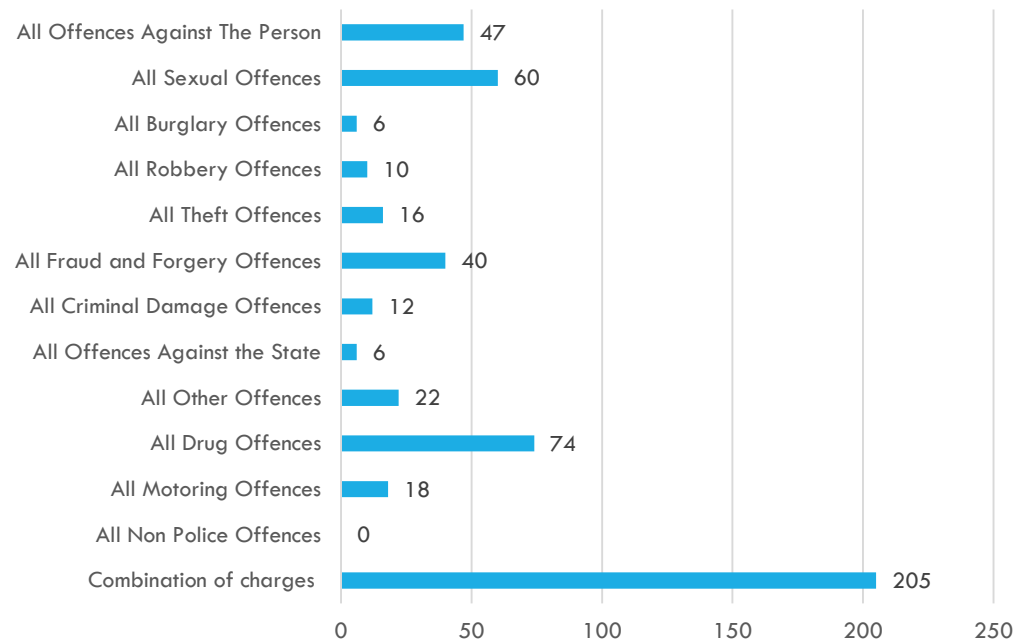
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Crown Court

Crown Court Quarterly Business

- Table 3 on the following page shows that during the quarter there were 837 sittings (1,844 hours sat). County Court Judges disposed of 99% of defendants (510), a figure that has remained relatively stable over the last five years (98-99%).
- There were 360 cases and 453 defendants received during the quarter; 413 cases and 516 defendants were disposed.
- Average time from committal to hearing was 189 days and from conviction to disposal was 82 days.
- In comparison to the same quarter in the previous year the number of cases and defendants received and disposed increased.
- Figure 1 shows that the majority of defendants disposed were charged with a combination of offences, a similar pattern seen in each of the last five years. Average time from committal to hearing and from conviction to disposal both increased. These figures will be affected by the delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 1: Crown Court defendants disposed by charge type January to March 2023



5 | Crown Court

Table 3: Crown Court Business – January to March 2023 compared with January to March 2022

	Quarter 2023	Quarter 2022	% change from 2022
Sittings	837	837	-
Hours sat	1,844	1,910	-3%↓
Cases received	360	343	5%↑
Cases disposed	413	353	17%↑
Defendants received	453	423	7%↑
Defendants disposed	516	450	15%↑
Defendants pleading guilty to all charges	152	111	37%↑
Defendants pleading guilty or found guilty of at least one charge	291	278	5%↑
Average time from committal to hearing (days)	189	174	9%↑
Average time from conviction to disposal (days)	82	74	11%↑

Supplementary data are available from the DoJ website in the accompanying spreadsheet.

6 High Court

High Court Quarterly Business

- Table 4 on the following pages show that there were 642 High Court sitting days during the quarter, the highest proportion of which was spent on Judicial Reviews business (21%).
- King's Bench business included:
 - 869 writs and originating summonses were received, 1,044 were disposed.
 - 87 applications for leave to apply for Judicial Review were received, as well as 28 applications for Judicial Review and one ancillary application.
- Chancery Division business included:
 - Receipt of 468 (65% of which were Chancery, 27% bankruptcy and 8% companies cases) and disposal of 264 cases; and
 - 1,668 grants issued in the Probate office.
- Family Division business included –
 - 27 adoption cases and applications received and 12 disposed;
 - 626 divorce petitions received, 256 decrees granted (39% (99) '2 years with consent' and 21% (55) 'Combination of grounds or other') and 238 decrees absolute issued;
 - 691 new referrals in the Patients section; and
 - 35 Official Solicitor's Office cases received, 35 disposed and a current caseload of 387 cases at the end of the quarter.

Supplementary data are available from the DoJ website in the accompanying spreadsheet.

6 High Court

Table 4: High Court Business - January to March 2023 compared with January to March 2022

	Quarter 2023	Quarter 2022	% change from 2022
Sitting days	642	614	5%↑
Writs & originating summonses received	869	874	1%↓
Writs & originating summonses disposed	1,044	456	129%↑
Applications for leave to apply for Judicial Review received	87	75	16%↑
Applications for Judicial Review received	28	27	4%↑
Ancillary applications received	1	1	-
Chancery cases received	468	316	48%↑
Chancery cases disposed	264	385	31%↓
Grants issued in the Probate office	1,668	1,976	16%↓

Supplementary data are available from the DoJ website in the accompanying spreadsheet.

6 | High Court

Table 4 continued: High Court Business - January to March 2023 compared with January to March 2022

	Quarter 2023	Quarter 2022	% change from 2022
Adoption cases & applications received	27	22	23%↑
Adoption cases & applications disposed	12	27	56%↓
Average time taken from issue to disposal for adoption case/application (weeks)	22	36	39%↓
Divorce petitions received	626	665	6%↓
Decrees granted in High Court	256	243	5%↑
Decrees absolute issued	238	205	16%↑
Average time taken from issue of divorce petition to date decree granted (weeks)	54	50	8%↑
Patients section referrals received	691	510	35%↑
Official Solicitors Office cases received	35	39	10%↓
Official Solicitors Office cases disposed	35	26	35%↑
Official Solicitors Office caseload at end of quarter	387	377	3%↑

Supplementary data are available from the DoJ website in the accompanying spreadsheet.

7 Magistrates' Court

Magistrates' Court Quarterly Business

- During the quarter there were 1,065 scheduled, 22 additional and 34 special Magistrates' sitting days (Table 5).
- Within the 1,121 total, 72% were adult criminal, 6% were youth criminal and 22% were civil and family days.

Table 5: Magistrates' Court Sitting Days - January to March 2023 compared with January to March 2022

	Adult	Youth	Civil & Family	Total Quarter 2023	Total Quarter 2022	% change from 2022
Scheduled	757	70	238	1,065	1,028	4%↑
Additional	17	0	5	22	33	33%↓
Special	34	0	0	34	38	11%↓
Total	808	70	243	1,121	1,099	2%↑

Supplementary data are available from the DoJ website in the accompanying spreadsheet.

7 Magistrates' Court

- There were 1,050 new civil and family applications and 9,556 new adult and 307 new youth defendants received; corresponding disposals were 897, 9,795 and 242 respectively.
- The average waiting times from first hearing to disposal in the adult and youth criminal courts were 16 weeks and 20 weeks respectively. For civil and family applications it was 17 and 8 weeks respectively from date of receipt to disposal.

Table 6: Magistrates' Court Business - January to March 2023 compared with January to March 2022

	Adult Q1 2023	Adult Q1 2022	% change from 2022	Youth Q1 2023	Youth Q1 2022	% change from 2022	Civil Q1 2023	Civil Q1 2022	% change from 2022	Family Q1 2023	Family Q1 2022	% change from 2022
Defendants or applications received	9,556	8,998	6%↑	307	240	28%↑	94	55	71%↑	956	884	8%↑
Defendants or applications disposed	9,795	8,548	15%↑	242	248	2%↓	67	67	-	830	867	4%↓
Average waiting time (weeks)	16	16	-	20	24	17%↓	17	33	48%↓	8	10	20%↓

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Appendix 1 - Methodology

Data Source and Coverage

The statistics are produced using administrative data sourced from the Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS). 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.

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

Counting Rules

- Children Order

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

- County Court

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'.

8

Appendix 1 - Methodology

- Crown Court

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.'

- High Court

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, or the date an applicant withdraws or discontinues their application prior to the hearing, changing the case status to 'dealt with'.

- Magistrates' Court

Receipts are counted from the date a served summons or a charge sheet is received by the Magistrates' Court office. Disposals are counted from the result date that a final order was made against the case changing the case status to 'dealt with'.