

# Adult and Youth Reoffending in Northern Ireland (2019/20 Cohort)

S. Browne & R. Palmer  
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Department of  
**Justice**





An Roinn Dí agus Cirt  
Máinnstríe o tha Laa

## Summary Findings

- This annual bulletin provides information on the one year proven reoffending rate for offenders who received a non-custodial disposal at court, a diversionary disposal or who were released from custody during 2019/20 within Northern Ireland. Information is presented in relation to the full cohort and also disaggregated in relation to adults (those aged 18 and over) and youths (those aged 17 and under).
- **Of the 20,392 people included in the 2019/20 cohort, 3,358 (16.5%) reoffended during the one year observational period (adults 16.0%, youths 24.8%).**
- Of the 3,358 who reoffended, over two-fifths (46.5%) committed their first reoffence within the first three months (adults 45.9%, youths 52.7%).
- In terms of offending history, 63.2% of the 20,392 had committed previous offences, ranging from one to 484 distinct offences (adults 64.8%, youths 32.6%).
- Overall, 10.9% of females and 17.9% of males had reoffended (adult females 10.4% and adult males 17.5%, youth females 20.0% and youth males 26.1%).
- The one year proven reoffending rate for<sup>1</sup>;
  - custody releases was 46.8% (adults 46.2% and 16 of 20 youths).
  - court community disposal (supervision) was 29.9% (adults 28.7%, youths 45.6%).
  - court community disposal (no supervision) was 15.6% (adults 15.4%, youths 38.6%).
  - diversionary disposal was 14.2% (adults 12.2%, youths 21.5%).
- The highest reoffending rates were found amongst those who committed a baseline offence in the 'Robbery' category (50.0%), followed by 'Burglary' (43.5%). This was the same for adults only ('Robbery' 50.0% and 'Burglary' 45.5%). For youths, the highest reoffending rates were found amongst those who committed a baseline offence of 'Robbery' (2 out of 4), followed by 'Drugs' (34.6%) and 'Criminal Damage & Arson' (29.6%).

<sup>1</sup>Base reoffending rates should not be used to measure comparative success of different disposal types in their own right. The reason for this is that different offender characteristics and histories, coupled with different offence types, will themselves be related to type of disposal given. Therefore, offender profiles may differ substantially between the different disposal types.

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Produced by Analytical Services Group, Department of Justice

For further information write to:

**Analytical Services Group,**  
**Financial Services Division,**  
**Department of Justice,**  
**Level 3, Block B,**  
**Castle Buildings,**  
**Stormont Estate,**  
**Belfast BT4 3SG**

**Email:** [statistics.research@justice-ni.gov.uk](mailto:statistics.research@justice-ni.gov.uk)

**Telephone:** 028 90525190

This bulletin is available on:

**[Department of Justice Webpage \(opens in new window\)](#)**

Feedback on this publication can be provided directly to Analytical Services Group at the email address listed above.

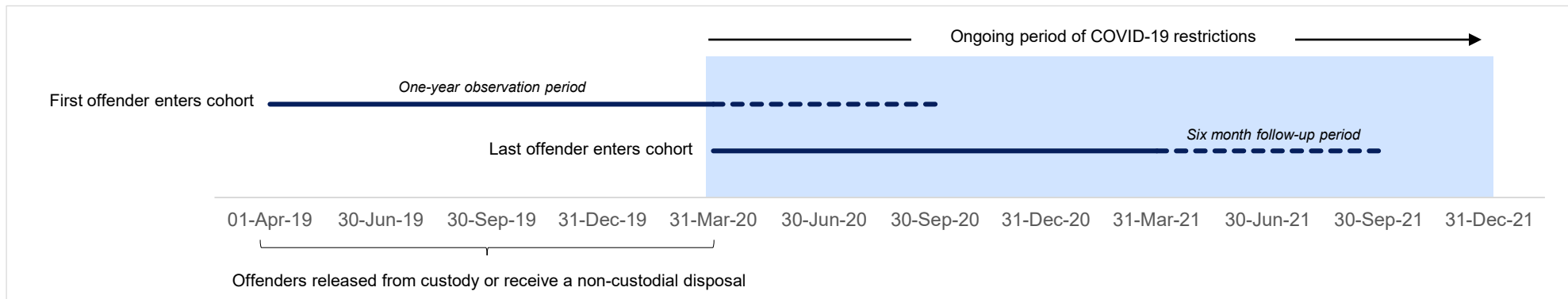
# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Adult and Youth Reoffending in Northern Ireland

In 2013, the Department of Justice’s Analytical Services Group embarked on a project to revise the methodology used to calculate recidivism rates within Northern Ireland, bringing it more in line with established methodology in England and Wales. A brief summary of the approach used is detailed in Appendix 1 – Methodology and Counting Rules. For more detailed methodology refer to ‘Northern Ireland Reoffending Methodology: Methodology and Glossary’ Parts 1 and 2, which can be found at: [Department of Justice Reoffending Statistics \(opens in new window\)](#).

This report provides information on reoffending rates for the 2019/20 adult and youth cohorts. Figures reported throughout have not been adjusted to make allowances for factors known to influence reoffending, such as gender, age and criminal history. Therefore, it is inappropriate to compare findings with other results from within Northern Ireland or other jurisdictions. It should also be noted that observation and follow-up periods for the current cohort overlap with national COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, which began on 23 March 2020 (and remained ongoing until early 2022) (Figure 1). Ongoing periods of restrictions will have affected offending behaviour. This, coupled with limited operation of criminal courts during this time, will continue to impact upon numbers recorded in the current bulletin and future releases. The effects of the pandemic on proven reoffending should be taken into consideration when interpreting findings from this publication and publications over the coming years as COVID recovery continues.

**Figure 1: Timeline for the 2019/20 Reoffending Cohort**



Details of methodology, data coverage and quality are detailed in Appendix 1. Data in all tables and charts in the bulletin, along with supplementary data, are available from the Department of Justice website in the accompanying spreadsheet [Adult and Youth Reoffending in Northern Ireland \(201920 Cohort\) ODS \(57KB\) \(opens in a new window\)](#). The next update covering the 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020 will be published in Autumn 2022. A full [ASG Publication Schedule Excel \(13KB\) \(opens in new window\)](#) is available on the Department of Justice website.

# 2 Findings

## About this Chapter

The following section provides information on the reoffending rates of the total cohort along with a separate breakdown for adults and youths. Information is presented by overall reoffending rate, reoffending interval, number of proven reoffences, offending history, gender, age, disposal, baseline offence and specified and serious offences. Associated tables can be found in the accompanying spreadsheet [Adult and Youth Reoffending in Northern Ireland \(2019/20 Cohort\) ODS \(57KB\) \(opens in a new window\)](#). Corresponding table numbers are included within the report.

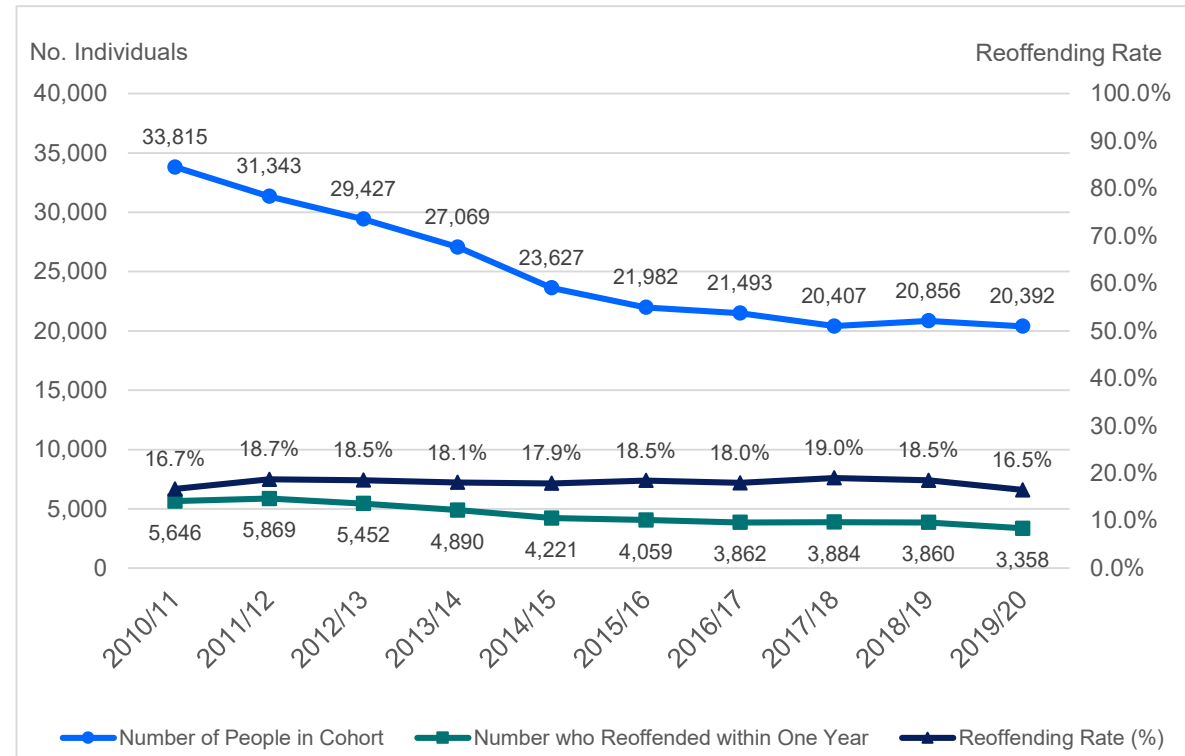
## 2.1 Reoffending Rate

### 2.1.1 Overall Reoffending Rate

A total of 20,392 offenders were included in the 2019/20 cohort. Overall, 3,358 (16.5%) committed a proven reoffence within the year following release from custody, receiving a non-custodial court disposal or a diversionary disposal. This represents a 2.0 percentage point decrease in the actual rate of reoffending from the figure for the 2018/19 cohort (18.5%).

The number of individuals included within the 2019/20 cohort of offenders (20,392) also decreased by 464 from 2018/19 (20,856). Furthermore, the number of individuals who committed a one-year proven reoffence decreased by 502, from 3,860 in 2018/19 to 3,358 in 2019/20 (Figure 2) (Table 1a).

**Figure 2: Overall Reoffending Rate from 2010/11 to 2019/20**



## 2 Findings

### 2.1.2 Adult Reoffending Rate

A total of 19,344 adults were included in the 2019/20 cohort, with 3,098 (16.0%) reoffending (Figure 3). This represents a 1.9 percentage point decrease from the 2018/19 cohort (17.9%). The total number of adults within the 2019/20 cohort (19,344) decreased by 497 compared with the 2018/19 adult cohort (19,841), whilst the number of adults who reoffended decreased by 456, from 3,554 in 2018/19 to 3,098 in 2019/20 (Table 1b).

### 2.1.3 Youth Reoffending Rate

Youths make up approximately five percent of the entire 2019/20 cohort. In total 260 (24.8%) of the 1,048 youths in the cohort committed a reoffence within one year of being released from custody, being given a non-custodial disposal at court or a diversionary disposal (Figure 3). The total number of young people within the 2019/20 cohort (1,048) was 33 more than the youth cohort in 2018/19 (1,015), however the number who reoffended decreased by 46, from 306 in 2018/19 to 260 in 2019/20 (Table 1c).

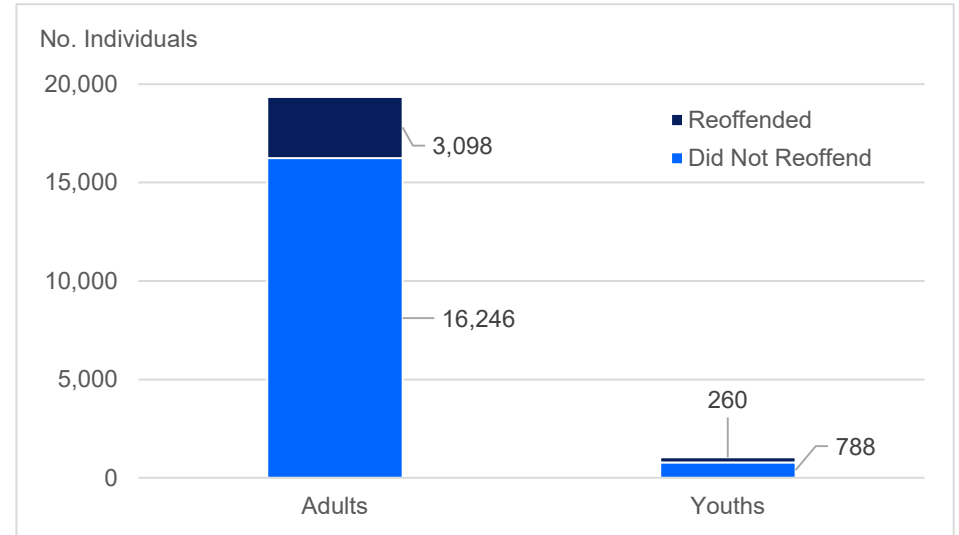
## 2.2 Reoffending Interval

Of the total 3,358 individuals who reoffended, 711 (21.2%) did so within the first month of being released from custody, receiving a non-custodial court disposal or a diversionary disposal. At 23.5% (61 of the 260 youths who committed a reoffence), the proportion of young people committing an offence within the first month was slightly higher than that for adults (21.0%; 650 of the 3,098 adults who committed a reoffence).

By three months, 1,560 (46.5%) of all adults and youths who reoffended had committed a further offence. The comparative figure for adults only was 45.9% and 52.7% for youths.

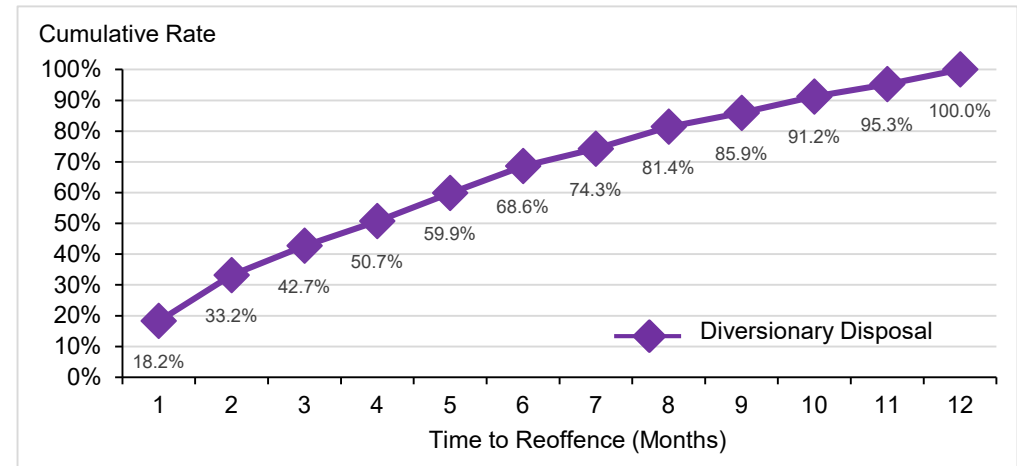
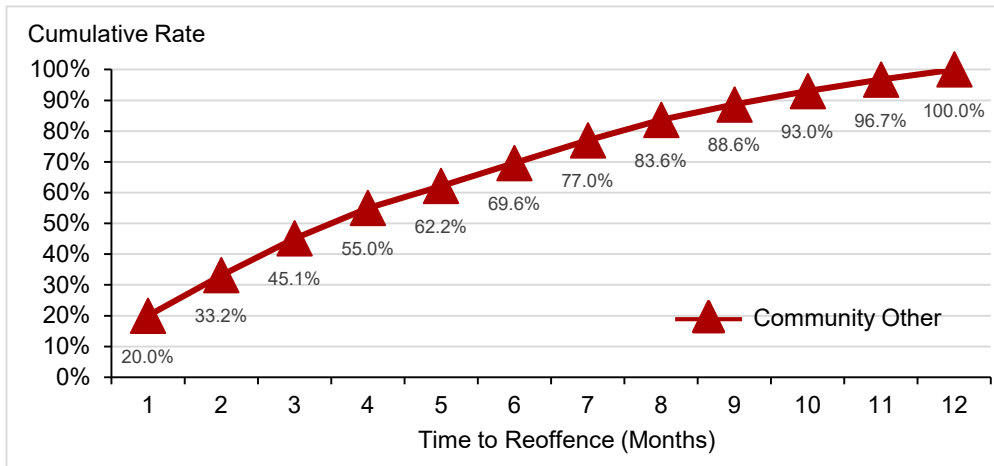
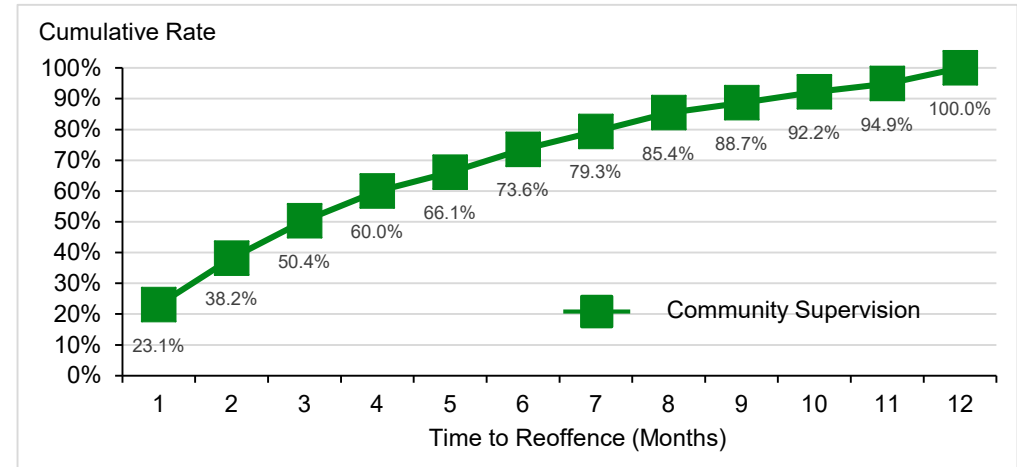
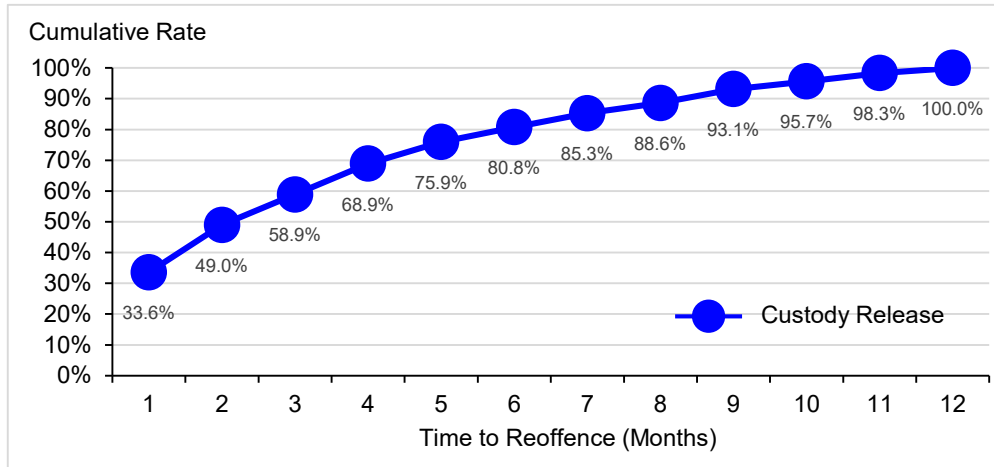
Although all disposal groups followed the same general trend, those released from custody were more likely to reoffend within the first month of release. Of those released from custody who reoffended, 58.9% had done so within the first three months of release, rising to 80.8% by the end of the first six months (Figure 4 and Table 2a, 2b and 2c).

**Figure 3: Adult and Youth Cohorts Released in 2019/20**



# 2 Findings

Figure 4: Reoffending Interval by Disposal Group<sup>2</sup>



<sup>2</sup>Offenders are counted once per disposal group, however they may appear in more than one group.

## 2 Findings

### 2.3 Number of Proven Reoffences

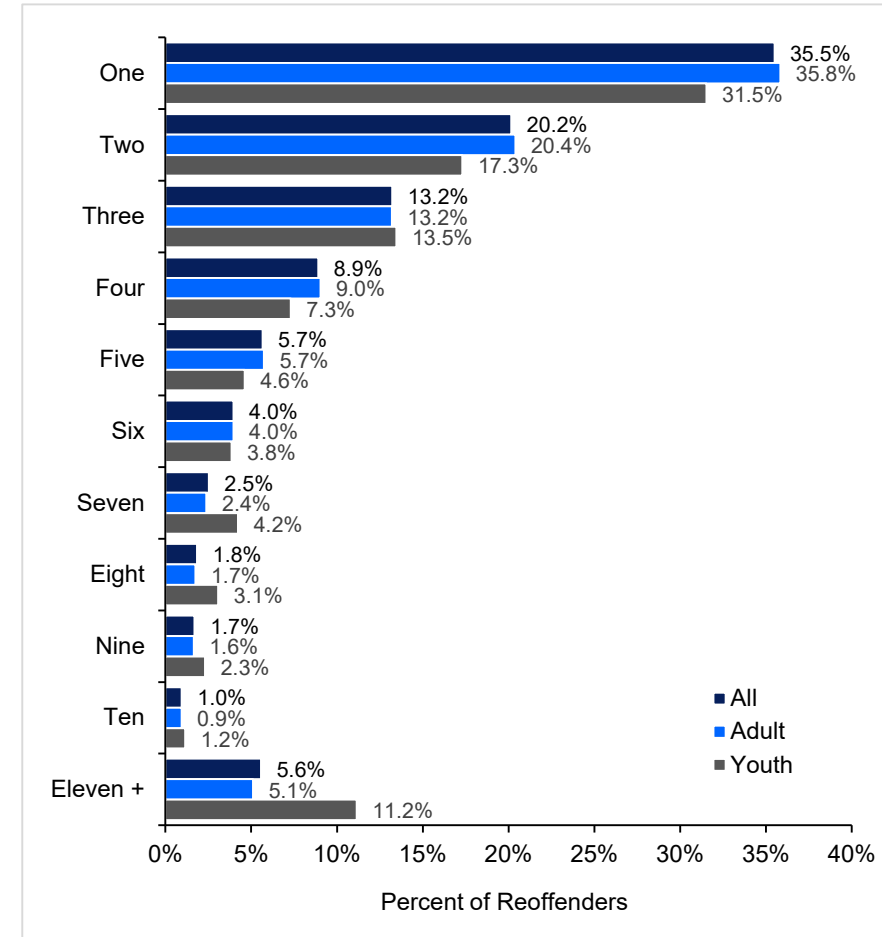
During the observation year, the 3,358 people who reoffended committed a further 11,571 proven offences, with adults committing 10,355 and youths committing 1,216 offences.

Overall this averages to just over three offences per reoffender and less than one offence per offender across the entire 2019/20 cohort. This was also true for adults, whereas youth reoffences equated to an average of five offences per youth who reoffended and one offence per offender across the youth cohort.

Just over one-third (35.8%) of adults committed only one further offence within the observation year and 5.1% committed 11 or more reoffences. In contrast, 31.5% of youths committed only one further offence, with 11.2% committing 11 or more.

The number of reoffences ranged from one to 32 for adults and one to 37 for youths (Figure 5 and Table 3).

Figure 5: Number of Proven Reoffences





## 2 Findings

### 2.4 Offending History

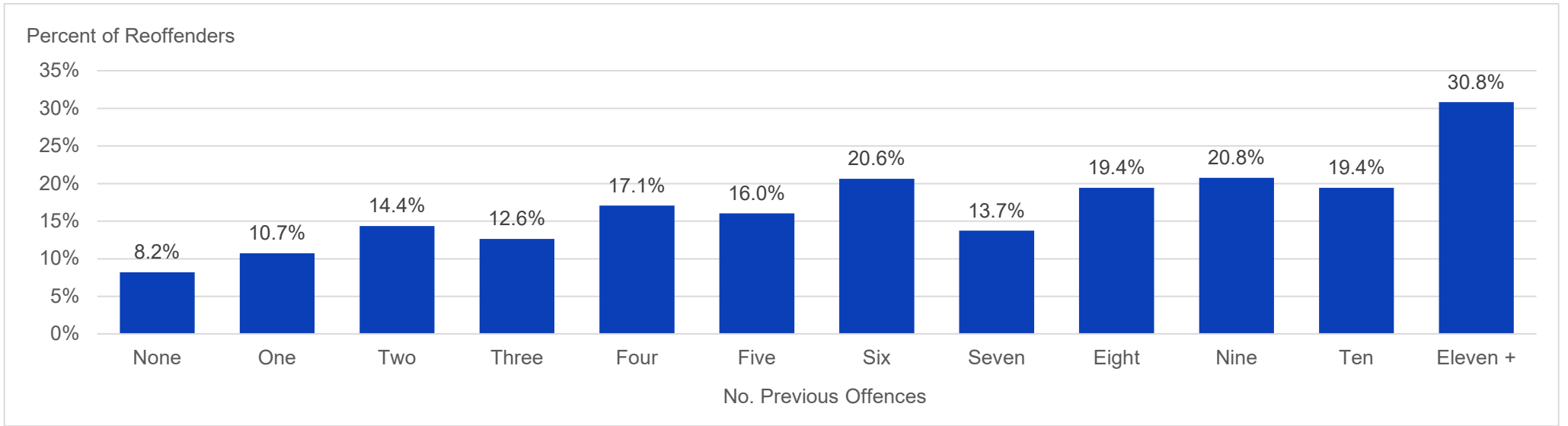
Of the 20,392 offenders included in the 2019/20 cohort, 7,514 had no previous offences. The remaining 12,878 (63.2%) had committed a total of 220,802 previous offences<sup>3</sup> within their lifetime, ranging from one to 484 offences (Table 4).

Of 19,344 adults, 6,808 had no previous offences. The remaining 12,536 (64.8%) had committed 217,969 previous offences, ranging from one to 484.

Of the 1,048 youths, 706 had no previous offences. The remaining 342 (32.6%) had committed 2,833 previous offences, ranging from one to 113.

As shown in Figure 6, the reoffending rate overall tends to increase with the number of previous offences.

**Figure 6: Overall Reoffending Rate by Number of Previous Offences**

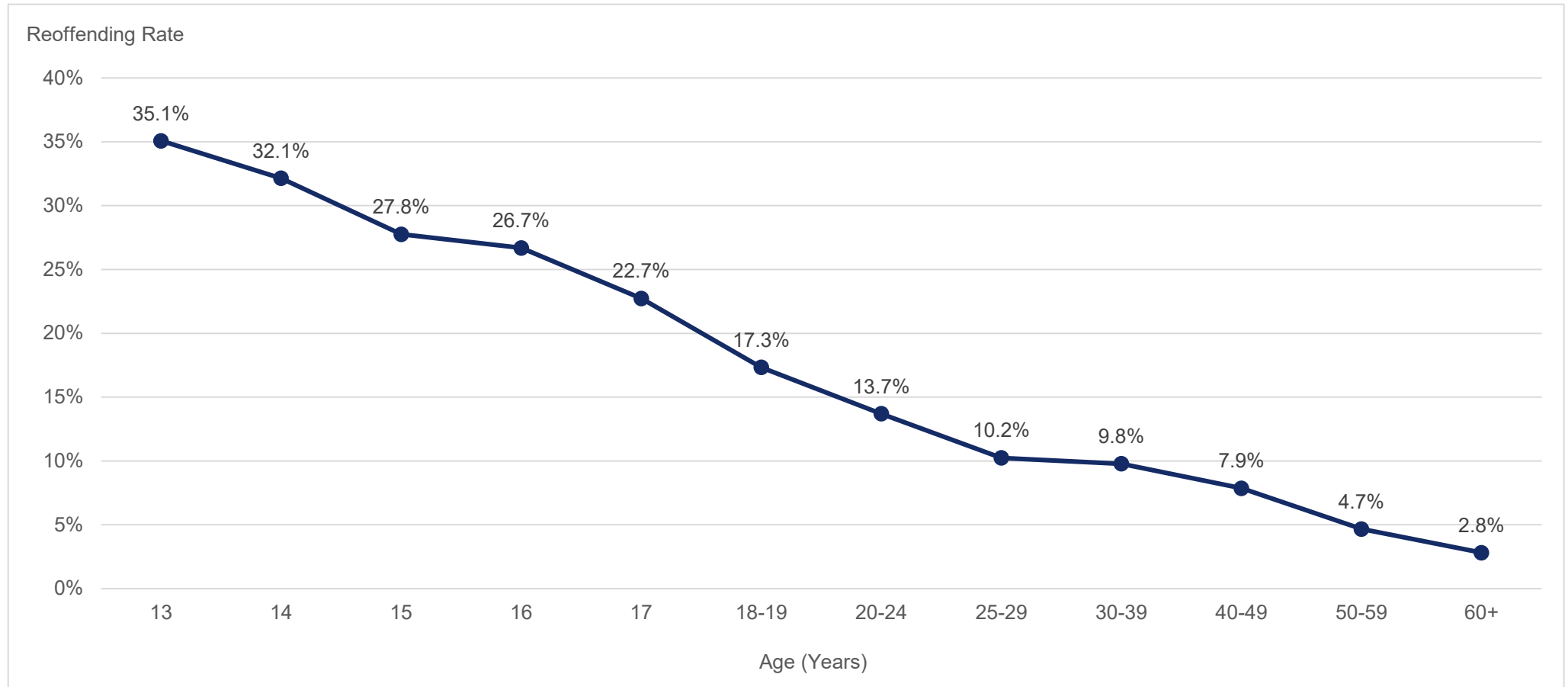


<sup>3</sup>Offences included are those recorded on an offender's criminal record only.

## 2 Findings

For each person in the 2019/20 cohort, their age at first recorded offence was calculated. As Figure 7 shows, the rate of reoffending appears to be generally higher for those who committed their first recorded offence in their early teenage years (Table 5).

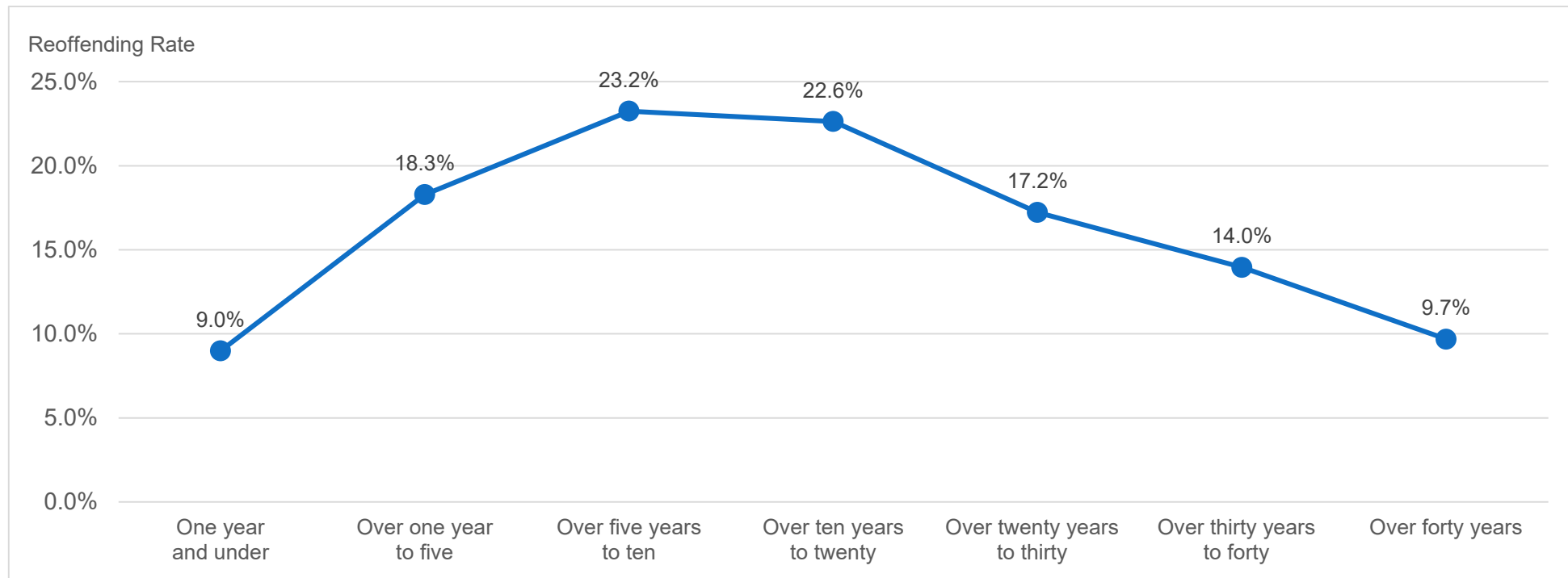
**Figure 7: Overall Reoffending Rate by Age at First Recorded Offence**



## 2 Findings

As well as age at first offence, the time between committing this first offence and entering the 2019/20 cohort (i.e. the baseline date) was calculated as an estimate of the length of time each person has been engaging in criminal behaviours (Table 6). This represents a very simplistic measure and does not take into consideration the frequency or severity of offending during this period. However, as can be seen in Figure 8, although the rates of reoffending initially appear to increase as the length of time between first offence and the date they enter the 2019/20 cohort increases, after approximately 10 years the reoffending rate appears to consistently decline. This is likely an interaction between ageing and reoffending behaviours. As highlighted in section 2.5, reoffending rates appear to decline as age increases.

**Figure 8: Overall Reoffending Rate by Time between First Offence and Baseline Date**



## 2 Findings

### 2.5 Gender and Age at Baseline

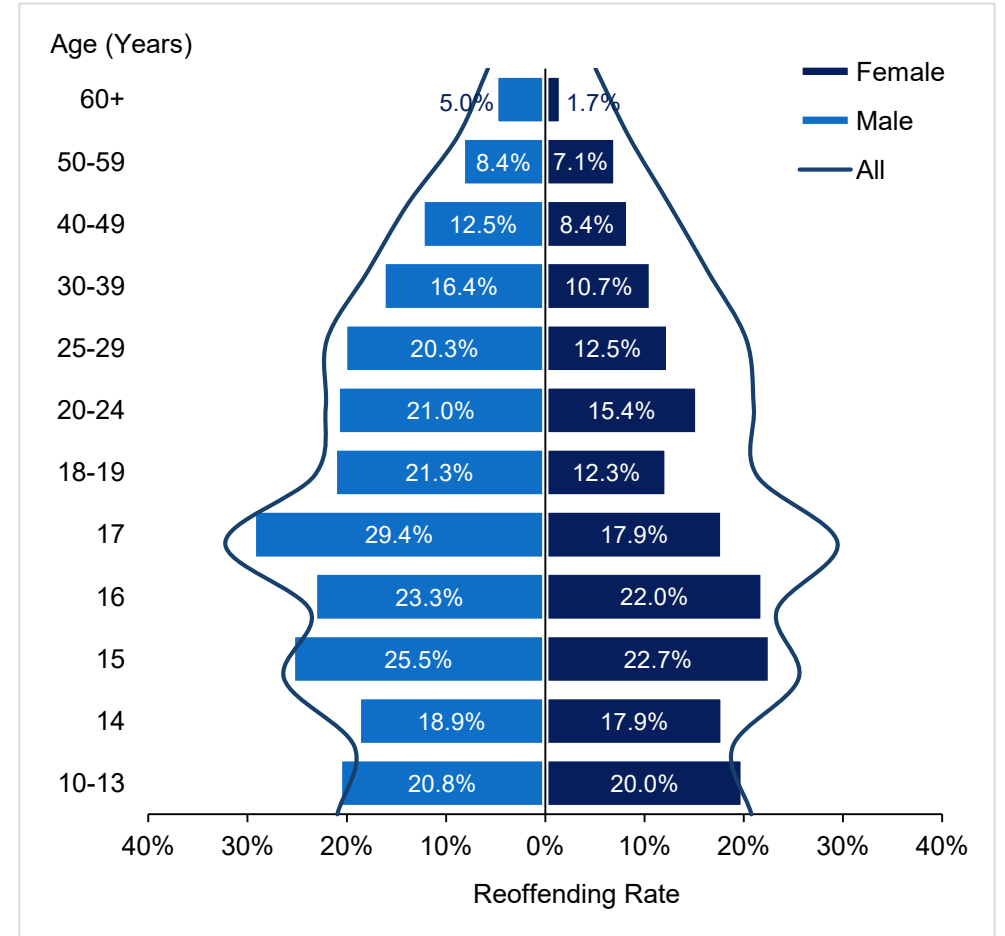
Of the 20,392 offenders in the cohort, 4,199 (20.6%) were female and the remaining 16,193 were male (79.4%). Overall, 457 females (10.9%) and 2,901 males (17.9%) had a proven reoffence within one year (Table 7).

Of the 19,344 adults in the cohort, 3,974 (20.5%) were female and the remaining 15,370 were male (79.5%). Overall, 412 adult females (10.4%) and 2,686 adult males (17.5%) had a proven reoffence within one year.

Of the 1,048 youths in the cohort, 225 (21.5%) were female and the remaining 823 were male (78.5%). Overall, 45 youth females (20.0%) and 215 youth males (26.1%) had a proven reoffence within one year.

In terms of age, when looking at the entire cohort, the rate of reoffending fluctuates throughout the early teen years, before peaking at the age of 17, and then generally declines thereafter. Both males and females follow a similar pattern, however reoffending rates for females are lower than males across all age bands (Figure 9 and Table 7).

Figure 9: Reoffending Rate by Age at Baseline and Gender



## 2 Findings

### 2.6 Disposal

Table 8 provides a breakdown of reoffending by baseline disposal. Although separate disposals are listed, disposals are grouped into four main categories:

1. People released from custody or young offender centre during 2019/20. This group includes those released from serving a prison term only and those released under community supervision (such disposals include Determinate Custodial Sentences; definitions for the different types of custodial sentences can be found on the [NI Direct website \(opens in new window\)](#));
2. People given a non-custodial disposal at court that requires supervision in the community (such as a Probation Order);
3. People given a non-custodial disposal at court that does not require supervision in the community (such as a fine or a suspended sentence); and
4. People given a diversionary disposal (such as a caution or an informed warning).

At 46.8%, those released from custody have the highest reoffending rate, followed by non-custodial disposal with community supervision (29.9%), non-custodial disposal without supervision (community other) (15.6%) and, finally, diversionary disposals (14.2%).

Adults released from custody had a one year reoffending rate of 46.2%, followed by non-custodial disposal with community supervision (28.7%), non-custodial disposal without supervision (15.4%) and, finally, diversionary disposals (12.2%).

Sixteen of the 20 youths released from custody reoffended within one year, as did 45.6% of those who received a non-custodial disposal with community supervision, 38.6% of those who received a non-custodial disposal without supervision and 21.5% of those who received a diversionary disposal.

Please note that base reoffending rates should not be used to measure the comparative success of different disposal types in their own right. The reason for this is that different offender characteristics and histories and different offence types will themselves be related to the type of disposal given. Therefore, offender profiles may differ substantially between the different disposal types.

## 2 Findings

### 2.7 Baseline Offence

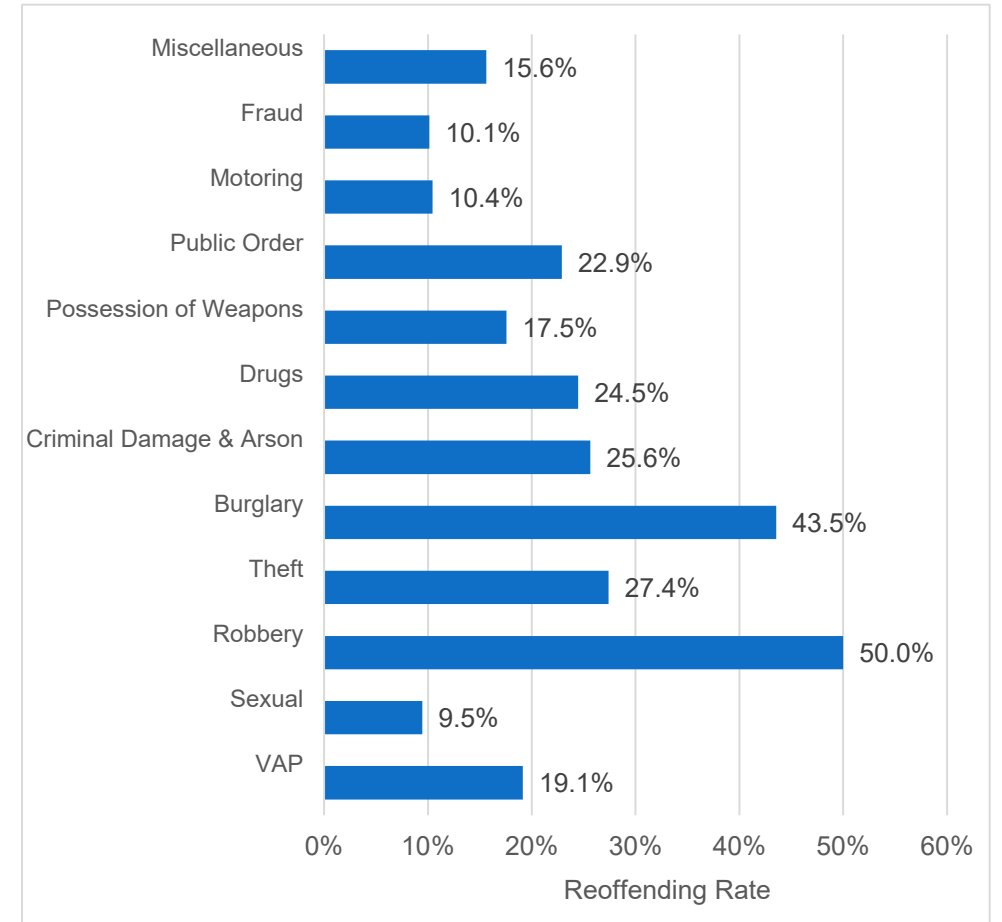
Figure 10 presents the reoffending rate by baseline offence category. Overall, reoffending rates were highest amongst those who committed a baseline offence in the 'Robbery' category followed by 'Burglary' (50.0% and 43.5% respectively).

For adults, the highest reoffending rates were for baseline offence categories of 'Robbery' and 'Burglary' (50.0% and 45.5%). For youths, the highest reoffending rates were found amongst those who had committed a baseline offence in the 'Robbery' category (2 out of 4), followed by 'Drugs' (34.6%) and 'Criminal Damage & Arson' (29.6%).

The lowest overall rates of reoffending for the 2019/20 cohort were committed by those with a baseline 'Sexual' offence (9.5%). This also held true for both adults and youths when viewed separately (Table 9).

Tables 10a, 10b and 10c provide a breakdown of baseline offence category by first reoffence category. It is interesting to note that, overall and for adults and youths, for those who committed a baseline offence of 'Motoring', 'Drugs', 'Violence Against the Person (VAP)' and 'Theft', the largest proportion of first reoffences were for offences in the same category.

Figure 10: Overall Reoffending Rate by Baseline Offence



## 2 Findings

### 2.8 Specified and Serious Offences

During September 2016 there was an internal Department of Justice exercise which made a small number of changes to offence classifications designated as specified or serious, as per the Criminal Justice (NI) Order 2008<sup>4</sup>. This had a limited impact on the number of offences designated as 'serious'. However, those offences designated as 'specified' have increased substantially. This should not be interpreted as an increase in such offences, but has resulted from the inclusion of additional offence types in this classification. As such, no comparison with years prior to the 2013/14 cohort can be made.

Overall, 2,027 (9.9%) of the 20,392 people in the 2019/20 cohort had committed a baseline 'specified' offence. Of these, 438 (21.6%) went on to reoffend, 47 committing a further 'specified' offence. When examined separately, 9.5% of the adult cohort (1,842 of the 19,344 adults), had committed a baseline 'specified' offence. Of these, 393 (21.3%) went on to reoffend, 44 committing a further 'specified' offence. For youths, 185 out of 1,048 (17.7%) had committed a baseline 'specified' offence. Of these, 45 (24.3%) went on to reoffend, with 3 committing a further 'specified' offence (Tables 11a and 11b).

Overall, 552 (2.7%) of the 20,392 people in the 2019/20 cohort had committed a 'serious' offence, of which 106 (19.2%) reoffended, 2 committing a further serious offence. In total, 505 (2.6%) of the 19,344 adults had committed such offences, of whom 97 (19.2%) reoffended, with 2 committing a further serious offence. Of youths, 47 (4.5% of the 1,048 youths) had committed such offences. Of the 47, 9 reoffended, but none committed a further serious offence (Tables 11a and 11b).



<sup>4</sup>[The Criminal Justice NI Order 2008 \(opens in new window\)](#)

## Appendix 1 – Methodology and Counting Rules

The following section provides a brief summary of the methodology and counting rules used in the production of the Northern Ireland reoffending rates. For more detailed methodologies and glossaries providing definitions of key terms please refer to the two published methodology papers<sup>5</sup>.

### **Who is included in the cohort?**

The cohort is made up of all adults and youths who have been given a non-custodial disposal at court, a diversionary disposal or who have been released from custody<sup>6</sup> during the financial year 2019/20. An adult is defined as someone aged 18 or over at the time of community disposal or release from custody and a youth is defined as anyone aged 17 or under at this point. Information in the following bulletin is presented for the full cohort (adults and youths combined) and separately for adults and youths.

### **What are the baseline date, offence and disposal?**

The baseline date is the date of entry into the cohort. This is the date that a non-custodial sentence is given at court, a diversionary disposal imposed or an individual is released from custody. This date forms the starting point for the observation period. The baseline offence is the principal offence associated with this baseline date. A review of offence categories was conducted in early 2020; figures for the 2019/20 cohort onwards will be reported in line with revised offence categorisations. Following consultation, it has been agreed that an offender will be counted once within each relevant disposal category, including the initial baseline disposal associated with their entry into the cohort and also disposal categories associated within any subsequent proven reoffences.

### **What are the observation and follow up periods?**

The observation period is the window of time over which a person is observed following receipt of a diversionary disposal or non-custodial disposal at court or release from custody. A balance needs to be struck between the need for timely information and the need to make the reoffending rate as informative and meaningful as possible. For one year reoffending, the observation period is one year and the follow up period is six months.

<sup>5</sup> [Northern Ireland Reoffending Methodology 2014 \(opens in new window\)](#) & [Northern Ireland Reoffending Methodology 2015 \(opens in new window\)](#)

<sup>6</sup>Includes only those released from custody following the completion of a sentence and excludes fine defaulters, those bailed or released following a period on remand, subject to extradition or transfer to another secure hospital facility.



## Appendix 1 – Methodology and Counting Rules

### What counts as a reoffence?

Under one year proven reoffending methodology an offence is counted as a reoffence if it:

- occurs within the one year observation period.
- has been committed within Northern Ireland.
- is prosecuted via the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and not a third party (e.g. the Department of Communities can bring some cases of benefit fraud).
- is not a breach offence (e.g. breach of a probation order).
- has been 'proven', meaning that a court conviction or diversionary disposal has been imposed within the observation year or by the end of the 6 month follow up period.

### Data Source and Coverage

In Northern Ireland the main data source used to measure reoffending rates is supplied to the Department of Justice's Analytical Services Group from the Causeway Data Sharing Mechanism (DSM1). The information used is primarily created from an extract of records held on the Criminal Records Viewer (CRV). The CRV is held on Causeway and utilises data which originated from PSNI, along with data from Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service. Causeway is an interconnected information system, launched as a joint undertaking by the Criminal Justice Organisations (CJOs) in Northern Ireland. Information is also provided from the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) case management system (PRISM) and the Youth Justice Agency regarding releases from custody. Information on these offenders is matched to information taken from CRV.

Full details of data relevance, accuracy, timeliness, accessibility, coherence, user need, cost and confidentiality is available in the accompanying [Background Quality Report PDF \(273KB\) \(opens in new window\)](#). Details of the data quality checks and processes that DoJ has in place are available in [Quality Assurance of Administrative Data \(QAAD\) PDF \(502KB\) \(opens in new window\)](#) on the DoJ website.

## Appendix 1 – Methodology and Counting Rules

### **Interpreting Trends**

The ability to compare and discuss trends in reoffending is important to its usefulness as a performance target within government. However, differences in the offending related characteristics of those included in each cohort make comparing reoffending rates problematic, across both time and jurisdictions. In previous bulletins, reoffending figures were provided alongside adjusted reoffending rates for adults and the overall cohort, to help provide an estimate of change in reoffending. Following consultation with key users, the decision has been taken to exclude this from future publications to avoid confusion in the interpretation of findings. We will continue to explore statistical techniques that could be employed to control for differences within the cohorts, meanwhile, care should be taken to understand the wider context within which offending and reoffending has occurred.

In addition, reoffending rates should not be used routinely to measure the comparative success of the different disposal types. As no adjustments have been made to control for offender characteristics or factors relating to variations in sentencing, such comparisons would be misleading.

Since 2015, there has been a consistent decline in the number of cases prosecuted and also in corresponding guilty findings. This has resulted in a further reduction in the size of the reoffending cohort. A further distorting factor for 2017/18 may be the significant reduction in disposals at the Crown Court. 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 affected defendants' access to legal aid representation and had an impact on disposals and delay within the Crown Court process during the period.