

Adult and Youth Reoffending in Northern Ireland (2020/21 Cohort)

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Máinnstríe o tha Laa

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1 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 2020/21 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 15,631 people in the 2020/21 cohort, 18.8% (2,935) reoffended during the one year observation period (adults 18.5%, youths 25.0%).**
- Overall, 20.1% of males and 13.1% of females reoffended (adult males 19.9% and adult females 12.6%, youth males 25.8% and youth females 22.5%).
- In terms of offending history, 64.5% of the cohort had committed previous offences, ranging from one to 591 offences (adults 66.0%, youths 31.8%).
- Of those who reoffended, 45.8% committed their first reoffence within the first three months (adults 45.6%, youths 48.6%).
- The one year proven reoffending rate for¹:
 - custody releases was 49.1% (adults 48.9%, 7 of 10 youths).
 - community disposal (supervision) was 28.8% (adults 27.4%, youths 49.5%).
 - community disposal (no supervision) was 17.5% (adults 17.3%, youths 52.1%).
 - diversionary disposal was 17.3% (adults 16.2%, youths 21.5%).
- The highest reoffending rates were found among those who committed a baseline burglary offence (45.2%), followed by robbery (35.5%) and criminal damage & arson (32.3%). This was the same for adults only (burglary 45.8%, robbery 34.4%, criminal damage & arson, 33.0%). For youths, the highest reoffending rates were found among those with a baseline offence of robbery (1 out of 1), followed by burglary (7 out of 18) and theft (32.7%).

¹Base 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.

2 Measuring Reoffending in Northern Ireland

This report provides information on the one year proven reoffending rate for individuals who received a non-custodial disposal at court, a diversionary disposal or who were released from custody during 2020/21. Information is presented in relation to the full cohort and broken down by adults (those aged 18 and over at the time of disposal or release) and youths (those aged 17 and under at the time of disposal or release).

A summary of this methodology, revised in 2013 to bring it more in line with that in England and Wales, is included in Section 8 of this report. Full methodology is available online at [Department of Justice Reoffending Statistics \(opens in new window\)](#). Associated tables can be found in the accompanying spreadsheet [Adult and Youth Reoffending in Northern Ireland \(202021 Cohort\) ODS \(56KB\) \(opens in a new window\)](#). Corresponding table numbers are included within the report.

Figures reported throughout have not been adjusted to make allowances for factors known to influence reoffending, such as gender,

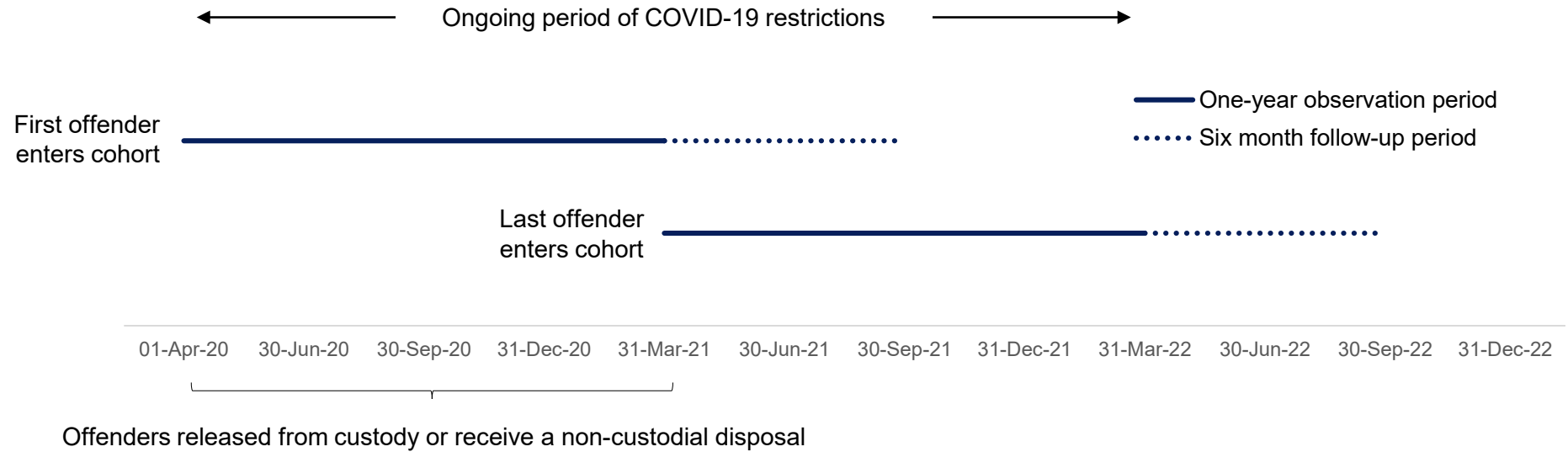
age and criminal history. Therefore, it is inappropriate to compare findings with other results from within Northern Ireland or other jurisdictions.

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.

The next update covering the 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 will be published in Autumn 2024. A full [ASG Publication Schedule Excel \(13KB\) \(opens in new window\)](#) is available on the Department of Justice website.

2 | Measuring Reoffending in Northern Ireland

Figure 1: Timeline of measurement for the 2020/21 reoffending cohort



3 Overall Reoffending

The overall proven reoffending rate for the 2020/21 cohort was 18.8%

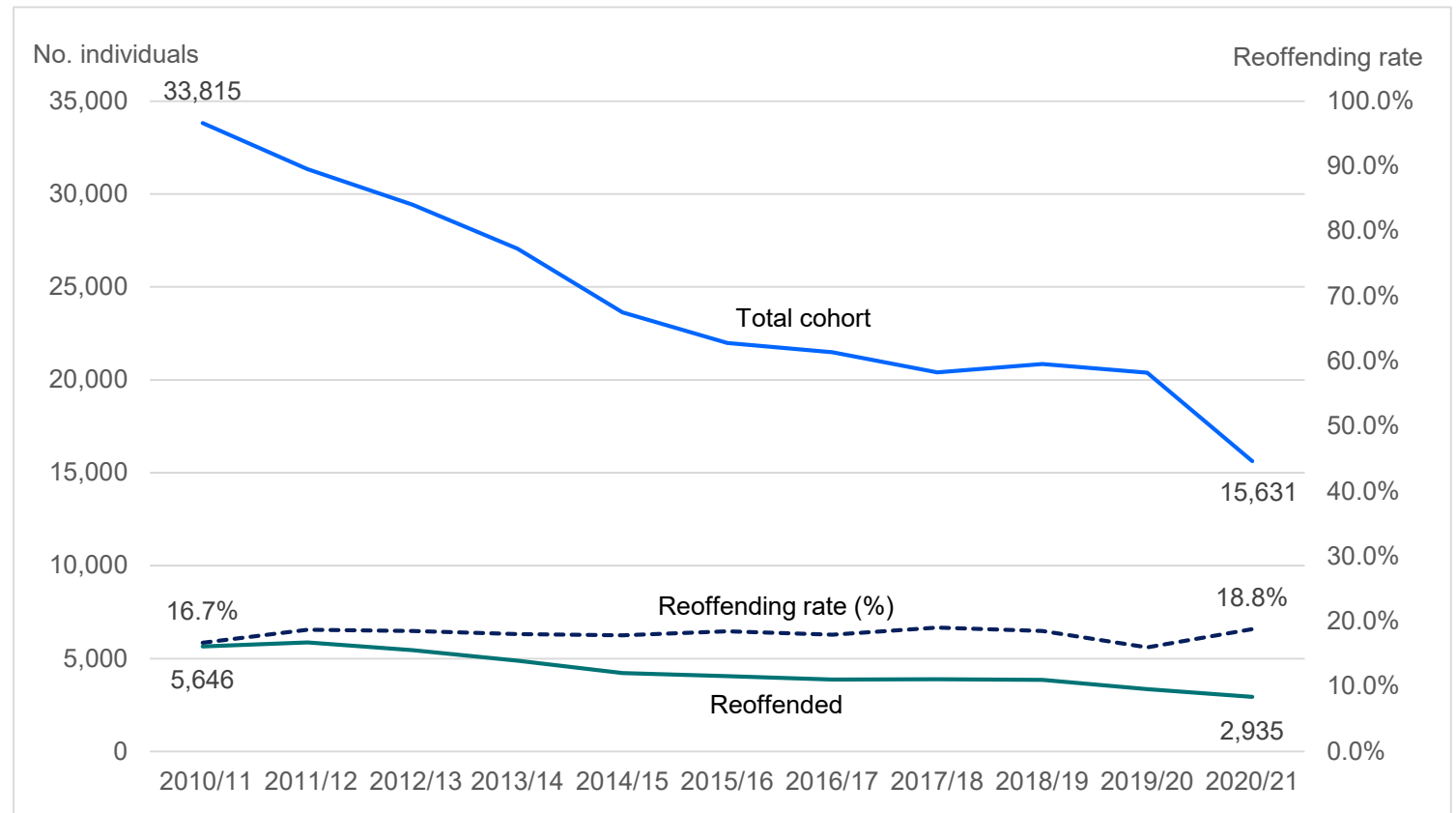
This represents a 2.3 percentage point increase in the actual rate of reoffending from 2019/20 (16.5%). Previously the rate has fluctuated between 16.7% and 19.0%. The current cohort (15,631) and number of individuals who reoffended (2,935) are the lowest since the beginning of the time series.

Reoffending Rate

A total of 15,631 offenders were included in the 2020/21 cohort. Overall, 18.8% (2,935) committed a proven reoffence within one year following release from custody, receiving a non-custodial court disposal, or a diversionary disposal. This represents a 2.3 percentage point increase from the previous year (16.5%).

The number of individuals within the cohort and the number who reoffended decreased from the previous year (by 4,761 and 423 respectively) (Figure 2 and Table 1a).

Figure 2: Overall reoffending cohorts, 2010/11 to 2020/21



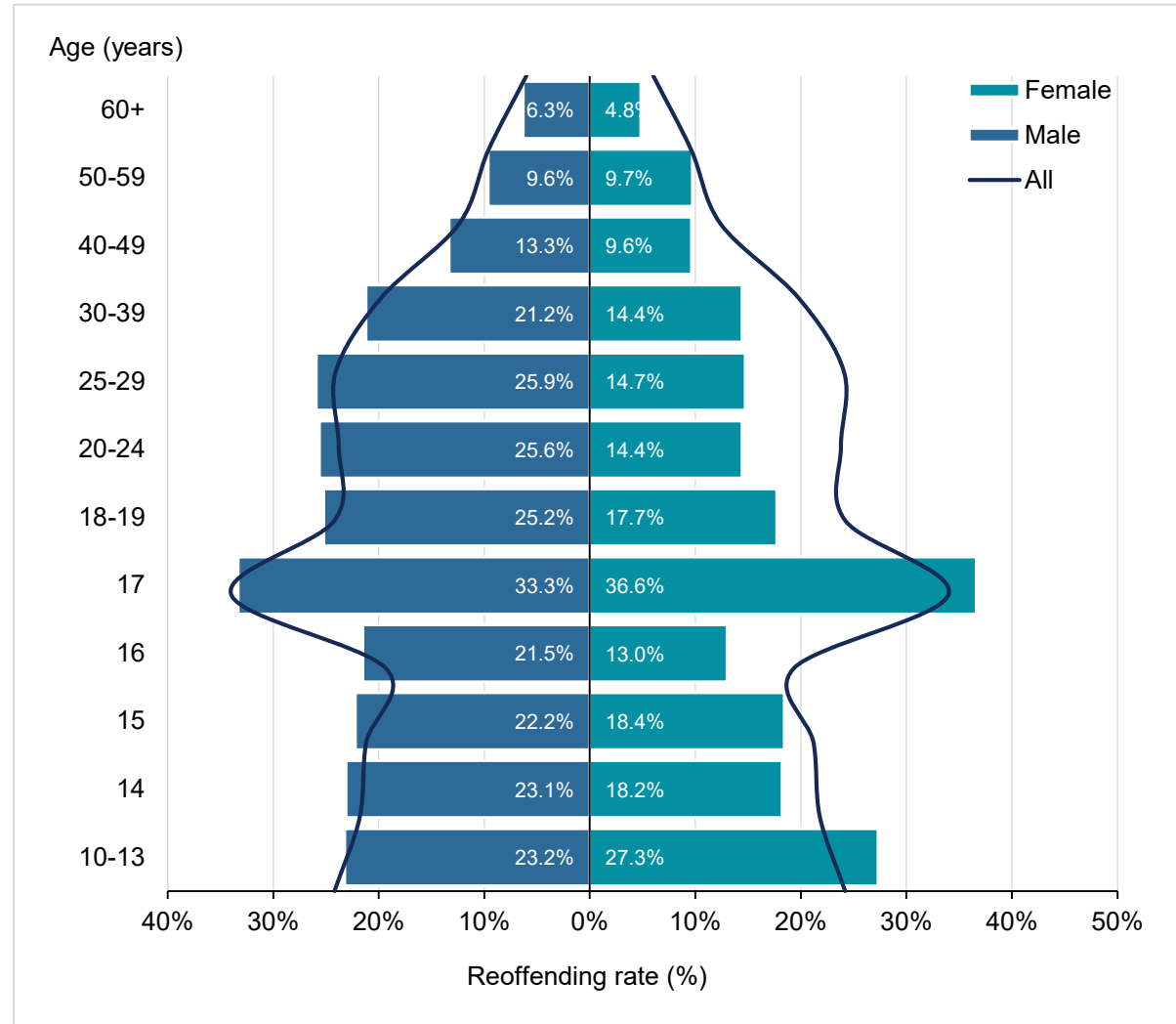
3 Overall Reoffending

Demographics

In terms of gender, 80.5% (12,586) of the overall cohort were male and 19.5% (3,045) were female; 20.1% of males (2,535) and 13.1% of females (400) reoffended within one year (Table 2). Both the male and female reoffending rates are a 2.2 percentage point increase from the previous cohort. Figures for males also include those categorised as 'other' (e.g. transgender, non-binary, gender not specified); these individuals make up less than 0.1% of the overall cohort.

When looking at the entire cohort by age, the rate of reoffending is generally consistent among those in their early teens, before peaking at the age of 17, and generally declining thereafter. Both males and females follow a similar pattern, however reoffending rates for females are lower than males across all age bands, with the exception of 10-13, 17 and 50-59 year olds (Figure 3 and Table 2).

Figure 3: Reoffending rate by age and gender, 2020/21



3 Overall Reoffending

Offending History

Over one-third of individuals (5,555) had no previous offences. The remaining 64.5% (10,076) had committed 185,353 previous offences within their lifetime, ranging from one to 591. As has been the case with previous years, the reoffending rate was highest among those with 11 or more previous offences (34.7%) (Table 3). Note that this only includes offences recorded on an individual's criminal record.

Age at first recorded offence was calculated for each individual in the cohort. Since 2010/11, the rate of reoffending has generally been higher for those who committed their first recorded offence in their early teenage years; this steadily declines as age increases. As with previous years, within the current cohort, the highest reoffending rates were found among those aged 13 at the time of their first recorded offence (38.4%), while the lowest reoffending rates were found among those aged 60 or over (2.4%) at first recorded offence (Table 4).

Time between committing first offence and entering the current cohort was also calculated as an estimate of the length of time each person within the cohort has been engaging in criminal behaviours (Table 5). This represents a very simplistic measure and does not take into consideration the frequency or severity of offending during this period. However, there is a general trend, consistent throughout the time series, indicating that, although rates of reoffending initially increase as length of time between first offence and the date they enter the current cohort increases, after approximately 10 years reoffending rates decline. As was highlighted in Figure 3, reoffending rates generally decline as age increases so this trend is likely an interaction between ageing and reoffending.

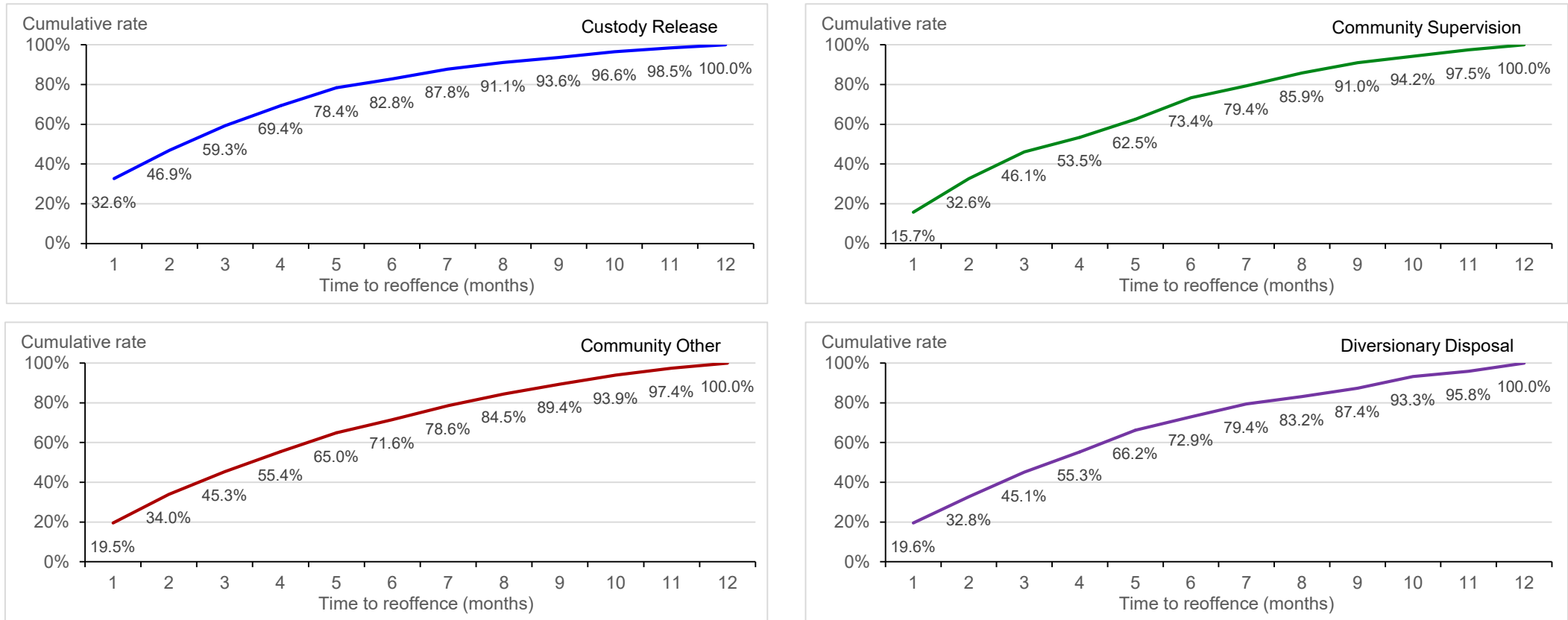
Reoffences

There were 10,222 proven reoffences committed by 2,935 individuals during the observation year; with adults committing 9,428 and youths committing 794 offences. The number of reoffences per person ranged from one to 35. The greatest proportion of those who reoffended (67.2%) went on to commit one to three proven reoffences within the observation year (Table 6).

3 Overall Reoffending

Of those who reoffended, 19.9% (585) did so within the first month of being released from custody or receiving a non-custodial court or diversionary disposal. By three months, 45.8% (1,343) had reoffended. Although all disposal groups followed the same general trend, those released from custody were more likely to reoffend within the first month of release (32.6%). This rose to 59.3% within three months, and 82.8% by six months (Figure 4 and Table 7a).

Figure 4: Reoffending interval by disposal group²



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

4 Adult Reoffending

The proven reoffending rate for adults in the 2020/21 cohort was 18.5%.

This represents a 2.5 percentage point increase in the reoffending rate from the previous year (16.0%). This is the highest reoffending rate since the beginning of the time series; over previous years, the adult reoffending rate has fluctuated between 15.9% and 18.4%. However, the current annual cohort (14,923) and number of adults who reoffended (2,758) are the lowest since the beginning of the time series.

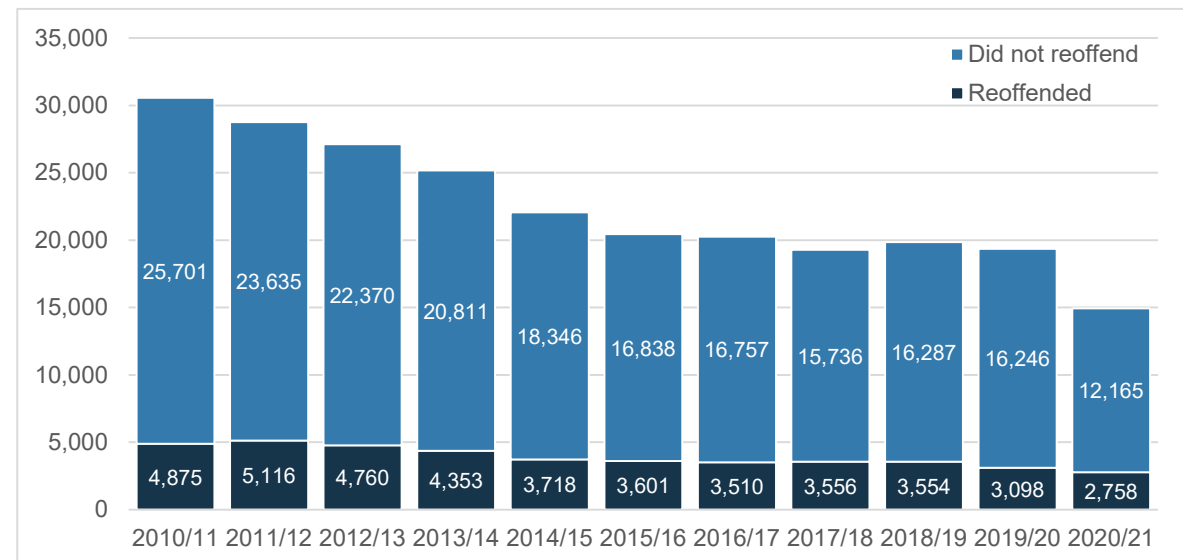
Reoffending Rate

A total of 14,923 adults were released from custody, given a non-custodial disposal at court or received a diversionary disposal in 2020/21; 18.5% (2,758) reoffended within one year. This represents a 2.5 percentage point increase from the previous cohort (16.0%). However, the number of individuals within the cohort decreased significantly from the previous year (by 4,421), as did the number who reoffended within one year (340) (Figure 5 and Table 1b).

Demographics

In terms of gender, 80.7% (12,047) of the adult cohort were male and 19.3% (2,876) were female; 19.9% of adult males (2,396) and 12.6% of adult females (362) reoffended within one year. Reoffending rates for adult males and adult females increased by 2.4 and 2.2 percentage points respectively from the previous cohort. The highest reoffending rates for adult males were found among those aged 25-29 (25.9%); for adult females the highest reoffending rates were found among those aged 18-19 (17.7%) (Table 2).

Figure 5: Adult reoffending cohorts, 2010/11 to 2020/21



4 Adult Reoffending

Offending History

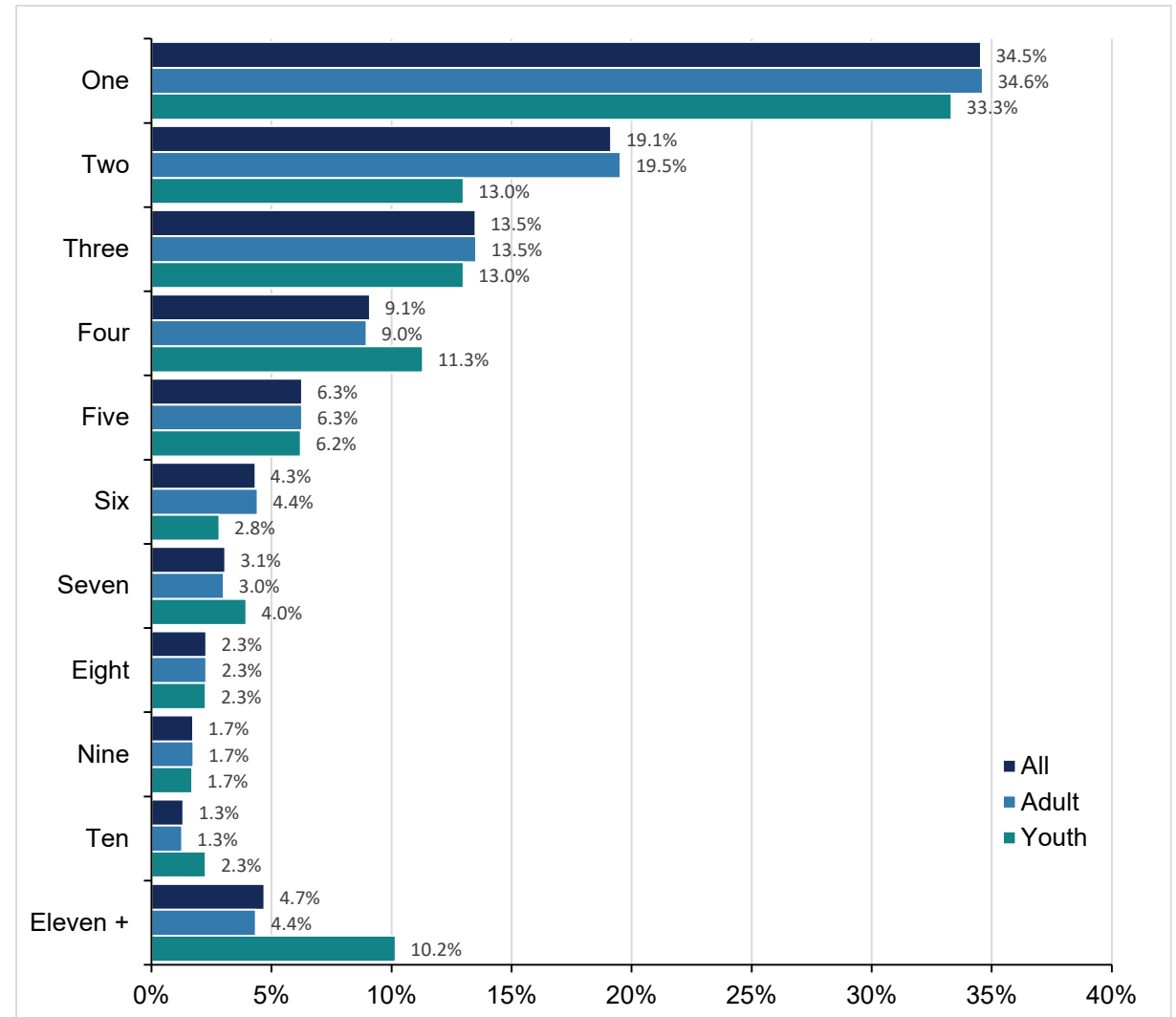
Approximately one-third of adults (5,072) had no previous offences. The remaining 66.0% (9,851) had committed 183,675 previous offences, ranging from one to 591 (based on criminal record only). The reoffending rate for adults with no previous offences was 7.9%, in contrast to 34.4% for adults with 11 or more previous offences (Table 3).

Reoffences

The 2,758 adults who reoffended committed 9,428 reoffences during the observation period, ranging from one to 35 offences per person. Over one-third of adults who reoffended (34.6%) committed only one further offence within the observation year, while 4.4% committed 11 or more reoffences (Figure 6 and Table 6).

Of the adults who went on to reoffend, 20.0% (552) did so within one month and 45.6% (1,257) did so within three months. For adults, disposal groups followed the same trend as the overall cohort, with just under half of those who reoffended following release from custody doing so within the first two months post-release (46.8%) (Table 7b).

Figure 6: Reoffending rates by number of proven reoffences, 2020/21



5 Youth Reoffending

The proven reoffending rate for youths in the 2020/21 cohort was 25.0%.

This represents an increase of 0.2 percentage points in the reoffending rate from 2019/20 (24.8%). The youth reoffending rate has fluctuated between 23.8% and 32.2%. The current annual cohort (708) and number of youths who reoffended (177) are the lowest since the beginning of the time series.

Reoffending Rate

Youths have consistently made up a small proportion of the annual cohort, therefore there is likely to be more variation in youth reoffending rates from year-to-year. Currently, youths make up less than five percent of the cohort (708 out of 15,631) (Figure 7). Of the 708, 25.0% (177) of youths reoffended within one year of being released from custody, being given a non-custodial disposal at court or a diversionary disposal. The number of youths within the cohort decreased by 340 from the previous year while the number who reoffended within one year decreased by 83 (Figure 8 and Table 1c).

Figure 7: Adult and youth reoffending cohorts, 2020/21

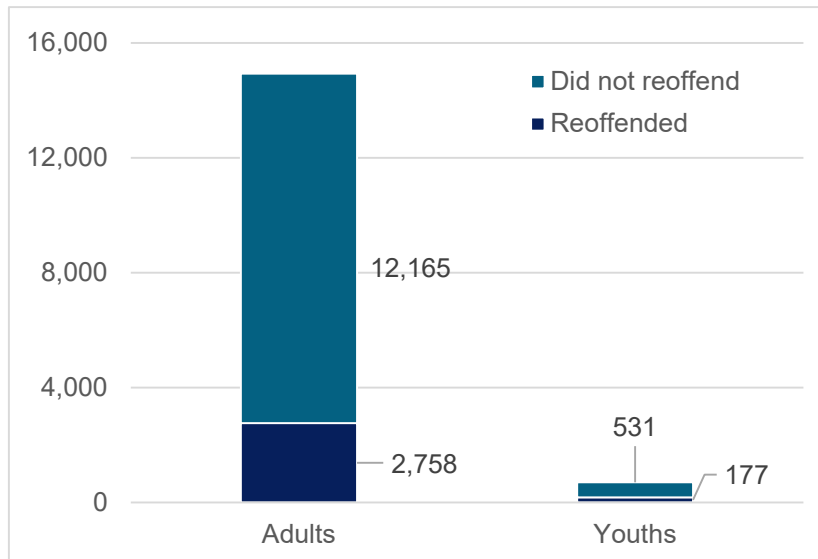
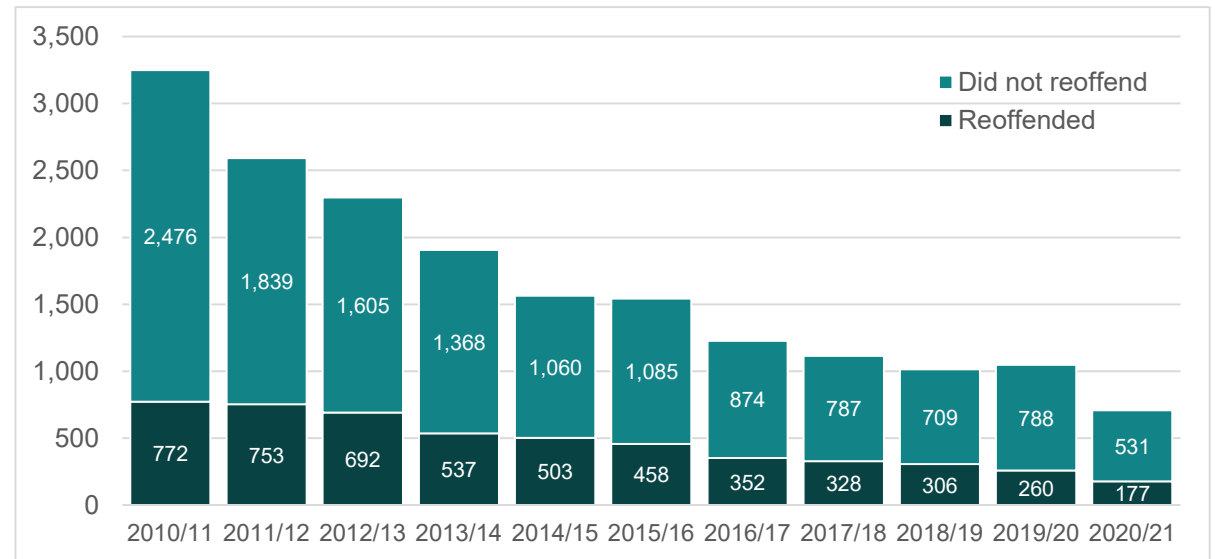


Figure 8: Youth reoffending cohorts, 2010/11 to 2020/21



5 Youth Reoffending

Demographics

In terms of gender, 76.1% (539) of the youth cohort were male and 23.9% (169) were female; 25.8% of young males (139) and 22.5% of young females (38) reoffended within one year. This represents a 0.3 percentage point decrease for young males and a 2.5 percentage point increase for young females when compared to the previous cohort. For young males, the highest reoffending rates were among those aged 17 (33.3%). The highest reoffending rates among young females were also for those aged 17 (36.6%). (Table 2).

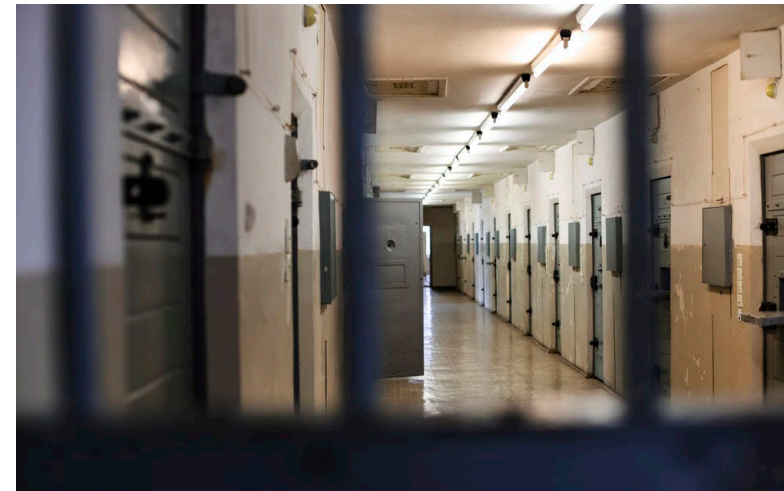
Offending History

Over two-thirds of youths in the current cohort (483) had no previous offences. The remaining 31.8% (225) had committed 1,678 previous offences, ranging from one to 81 (based on criminal record only). The reoffending rate for youths with no previous offences was 15.9%, in contrast to 68.9% for youths with 11 or more previous offences (Table 3).

Reoffences

The 177 youths who reoffended committed 794 reoffences during the observation year, ranging from one to 33 offences per young person. Almost half of youths who reoffended (46.3%) committed one or two further offences, while 10.2% committed 11 or more (Table 6).

Of the youths who went on to reoffend, 18.6% (33) did so within one month and 48.6% (86) did so within the first three months. By six months, more than three quarters (78.0%) of youths who went on to reoffend had done so (Table 7c).



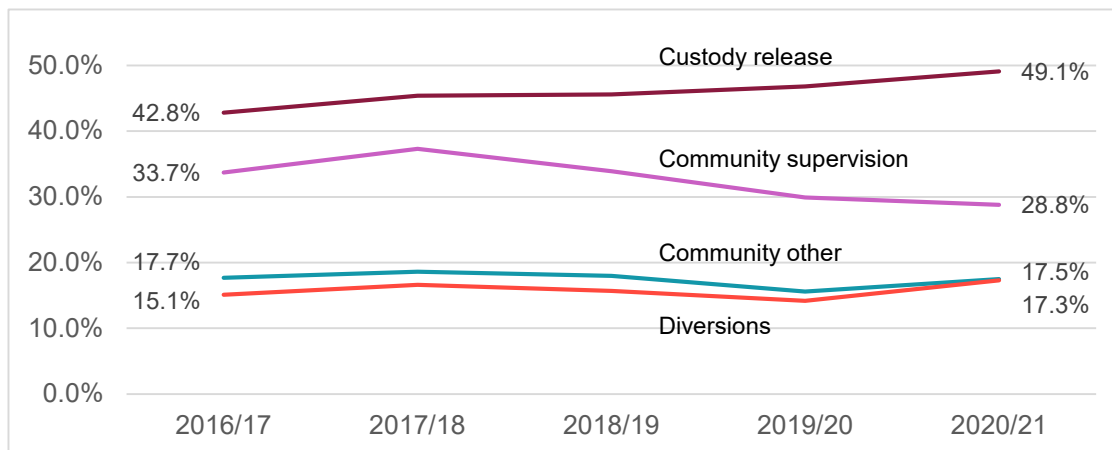
6 Disposal and Reoffending

Disposal Group

Disposals are grouped into four main categories:

1. People released from custody or young offender centre. This includes those released from serving a prison term only and those released under community supervision (e.g. Determinate Custodial Sentences); definitions for custodial sentence types 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 (e.g. Probation Order);
3. People given a non-custodial disposal at court that does not require supervision in the community (e.g. fine or suspended sentence);
4. People given a diversionary disposal (e.g. caution or informed warning).

Figure 9: Reoffending rates by disposal group, 5 year trends



Reoffending by Disposal Group

At 49.1%, those released from custody had the highest reoffending rate. This was followed by community supervision (28.8%), community other (17.5%) and diversions (17.3%). Reoffending rates for those released from custody have consistently increased, while rates for those under community supervision have decreased over the last four years. Reoffending rates for those who received a diversion are also at their highest in the last five years (Figure 9).

The 2020/21 reoffending rate for adults released from custody was 48.9%, while 7 of 10 youths released from custody also reoffended within one year. For community supervision, community other and diversionary disposals, adult reoffending rates were 27.4%, 17.3% and 16.2% respectively; corresponding rates for youths were 49.5%, 52.1% and 21.5%. A full breakdown of reoffending rates by baseline disposal for the current cohort can be found within the accompanying ODS file (Table 8).

Reoffending rates should not be used to measure the comparative success of disposal types as different offender characteristics, histories and offence types will themselves be related to type of disposal given. Offender profiles therefore may differ substantially between disposal groups and types.

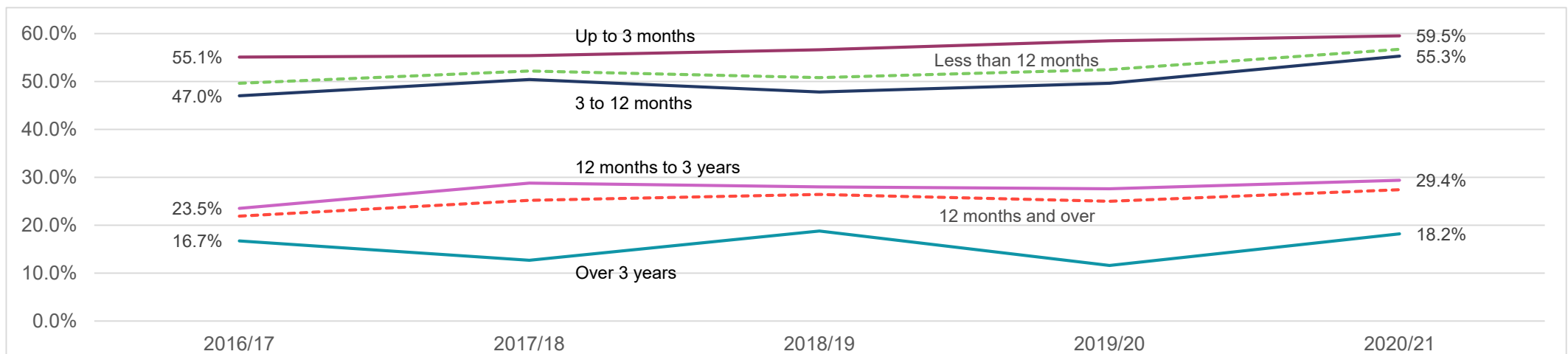
6 Disposal and Reoffending

Reoffending by Custodial Sentence Length

As noted in the previous section, reoffending rates for custody releases are consistently higher than other disposal groups, however custodial reoffending rates can differ substantially depending on length of custodial sentence. In 2020/21, 1,185 individuals were released from custody in Northern Ireland. Those released from sentences of 12 months or more reoffended at a substantially lower rate (27.4%) than those serving sentences of less than 12 months (56.7%) (Table 9). This latter figure includes individuals with sentences of up to 3 months, who have consistently had the highest reoffending rates throughout the time series; these rates have increased year-on-year over the last 5 years to 59.5% for the 2020/21 cohort (Figure 10). This was followed by 55.3% for individuals released from custodial sentences of 3 to 12 months, 29.4% for 12 months to 3 years and 18.2% among those who spent over 3 years in custody.

The current reoffending rate for sentences of less than 12 months (56.7%) increased by 4.2 percentage points compared with the previous cohort (52.5%); sentences of 12 months or more increased by 2.4 percentage points (25.0% previously compared with 27.4% in the current cohort). Care should be taken when interpreting these findings as these rates do not control for known differences in offender characteristics.

Figure 10: Reoffending rates by custodial sentence length, 5 year trends



7 | Offence Type and Reoffending

Baseline Offence Category

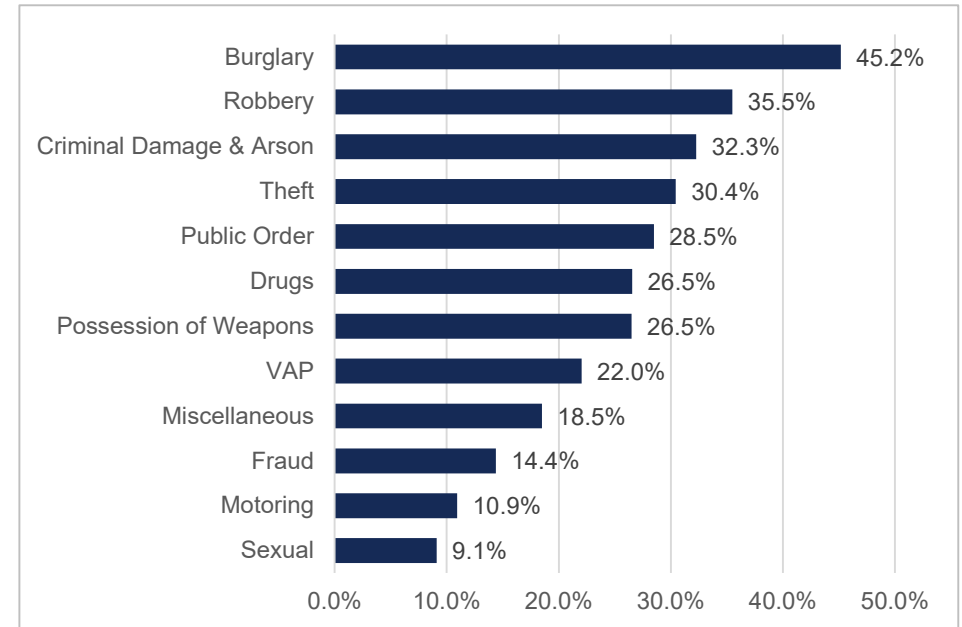
Overall, reoffending rates were highest among those with a baseline offence of burglary (45.2%), robbery (35.5%) and criminal damage & arson (32.3%) (Figure 11 and Table 10). This was the same for adults only (burglary 45.8%, robbery 34.4%, criminal damage & arson, 33.0%). For youths, the highest reoffending rates were found among those with a baseline offence of robbery (1 out of 1), burglary (7 out of 18) and theft (32.7%). Those with a baseline sexual offence had the lowest overall reoffending rate (9.1%), a pattern that was the same for adults and youths. It is interesting to note that, overall and for adults and youths, for those who committed a baseline offence relating to motoring, drugs, violence against the person (VAP) and theft, the largest proportion of first reoffences were for offences in the same category (Tables 11a, 11b and 11c).

Specified and Serious Offences

Overall, 10.6% (1,650) of the cohort had committed a baseline specified offence; 24.0% (396) went on to reoffend, with 83 committing a further specified offence. When examined separately, 10.1% of the adult cohort (1,509) had committed a baseline specified offence; 23.7% (358) went on to reoffend, with 73 committing a further specified offence. For youths, 19.9% (141) had committed a specified offence, with 27.0% (38) reoffending, including 10 who committed a further specified offence (Tables 12a and 12b).

A smaller proportion (3.1%; 490) had committed a serious offence, of which 19.6% (96) reoffended; 3 committed a further serious offence. In total, 3.1% of adults (458) had committed a serious offence; 20.1% (92) reoffended, with 3 committing a further serious offence. For youths, 4.5% (32) had committed a serious offence; 4 reoffended but none committed a further serious offence (Tables 12a and 12b). See Section 8 for further information on specified and serious offences.

Figure 11: Reoffending rate by baseline offence, 2020/21



8 Further Information

Methodology and Counting Rules

This 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 on the 'Methodology and Quality Assurance' section of the [Department of Justice Reoffending Statistics webpage \(opens in new window\)](#).

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 during the given financial year. 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 this report is presented for the overall cohort (adults and youths combined) and separately for adults and youths.

It should be noted that 'custody releases' includes those released from custody following the completion of a sentence and excludes fine defaulters, those bailed or released following a period on remand, or those subject to extradition or transfer to another secure hospital facility.

What are the baseline date, offence and disposal?

The baseline date is the date of entry into the cohort (i.e. 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 the baseline date. A review of offence categories was conducted in early 2020; figures for the 2019/20 cohort onwards are reported in line with revised offence categorisations.

Following user 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.

8 Further Information

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 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.

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. Department of Communities can bring some cases of benefit fraud);
- is not a breach offence (e.g. breach of a probation order); and
- has been 'proven', meaning a conviction or diversionary disposal has been imposed within the observation year or by the end of the 6 month follow up period.

What are serious and specified offences?

A number of offences have been designated as serious or specified, as per the [Criminal Justice \(NI\) Order 2008 \(opens in new window\)](#). These are the most serious of offences, for which the severity can justify an enhanced sentence, and will remain on an individual's criminal record. Examples of serious and specified offences include murder, manslaughter, rape, kidnap, money laundering, violence, sexual crimes and safeguarding or child protection matters. 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. 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.

8 Further Information

Data Source and Coverage

In Northern Ireland, the Causeway Data Sharing Mechanism is the main data source used to measure reoffending rates. The information used is primarily created from an extract of records held on the Criminal Records Viewer (CRV) on Causeway. It uses 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 in Northern Ireland. Information, regarding releases from custody, is also provided from the Northern Ireland Prison Service case management system (PRISM) and the Youth Justice Agency. 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 \(267KB\) \(opens in new window\)](#). Details of the data quality checks and processes that DoJ has in place are available at [Quality Assurance of Administrative Data \(QAAD\) PDF \(502KB\) \(opens in new window\)](#).

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 bulletins prior to 2017/18, 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 was 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.

8 Further Information

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.

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. 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.

Contact Us

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