

Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service Provisional Figures

January to March 2024

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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 2024 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 493 Children Order sittings (1,220 total hours sat), 1,080 Children Order Applications received and 1,046 disposed. In terms of orders made, 155 were own motion, 2,319 were interim and 1,463 were final orders.
 - County Court and District Judges sat a total of 1,265 days within the County Court. In terms of cases 38 equity, 232 ejectment, 2,074 small claims and one criminal damage case were received; 37 equity, 164 ejectment, 1,921 small claims and four criminal damage cases were disposed.
 - In terms of Crown Court business there were 779 sittings with 405 cases and 499 defendants received and 375 cases and 467 defendants disposed.
- There were 553 High Court sitting days. The highest proportion of these was spent on Crown business (16%) with 1,189 writs and originating summons received and 1,429 disposed.
 - Within the 1,071 Magistrates' sitting days during the quarter, 72% were adult criminal, 6% youth criminal and 21% civil and family days. There were 827 civil and family applications and 9,149 adult and 279 youth defendants received. Corresponding figures for disposals were 789 civil and family, 9,044 adult and 303 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 2024 –

- 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 2024 will be published in August 2024. A full [publication schedule](#) is available on the DoJ website.

2 | Introduction

It is important to note court activity during 2020 and 2021 was severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time the courts made more use of remote audio and video technology.

Our statistical practice is regulated by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR). OSR sets the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) that all producers of official statistics should adhere to. You are welcome to contact us directly with any comments about how we meet these standards. Alternatively, you can contact OSR by emailing regulation@statistics.gov.uk or via the OSR website.

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Children Order

Children Order Quarterly Business

- Table 1 on the following page shows that during the quarter there were 493 sittings (1,220 hours), 1,080 Children Order Applications received and 1,046 disposed.
 - A total of 1,523 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 15% 13-16 years.
 - Like each of the last five years, the most common reason for transferring Children Order applications during the quarter was Complexity (71%, 140 of 196 reasons). This was followed by Consolidation (21), Jurisdiction (18), Return to Lower Court (8), Convenience (7), Urgency (1) and Gravity (1).
- In terms of orders made –
 - 155 were own motion orders.
 - 2,319 were interim orders.
 - 1,463 were final orders.
 - The average waiting time for applications disposed was 49 weeks for public and 31 weeks for private law.
 - Table 1 shows that applications received decreased and applications disposed increased. The waiting times for disposal for public law and private law were lower than the comparative figures for the same quarter in the previous year.

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Children Order

Table 1: Children Order Business – January to March 2024 compared with January to March 2023

	Quarter 2024	Quarter 2023	% change from 2023
Sittings	493	524	6% ↓
Hours sat	1,220	1,289	5% ↓
Applications received	1,080	1,096	1% ↓
Applications disposed	1,046	991	6% ↑
Number of children involved in applications disposed	1,523	1,491	2% ↑
Own motion orders made	155	461	66% ↓
Interim orders made	2,319	2,278	2% ↑
Final orders made	1,463	1,369	7% ↑
Average waiting time for disposal for public law (weeks)	48.6	57.6	16% ↓
Average waiting time for disposal for private law (weeks)	30.9	34.1	9% ↓

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 1,265 sitting days during the quarter. Within those days 659 were spent on criminal business and 606 days on civil and family business.
- During the quarter –
 - 2,347 Civil bills with notice of intention to defend (NID) were received and 2,846 disposed.
 - In terms of cases 38 equity, 232 ejectment, 2,074 small claims and 1 criminal damage case were received; 37 equity, 164 ejectment, 1,921 small claims and four criminal damage cases were disposed.
 - 371 divorce decrees were granted, 376 decrees absolute issued.
 - 74 licence applications were received and 63 disposed.
- Table 2 shows a mixed set of results 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 2024 compared with January to March 2023

	Quarter 2024	Quarter 2023	% change from 2023
Sitting days	1,265	1,370	8%↓
Civil bills with NID received	2,347	1,967	19%↑
Civil bills disposed	2,846	2,523	13%↑
Average time taken from issue to disposal of civil bill (weeks)	55	61	10%↓
Equity cases received	38	36	6%↑
Equity cases disposed	37	45	18%↓
Average time taken from issue to disposal of equity cases (weeks)	111	73	52%↑
Ejectment cases received	232	254	9%↓
Ejectment cases disposed	164	169	3%↓
Average time taken from issue to disposal of ejectment cases (weeks)	35	36	3%↓

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

4 | County Court

Table 2 continued: County Court Business – January to March 2024 compared with January to March 2023

	Quarter 2024	Quarter 2023	% change from 2023
Small claims received	2,074	2,205	6%↓
Small claims disposed	1,921	1,812	6%↑
Average time taken from issue to disposal of small claims cases (weeks)	21	26	19%↓
Criminal damage cases received	1	1	-
Criminal damage cases disposed	4	2	100%↑
Divorce decrees granted	371	366	1%↑
Decree absolute issued	376	427	12%↓
Average time taken from issue to date divorce decree granted (weeks)	47	42	12%↑
Licences applications received	74	71	4%↑
Licences applications disposed	63	71	11%↓

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

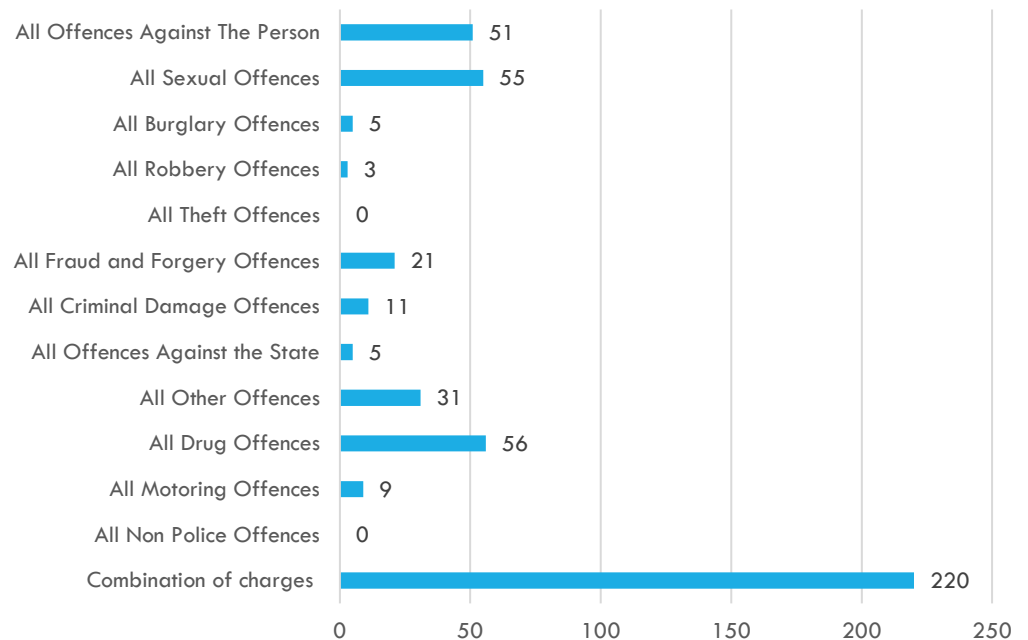
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Crown Court

Crown Court Quarterly Business

- Table 3 on the following page shows that during the quarter there were 779 sittings (1,581 hours sat). County Court Judges disposed of 98% of defendants (457), a figure that has remained relatively stable over the last five years (98-99%).
- There were 405 cases and 499 defendants received during the quarter; 375 cases and 467 defendants were disposed.
- Average time from committal to hearing was 149 days and from conviction to disposal was 92 days.
- In comparison to the same quarter in the previous year the number of cases and defendants received 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 decreased and from conviction to disposal increased.

Figure 1: Crown Court defendants disposed by charge type January to March 2024



5 | Crown Court

Table 3: Crown Court Business – January to March 2024 compared with January to March 2023

	Quarter 2024	Quarter 2023	% change from 2023
Sittings	779	837	-7%↓
Hours sat	1,581	1,844	-14%↓
Cases received	405	360	13%↑
Cases disposed	375	413	-9%↓
Defendants received	499	453	10%↑
Defendants disposed	467	516	-9%↓
Defendants pleading guilty to all charges	112	152	-26%↓
Defendants pleading guilty or found guilty of at least one charge	290	291	-
Average time from committal to hearing (days)	149	189	-21%↓
Average time from conviction to disposal (days)	92	82	12%↑

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 553 High Court sitting days during the quarter, the highest proportion of which was spent on Crown business (16%).
- King's Bench business included:
 - 1,189 writs and originating summonses were received, 1,429 were disposed.
 - 79 applications for leave to apply for Judicial Review were received, as well as 26 applications for Judicial Review.
- Chancery Division business included:
 - Receipt of 595 (63% of which were Chancery, 21% bankruptcy and 16% companies cases) and disposal of 379 cases; and
 - 1,670 grants issued in the Probate office.
- Family Division business included –
 - 15 adoption cases and applications received and 24 disposed;
 - 527 divorce petitions received, 229 decrees granted (35% (81) '2 years with consent' and 25% (57) 'Combination of grounds or other') and 230 decrees absolute issued;
 - 50 Official Solicitor's Office cases received, 33 disposed and a current caseload of 437 cases at the end of the quarter.

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

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High Court

Table 4: High Court Business - January to March 2024 compared with January to March 2023

	Quarter 2024	Quarter 2023	% change from 2023
Sitting days	553	642	14%↓
Writs & originating summonses received	1,189	869	37%↑
Writs & originating summonses disposed	1,429	1,044	37%↑
Applications for leave to apply for Judicial Review received	79	87	9%↓
Applications for Judicial Review received	26	28	7%↓
Ancillary applications received	-	1	100%↓
Chancery, Bankruptcy & Companies cases received	595	468	27%↑
Chancery, Bankruptcy & Companies cases disposed	379	264	44%↑
Grants issued in the Probate office	1,670	1,668	-

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

6 | High Court

Table 4 continued: High Court Business - January to March 2024 compared with January to March 2023

	Quarter 2024	Quarter 2023	% change from 2023
Adoption cases & applications received	15	27	44%↓
Adoption cases & applications disposed	24	12	100%↑
Average time taken from issue to disposal for adoption case/application (weeks)	20	22	9%↓
Divorce petitions received	527	626	16%↓
Decrees granted in High Court	229	256	11%↓
Decrees absolute issued	230	238	3%↓
Average time taken from issue of divorce petition to date decree granted (weeks)	58	54	7%↑
Official Solicitors Office cases received	50	35	43%↑
Official Solicitors Office cases disposed	33	35	6%↓
Official Solicitors Office caseload at end of quarter	437	387	13%↑

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

7 | Magistrates' Court

Magistrates' Court Quarterly Business

- During the quarter there were 1,011 scheduled, 25 additional and 35 special Magistrates' sitting days (Table 5).
- Within the 1,071 total, 72% were adult criminal, 6% were youth criminal and 21% were civil and family days.

Table 5: Magistrates' Court Sitting Days - January to March 2024 compared with January to March 2023

	Adult	Youth	Civil & Family	Total Quarter 2024	Total Quarter 2023	% change from 2023
Scheduled	718	67	226	1,011	1,065	5%↓
Additional	23	0	2	25	22	14%↑
Special	35	0	0	35	34	3%↑
Total	776	67	228	1,071	1,121	4%↓

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

7 | Magistrates' Court

- There were 827 new civil and family applications and 9,149 new adult and 279 new youth defendants received; corresponding disposals were 789, 9,044 and 303 respectively.
- The average waiting times from first hearing to disposal in the adult and youth criminal courts were 15 weeks and 23 weeks respectively. For civil and family applications it was 34 and 10 weeks respectively from date of receipt to disposal.

Table 6: Magistrates' Court Business - January to March 2024 compared with January to March 2023

	Adult Q1 2024	Adult Q1 2023	% change from 2023	Youth Q1 2024	Youth Q1 2023	% change from 2023	Civil Q1 2024	Civil Q1 2023	% change from 2023	Family Q1 2024	Family Q1 2023	% change from 2023
Defendants or applications received	9,149	9,556	4%↓	279	307	9%↓	112	94	19%↑	715	956	25%↓
Defendants or applications disposed	9,044	9,795	8%↓	303	242	25%↑	100	67	49%↑	689	830	17%↓
Average waiting time (weeks)	15	16	6%↓	23	20	15%↑	34	17	100%↑	10	8	25%↑

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

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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'.

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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'.