

Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland

Perceptions of the Public Prosecution Service

Findings of the PPS Module of the Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey
April – June 2017



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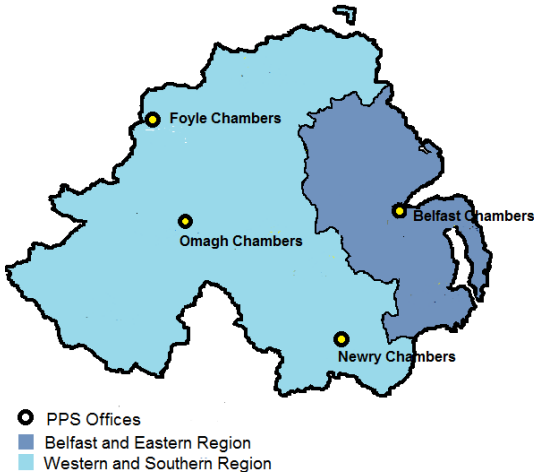
Introduction

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.

PPS Regional Structure



A revised organisational structure was introduced in January 2016 as a result of the PPS Transformation Programme. This included the implementation of a two region model, reducing from the four regions in place previously. Each of the regions, Belfast and Eastern Region and Western and Southern Region, is headed by an Assistant Director (AD). The AD is responsible for working with the courts and the police to provide a high quality prosecution service in their area. The regions deal with a wide range of cases, from the less serious summary cases, which are heard in the Magistrates' Courts, through to more serious indictable cases which are heard in the Crown Court.

A new Serious Crime Unit (SCU) was also implemented in January 2016. The SCU, which is headed by an AD, deals with a range of the most serious offences including murder, manslaughter, rape and serious sexual offences, human trafficking, prostitution and related offences. Prior to January, cases of this type would typically have been dealt with by the regions.

In addition there are three legal sections, based in PPS Headquarters, which are also headed at AD level. These are as follows:

- Central Casework Section which deals with some of the most high profile and difficult cases in Northern Ireland, including files relating to terrorism and organised crime;
- Fraud and Departmental Section which deals with serious and complex fraud files submitted by the police, as well as files from public bodies; and
- High Court and International Section which deals with a range of specialist legal matters (for example, High Court bail applications, extradition and appeals to the Court of Appeal).

Corporate Services is responsible for the organisation's support services such as Policy and Information, Finance, Resource Management and ICT, as well as the Victim and Witness Care Unit (VWCU).

The Omnibus Survey

The Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey is a regular sample survey carried out by the Central Survey Unit (CSU) of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. It is designed to provide a snapshot of the behaviour, lifestyle and views of a representative sample of people in Northern Ireland, and is used to inform Government policy in a range of areas. The survey comprises two distinct parts: core questions about the respondents and their individual circumstances, and a variety of questions commissioned by clients, which seek the views of the public on a range of matters, including criminal justice.

The PPS has commissioned questions for inclusion in the Omnibus Survey on an annual basis since 2006. A total of five questions were included in the 2017 survey in order to gauge the following:

- Public awareness of the PPS and its role (Questions 1 and 2).
- Views as to the PPS's effectiveness (Question 3).
- Public perceptions of the Service's independence, fairness and impartiality (Questions 4 and 5).

Questions 1 and 2 were asked of all respondents. Questions 3, 4 and 5 relate only to those respondents who had heard of the PPS (i.e. respondents who had answered 'yes' at Question 2).

It should be noted that Questions 1 and 3 were asked for the first time in 2015 and 2011 respectively.

The information gathered via the survey is used by the PPS for a variety of purposes, such as informing the development of policy and assessing the effectiveness of the Service's communication. Data in respect of the PPS's effectiveness and its fairness and impartiality are also used as key performance indicators for the Service.

Detailed notes have been supplied, which provide an account of the technical aspects of the survey, including the origin of the sample, response rates and its representativeness (see 'User Information', page 12).

About this Report

This report provides information in respect of the 2017 survey and includes comparisons with 2016. Where appropriate, information from earlier years has also been provided (see tables at Annex A for details). All figures refer to 2017 unless otherwise stated.

Analysis of each of the Service's questions is available across ten key variables, as follows: Age-group, gender, religion, marital status, disability status, dependant status, socio-economic group, employment status, qualification level and PPS Region. For the purposes of this report, the analysis has been limited to gender and religion. However data in respect of any of the remaining variables can be provided on request (see contact details below).

It should be noted that percentages in the accompanying tables may not add to 100% due to rounding or because more than one answer may be given by a respondent.

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

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Survey Findings

Question 1

The criminal justice system in Northern Ireland is made up of a number of different agencies. Which of the following agencies do you think is responsible for making decisions as to whether or not people accused of committing a crime should be prosecuted at court?

Just under seven-tenths (69%) of respondents thought that the PPS was responsible for making decisions as to whether or not people should be prosecuted at court. Other agencies mentioned included the Police Service of Northern Ireland (33%), the Department of Justice for Northern Ireland (28%) and the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (24%).

More men than women (70% and 68% respectively) thought that the PPS was responsible for making prosecution decisions (Table 1). A higher proportion of Protestant than Catholic respondents (72% and 63% respectively) thought that the PPS was responsible for such decisions (Table 2).

Table 1:
Which of the following agencies do you think is responsible for making decisions as to whether or not people accused of committing a crime should be prosecuted at court? *Analysis by gender 2016 and 2017*

Percentage of Respondents

Response	2016			2017		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
Department of Justice for NI	23	27	25	27	28	28
NI Courts and Tribunals Service	15	22	19	24	25	24
Police Service of NI	26	29	28	31	34	33
Public Prosecution Service	70	62	66	70	68	69
Youth Justice Agency of NI	6	7	7	11	13	12
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0
Don't know	4	7	6	3	3	3

Note: Percentages add to more than 100% due to the inclusion of multiple responses.

Table 2:
Which of the following agencies do you think is responsible for making decisions as to whether or not people accused of committing a crime should be prosecuted at court? *Analysis by religion 2016 and 2017*

Percentage of Respondents

Response	2016			2017		
	Catholic	Protestant	All	Catholic	Protestant	All
Department of Justice for NI	22	27	25	28	28	28
NI Courts and Tribunals Service	19	17	19	26	23	24
Police Service of NI	29	26	28	30	34	33
Public Prosecution Service	60	70	66	63	72	69
Youth Justice Agency of NI	7	7	7	11	13	12
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0
Don't know	7	5	6	4	2	3

Note: Percentages add to more than 100% due to the inclusion of multiple responses.

Comparing 2016 and 2017, the percentage of respondents who thought that the PPS was responsible for making prosecution decisions increased from 66% to 69%.

Question 2

Have you heard of the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland, “the PPS”?

Four-fifths (80%) of respondents in the 2017 survey stated that they had heard of the PPS. This compared with 79% in 2016.

More men than women (83% and 78% respectively) had heard of the PPS (Table 3). Eighty-two percent of Protestant respondents had heard of the PPS, compared with 79% of Catholics (Table 4).

Table 3:
Have you heard of the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland, “the PPS”?
Analysis by gender 2016 and 2017

Response	2016			2017		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
Yes	84	75	79	83	78	80
No	16	25	21	17	22	20

Percentage of Respondents

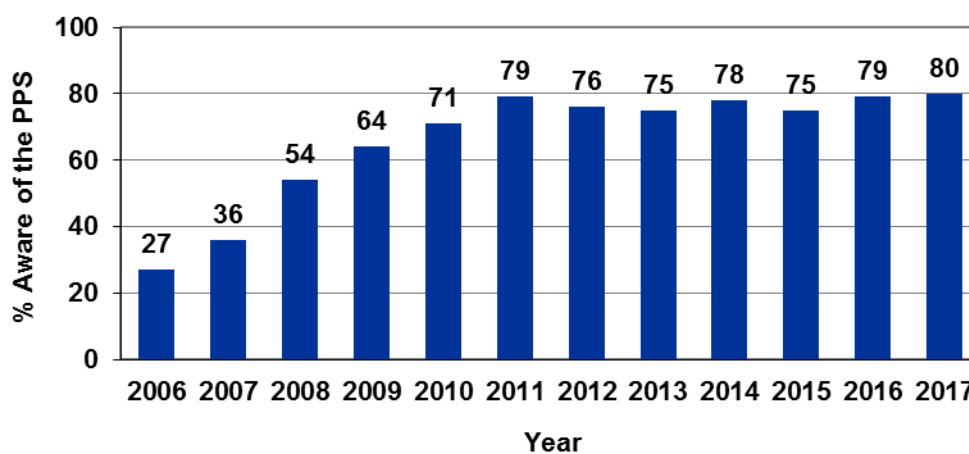
Table 4:
Have you heard of the Public Prosecution Service, “the PPS”?
Analysis by religion 2016 and 2017

Response	2016			2017		
	Catholic	Protestant	All	Catholic	Protestant	All
Yes	76	82	79	79	82	80
No	24	17	21	21	18	20

Percentage of Respondents

Figure 1 (below) presents the findings in respect of this question since it was first asked in 2006. Levels of awareness of the PPS rose steadily over the first six years of the survey, from an initial low of 27% in 2006 to 79% in 2011. The current figure, at 80%, is the highest recorded since the commencement of the survey.

Figure 1: Awareness of the PPS 2006 - 2017



Question 3

How confident are you that the PPS is effective at prosecuting people accused of committing a crime?

Seventy-one percent of respondents in the latest survey were very or fairly confident that the PPS was effective at prosecuting people accused of committing a crime. This was higher than in 2016 (65%).

More women (72%) than men (70%) were very or fairly confident in the PPS's effectiveness, reversing the position from the previous year (Table 5). The outcome for Protestant respondents was higher than for Catholics, with 75% of Protestants stating that they were very or fairly confident, compared with 67% of Catholics. The equivalent figures for 2016 were 65% and 64% respectively (Table 6).

Table 5:
How confident are you that the PPS is effective at prosecuting people accused of committing a crime? *Analysis by gender 2016 and 2017*

Percentage of Respondents

Response	2016			2017		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
Very / fairly confident	69	61	65	70	72	71
Not very confident	23	26	25	24	22	23
Not at all confident	6	7	7	4	4	4
Don't know	2	6	4	2	2	2

Table 6:
How confident are you that the PPS is effective at prosecuting people accused of committing a crime? *Analysis by religion 2016 and 2017*

Percentage of Respondents

Response	2016			2017		
	Catholic	Protestant	All	Catholic	Protestant	All
Very / fairly confident	64	65	65	67	75	71
Not very confident	23	26	25	26	21	23
Not at all confident	7	6	7	6	3	4
Don't know	6	3	4	2	2	2

Question 4

How confident are you that the PPS provides a fair and impartial prosecution service?

Overall 76% of respondents in the latest survey were very or fairly confident in the fairness and impartiality of the PPS, representing an increase on 2016 (71%).

There was only a marginal difference between male and female respondents in this regard; 76% of men were very or fairly confident, compared with 77% of women (Table 7).

Confidence levels were lower for Catholic respondents than for Protestants (71% and 81% respectively - see Table 8).

Table 7:
How confident are you that the PPS provides a fair and impartial prosecution service?
Analysis by gender 2016 and 2017

Percentage of Respondents

Response	2016			2017		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
Very / fairly confident	75	68	71	76	77	76
Not very confident	16	21	19	17	16	17
Not at all confident	6	5	5	5	5	5
Don't know	3	6	4	2	2	2

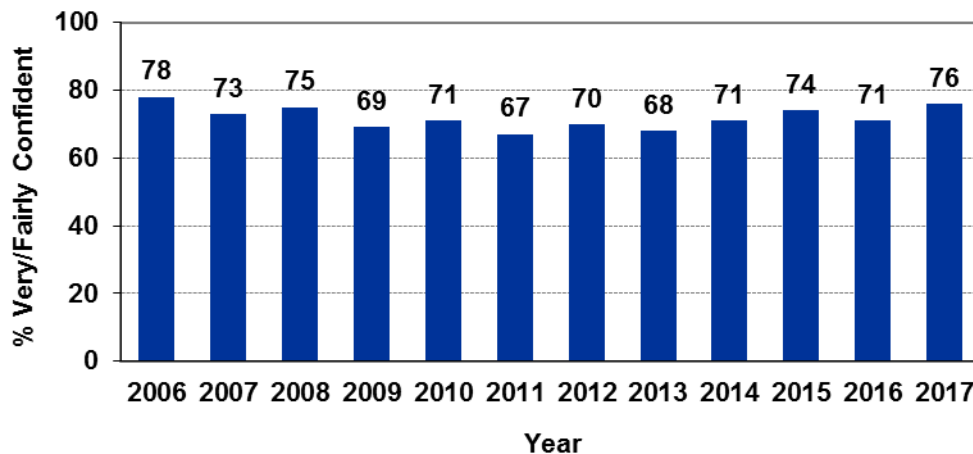
Table 8:
How confident are you that the PPS provides a fair and impartial prosecution service?
Analysis by religion 2016 and 2017

Percentage of Respondents

Response	2016			2017		
	Catholic	Protestant	All	Catholic	Protestant	All
Very / fairly confident	71	73	71	71	81	76
Not very confident	18	19	19	19	14	17
Not at all confident	5	5	5	7	4	5
Don't know	5	2	4	3	1	2

This is a core question in the Omnibus Survey and has been asked each year in which the PPS module has been conducted. In the 2006 survey, almost four-fifths of respondents (78%) reported that they were very or fairly confident in the fairness and impartiality of the Service. This was followed by an outcome of 73% in 2007 and 75% in 2008. Since 2009, results have remained relatively consistent; the figure of 69% for that year compared with the 2016 figure of 71%. The current figure of 76% is the highest since 2006 (see Figure 2, below).

Figure 2: Confidence in the Fairness and Impartiality of the PPS 2006 - 2017



Question 5

How confident are you that the PPS takes its prosecution decisions independently? (that is, independent of police, Government or any other body)

Overall 73% of respondents in the latest survey were very or fairly confident that the PPS takes its decisions independently of any other body. This compared with 67% in 2016.

Nearly three-quarters (74%) of men were very or fairly confident, compared with 72% of women (Table 9). Confidence levels were higher among Protestants than Catholics (76% and 71% respectively - see Table 10).

Table 9:
How confident are you that the PPS takes its prosecution decisions independently?
Analysis by gender 2016 and 2017

Percentage of Respondents

Response	2016			2017		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
Very / fairly confident	71	62	67	74	72	73
Not very confident	20	26	23	19	21	20
Not at all confident	5	6	6	4	3	4
Don't know	4	6	5	3	4	4

Table 10:
How confident are you that the PPS takes its prosecution decisions independently?
Analysis by religion 2016 and 2017

Percentage of Respondents

Response	2016			2017		
	Catholic	Protestant	All	Catholic	Protestant	All
Very / fairly confident	63	71	67	71	76	73
Not very confident	24	22	23	21	18	20
Not at all confident	5	4	6	5	2	4
Don't know	7	3	5	3	4	4

Annex A: Results from previous modules of the Omnibus Survey

Question 1

Which of the following agencies do you think is responsible for making decisions as to whether or not people accused of committing a crime should be prosecuted at court? 2015 - 2017

Percentage of Respondents

Response	Year		
	2015	2016	2017
Department of Justice for NI	25	25	28
NI Courts and Tribunals Service	24	19	24
Police Service of NI	31	28	33
Public Prosecution Service	66	66	69
Youth Justice Agency of NI	7	7	12
Other	0	0	0
Don't know	3	6	3
No. of Respondents	1,114	1,020	910

Note: This question was first asked in 2015.

Question 2

Have you heard of the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland, "the PPS"? 2006 - 2017

Percentage of Respondents

Response	Year										
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2014	2015	2016	2017
Yes	27	36	54	64	71	79	76	78	75	79	80
No	73	64	46	36	29	21	23	22	25	21	20
Don't know	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
No. of Respondents	1,122	1,211	1,238	1,126	1,217	1,109	1,141	1,217	1,114	1,020	910

Question 3

How confident are you that the PPS is effective at prosecuting people accused of committing a crime? 2011 - 2017

Percentage of Respondents

Response	Year						
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Very / fairly confident	57	67	65	67	67	65	71
Not very confident	32	24	27	23	23	25	23
Not at all confident	7	6	6	6	7	7	4
Don't know	3	4	2	4	3	4	2
No. of Respondents	862	869	876	944	855	817	741

Note: This question was first asked in 2011.

Question 4

**How confident are you that the PPS provides a fair and impartial prosecution service?
2006 - 2017**

Percentage of Respondents

Response	Year											
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Very / fairly confident	78	73	75	69	71	67	70	68	71	74	71	76
Not very confident	13	14	16	18	19	22	19	23	18	16	19	17
Not at all confident	5	3	2	5	5	7	5	5	5	7	5	5
Don't know	5	10	6	8	5	3	4	4	5	3	4	2
No. of Respondents	305	432	668	725	858	862	869	876	944	855	817	741

Question 5

How confident are you that the PPS takes its prosecution decisions independently? (that is, independent of police, Government or any other body) 2015 – 2017

Percentage of Respondents

Response	Year		
	2015	2016	2017
Very / fairly confident	64	67	73
Not very confident	22	23	20
Not at all confident	8	6	4
Don't know	5	5	4
No. of Respondents	855	817	741

Note: This question was first asked in 2015.

User information

The sample

The sample for the 2017 Omnibus survey comprised of 2,200 addresses drawn at random from lists supplied by the Land and Property Services Agency. At each address one person aged 16 or over was selected for interview. From an eligible sample of 1,776 individuals, 911 interviews were achieved, giving a response rate of 51%.

Interviews were conducted between 3 April – 6 May, 8 May - 3 June and 5 June – 1 July 2017.

How representative is the sample?

In any survey there is the possibility of non-response bias. Non response bias occurs if the characteristics of non-respondents differ from those of respondents in such a way that they are reflected in the responses given in the survey. Estimates of non-response bias can be obtained by comparing the characteristics of the achieved sample with the distribution of the same characteristics in the general population at the time of sampling. To assess how accurately the Omnibus Survey sample reflects the population of Northern Ireland, CSU compared the sample to the Mid-Year Population Estimates from 2016 in respect of both age-group and gender (see below).

Comparison of Omnibus Survey sample and 2016 Mid-Year Population Estimates

Categories	Percentage of sample / population	
	Omnibus (Selected respondent)	Mid-Year Population Estimates 2016
Age:		
16-24	8	14
25-34	14	16
35-49	26	23
50-64	23	22
65 and over	28	19
Gender:		
Male	45	49
Female	55	51
Base = 100%	911	1,586,373

Sampling error

No sample is likely to reflect precisely the population from which it is drawn. The margin of error varies with the size of the sample and the size of the percentage for a particular response.

An estimate of the amount of error due to the sampling process can be calculated. For a simple random sample design, in which every member of the sampled population has an equal and independent chance of inclusion, the sampling error of any percentage, p , can be calculated by the following formula:

$$s.e. (p) = \sqrt{p*(100-p)/n}$$

where n is the number of respondents on which the percentage is based. The sample for the NI Omnibus Survey is drawn as a random sample, and therefore this formula can be used to calculate the sampling error for any percentage estimate from this survey.

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.

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