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Analytical Services Group

First Time Entrants to the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland 2015/16

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KEY FINDINGS

- In 2015/16, a total of 29,083 offences were recorded as dealt with by conviction or diversion in the justice system in Northern Ireland. Of these, 8,848 were first offences and 20,235 were further offences. First offences constituted 30.4% of all offences in 2015/16. Of these first offences, 37.9% (3,354) were dealt with by way of diversionary disposal, compared to 62.1% (5,494) which were dealt with by conviction.
- Of the 8,848 first time entrants to the criminal justice system in 2015/16, 11.0% (976) were in the 10 – 17 year old age group. First offences accounted for 38.0% of all instances where a conviction or diversion was issued to that age group (976 out of 2,568).
- Similarly, 28.4% (2,517) of the first time entrants were by those in the 18 – 24 year old age group. First offences accounted for 30.8% of all instances where a conviction or diversion was issued to that age group (2,517 out of 8,178).
- First offences accounted for 56.9% (3,354) of all instances where a diversionary disposal was issued in 2015/16. People in the 10 – 17 year old age group were most likely (90.2%, 880) to receive a diversion for a first offence.
- Of all offences dealt with by conviction or diversion, 26.7% (6,334) by males¹ were first offences, compared to 46.9% (2,514) by females. Of all first offences dealt with by diversion or conviction, 71.6% were by males¹, compared to 28.4% by females.
- Just over half, 51.3% (4,536) of all first offences in 2015/16 were motoring offences. Of all instances where a conviction or diversion was issued for offences in that category in 2015/16, 42.5% were for first offences.
- Monetary disposals made up 50.0% (4,420) of all disposals for first offences in 2015/16. First offences accounted for 35.3% of all instances where a monetary penalty was imposed in relation to a conviction or diversion. However, of all instances where imprisonment was imposed as a penalty in 2015/16, first offences accounted for only 4.8% (130 out of 2,731).
- 56.9% (3,354) of all cases dealt with by diversion were for first offences. Of first offences dealt with by diversion, 79.4% (2,664) were dealt with by way of caution. However, while 57.7% of all cautions were for first offences, 87.4% (418) of all PPS ordered youth conference plans were for first offences.

¹ Figures for Males also include organisations, transgender and gender not specified.

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INTRODUCTION

In the 2011-16 Programme for Government, the Minister outlined a commitment to reduce the level of serious crime by reshaping the approach used to tackle factors leading to criminal behaviours within Northern Ireland. A commitment was given to monitor the number of young people entering the criminal justice system for the first time.

This bulletin presents data on first time entrants to the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland for the year 1 April 2015 – 31 March 2016. It aims to provide an overview of the structure of the known offending population in 2015/16, with information on the breakdown of offences committed by new offenders and the disposals received. Findings for the 2015/16 year will also allow some comparison with figures published previously for 2014/15.

COUNTING RULES

Who are first time entrants to the criminal justice system?

For the sake of this publication, first time entrants to the criminal justice system are those who are recorded by the criminal justice system as having committed a proven first offence, whether it was dealt with by way of diversionary disposal or by conviction. The term ‘first time entrants’ equates directly to that of ‘first offence’, the phraseology used to describe data presented within this document. However, ‘further offences’ do not relate directly to the number of offenders who have committed further offences, as an offender may have had more than one further conviction or diversionary disposal within the time period covered by the report.

What counts as a first offence?

An offence is defined as a ‘first offence’ if it results in the offender receiving their first diversion, warning, caution or conviction – i.e., they have no previous criminal record in Northern Ireland. Offences resulting in further diversions, warnings, cautions or convictions are known as ‘further offences’, since the offender already has a recorded criminal history.

Where an offender has had a diversion imposed, been warned, cautioned or convicted of several offences on the same occasion, only one offence, the principal offence, is counted. The basis for selection of the principal offence is laid down in rules issued by the Home Office. In summary, these stipulate that only offences with an admission or finding of guilty are included and, the principal offence is usually taken as that for which the greatest penalty was imposed.

The offence counted and used in the compilation of figures in this bulletin is the one on which the court took its final decision, or for which a diversionary disposal was issued and recorded as completed with the Public Prosecution Service (PPS). In relation to convictions, this is not necessarily the same offence as that for which the defendant was initially proceeded against. The decision recorded is that reached by the court and takes no account of any subsequent appeal to a higher court.

Out of court disposals not taken into account in this bulletin are Penalty Notices for disorder (PNDs). PNDs are a fixed penalty designed to tackle low-level, anti-social and nuisance offending for offenders aged 18 and over and are issued for a range of minor offences. They were introduced in Northern Ireland on the 6th June 2012 as a result of the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. PNDs provide police with a swift financial punishment to deal with misbehaviour and a practical deterrent to future re-offending. However, they do not require an admission of guilt and do not form part of an individual's criminal record. Further information on PNDs can be accessed at <http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/police-issued-penalty-notices>.

Data source

The data used in this bulletin were taken from the Causeway Data Sharing Mechanism (DSM1). They were extracted primarily based on records contained on the Criminal Records Viewer (CRV). The CRV is held on Causeway and utilises data which originated in the PSNI, PPS and 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.

Data quality and validation

Although numerous validation exercises have been conducted in relation to both prosecutions data and diversions data, to ensure data quality, the statistics contained in this publication nevertheless still originate from various administrative data sources and caution should therefore be exercised when making comparisons with previous years. These data sources have different purposes, aims and objectives and are kept for non-statistical purposes, e.g., CRV is maintained for reviewing and vetting individuals' criminal records.

Interpreting the data

Figures for first time entrants to the justice system in Northern Ireland, as reported in this bulletin, are based on those who have had a conviction at any time since 1960 and those who had either a conviction or a diversionary disposal since the implementation of the Causeway system DSM1, in December 2009. This means that the reported rate of first offences may be slightly higher than the actuality, as, in some cases, first offences would have been dealt with by means of diversionary disposal, information on which is not available prior to the introduction of DSM1. However, any likely impact of this statistical effect should lessen with the passing of time. Reoffending statistics suggest that, in most crime categories, persons who commit a proven re-offence do so within one year. As a result, the first year when it might be considered that the effect of diversions data being unavailable for the period prior to 2010 might be reduced is 2011/12 and data have therefore been provided as part of this series from that point forward.

In this publication, first offences dealt with by conviction are distinct from those instances counted as a first conviction. This is because an individual receiving a first conviction may have previously been dealt with within the justice system by way of diversion. The following table compares first offences where a conviction has been imposed in 2015/16 with those cases of first convictions where diversions previously received have not been taken into consideration. The difference between the two rates is explained by the inclusion of diversions information for those cases where a diversion was an offender's first true first contact with the justice system.

First convictions and first offences dealt with by conviction, 2015/16

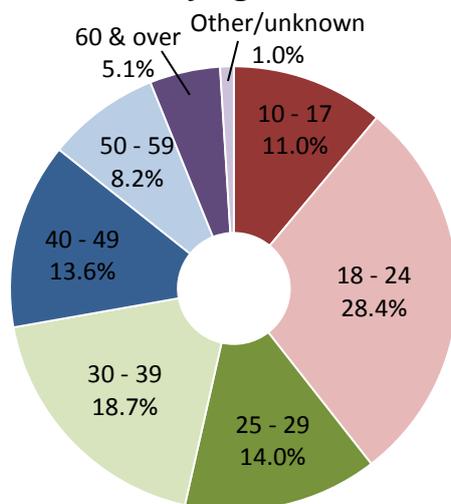
First convictions	First offence dealt with by conviction	All convictions	First convictions as % all convictions	First offences as % all convictions
6,663	5,494	23,190	28.7%	23.7%

Statistical coverage

The data included in the bulletin are based on those who were convicted in a court, or who had a diversionary disposal recorded as completed in Northern Ireland for the year 1 April 2015 – 31 March 2016. Statistical coverage is restricted to those criminal prosecutions or diversions in which the Police Service for Northern Ireland, the National Crime Agency, the Airport Constabulary or Harbour Police were involved and breaches of community sentences. Prosecutions brought by government departments, public bodies and private individuals are not included.

and diversions for the 10 – 17 year old age group, 38.0% (976) were first offences (Table 1a).

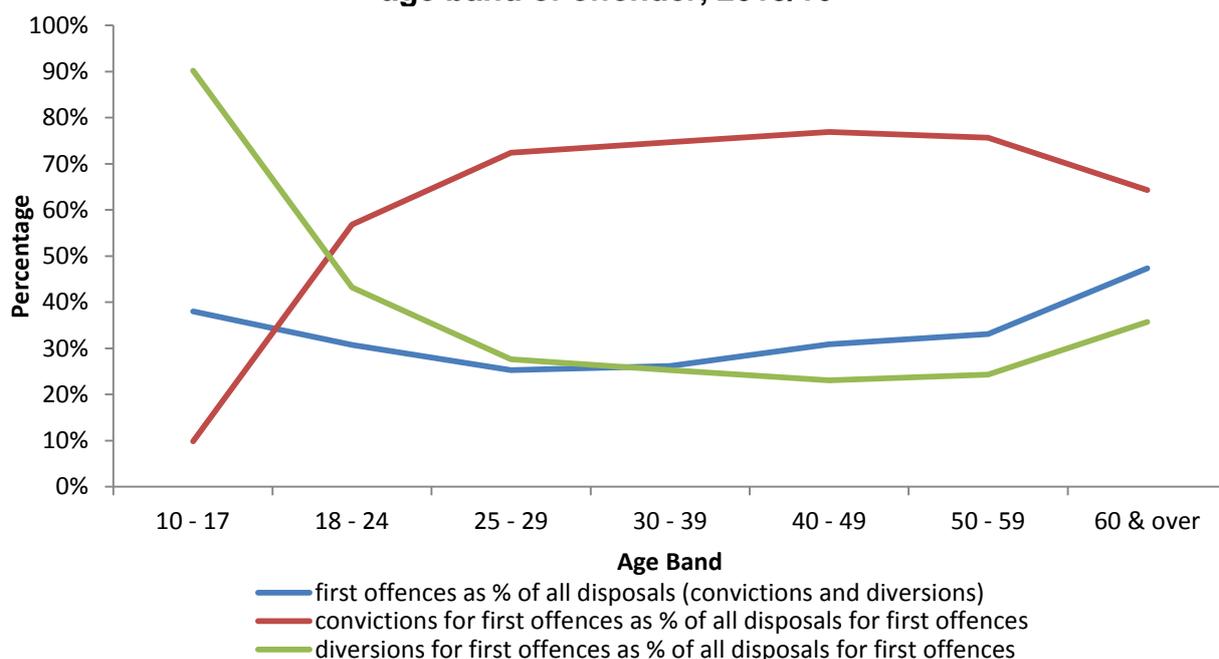
Figure 2: First offences by age band of offender, 2015/16



Young people in the 10 – 17 year old age group received 25.5% (1,501) of all diversionary disposals (26.2% (880) of all diversions for first offences), compared to 4.6% (1,067) of all convictions (1.7% (96) of convictions for first offences) (Tables 1c and 1d).

In 2015/16, 28.4% (2,517) of first offences were by people in the 18 – 24 year old age group. Of these, 43.2% (1,087) were dealt with by way of diversion and 58.2% of all diversions for 18 – 24 year olds were for first offences. First offences by 18 – 24 year olds made up only 22.7% (1,430) convictions for that age group in 2015/16, but 26.0% of all convictions for first offences in 2015/16 (Tables 1c and 1d).

Figure 3: First offences as percentage of first/all convictions and diversions by age band of offender, 2015/16



The rate of first convictions in 2015/16, whether or not it was for a first offence, was 28.7% (6,663) overall (compared with 28.3% in 2014/15). This compares to a rate of 23.7% (5,494) for convictions for first offences only (which has not changed from 2014/15). For those in the 10 - 17 year old age group, the rate of first convictions overall was 22.8% (243), up from 21.4% in 2014/15. For first offences, the rate of conviction for 10 – 17 year olds was 9.0% (96), higher than the rate of 7.2% for 2014/15. People in the 10 – 17 year old age group were most likely (90.2%, 880) to receive a diversion for a first offence in 2015/16 (Tables 1b, 1c and 1d).

Gender

In 2015/16, 26.7% (6,334) of all offences by males² dealt with by conviction or diversion were first offences, compared to 46.9% (2,514) by females. Of all first offences dealt with by diversion or conviction, 71.6% were by males, compared to 28.4% by females (Table 2a).

In 2015/16, 53.6% (2,373) of all diversions issued to males² were for first offences, while 20.5% (3,961) of all convictions handed down to males in 2015/16 were for first offences. The rate of first convictions in 2015/16, whether or not it was for a first offence, was 25.4% (4,900) for males (Tables 2b, 2c and 2d).

For females, 67.1% (981) of all diversions were for first offences and 39.3% (1,533) of all convictions were for first offences. The rate of first convictions in 2015/16, whether or not it was for a first offence, was 45.2% (1,763) for females (Tables 2b, 2c and 2d).

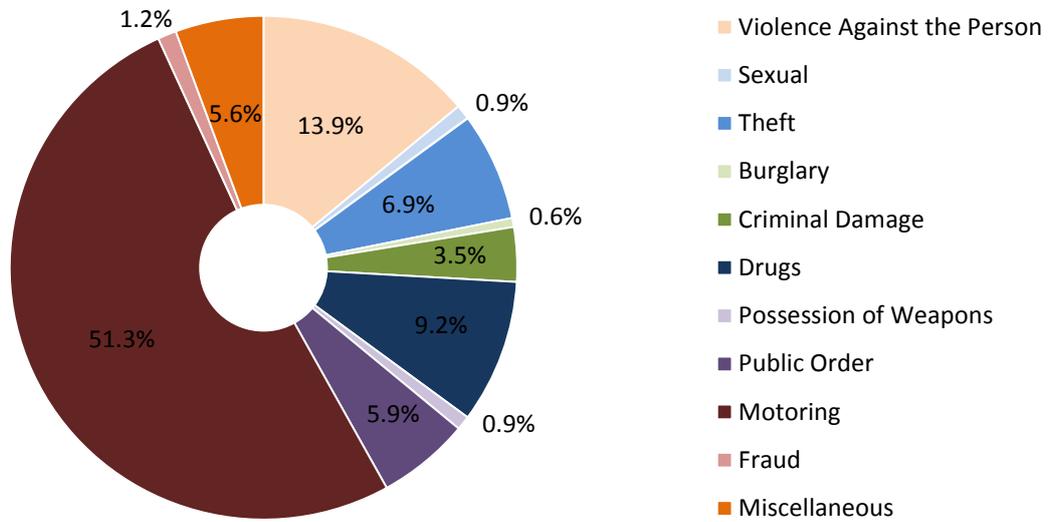
Offence Classification

Of all first offences dealt with by way of diversion or conviction, 51.3% (4,536) were for motoring offences, while 13.9% (1,233) were for violence against the person offences (VAP), 9.2% (816) were for drugs and 6.9% (614) were for offences in the theft category (Table 3a).

Of all offence classifications, sexual offences (48.8%, 83), fraud (43.2%, 105) and motoring offences (42.5%, 4,536) were the offence classifications where first offences made up the largest proportion of the total convictions and diversions for offences in those categories in 2015/16 (Table 3a).

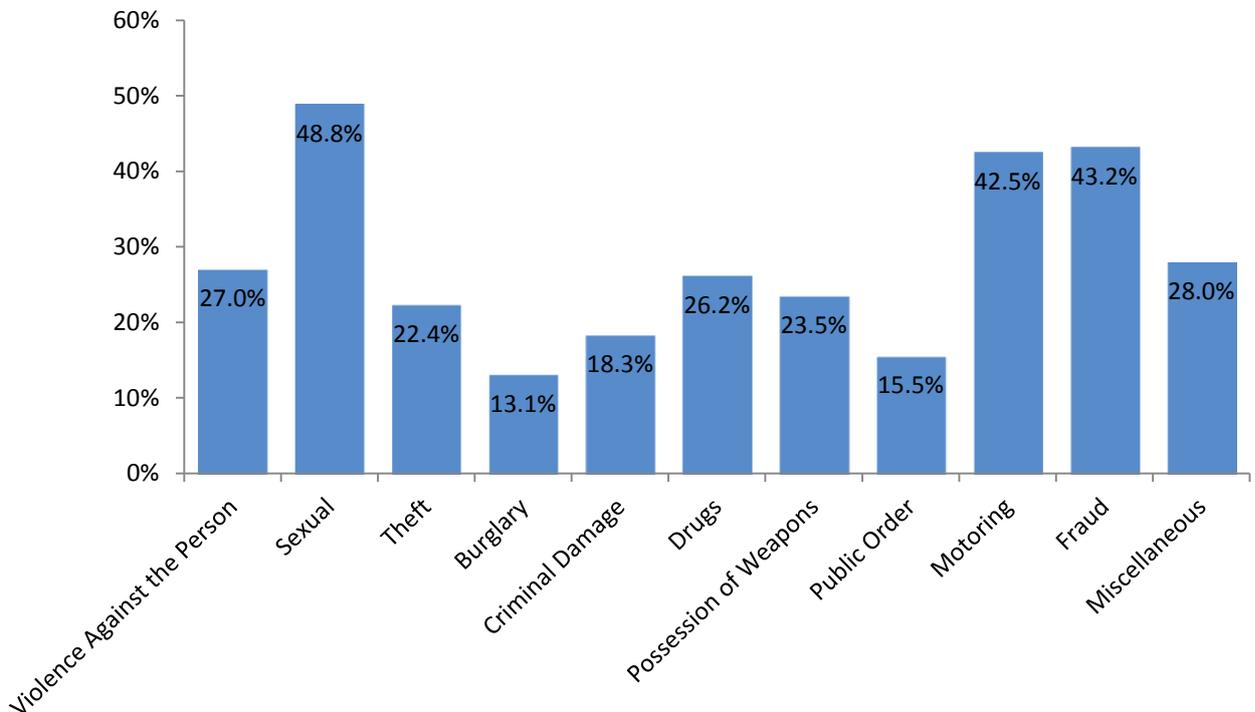
² Figures for Males also include organisations, transgender and gender not specified.

Figure 4: First offences by offence classification, 2015/16¹



¹ Does not include robbery as < 0.1%.

Figure 5: First offences as percentage of all convictions and diversions by offence classification, 2015/16



As was the case in 2014/15, robbery (2 out of 22 cases) burglary (13.1%, 51) and public order (15.5%, 522) were the offence classifications where first offences made up the smallest proportion of the total convictions or diversions for offences in those categories in 2015/16 (Table 3a).

The offence categories where first offences were dealt with mainly by diversion in 2015/16 were drugs (82.1%, 670), public order (76.8%, 401) and possession of weapons (75.0%, 60). Conversely, first offences in the motoring (88.2%, 4,001), sexual (67.5%, 56) and fraud (61.9%, 65) categories were mostly dealt with by conviction in 2015/16 (Table 3e).

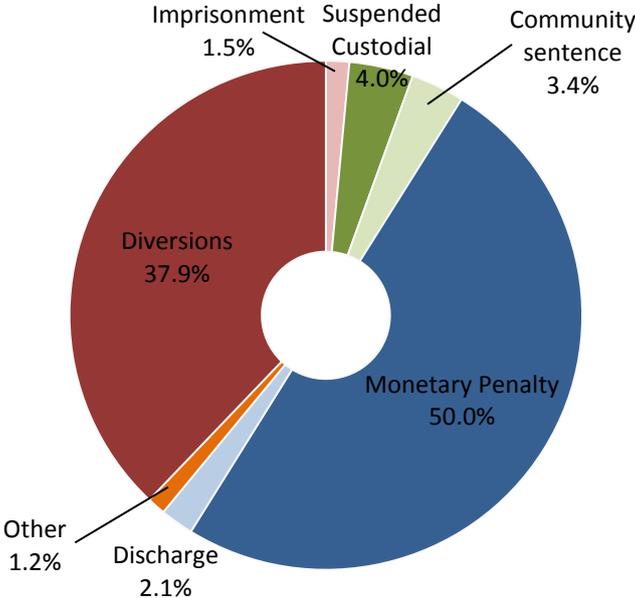
Disposal type

Of all first offences in 2015/16, 37.9% (3,354) were dealt with by way of diversion, compared to 36.8% (3,537) in 2014/15. This accounted for 11.5% of all disposals in 2015/16, whether for first offences or further offences dealt with by diversion or conviction (Table 4a).

Monetary penalties were imposed for 50.0% (4,420) of first offences and first offences accounted for 35.3% of those receiving a monetary penalty upon conviction, up slightly from 34.5% in 2014/15. Imprisonment disposals were the outcome in relation to only 1.5% (130) of all first offences. In fact, only 4.8% of all imprisonment disposals in 2015/16 were for first offences (Table 4a).

Suspended custodial disposals were imposed in relation to 4.0% (357) of all first offences, though of those offences for which a suspended custodial disposal was the outcome, 9.9% were for first offences. Community sentences were imposed in 3.4% (298) of disposals for first offences and, of those offences for which a community sentence was the outcome, 9.7% were for first offences in 2015/16 (Table 4a).

Figure 6: First offences by disposal type, 2015/16



For first offences dealt with by way of diversion in 2015/16, most (79.4%, 2,664) were dealt with by way of caution, whereas PPS ordered youth conference plans (8.1%, 272) and informed warnings (12.5%, 418) accounted for substantially smaller

proportions of the total. First offences made up 87.4% (418 out of 478) of all informed warnings issued in 2015/16. This compares to 57.7% (2,664 out of 4,620) of cautions and 34.2% (272 out of 795) of PPS ordered youth conference plans (Table 4d).

APPENDIX 1

Table 1a: First offences^{1,2} as percentage of all convictions and diversions by age band, 2015/16

Age band	2014/15	2015/16		
	First offences as % of all convictions and diversions	First offences	All convictions and diversions	First offences as % of all convictions and diversions
10 - 17	35.7%	976	2,568	38.0%
18 - 24	31.5%	2,517	8,178	30.8%
25 - 29	26.0%	1,242	4,909	25.3%
30 - 39	25.9%	1,653	6,315	26.2%
40 - 49	29.7%	1,199	3,884	30.9%
50 - 59	34.2%	723	2,183	33.1%
60 & over	46.6%	451	952	47.4%
Other/unknown	92.7%	87	94	92.6%
Total	30.4%	8,848	29,083	30.4%

Table 1b: First convictions as percentage of all convictions by age band, 2015/16

Age band	2014/15	2015/16		
	First convictions as % all convictions	First convictions	All convictions	First convictions as % all convictions
10 - 17	21.4%	243	1,067	22.8%
18 - 24	32.8%	2,098	6,311	33.2%
25 - 29	24.3%	1,021	4,275	23.9%
30 - 39	24.2%	1,361	5,529	24.6%
40 - 49	27.5%	982	3,347	29.3%
50 - 59	32.0%	573	1,857	30.9%
60 & over	39.4%	308	723	42.6%
Other/unknown	92.6%	77	81	95.1%
Total	28.3%	6,663	23,190	28.7%

Table 1c: First offences^{1,2} as percentage of all convictions by age band, 2015/16

Age band	2014/15	2015/16		
	First offences as % all convictions	First offences	All convictions	First offences as % all convictions
10 - 17	7.2%	96	1,067	9.0%
18 - 24	23.1%	1,430	6,311	22.7%
25 - 29	21.5%	899	4,275	21.0%
30 - 39	22.5%	1,235	5,529	22.3%
40 - 49	26.2%	922	3,347	27.5%
50 - 59	30.4%	547	1,857	29.5%
60 & over	37.3%	290	723	40.1%
Other/unknown	92.6%	75	81	92.6%
Total	23.7%	5,494	23,190	23.7%

Table 1d: First offences^{1, 2, 3} as percentage of all diversions by age band, 2015/16

Age band	2014/15	2015/16		
	First offences as % all diversions	First offences	All diversions	First offences as % all diversions
10 - 17	58.2%	880	1,501	58.6%
18 - 24	61.3%	1,087	1,867	58.2%
25 - 29	58.0%	343	634	54.1%
30 - 39	52.5%	418	786	53.2%
40 - 49	51.2%	277	537	51.6%
50 - 59	56.1%	176	326	54.0%
60 & over	76.9%	161	229	70.3%
Other/unknown	*	12	13	*
Total	58.4%	3,354	5,893	56.9%

Table 2a: First offences^{1, 2} as percentage of all convictions and diversions by gender, 2015/16

Gender	2014/15	2015/16		
	First offences as % of all convictions and diversions	First offences	All convictions and diversions	First offences as % of all convictions and diversions
Male	26.2%	6,334	23,717	26.7%
Female	49.0%	2,514	5,366	46.9%
Total	30.4%	8,848	29,083	30.4%

Table 2b: First convictions as percentage of all convictions by gender, 2015/16

Gender	2014/15	2015/16		
	First convictions as % all convictions	First convictions	All convictions	First convictions as % all convictions
Male	24.4%	4,900	19,287	25.4%
Female	47.6%	1,763	3,903	45.2%
Total	28.3%	6,663	23,190	28.7%

Table 2c: First offences^{1, 2} as percentage of all convictions by gender, 2015/16

Gender	2014/15	2015/16		
	First offences as % all convictions	First offences	All convictions	First offences as % all convictions
Male	20.0%	3,961	19,287	20.5%
Female	42.4%	1,533	3,903	39.3%
Total	23.7%	5,494	23,190	23.7%

Table 2d: First offences^{1, 2} as percentage of all diversions by gender, 2015/16

Gender	2014/15	2015/16		
	First offences as % all diversions	First offences	All diversions	First offences as % all diversions
Male	55.2%	2,373	4,430	53.6%
Female	68.3%	981	1,463	67.1%
Total	58.4%	3,354	5,893	56.9%

Table 3a: First offences^{1, 2, 3} as percentage of all convictions and diversions by offence classification, 2015/16

Offence classification	2014/15	2015/16		
	First offences as % of all convictions and diversions	First offences	All convictions and diversions	First offences as % of all convictions and diversions
Violence Against the Person	26.5%	1,233	4,563	27.0%
Sexual	47.0%	83	170	48.8%
Robbery	8.3%	2	22	*
Theft	21.5%	614	2,746	22.4%
Burglary	12.4%	51	388	13.1%
Criminal Damage	18.9%	309	1,687	18.3%
Drugs	27.2%	816	3,115	26.2%
Possession of Weapons	23.2%	80	341	23.5%
Public Order	15.1%	522	3,361	15.5%
Motoring	41.4%	4,536	10,669	42.5%
Fraud	38.0%	105	243	43.2%
Miscellaneous	30.2%	497	1,778	28.0%
Total	30.4%	8,848	29,083	30.4%

Table 3b: First convictions³ as percentage of all convictions by offence classification, 2015/16

Offence classification	2014/15	2015/16		
	First convictions as % all convictions	First convictions	All convictions	First convictions as % all convictions
Violence Against the Person	23.2%	747	3,318	22.5%
Sexual	45.8%	60	134	44.8%
Robbery	11.4%	3	20	*
Theft	15.0%	337	2,119	15.9%
Burglary	12.9%	43	341	12.6%
Criminal Damage	13.1%	173	1,241	13.9%
Drugs	14.9%	281	1,792	15.7%
Possession of Weapons	18.0%	31	228	13.6%
Public Order	10.4%	256	2,592	9.9%
Motoring	42.2%	4,423	9,957	44.4%
Fraud	36.2%	77	190	40.5%
Miscellaneous	21.2%	232	1,258	18.4%
Total	28.3%	6,663	23,190	28.7%

Table 3c: First offences^{1, 2, 3} as percentage of all convictions by offence classification, 2015/16

Offence classification	2014/15	2015/16		
	First offences as % all convictions	First offences	All convictions	First offences as % all convictions
Violence Against the Person	16.8%	547	3,318	16.5%
Sexual	42.9%	56	134	41.8%
Robbery	5.7%	1	20	*
Theft	10.3%	244	2,119	11.5%
Burglary	7.8%	30	341	8.8%
Criminal Damage	7.7%	94	1,241	7.6%
Drugs	8.9%	146	1,792	8.1%
Possession of Weapons	11.2%	20	228	8.8%
Public Order	5.6%	121	2,592	4.7%
Motoring	38.7%	4,001	9,957	40.2%
Fraud	33.2%	65	190	34.2%
Miscellaneous	16.7%	169	1,258	13.4%
Total	23.7%	5,494	23,190	23.7%

Table 3d: First offences^{1, 2, 3} as percentage of all diversions by offence classification, 2015/16

Offence classification	2014/15	2015/16		
	First offences as % all diversions	First offences	All diversions	First offences as % all diversions
Violence Against the Person	55.6%	686	1,245	55.1%
Sexual	*	27	36	*
Robbery	*	1	2	*
Theft	59.8%	370	627	59.0%
Burglary	43.8%	21	47	*
Criminal Damage	50.7%	215	446	48.2%
Drugs	53.7%	670	1,323	50.6%
Possession of Weapons	55.0%	60	113	53.1%
Public Order	54.4%	401	769	52.1%
Motoring	72.7%	535	712	75.1%
Fraud	*	40	53	75.5%
Miscellaneous	60.9%	328	520	63.1%
Total	58.4%	3,354	5,893	56.9%

Table 3e: First offences^{1, 2, 3} as percentage of all convictions and diversions by offence classification and disposal, 2015/16

Offence classification	Disposal type	First offences	All convictions and diversions	First offences as % of all convictions and diversions
Violence Against the Person	Convictions	547	4,563	12.0%
	Diversions	686		15.0%
Sexual	Convictions	56	170	32.9%
	Diversions	27		15.9%
Robbery	Convictions	1	22	*
	Diversions	1		*
Theft	Convictions	244	2,746	8.9%
	Diversions	370		13.5%
Burglary	Convictions	30	388	7.7%
	Diversions	21		5.4%
Criminal Damage	Convictions	94	1,687	5.6%
	Diversions	215		12.7%
Drugs	Convictions	146	3,115	4.7%
	Diversions	670		21.5%
Possession of Weapons	Convictions	20	341	5.9%
	Diversions	60		17.6%
Public Order	Convictions	121	3,361	3.6%
	Diversions	401		11.9%
Motoring	Convictions	4,001	10,669	37.5%
	Diversions	535		5.0%
Fraud	Convictions	65	243	26.7%
	Diversions	40		16.5%
Miscellaneous	Convictions	169	1,778	9.5%
	Diversions	328		18.4%
Total	Convictions	5,494	29,083	18.9%
	Diversions	3,354		11.5%

Table 4a: First offences^{1, 2} as percentage of all convictions and diversions by disposal type, 2015/16

Disposal category	2014/15	2015/16		
	First offences as % of all convictions and diversions	First offences	All convictions and diversions	First offences as % of all convictions and diversions
Imprisonment	6.3%	130	2,731	4.8%
Suspended Custodial	10.3%	357	3,589	9.9%
Community sentence	10.4%	298	3,066	9.7%
Monetary Penalty	34.5%	4,420	12,522	35.3%
Discharge	20.0%	186	1,016	18.3%
Other	40.0%	103	266	38.7%
Diversions	58.4%	3,354	5,893	56.9%
Total	30.4%	8,848	29,083	30.4%

Table 4b: First convictions as percentage of all convictions by disposal type, 2015/16

Disposal category	2014/15	2015/16		
	First convictions as % all convictions	First convictions	All convictions	First convictions as % all convictions
Imprisonment	7.4%	146	2,731	5.3%
Suspended Custodial	12.5%	451	3,589	12.6%
Community sentence	19.1%	540	3,066	17.6%
Monetary Penalty	39.3%	5,101	12,522	40.7%
Discharge	29.4%	300	1,016	29.5%
Other	46.5%	125	266	47.0%
Total	28.3%	6,663	23,190	28.7%

Table 4c: First offences^{1,2} as percentage of all convictions by disposal type, 2015/16

Disposal category	2014/15	2015/16		
	First offences as % all convictions	First offences	All convictions	First offences as % all convictions
Imprisonment	6.3%	130	2,731	4.8%
Suspended Custodial	10.3%	357	3,589	9.9%
Community sentence	10.4%	298	3,066	9.7%
Monetary Penalty	34.5%	4,420	12,522	35.3%
Discharge	20.0%	186	1,016	18.3%
Other	40.0%	103	266	38.7%
Total	23.7%	5,494	23,190	23.7%

Table 4d: First offences^{1,2} as percentage of all diversions by disposal type, 2015/16

Disposal category	2014/15	2015/16		
	First offences as % all diversions	First offences	All diversions	First offences as % all diversions
Caution	59.0%	2,664	4,620	57.7%
PPS Ordered Youth Conference Plan	33.1%	272	795	34.2%
Informed warning	90.6%	418	478	87.4%
Total	58.4%	3,354	5,893	56.9%

Source: Department of Justice

Notes:

1. Figures are based on those who have had a conviction at any time since 1960 and those who had either a conviction or a diversionary disposal since the implementation of the Causeway system, DSM1, in December 2009. This means the rate of first time offenders may appear slightly higher than the actuality, as, in some cases, first offences would have been dealt with by means of diversionary disposal. However, any likely impact should lessen with the passing of time.
2. Figures are calculated using principal offence methodology.
3. Percentages cannot be presented where the denominator is less than 50.
4. Includes organisations, transgender and gender not specified.
5. Figures for 2014/15 are included in tables for comparison.

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