



An Official Statistics Publication for Scotland

Criminal court cases activity from Quarter 1 2014/15 to Quarter 2 2020/21

This is the tenth statistical bulletin providing quarterly Official Statistics on first and second instance criminal case activity in the High, Sheriff, Justice of the Peace and Sheriff Criminal Appeal courts in Scotland.

Notice

In October 2020, to meet the needs of justice partners, court users and the media, the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service commenced the publication of a monthly workbook of Management Information showing interim monthly business volumes and trends for first instance criminal cases calling at Scottish courts during the pandemic. The monthly workbook, which is not designated as Official Statistics, may be used alongside these quarterly Official Statistics. The workbook will be updated more frequently than this quarterly Official Statistics series and it contains an estimate of trials in the system without a trial diet so that a forecast of scheduled trials can be provided. <http://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/official-statistics>

The Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service (SCTS) aims to provide the people, buildings and services to enable criminal cases to call in court. The statistics show the volume of criminal first and second instance court cases over time as they flow through court.

The statistics in this bulletin do not have information relating to accused persons in terms of what they were charged with or their resulting conviction or sentence as there are already well-established National Statistics on these aspects of criminal justice. This bulletin does not cover court cases relating to civil business. See the Scottish Government's website for statistics relating to criminal or civil justice:

<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Crime-Justice>

Commentary on high level trends in first instance criminal court case activity

All Criminal Courts

The number of first instance criminal cases registered in Scottish courts has risen significantly to 23,534 in Q2 2020/21, showing an increase of 51% when compared to the first quarter of 2020/21. Q2 2020/21's figure is approximately 89% of the average per quarter in 2019/20 which provides a clear indication that business levels are returning to normal during the Coronavirus pandemic.

The number of trials scheduled is an indication of system capacity as it shows the volume of trial business at the end of each financial year or quarter. There has been a 38% rise to 30,956 trials when scheduled trials at the end of June 2020 are compared to those still to call as at the end of September 2020. This is wholly attributable to Summary business which saw trial diets being fixed for the priority cases that were entering pleas. In Solemn business, a trial diet can only be fixed when all parties are ready to go to trial.

The percentage of trials adjourned due to lack of court time is 1.2% in the second quarter of 2020/21. This is a fall of 4.4 percentage points when compared to 2014/15 (5.6%).

Despite the challenging conditions due to the pandemic, the volume of cases concluded in the quarter stands at 15,643 which is over four times the number of cases concluded in Q1 2020/21.

The High Court of Justiciary

For the first time since Q3 2017/18, the volume of indictments registered in a quarter has fallen below 200 with Q2 2020/21 showing as 177.

There were 36 evidence led trials in the quarter and no adjournments due to lack of court time.

Trials scheduled at the end of Q2 2020/21 is 360 which is a decrease on the 390 reported as scheduled at the end of Q1 2020/21. This is due to no new trial diets being fixed in the period coupled with trial indictments concluding.

87 indictments were concluded in the quarter.

The Sheriff Court – solemn business

The volume of petitions registered is a useful indicator of future levels of solemn business as petitions tend to become registered indictments at the High Court or Sheriff Court. The number of petitions registered in Q2 2020/21 is 3,210 which is 28% higher than the previous quarter and remains higher than all quarters during 2019/20.

The number of indictments registered has also increased from 893 in Q1 2020/21 to 1,457 in Q2 2020/21, a rise of 63%.

In this reporting quarter, there were no evidence led trials and accordingly, no trials were adjourned due to lack of court time. The number of trials scheduled at the end of September 2020 has increased by 23% when compared with trials scheduled to call at the end of June 2020. This is as a result of cases beginning to progress through the Courts with trial diets being fixed.

During the quarter, 2,999 cases called for first diet, continued first diet or Section 76 hearing.

816 indictments were concluded in the quarter.

The Sheriff Court – summary business

Registered complaints rose by 71% when Q2 2020/21 (18,097) and Q1 2020/21 (10,572) are compared.

Cases called for trial in Q2 2020/21 are 5,741 with 802 evidence led trials. 1.2% of trials were adjourned due to lack of court time.

The volume of scheduled trials is 25,146 as at the end of September 2020 which is an increase of 41% since the end of June 2020 and an 80% rise since the end of March 2020.

11,070 complaints were concluded in the quarter.

The Justice of the Peace Court

For the reporting quarter, the volume of cases registered remains consistent with the volumes recorded in Q1 2020/21, at 3,803 for the latest quarter.

There were 92 evidence led trials in Q2 2020/21 with 1.3% adjournments due to lack of court time. The number of trials scheduled at the end of September 2020 has risen by 30% to 4,837 when compared to the end of June 2020.

3,670 complaints were concluded in the quarter.

Commentary on high level trends in second instance criminal court case activity

All criminal appeals

The volume of criminal appeals registered has dropped between 2014/15 and 2019/20 by 16% to 1,241 appeals.

Of the appeals registered in 2019/20, 15% relate to appeal solely against conviction, 66% to appeal solely against sentence and 19% to a joint appeal against conviction and sentence showing that appeals solely against sentence are the most common type, following the trend of preceding years.

Sustained appeals expressed as a percentage of registered appeals rose from 11% in 2014/15 to 18% in 2019/20.

The most successful type of appeal continues to be solely against sentence which account for 84% of all sustained appeals in 2019/20.

49% of appeals registered relate to summary business and 51% relate to solemn business. . 89% of summary appeals are from Sheriff Court cases and 11% are from Justice of the Peace Court cases.

Appeals at the High Court of Justiciary

Since the Sheriff Criminal Appeal Court commenced on 22nd September 2015, registration of appeals at the High Court of Justiciary sits at the anticipated levels following the introduction of the new appeal Court. Approximately 600 appeals per year are being received. Three in five relate to appeals solely against sentence.

2019/20 saw 91 sustained appeals at the High Court with 73% of these being solely against sentence.

Appeals at the Sheriff Criminal Appeal Court

The Sheriff Criminal Appeal Court saw 611 appeals registered in 2019/20 which is a decrease of 13% when compared to the 700 registered in 2016/17 – the first full financial year since the new appeal court commenced in September 2015. Three in four relate to appeal solely against sentence.

Similar to 2018/19, in 2019/20 22% of appeals registered at the Sheriff Criminal Appeal Court were sustained. The most common type of successful appeal is solely against sentence at 92% of sustained appeals.

Data tables

The Q2 2020/21 Excel workbook with interactive tables and charts is located on webpage: <http://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/official-statistics>

Background

This is the tenth bulletin in a series of quarterly reports on criminal court activity and can be viewed on webpage: <http://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/official-statistics>

Revisions and corrections

There are no revisions or corrections to report.

Guidance on definitions and data

See the Glossary and Data Notes worksheet within the Excel workbook.

Shaping Scotland's Court Services

As part of [Shaping Scotland's Court Services](#) work, a number of courts closed with relevant live business transferring to receiving courts.

Closed Court	Receiving Court
<i>End of November 2013</i>	
Annan JP Court Cumbernauld JP Court Dornoch Sheriff and JP Court Irvine JP Court Kirkcudbright Sheriff and JP Court Motherwell JP Court Portree JP Court Rothsay Sheriff Court Stornoway JP Court Wick JP Court	Dumfries JP Court Coatbridge JP Court Tain Sheriff and JP Court Kilmarnock JP Court Dumfries Sheriff and JP Court Hamilton JP Court Portree Sheriff Court Greenock Sheriff and JP Court Stornoway Sheriff Court Wick Sheriff Court
<i>End of May 2014</i>	
Arbroath Sheriff and JP Court Cupar Sheriff and JP Court Stonehaven Sheriff and JP Court	Forfar Sheriff and JP Court Dundee Sheriff and JP Court Aberdeen Sheriff and JP Court
<i>End of July 2015</i>	
Dingwall Sheriff and JP Court Duns Sheriff and JP Court Haddington Sheriff and JP Court Peebles Sheriff and JP Court	Inverness Sheriff and JP Court Jedburgh Sheriff and JP Court Edinburgh Sheriff and JP Court Selkirk Sheriff and JP Court

Contacts

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Further information about Official and National Statistics in Scotland is available from <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/producingstats>

Access to official statistics in their final form before they are published is restricted. The following list details who received pre-release access to the statistics in their final form within the maximum period of 5 working days before publication:

Chief Operations Officer, Court and OPG Operations, SCTS
Director of Operations - Delivery, SCTS
Principal Clerk of Session & Justiciary, SCTS
Deputy Principal Clerk of Justiciary, SCTS
Head of Corporate Communications, SCTS
Media Officer, Corporate Communications, SCTS
Web developer, Information Technology Unit, SCTS
Head of Policy, Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service
Statistician, Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service
Statistician, Justice Analytical Services, Scottish Government
Media Officer, Justice Communications, Scottish Government
Policy Implementation Manager, Criminal Justice Division, Scottish Government

The next quarterly bulletin of Criminal Court statistics will be published in March 2021. The exact date of the report will be announced via the Scottish Government's Forthcoming Publications Schedule - <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/ForthcomingPubs> at least 4 weeks in advance and on the SCTS' Official Statistics webpage <http://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/official-statistics>.