



An Official Statistics Publication for Scotland

Criminal court cases activity from Quarter 1 2014/15 to Quarter 3 2020/21

This is the eleventh 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 dropped by 20% to 18,811 in Q3 2020/21, when compared to Q2 2020/21. In comparison to the average per quarter in 2019/20, Q3 2020/21 is approximately 71% of the average per quarter in 2019/20.

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. This has increased by 11% to 34,283 trials when scheduled trials at the end of September 2020 are compared to those still to call as at the end of December 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.

In the third quarter of 2020/21, the percentage of trials adjourned due to lack of court time has risen by 0.7 percentage points to 1.9%. This is due to the rise in the number of trials called since the last quarter.

The volume of cases concluded in each quarter of 2020/21 continues to grow in spite of the continued challenging conditions due to the pandemic. The latest quarter was 18,586 - a 19% increase on 2020/21 Q2.

The High Court of Justiciary

The volume of indictments registered in the quarter fell to 140 registrations, significantly lower than the 200 plus indictments that had been received for each quarter from 2017/18 Q4 to 2020/21 Q1.

There was a sharp increase in the number of evidence led trials in the quarter at 106, which is almost three times the number reported in 2020/21 Q2. This was due to remote jury centres running at full capacity enabling trials to proceed.

Trials scheduled at the end of December 2020 is 250 which is a decrease on the 360 reported as scheduled at the end of September 2020. This is due to no new trial diets being fixed in the period coupled with trial indictments concluding.

147 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 Q3 2020/21 is 2,611 which is a fall of 19% from 2020/21 Q2.

Indictments registered in 2020/21 Q3 is 1,334 which is broadly comparable to the average volume registered per quarter in 2019/20.

During the quarter, 3,655 cases called for first diet, continued first diet or Section 76 hearing which represents an increase of almost 40% on 2020/21 Q2.

The number of trials scheduled at the end of December 2020 is 939 which is 53% higher than the position at the end of September 2020. This growth is due to trial diets being fixed but very few trials taking place. In December 2020, remote jury centres commenced which enabled trials to proceed. There were 11 evidence led trials and no trials were adjourned due to lack of court time.

898 indictments were concluded in 2020/21 Q3, continuing the upward trend seen in the previous quarter.

The Sheriff Court – summary business

There has been a 28% reduction in the volume of registered complaints from 18,097 in 2020/21 Q2 to 12,973 in 2020/21 Q3.

The number of cases called for trial in Q3 2020/21 is 9,740 which is similar to the number in 2019/20 Q3 at 9,986. Of these, 1,369 were evidence led trials and 2% of trials were adjourned due to lack of court time.

As at the end of December 2020, the volume of scheduled trials is 27,723, which is a 10% rise since the end of September 2020.

In total for 2020/21 Q3, there were 12,583 complaints concluded which is 89% of the volume in 2019/20 Q3.

The Justice of the Peace Court

For the reporting quarter, the number of cases registered has increased by 15% on the previous quarter to 4,364.

In 2020/21 Q3, there were 228 evidence led trials with 1.1% adjournments due to lack of court time. The number of trials scheduled increased by 11% to 5,371 at the end of December 2020 compared to 4,837 at the end of September 2020.

Concluded complaints totalled 4,958 for 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 Q3 2020/21 Excel workbook with interactive tables and charts is located on webpage: <http://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/official-statistics>

Background

This is the eleventh 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 Rothesay 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
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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:

Executive Director, Court 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 June 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>.