

Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service



Courts Data Scotland: Criminal (Edition 24) Annual Bulletin

An Official Statistics Publication for Scotland

Criminal court cases activity from Quarter 1 2014/15 to Quarter 4 2023/24

This statistical series provides an annual bulletin and quarterly workbook refresh of statistics on first instance criminal case activity in the High, Sheriff and Justice of the Peace courts.

Annual statistics showing custody and remand rates; crime and offence breakdowns; protected characteristics (sex, ethnicity and age) and criminal appeals are also provided.

Notice

On 1st April 2023, the planned recovery resource switch from summary to solemn business occurred meaning ten fewer Sheriff summary trial courts, two additional High Court and six additional Sheriff Solemn trial courts.

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

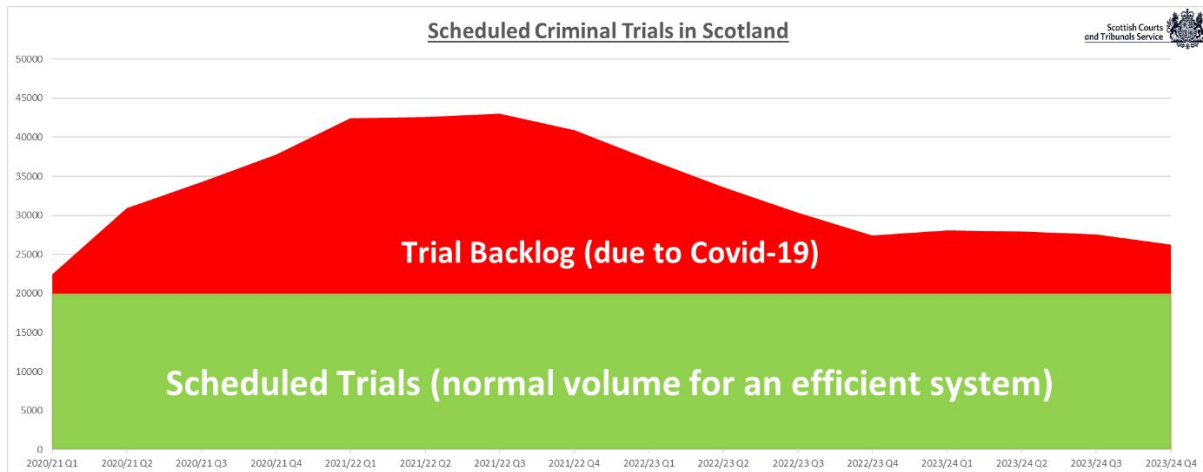
All Criminal Courts

There were 93,357 first instance criminal cases registered in Scottish courts in 2023/24, which is a 9% increase on the 85,859 cases registered in 2022/23 and is 88% of the pre-COVID level (105,548 in 2019/20).

67,490 trials were called in 2023/24, which is a 17% decrease on the number called in 2022/23 (81,105).

The volume of evidence led trials that took place in 2023/24 was 8,644, a 4.5% decrease on the number that occurred in 2022/23 (9,051) and 85% of the pre-COVID volume.

The percentage of trials adjourned due to lack of court time is 2.5% for 2023/24 which is 0.4 percentage points higher than in 2022/23 and 0.4 percentage points lower than 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. There were 26,227 trials scheduled at the end of March 2024 which is a 39% reduction compared to the peak quarter-end scheduled trial volume (December 2021 - 43,016). Specifically, this is a reduction of 73% in the trial backlog caused by COVID-19.

92,495 cases were concluded in 2023/24 – 7% less than the volume concluded in 2022/23 (99,671) and 91% of the pre-COVID figure (101,790 in 2019/20).

The High Court of Justiciary

There were 935 indictments registered in 2023/24, comparable to the 939 indictments registered in 2022/23 and 91% of the pre-COVID level (1,024 in 2019/20).

686 evidence led trials took place in 2023/24, a 12% rise compared with 611 in 2022/23. This is 38% higher than the pre-COVID volume (498 in 2019/20).

Trials scheduled as at the end of March 2024 is 693, an increase of 1% from the trials scheduled as at the end of March 2023 (687).

996 indictments were concluded in 2023/24, which is an increase of 22% on the previous year (815) and 24% rise on pre-COVID level (806).

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 2023/24 (11,128) is a 5% decrease on the 11,699 registered in 2022/23. This equates to a 14% rise in petitions registered when compared to 2019/20 (9,780).

In 2023/24 the number of indictments registered was 7,384, a 24% increase from 2022/23. This is 35% higher than the 2019/20 pre-COVID volume of 5,452.

As at the end of March 2024, the volume of trials scheduled is 1,709, a decrease of 28% when compared with the volume scheduled as at the end of March 2023 (2,389).

The number of evidence led trials in 2023/24 has risen by 20% to 1,275 when compared to 1,061 in 2022/23 and is a 12% increase of the 1,134 in 2019/20 before COVID-19.

7,877 indictments were concluded in 2023/24, which is an increase of 13% from the 6,986 in 2022/23 and an increase of 35% when compared to 2019/20 (5,841).

The Sheriff Court – summary business

There was a 14% increase in the volume of complaints registered in the Sheriff Court between 2022/23 (57,226) and 2023/24 (65,357). This is comparable to the number registered in 2019/20 (65,490).

95% of domestic abuse court cases are heard at the Sheriff Summary Court. Domestic abuse cases make up 21.6% of the total summary complaints registered in 2023/24 in the Sheriff Court. This is 2.4 percentage points lower than in 2022/23 (24%) and 1.3 percentage points lower than in 2019/20 (22.9%).

The number of Sheriff Summary cases called for trial during 2023/24 was 50,466, down 19% on the 62,350 called in 2022/23.

Evidence led trials have fallen by 10% to 5,746 in 2023/24 from 6,380 in 2022/23, and is 83% of the pre-COVID figure (6,946 in 2019/20).

Compared to 2019/20, the percentage of trials adjourned due to lack of court time for 2023/24 shows a decrease of 0.5 percentage points to 2.5%.

Domestic abuse cases account for 28% of Sheriff Summary trials called and 32% of Sheriff Summary trials in which evidence was led.

The volume of Sheriff Summary trials scheduled as at the end of March 2024, is 20,644, which is a 3% rise compared to the end of March 2023 and a 39% reduction since the peak in Q2 2021/22 when it was 33,598. Domestic abuse scheduled trials decreased by 13% to 3,572 between the end of March 2023 and March 2024.

63,910 complaints were concluded in 2023/24 which is a decrease of 5% compared to the volume concluded in 2022/23. Domestic abuse cases accounted for 23% of cases concluded in the period.

The Justice of the Peace Court

The Justice of the Peace Court has seen a 10% decrease in the volume of cases registered between 2022/23 and 2023/24 to 19,681.

The number of evidence led trials is 937 in 2023/24, which is a 6% decrease on the volume in 2022/23 (999).

1.5% of trials were adjourned due to lack of court time in 2023/24 which is 0.9 percentage points lower than 2019/20.

The number of trials scheduled at the end of March 2024 has decreased by 25% to 3,181 when compared to the end of March 2023. This is 316 lower than the pre-COVID level of 3,497 and this is due to significantly lower numbers of cases registered compared to pre-COVID.

19,712 complaints were concluded in 2023/24 which is a 21% decrease when compared to 2022/23.

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

All criminal appeals

The volume of criminal appeals registered has fallen between 2014/15 and 2023/24 by 38% to 923 appeals.

Of the appeals registered in 2023/24, 15% relate to appeal solely against conviction, 61% to appeal solely against sentence and 24% to a joint appeal against conviction and sentence following the trend of previous years, showing that appeals solely against sentence continue to be the most common type of appeal.

Sustained appeals expressed as a percentage of registered appeals stands at 18% for 2023/24, which is similar to the rate in 2019/20 and a 2% drop from the 20% reported in 2022/23.

Appeals against sentence continue to be the appeal type most likely to be sustained which account for 92% of all sustained appeals in 2023/24.

35% of appeals registered relate to summary business and 65% relate to solemn business. 93% of summary appeals are from Sheriff Court cases and 7% 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 have fallen following the introduction of the new appeal Court.

In 2023/24, 597 appeals were registered; a 14% increase from 2022/23. 14% relate to appeal solely against conviction, 52% to appeal solely against sentence and 34% to a joint appeal against conviction and sentence.

There were 63 sustained appeals at the High Court in 2023/24 with 89% of these being solely against sentence.

Appeals at the Sheriff Criminal Appeal Court

In 2023/24, the Sheriff Criminal Appeal Court saw 326 appeals registered which is a decrease of 53% when compared to the 700 registered in 2016/17 – the first full financial year since the new appeal court commenced in September 2015. 77% of appeals at Sheriff Criminal Appeal Court in 2023/24 relate to appeals solely against sentence.

31% of appeals registered at the Sheriff Criminal Appeal Court were sustained. The most common type of successful appeal is solely against sentence at 93% of sustained appeals.

Quarterly workbooks

The workbooks are located on webpage: <http://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/official-statistics>

Background

This is the latest bulletin and workbook in the Courts Data Scotland: Criminal series. Previous editions in the series can be viewed on webpage:

<http://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/official-statistics>

This series was previously known as the Quarterly Criminal Court 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

Contacts

Press enquiries on the contents of this bulletin should be directed to the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service communications office.

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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
Director of Corporate Communications, SCTS
Media Officer, Corporate Communications, SCTS
Web developer, Change and Digital Innovation, 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 quarterly workbook will be updated and published each June, September, December and March, while the annual bulletin will be published each June. The exact publication dates will be announced on the SCTS' Official Statistics webpage <http://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/official-statistics> and in addition, the bulletin's publication date will show on the Scottish Government's Forthcoming Publications Schedule - <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/ForthcomingPubs> at least 4 weeks in advance.