



Quarterly Criminal Court Statistics - Report 7 – Quarter 3 2019/20

An Official Statistics Publication for Scotland

Criminal court cases activity from Quarter 1 2014/15 to Quarter 3 2019/20

This is the seventh 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.

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 most recent quarter shows that 25,815 first instance criminal cases were registered which is a 3.4% drop when compared to the second quarter of 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 has been an increase to 17,983 trials when scheduled trials at the end of September 2019 are compared to those still to call as at the end of December 2019. This is a rise of 3.2%.

The percentage of trials adjourned due to lack of court time fell from 5.6% in 2014/15 to 3% in the first three quarters of 2019/20 – a drop of 2.6 percentage points.

The High Court of Justiciary

The volume of indictments registered in recent quarters continues to be above 200 per quarter. Q3 2019/20 is almost identical to Q2 2019/20 with 274 and 272 indictments respectively. Evidence led trials during the same period continue to be high with over 100 in each of the last fourteen quarters. This trend regarding volume is anticipated to continue due to increased reporting of sexual offending cases. (see 'Recorded Crime in Scotland 2018-19': <https://www.gov.scot/publications/recorded-crime-scotland-2018-19>)

There were 369 trials scheduled at the end of Q3 2019/20 which is a significant increase of 21% when compared to the end of Q2 2019/20. This appears to follow the seasonal trend experienced in Q3 2018/19 when a rise of 23% was reported.

The percentage of trials adjourned due to lack of court time is 11.6% in Q3 2019/20 compared to 1.8% in Q2 2019/20.

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. Q3 2019/20 shows a similar volume to Q2 2019/20 at 2,492 petitions. It is anticipated that the volume of petitions being registered will continue to be high due to the increase in prosecution of sexual offending cases.

Q3 2019/20 shows an 8% increase from Q2 2019/20 to 1,438 registered indictments.

The volume of evidence led trials in Q3 2019/20 is comparable to Q2 2019/20, with 292 evidence led trials taking place.

The number of trials scheduled at the end of December 2019 is consistent with the number scheduled to call at the end of September 2019.

The percentage of trials adjourned due to lack of court time has risen in Q3 2019/20 to 1.9% from 1.1% in Q2 2019/20 – an increase of 0.8 percentage points.

The Sheriff Court – summary business

Summary business in the Sheriff Court has fallen by 4% in respect of the volume of complaints registered between Q3 2019/20 and Q2 2019/20 with 16,138 complaints registered this quarter. The volume of cases called for trial in Q3 2019/20 is 9,986 which is a rise of 2% compared to Q2 2019/20.

The volume of evidence led trials experienced a slight increase of 1% between Q3 2019/20 and Q2 2019/20 to 1,747 evidence led trials.

The volume of trials scheduled shows a rise. There are 13,832 trials still to call as at the end of December 2019 compared to 13,186 at the end of September 2019.

The percentage of trials adjourned due to lack of court time in Q3 2019/20 is 2.9% which shows no change compared to the previous quarter.

The Justice of the Peace Court

The Justice of the Peace Court volume of cases registered has fallen by 4% in between Q2 2019/20 and Q3 2019/20 to 7,965.

In Q3 2019/20, the volume of evidence led trials increased by 12% to 407 when compared with the previous quarter.

The volume of trials scheduled at the end of December 2019 reduced by a further 4% to 3,300 trials still to call when compared to the end of September 2019. This follows the same trend as reported for the last three quarters.

The percentage of trials adjourned due to lack of court time rose from 2.5% in Q2 2019/20 to 3.4% in Q3 2019/20 – a rise of 0.9 percentage points.

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 2018/19 by 18%.

Of the appeals registered in 2018/19, 16% relate to appeal solely against conviction, 67% to appeal solely against sentence and 17% to a joint appeal against conviction and sentence showing that appeals solely against sentence are the most common type.

Sustained appeals expressed as a percentage of registered appeals rises from 11% in 2014/15 to 16% in 2018/19. Most of this change relates to appeals solely against sentence which was 13% in 2014/15 and 21% in 2018/19.

The most successful type of appeal is solely against sentence which account for 88% of all sustained appeals in 2018/19.

51% of appeals registered in 2018/19 relate to summary business and 49% relate to solemn business. 87% of summary appeals are from Sheriff 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.

Less than 8% of High Court appeals are sustained. The most common type of successful appeal in 2018/19 is solely against sentence at 81%.

Appeals at the Sheriff Criminal Appeal Court

The Sheriff Criminal Appeal Court saw 626 appeals registered in 2018/19 which is 11% lower than 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.

In 2018/19, 23% of appeals registered at the Sheriff Criminal Appeal Court were sustained. The most common type of successful appeal is solely against sentence at 90% of sustained appeals.

Data tables

The Q3 2019/20 Excel workbook with interactive tables and charts is located on webpage: <http://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/official-statistics>

Background

This is the seventh 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

In the sixth bulletin and interactive workbook, 'Trials adjourned due to lack of court time' for the High Court was incorrectly reported as two for the period Q2 2019/20, when it should have read four. The corresponding tables contained within tabs 1(a) and 2(a) of the workbook have been updated. There are no further 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

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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 June 2020. 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>.