



An Official Statistics Publication for Scotland

Criminal court cases activity from Quarter 1 2014/15 to Quarter 1 2021/22

This statistical bulletin is part of a series 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 fixed so that a forecast of scheduled trials can be provided. The impact of the pandemic has meant that some cases that would be expected to come to trial at a future date do not yet have a trial diet fixed and will therefore not be counted in the scheduled trial figures within these statistics. <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

There were 21,550 first instance criminal cases registered in Scottish courts in Q1 2021/22 which is a 15% increase from the number registered in Q4 2020/21.

The number of trials scheduled¹ 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 of 12% to 42,451 trials when scheduled trials at the end of March 2021 are compared to those still to call as at the end of June 2021. This is mostly attributable to Summary business which

saw trial diets being fixed for the priority cases that were entering pleas. In Solemn business, a trial diet is fixed when all parties are ready to go to trial.

The percentage of trials adjourned due to lack of court time has risen from 0.6% in Q4 2020/21 to 2.5% in Q1 2021/22 – an increase of 1.9 percentage points. This is likely to be as a result of the increased number of trials calling in the period.

16,269 cases were concluded in Q1 2021/22 – an increase of 83% from the previous quarter.

The High Court of Justiciary

The volume of indictments registered in the latest quarter has fallen to 155 in Q1 2021/22 from 219 in Q4 2020/21.

The number of evidence led trials remains comparable with pre-pandemic levels with 124 evidence led trials in Q1 2021/22 compared to an average of 125 per quarter in 2019/20. This was due to remote jury centres running at full capacity enabling trials to proceed.

Trials scheduled¹ at the end of June 2021 is 313, an increase of 17% when compared to 267 scheduled at the end of March 2021. New trials are now being fixed which is causing this figure to increase.

173 indictments were concluded in Q1 2021/22 which is 91% of the number concluded in Q4 2020/21.

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. Q1 2021/22 shows an increase of 6% to 2,909 petitions when compared to Q4 2020/21.

The number of indictments registered has risen in this reporting quarter by 24% to 1,444 from 1,167 in Q4 2020/21.

As at the end of June 2021, the number of trials scheduled¹ increased by 20% when compared to the end of the previous quarter.

The volume of evidence led trials has grown by 37% this quarter from 186 in Q4 2020/21, facilitated by the remote jury centres.

1,364 indictments were concluded in 2021/22 Q1, continuing the upward trend seen in the previous three quarters.

The Sheriff Court – summary business

There has been a 14% rise in the volume of registered complaints from 12,468 in 2020/21 Q4 to 14,164 in 2021/22 Q1.

95% of domestic abuse court cases are heard at the Sheriff Summary Court. In Q1 2021/22, domestic abuse cases constitute 24% of the total summary complaints registered in the Sheriff Court. This figure is comparable with previous quarters.

The number of Sheriff Summary cases called for trial in Q1 2021/22 is 9,715 which is a rise of 41% from Q4 2020/21. There were 1,256 evidence led trials and 2% of trials were adjourned due to lack of court time.

Domestic abuse cases account for 34% of Sheriff Summary trials called and 44% of those Sheriff Summary trials in which evidence was led.

As at the end of June 2021, the volume of Sheriff Summary trials scheduled¹ is 33,598, which is a 10% rise since the end of March 2021.

In Q1 2021/22, there were 12,194 complaints concluded which is almost double the volume in Q4 2020/21. 27% of Q1 2021/22 conclusions were domestic abuse cases.

The Justice of the Peace Court

For the reporting quarter, the number of cases registered has increased by 19% on the previous quarter to 5,787.

The volume of evidence led trials is 16 for Q1 2021/22 with zero adjournments due to lack of court time.

The number of trials scheduled¹ at the end of June 2021 has increased by 25% to 6,945 when compared to the end of March 2021, with Justice of the Peace courts having re-opened on 7th June 2021 following a period of closure due to the pandemic.

2,538 complaints were concluded in the quarter, more than double the number of complaints concluded in Q4 2020/21.

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 2020/21 by 63% to 554 appeals.

Of the appeals registered in 2020/21, 13% relate to appeal solely against conviction, 73% to appeal solely against sentence and 14% 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 rose from 11% in 2014/15 to 29% in 2020/21. This is due to lower level of registered appeals impacting the percentage rather than a significant change in sustainment.

Appeals against sentence continue to be the appeal type most likely to be sustained which account for 84% of all sustained appeals in 2020/21.

Echoing the trends illustrated last year, 49% of appeals registered relate to summary business and 51% relate to solemn business. 92% of summary appeals are from Sheriff Court cases and 8% 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 2020/21, 281 appeals were registered; under half the amount registered in 2019/20. In previous years approximately 600 appeals per year were received. Two in three relate to appeals solely against sentence.

There were 67 sustained appeals at the High Court with 81% of these being solely against sentence.

Appeals at the Sheriff Criminal Appeal Court

In 2020/21, the Sheriff Criminal Appeal Court saw 273 appeals registered which is a decrease of 61% when compared to the 700 registered in 2016/17 – the first full financial year since the new appeal court commenced in September 2015. Four in five relate to appeals solely against sentence.

One third of appeals registered at the Sheriff Criminal Appeal Court were sustained. The most common type of successful appeal is solely against sentence at 87% of sustained appeals.

Data tables

The Q1 2021/22 Excel workbook with interactive tables and charts is located on webpage: <http://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/official-statistics>

Background

This is the latest 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

Note 1: The figures for scheduled trials should be treated with caution.

The impact of the pandemic has meant that some cases that would be expected to come to trial at a future date do not yet have a trial diet fixed and will therefore not be counted in the scheduled trial figures within these statistics. The SCTS publish monthly figures that contain an estimate of trials in the system without a trial diet fixed so that a forecast of scheduled trials can be provided <http://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/official-statistics>

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:

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, 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 December 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>.