



### An Official Statistics Publication for Scotland

#### Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the data in this report

In order to keep court staff and court users safe, guidance from Public Health Scotland was followed and some court buildings closed during March 2020 with only priority business taking place in open courts. This means that the data for the month of March 2020 may not be complete hence a 'provisional' marking applies within this report to all Quarter 4 2019/20 figures; financial year 2019/20 figures and comparisons using these figures. Once courts re-open, the Q4 2019/20 and the 2019/20 figures will be refreshed and updated in a future edition of this Official Statistics series. See latest SCTS news <http://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/> and Public Health Scotland's guidance for non-healthcare organisations [https://hpspubsrepo.blob.core.windows.net/hps-website/nss/2973/documents/1\\_covid-19-guidance-for-non-healthcare-settings.pdf](https://hpspubsrepo.blob.core.windows.net/hps-website/nss/2973/documents/1_covid-19-guidance-for-non-healthcare-settings.pdf)

#### Criminal court cases activity from Quarter 1 2014/15 to Quarter 4 2019/20

This is the eighth 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

There were 104,972 first instance criminal cases registered in Scottish courts in 2019/20 which is 2.1% more than the number of cases registered in 2018/19.

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 of 14.4% to 18,319 trials when scheduled trials at the end of March 2019 are compared to those still to call as at the end of March 2020.

The percentage of trials adjourned due to lack of court time fell from 5.6% in 2014/15 to 2.9% in 2019/20 – a drop of 2.7 percentage points.

### The High Court of Justiciary

The volume of indictments registered in recent quarters continues to be above 200 per quarter. There were 1,024 indictments registered in 2019/20 compared to 911 in 2018/19, an increase of 12.4%. Evidence led trials continue to be high with over 100 in each of the last fifteen quarters and volumes in 2019/20 are on par with those recorded for 2018/19. This trend regarding volume has been attributed 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 390 trials scheduled at the end of Q4 2019/20 which is up 5.7% compared to the end of Q3 2019/20 and up 45.5% when compared to the position at the end of 2018/19.

The percentage of trials adjourned due to lack of court time has decreased from 11.6% in Q3 2019/20 to 7.7% in Q4 2019/20 – a drop of 3.9 percentage points.

### 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. There were 9,780 petitions registered in 2019/20, a rise of 620 (6.8%) from 2018/19.

A rise in indictments registered is also apparent when 2018/19 is compared to 2019/20.

The volume of evidence led trials in 2019/20 is 1,134 which is comparable to 2018/19.

When compared with the number of trials scheduled at the end of March 2019, there has been a reduction of 7% in the number of trials scheduled at the end of March 2020 to 461.

The percentage of trials adjourned due to lack of court time fell from 7.1% in 2014/15 to 1.8% in 2019/20 – a drop of 5.3 percentage points.

### The Sheriff Court – summary business

Summary business in the Sheriff Court has seen a 9% rise in the volume of complaints registered between 2018/19 and 2019/20 with an average of 16,300 complaints being registered per quarter. Cases calling for trial during this period are showing a 7% reduction compared to the previous year.

The volume of evidence led trials has decreased by 10% between 2018/19 and 2019/20 to 6,946 evidence led trials.

The volume of trials scheduled has risen by 24% between 2018/19 and 2019/20 with 13,971 trials still to call as at the end of March 2020.

The percentage of trials adjourned due to lack of court time fell from 6.1% in 2014/15 to 3.0% in 2019/20 – a drop of 3.1 percentage points.

### The Justice of the Peace Court

The Justice of the Peace Court has seen a reduction of 10% in the volume of cases registered between 2018/19 and 2019/20

The volume of evidence led trials dropped by almost 14% over the period 2018/19 to 2019/20.

The volume of trials scheduled at the end of March 2020 has fallen by 12% to 3,497 trials still to call when compared to the end of March 2019

The percentage of trials adjourned due to lack of court time fell from 4.0% in 2014/15 to 2.4% in 2019/20 – a drop of 1.6 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 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.

### Appeals at the High Court of Justiciary

Since the Sheriff Criminal Appeal Court commenced on 22<sup>nd</sup> 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 Q4 2019/20 Excel workbook with interactive tables and charts is located on webpage: <http://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/official-statistics>

## Background

This is the eighth 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

## 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:

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 September 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>.