



An Official Statistics Publication for Scotland

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

This is the ninth 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 15,587 first instance criminal cases registered in Scottish courts in Q1 2020/21 which is down 44% from the number of cases registered in Q4 2019/20 and is 38% lower than Q1 2019/20. This is likely due to reduced levels of recorded crime during the first few months of the Coronavirus pandemic.

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 22% to 22,437 trials when scheduled trials at the end of March 2020 are compared to those still to call as at the end of June 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.

The number of trials adjourned due to lack of court time is zero in the first quarter of 2020/21. This is due to very few trials calling in the period.

Despite the challenging conditions due to the pandemic, 3,035 cases concluded in the quarter which is approximately 13% of the cases concluded in Q4 2019/20.

The High Court of Justiciary

Despite the impact of the pandemic, the volume of indictments registered in recent quarters continues to be above 200 per quarter. There were 231 indictments registered in Q1 2020/21, which is comparable to the number registered in the previous quarter. There were no evidence led trials in the quarter and no adjournments due to lack of court time.

The number of trials scheduled at the end of Q1 2020/21 is 390 which remains the same as at the end of Q4 2019/20 due to no trials having called and no new trial diets being fixed.

149 cases called for preliminary hearing, continued preliminary hearing or Section 76 hearing during the quarter which equates to 39% of such hearings per quarter in 2019/20. 30 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. Q1 2020/21 shows an increase of 10% to 2517 petitions when compared to Q4 2019/20, though this is on par with the volumes registered in Q1, Q2 and Q3 2019/20.

The number of indictments registered has fallen in this reporting quarter by 31% to 893 from 1,302 in Q4 2019/20.

There were no evidence led trials in Q1 2020/21 and consequently no trials were adjourned due to lack of court time. The number of trials scheduled at the end of June 2020 is consistent with the number scheduled to call at the end of March 2020. Like the situation in the High Court, this is due to no trials having called and no new trial diets being fixed.

1,313 cases called for first diet, continued first diet or Section 76 hearing during the quarter which equates to 58% of such hearings per quarter in 2019/20. 433 indictments were concluded in the quarter.

The Sheriff Court – summary business

Summary business in the Sheriff Court has seen a drop of 36% in the volume of complaints registered between Q1 2020/21 and Q4 2019/20 with 10,572 complaints registered this quarter.

1,328 cases called for trial in Q1 2020/21, down 88% when compared to Q4 2019/20.

There were 38 evidence led trials in Q1 2020/21 and none were adjourned due to lack of court time.

The volume of trials scheduled shows a rise of 28% from the last quarter to 17,818 trials still to call as at the end of June 2020.

2,319 complaints were concluded in the quarter.

The Justice of the Peace Court

The Justice of the Peace Court has seen a 60% decrease in the volume of cases registered between Q4 2019/20 and Q1 2020/21.

The volume of evidence led trials sits at nil for the current reporting quarter, Q1 2020/21 with zero adjournments due to lack of court time. The number of trials scheduled at the end of June 2020 has increased by 7% to 3,732 when compared to the end of March 2020.

253 complaints were concluded in 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 Q1 2020/21 Excel workbook with interactive tables and charts is located on webpage: <http://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/official-statistics>

Background

This is the ninth 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 last bulletin, the impact of COVID-19 pandemic meant that a 'provisional' marking was applied to the report and interactive workbook. In order to keep court staff and court users safe, guidance from Public Health Scotland was followed and some court buildings closed between late March and early June 2020 with only priority business taking place in open courts. This meant that the data for the month of March 2020 was potentially incomplete hence a 'provisional' marking applied within the report to all Quarter 4 2019/20 figures; financial year 2019/20 figures and comparisons using these figures. The Q4 2019/20 and the 2019/20 figures have now been refreshed and the provisional marking removed in this edition of the statistical series.

The details of the revisions are as follows:

- 'Complaints registered' for Justice of the Peace Court for Q4 2019/20 has been updated to 9,787.
- 'Complaints registered' for Sheriff Court Summary Business for Q4 2019/20 has been updated to 16,647.
- 'National total of cases registered (not including petitions)' for 2019/20 has been updated to 105,548.
- 'Trials scheduled at end of period' for Sheriff Court Solemn Business for Q4 2019/20 has been updated to 497.

The tables and charts contained within tabs 1(a), 1(b), 3(a), 3(b), 4(a), 4(b), d 5(a) and 5(b) of the interactive 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	Dumfries JP Court
Cumbernauld JP Court	Coatbridge JP Court
Dornoch Sheriff and JP Court	Tain Sheriff and JP Court
Irvine JP Court	Kilmarnock JP Court
Kirkcudbright Sheriff and JP Court	Dumfries Sheriff and JP Court
Motherwell JP Court	Hamilton JP Court

Portree JP Court Rothesay Sheriff Court Stornoway JP Court Wick 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 December 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>.