
Mark Pont, Assessment Programme Lead

Professor Roger Halliday
Chief Statistician and Data Officer
Scottish Government

(By email)

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Dear Roger

Criminal Proceedings in Scotland statistics

As you are aware, we recently completed our compliance check of the Scottish Government's [Criminal Proceedings in Scotland statistics](#) against the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). I am pleased to confirm that these statistics should continue to be designated as National Statistics.

Crime and justice continue to form a significant part of the public discourse in Scotland, and it is important that the public is informed about how laws are being enforced and justice is served. These statistics cover both criminal proceedings concluded in Scottish courts and the alternatives to prosecution such as disposals issued by Police Scotland and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service. They provide a comprehensive overview of the justice system in Scotland and the different routes through it.

We found many positive features that demonstrates the value and quality of the statistics:

- The bulletin provides clear guidance for users on how to interpret the statistics, for instance, how the statistics relate only to the main offence a person is charged with and how the conviction rates depend on several factors so care should be taken when interpreting the stats.
- The bulletin is transparent about changes to the methods, highlighting them and their impact in the bulletin's introduction. One recent change the team made was the inclusion of domestic abuse statistics to reflect the passage of the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018, as well the importance of including data on this new crime.
- Information about the data sources, methods and quality assurance provided in the bulletin is detailed and informative. It explains the limitations of the data such as how, due to the nature of the data collection and complex nature of court cases, figures for the latest year should be considered as provisional and may be subject to revisions. We also welcome the improved information about how data about sex is collected.
- The team actively engages with users in a range of ways and takes on board their feedback. The [Crime and Justice Committee](#), which the team is involved with,

facilitates communication between users and providers of statistics on crime and justice to identify the key strategic statistical information required by all interested parties. The team also regularly reviews user requests to drive improvements.

- The team has demonstrated innovation by including experimental statistics on the Length of the Punishment Part of Life Sentences and Orders for Lifelong Restriction (OLRs), which were published as a supplement to the main bulletin in March 2020 in response to user demand. The team continue to evaluate if these statistics meet the needs of users, whether the methodology is suitable, and the scale of any revisions that are likely to be required.

We also identified some ways in which the value of the statistics could be enhanced:

- A major gap in the statistics which we identified was the lack of breakdown by ethnicity. Without these data it is impossible to track racial disparity in the Scottish criminal justice system. We appreciate that providing such a breakdown is challenging because ethnicity data are not held on the Criminal History System, the central database used for the recording of information on persons accused and/or convicted of committing a criminal act in Scotland. The team told us it is exploring whether it would be possible to link criminal history data with other data sources, such as the Census, to access information on ethnicity.
- There is possibly too much summary information at the start of the bulletin (a cover page, infographic and key points section). Cutting this down may aid the overall flow of the bulletin and boost reader engagement.
- Currently, the HTML version of the bulletin is not as user-friendly as it could be as all the commentary is grouped together in one tab. Navigability could be improved by adding separate tabs for each chapter/section of commentary. This may allow users to quickly and more-easily navigate to the section that is most relevant to them.
- The team should consider removing the data tables from the bulletin unless there is a strong user need for it. The data tables are already available separately as an Excel spreadsheet, as well as being included in the bulletin. Inserting links into the relevant places in the bulletin to help users find the data would aid the flow and readability of the bulletin. It may also improve the navigability of HTML pages as, currently, each data table is presented in a separate tab.
- Adding details to the bulletin about how the team engages with users would help to further demonstrate to the public the quality and value these statistics add and may facilitate further engagement with users.

Thank you to your team for their positive engagement during this review. We look forward to continuing to engage with you and the team, and we hope our findings inform the development of the Criminal Proceedings in Scotland. Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you would like to discuss any aspects of this letter further or if we can offer further assistance as these statistics continues to develop.

Yours sincerely



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