
Mark Pont, Assessment Programme Lead

Joan Ritchie
Senior Statistician
Department of Justice
(by email)

20 December 2021

Dear Joan

Northern Ireland prosecution and conviction statistics

As you are aware, we recently completed our compliance check of the Department of Justice's (DoJ) [Northern Ireland prosecution and conviction statistics](#) against the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). The statistics we reviewed are:

- Court Prosecution, Conviction and Out of Court Disposal Statistics for Northern Ireland
- First Time Entrant Statistics to the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland
- Case Processing Time for Criminal Cases dealt with at Courts in Northern Ireland

This review completes a series of compliance checks of criminal justice statistics: in October 2021 we reviewed Scottish Government's [criminal proceedings in Scotland statistics](#), and in May 2020 we reviewed the Ministry of Justice's (MoJ) [criminal justice system statistics](#) for England and Wales. This gave us insight into the trustworthiness, quality and value of the key criminal justice statistics across the UK. We hope our findings inform the continued development of your prosecution and conviction statistics and encourage you, where relevant, to reflect on the findings from the other reviews, to learn from Scottish Government's and MoJ's approaches and practices.

We found a range of positive features that demonstrate the quality and value of the statistics:

- The Causeway Data Sharing Mechanism, the administrative data system used to produce all three sets of statistics, aids information sharing between Criminal Justice Organisations in Northern Ireland. It helps to ensure that data are recorded consistently and supports easier and more rigorous validation.
- The [Quality Assurance of Administrative Data \(QAAD\) report](#) is exemplary. It covers all aspects of all administrative data sources used across DoJ, including governance, communication with data suppliers, strengths and limitations, and quality assurance, giving users detailed insight into the nature and quality of the data. The Background Quality Reports provide a high-level summary of all quality dimensions.

- There is regular, proactive engagement with users of all three sets of statistics, and user engagement across DoJ is joined up. The main source of feedback is a [biennial customer survey](#), which asks users about their satisfaction with all official statistics publications produced by the Analytical Services Group (ASG) as well as their uses of the statistics, and how the statistics could better meet their needs. The results are published in a detailed report which sets out DoJ's planned actions. We welcome this responsiveness and transparency.

We also identified some ways in which the value, trustworthiness and quality of the statistics could be enhanced:

- The clarity and insight of all three bulletins, in particular the Court Prosecution, Conviction and Out of Court Disposal Statistics bulletin, could be improved. To set the wider context, it would be helpful if the bulletin gave an overview of the different routes through the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland and explained how these statistics relate to statistics on crimes recorded by the Police Service of Northern Ireland. Adding more information about changes over time and further breakdowns by sex or age of defendants and offence category would provide a richer picture of prosecution and conviction and help users better understand trends and differences in the criminal justice system. And, to enhance coherence, the bulletins should explain how the three sets of statistics are related and collectively add insight on prosecution and conviction in Northern Ireland.
- The Court Prosecution, Conviction and Out of Court Disposal statistics are released on a calendar year basis whereas the others are released on a financial year basis. We understand that there are good reasons for this, including resourcing and aligning release with government target frameworks. The bulletins and background quality reports could better explain the timeliness, publication cycles, and interdependencies between the three sets of statistics.
- The majority of respondents to the latest customer survey worked for the Northern Ireland Civil Service. Your team should work on reaching out to users outside government more effectively, to develop a better understanding of the broader users and possible uses of the statistics, and to gather further feedback on the statistics. This will ensure that the statistics add value for all types of users and potential users.
- To increase the visibility of quality information and help users interpret the statistics, a summary of the key strengths and limitations of the data should be added to the statistical bulletins.

Thank you to you and your team for your positive engagement during this review. We look forward to continuing to engage with you. 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 continue to develop.

I am copying this letter to Ivor Graham, DoJ responsible statistician.

Yours sincerely



Mark Pont
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