



## Criminal court statistics quarterly, England and Wales, July to September 2019

*Including statistics on the use of language interpreter and translation services in courts and tribunals*

### Main points

<b>Magistrates' court: receipts and disposals stabilise following falls</b>		Receipts increased, but receipts for 'trial cases' reached the lowest levels since 2012. The volume of outstanding cases remained broadly in line with levels seen since Q2 2016.
<b>Crown Court: increase in receipts, decrease in disposals</b>	 	The number of receipts increased 5% whilst the number of disposals fell by 4% on the previous year.
<b>Crown Court: increase in outstanding</b>		A provisional estimate of outstanding cases increased by 3% on the previous quarter.
<b>Average waiting times at the Crown Court continue to fall</b>		The median waiting time reached a series low of 5.9 weeks, down half a week compared to Q3 2018 (6.4 weeks) and less than half of the peak seen in Q2 2015 (13.0 weeks).
<b>Time spent from offence to completion increased at magistrates' courts</b>		For all cases completing at the magistrates' courts, the median number of days from offence to completion was 161 days, up 5% on the previous year.
<b>Estimates of timeliness at Crown Court temporarily suspended</b>		Following changes to underlying administrative systems it has not been possible to produce robust estimates for Q3. Data for Q2 2019 is the latest available published estimate.
<b>Interpreters: completed requests increased</b>		The number of completed requests in Q3 2019 (42,637) increased 9% compared to the previous year, while the success rate remained at 97%.
<b>Failure to Appear warrants published</b>		A new series of warrants issued for defendants failing to appear in magistrates' courts is being published alongside these statistics as an experimental series.

The technical guide to 'Criminal court statistics' and 'Language interpreter and translation services in courts and tribunals' can be found at the links below:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-guide-to-criminal-court-statistics>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/guide-to-language-interpreter-and-translation-services>

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# 1. Changes to note

## Crown Court system change

Changes to the administrative systems at the Crown Court that completed in September 2019 have resulted in discontinuities in the published series, most notably for estimates of outstanding cases, vacated trials and end-to-end timeliness.

As a result :

- A provisional estimate of total outstanding cases at the Crown Court has been **temporarily imputed** and made available using a different methodology to that previously published. The observed trends in the data are consistent with existing published data and while like-for-like estimates are not available, we believe the provisional estimate to be robust.
- Estimates of vacated trials and end-to-end timeliness have been **temporarily suspended** to enable more time to better understand the impact that changes to the underlying data have had, to develop the existing series and produce the best long term estimates following the changes.

The change does not affect any data related to the magistrates' courts and other Crown Court measures are largely unaffected by the change. For further information see the [Guide to Criminal Court Statistics](#).

## Failure to appear warrants

This is the first publication of a new series on Failure to Appear (FTA) warrants issued in magistrates' courts. These are published as [experimental statistics](#), developed alongside colleagues in Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service (HMCTS) in response to user demand and will be subject to further development, in line with users' views.

Supporting guidance and further information relating to the FTA collection can be found at the link below:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/criminal-court-statistics>

Feedback is sought regarding the experimental FTA statistics and can be directed to:

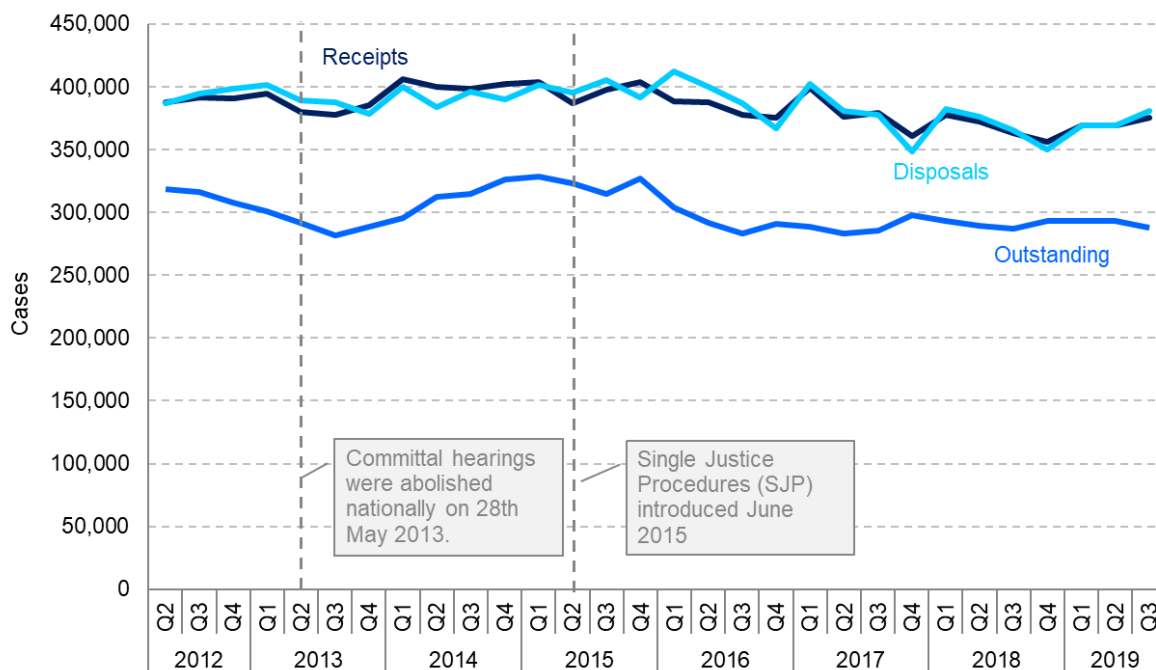
[HMCTS\\_Analysis\\_and@Justice.gov.uk](mailto:HMCTS_Analysis_and@Justice.gov.uk)

## 2. Criminal cases in the magistrates' courts

### Magistrates' courts caseload has increased back to levels seen in 2017 following falls

Magistrates' court receipts and disposals have both increased over the last year, by 4%. The volume of outstanding cases remained broadly in line with levels seen over the last three years.

**Figure 1: Magistrates' courts caseload, Q2 2012 – Q3 2019 (Source: Table M1)**



### Magistrates' court caseload

The magistrates' court workload tended to fall between 2016 and 2018, however since Q4 2018 there have been consistent increases in receipts and disposals. In Q3 2019, there was an increase of 4% in both receipts and disposals compared to the same quarter in the previous year. This was largely due to a 14% increase in summary motoring case receipts and disposals, accounting for 43% of the caseload at the magistrates' court.

Quarterly receipts for 'trial cases' (triable-either-way and indictable cases) have fallen from a peak in Q3 2013 (109,194 cases) to a series low (73,020) in the latest quarter, down 2% on Q3 2018. This is largely due to falls seen in triable-either-way case receipts (3%), whereas indictable trial receipts have been stable in recent quarters, up 2% compared with a year ago.

The trend in magistrates' courts trial caseload is broadly in line with annual decreases reported in the number of offences the police resolve with a charge/summons<sup>1</sup> (down 6% in the 12 months to June 2019) and annual decreases reported in proceedings at magistrates' court<sup>2</sup> (down 2% over the 12 months to June 2019).

The overall level of outstanding cases fell by 2% compared to the previous quarter (from 292,923 to 287,766 cases) bringing it in line with levels seen in the same quarter of the previous year.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-recorded-crime-open-data-tables>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/criminal-justice-system-statistics-quarterly-june-2019>

## **Trial efficiency**

The total number of trials in magistrates' courts has tended to fall since the quarterly series began in Q1 2010. In the latest quarter, there were 27,815 trials, down 9% compared to the same quarter of the previous year.

Of these trials, the proportion that are effective gradually increased between 2003 and 2015, after which the proportion has remained stable, ranging between 45% and 48% of all trials listed. The proportion of trials that were ineffective has seen a pattern that is the inverse of that of effective - falling between 2003 and 2015, after which it levelled out at around 15% up to the current quarter.

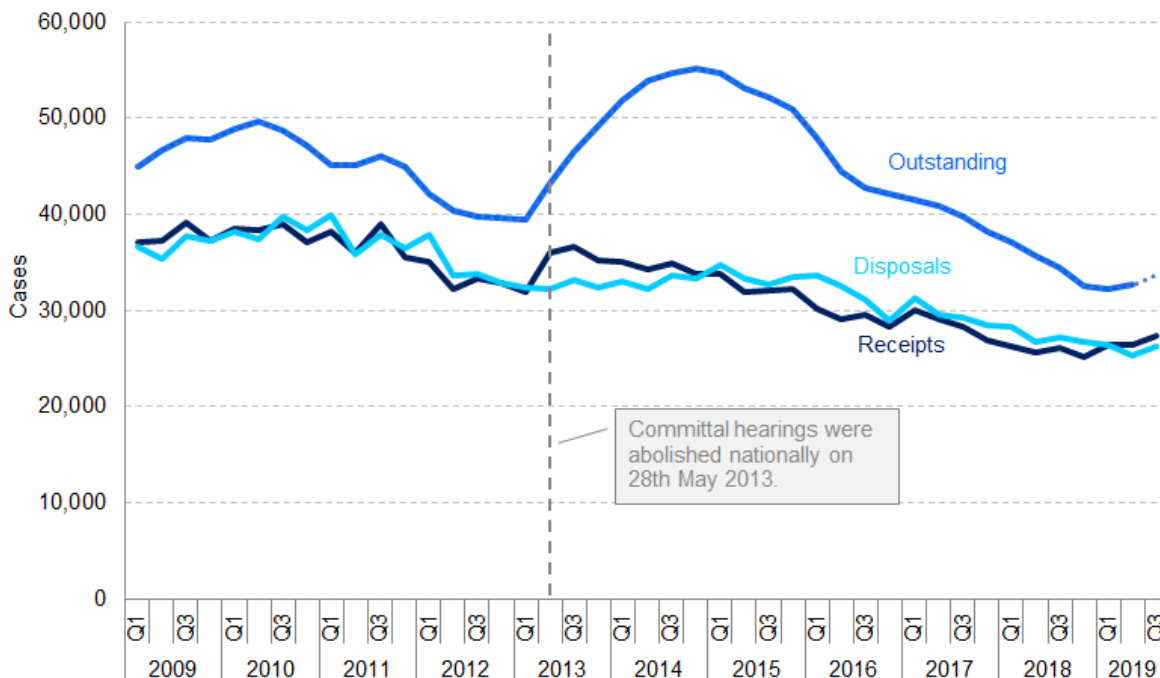
The proportion of trials that crack has remained stable ranging between 37% and 39% between 2003 and 2018. Over half (58%) of cracked trials in Q3 2019 were due to 'acceptable guilty plea(s) entered late' and 'acceptable guilty plea to alternative new charge'.

### 3. Criminal cases in the Crown Court

Whilst receipts have increased 5% on the previous year, disposals have fallen by 4% - both remain broadly in line with levels seen between 2017 and 2018.

In Q3 2019 there were 27,319 receipts and 26,224 disposals compared to 26,112 and 27,179 respectively in the same quarter in 2018. A provisional estimate of outstanding cases shows a 3% increase on the previous quarter but remains 2% lower than Q3 2018.

Figure 2: Crown Court caseload, Q1 2009 – Q3 2019 (Source: Table C1)



Crown court caseload (Table C1)

Estimates of the number of outstanding cases at the Crown Court in England and Wales have been **temporarily imputed** for Q3 2019. Following a change in the underlying case management system at the Crown Court, there have been some key changes in the variables stored on the court system and, as a result, there remain some unresolved data issues in deriving a National Statistics quality series for outstanding cases and vacated trials that span both the old and new system. Therefore, we are unable to produce a consistent series beyond Q2 2019 at this time. The provisional estimate is based on the existing published outstanding volume for Q2 2019 and receipts and disposals for the latest period.

Case receipts and disposals at the Crown Court are affected by these changes but not to the same extent. As such the updated receipts and disposals series are felt to be of sufficient quality for inclusion in further breakdowns by court and offence type. These data are all marked as provisional and are subject to future change as underlying methods are refined and developed to adjust for the new data source.

It has not been possible to produce a robust estimate for vacated trials using the existing data and this is not included here.

We continue to work with data suppliers to develop a consistent methodology and will update users as part of our March 2020 publication.

For further information, see the [Guide to Criminal Court Statistics](#).

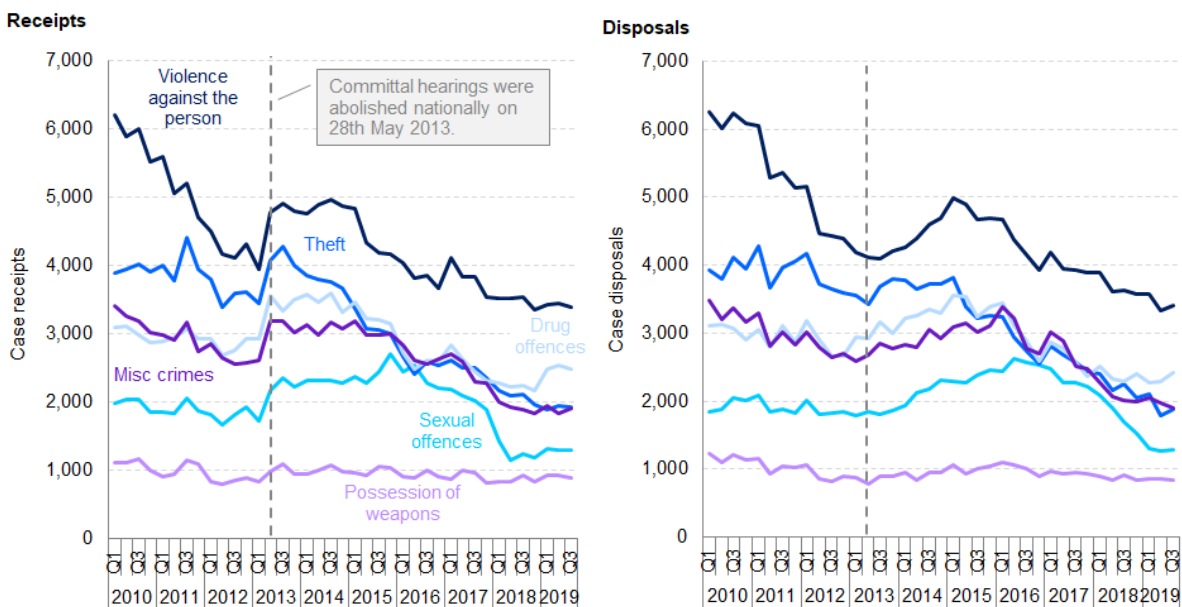
Compared to the previous year, the volume of cases received into the Crown Court has increased by 5% to 27,319 in Q3 2019, while disposals decreased by 4% to 26,224.

Following the abolition of committal hearings in May 2013, triable-either-way cases could be sent from the magistrates' courts to the Crown Court more quickly. The effect of this procedural change can be seen in the increase in receipts in Q2 2013 - which pushed receipts above disposals for around two years and saw outstanding cases increase. Since 2015 the volume of disposals has been higher than receipts and as a result outstanding cases fell, initially sharply. Case receipts and disposals have been stabilising over the past few years and are now at very similar volumes, however, receipts have recently overtaken disposals for the first time since the end of 2014.

The overall downward trend in the Crown Court workload over the past three years is in line with year-on-year decreases in the number of individuals dealt with in the Criminal Justice System in England and Wales. There has been a general decrease in the number of offences for which the police issue a charges/summons over the past three years<sup>3</sup>, along with a fall in the number of indictable offences being dealt with at the magistrates' court<sup>4</sup> which has a direct impact on the flow of cases into the Crown Court.

- Drug offence caseload has increased in 2019, with receipts and disposals increasing by 11% and 6% respectively when compared to Q3 2018.
- Similarly, despite the overall downward trend, the volume of receipts and disposals for possession of weapon offences have remained relatively stable.
- Following decreases in sexual offence caseload since a peak in 2016, the volume of receipts and disposals have levelled off at these lower levels over the last year.

**Figure 3: Receipts and disposals for trial cases by selected offence group, Q1 2010 – Q3 2019 (Source: cc\_rdos\_tool)**



<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/crime-outcomes-in-england-and-wales-statistics>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/criminal-justice-system-statistics-quarterly-december-2018>

## Guilty plea rates

For defendants dealt with in trial cases at the Crown Court, the guilty plea rate<sup>5</sup> increased by 3 percentage points on the previous year, up to 68%.

- Of those entering a guilty plea, the majority continue to enter a plea 'prior to trial' (61%), in line with proportions seen over the last three years.
- Where entering a guilty plea before trial, close to three-quarters enter a plea after one hearing (72%) – this has increased by 4 percentage points compared to the previous year and is the highest proportion seen since Q2 2010.

The largest increase (9 percentage point) in guilty plea rate was seen for sexual offences, up to 43% in Q3 2019, however it remains the offence group with the lowest guilty plea rate.

## Average waiting and hearing time at the Crown Court

Overall, the median average waiting time<sup>6</sup> for defendants at the Crown Court continued to fall, reaching a series low of 5.9 weeks in Q3 2019. This is a decrease of 9% compared to the same quarter in 2018 (6.4 weeks) and has more than halved since the series peak in Q2 2015 (13.0 weeks).

The median waiting time for defendants dealt with in trial cases has decreased by 3% to 14.1 weeks compared to the previous year.

Sexual offences (22.4 weeks), violence against the person (19.7) and fraud offences (15.4) continued to have the highest waiting times, despite all three categories showing decreases compared to the previous year (down 13%, 1% and 32% respectively).

The median hearing time<sup>7</sup> for trial cases has remained stable at around 1.3 hours. The average hearing time has changed very little across the series, ranging from 1.0 to 1.5 hours across the series.

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<sup>5</sup> Guilty plea rate is the number of defendants pleading guilty to all counts as a proportion of all those with a plea.

<sup>6</sup> The waiting time is the duration in weeks between a case being committed to the court and the first main hearing. A value is determined for each defendant dealt with during the period and averages calculated.

<sup>7</sup> The average hearing time is calculated as the total sum of all hearings in all cases divided by the number of cases - this represents the average time of all hearings combined in a case rather than a single hearing.



## 4. Timeliness

**For cases completing at the magistrates' court, the average number of days from offence to completion increased due to increases from offence to charge.**

In Q3 2019, the median number of days from offence to completion for cases completing at the magistrates' courts (excluding those sent to the Crown Court) was 161 days, up 5% on the previous year.

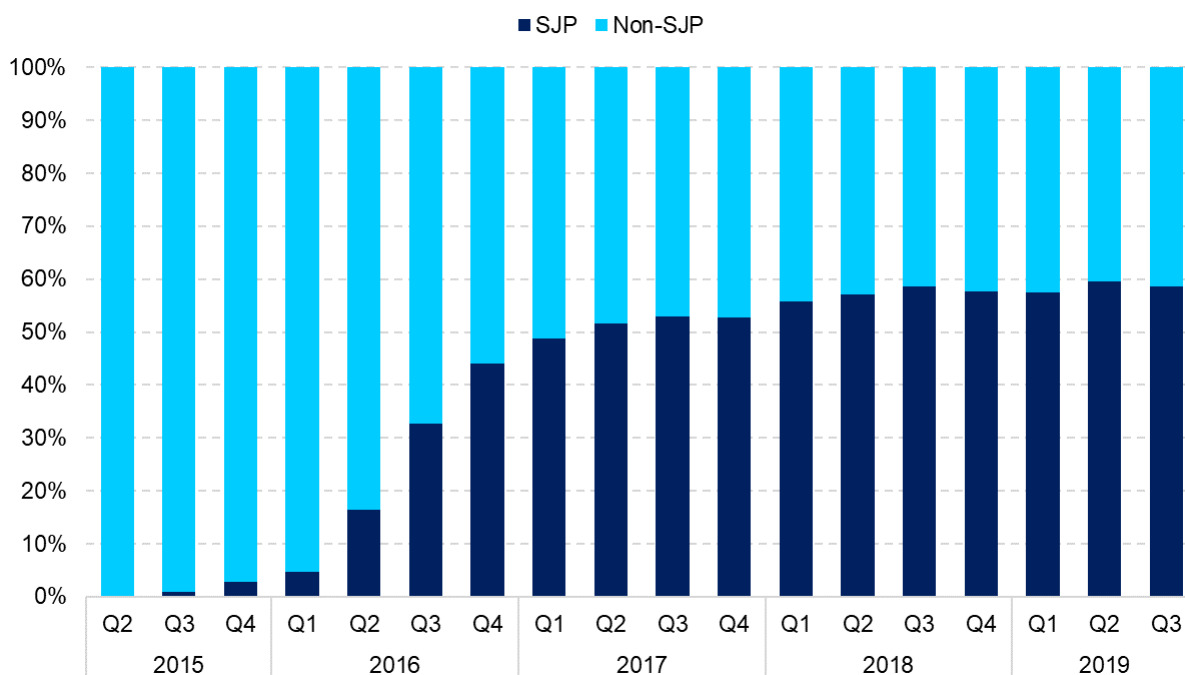
Estimates of end to end timeliness for defendants with cases completing at the Crown Court have been **temporarily suspended** for Q3 2019 whilst we develop a robust National Statistics series following the introduction of the new administrative system.

The published timeliness estimates and associated trends have been affected by the underlying court recording system change outlined above and more time is required to better understand the causes of these changes and the effect it has had on source data before we are able to produce a robust and consistent future series. The development of the timeliness production process remains ongoing and developments will be fed into the upcoming March 2020 release when we hope to be able to publish a consistent series.

For further information see the [Guide to Criminal Court Statistics](#).

The increase in offence to completion for cases completing at the magistrates' courts can be attributed largely to increases in time spent prior to reaching court – this increased by 6% (7 days). The average time spent at court remained broadly stable at 20 days between first listing and completion.

**Figure 4: Percentage of cases completed by Single Justice Procedures at the magistrates' courts, Q2 2015 – Q3 2019**



Introduced in June 2015 under the Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015, [Single Justice Procedure \(SJP\) notices](#) allow cases involving adults charged with summary offences to be dealt with in a single magistrates' sitting without a prosecutor or defendant being present.

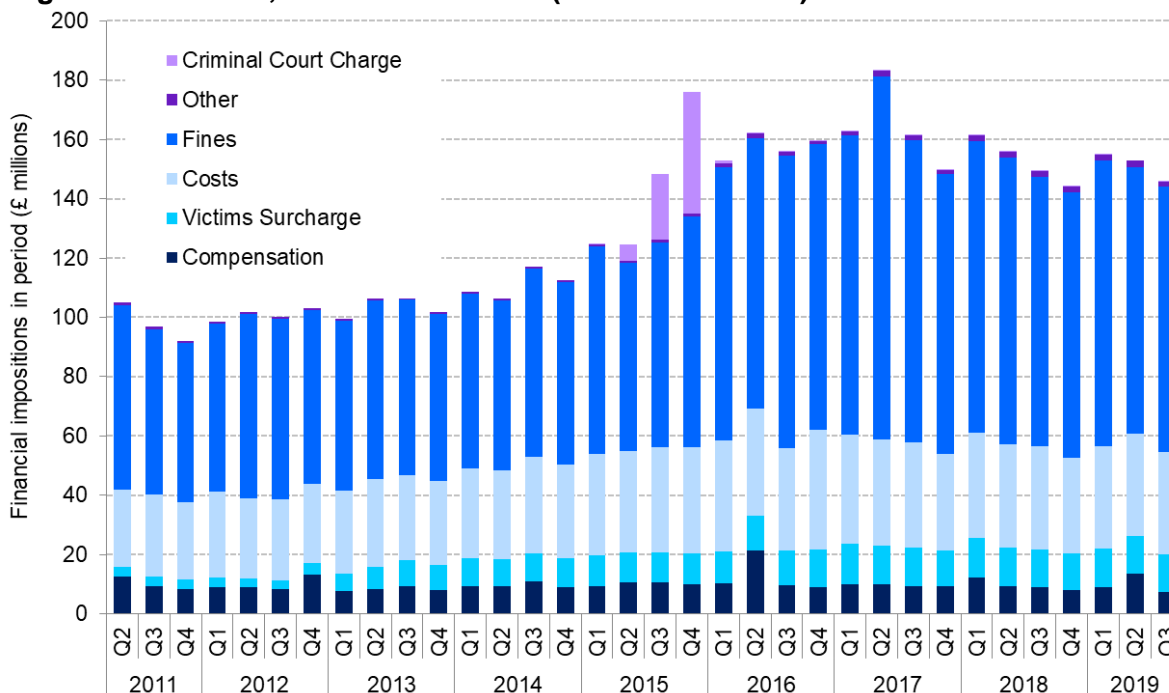
The number of SJP cases have increased each year since implementation in 2015 and levelled off since the Q3 2018 at around 59% of all completions at the magistrates' courts. The median time taken from offence to completion for SJP cases in Q3 2019 has remained broadly stable compared to Q3 2018. Since its introduction, it is estimated that the majority (~87%) of SJP cases are listed and completed at the magistrates' courts on the same day.

## 5. Enforcement of financial impositions

### Total financial impositions fell slightly in Q3 2019

Total financial impositions fell 2% in Q3 2019 to £145.7m compared with the previous year – this is due to decreases in both compensations and fines. The total value of outstanding financial impositions continued to rise, reaching £1.18 billion in Q3 2019.

**Figure 5: HMCTS management information: Financial impositions by imposition type, England and Wales, Q2 2011 – Q3 2019 (Source: Table A2)**



### Financial impositions and amounts paid by imposition type

The overall value of impositions fell by around £3.6m on the previous year due to falls in fines and compensation:

- The value of total fines imposed fell by £1.6m, down 2% compared to the previous year.
- Similarly, the value of compensation impositions fell by £1.6m, an 18% fall compared to the previous year.

Financial impositions for victim surcharge and costs both remained relatively stable with variations of around 1% compared to the previous year.

### Outstanding financial impositions

In Q3 2019, the total value of financial impositions outstanding in England and Wales was £1.18 billion, up 9% on the previous year and 1% on the previous quarter.

The amount of outstanding financial impositions has doubled since the start of 2015 (£571m). A change in policy regarding the collection of financial impositions is partially behind this cumulative increase – unpaid accounts are no longer routinely closed and therefore, more outstanding impositions are carried over from previous periods.

## 6. Experimental Statistics - language interpreter and translation services<sup>8</sup>

The number of completed language service requests has increased and the success rate<sup>9</sup> remained broadly stable<sup>10</sup>

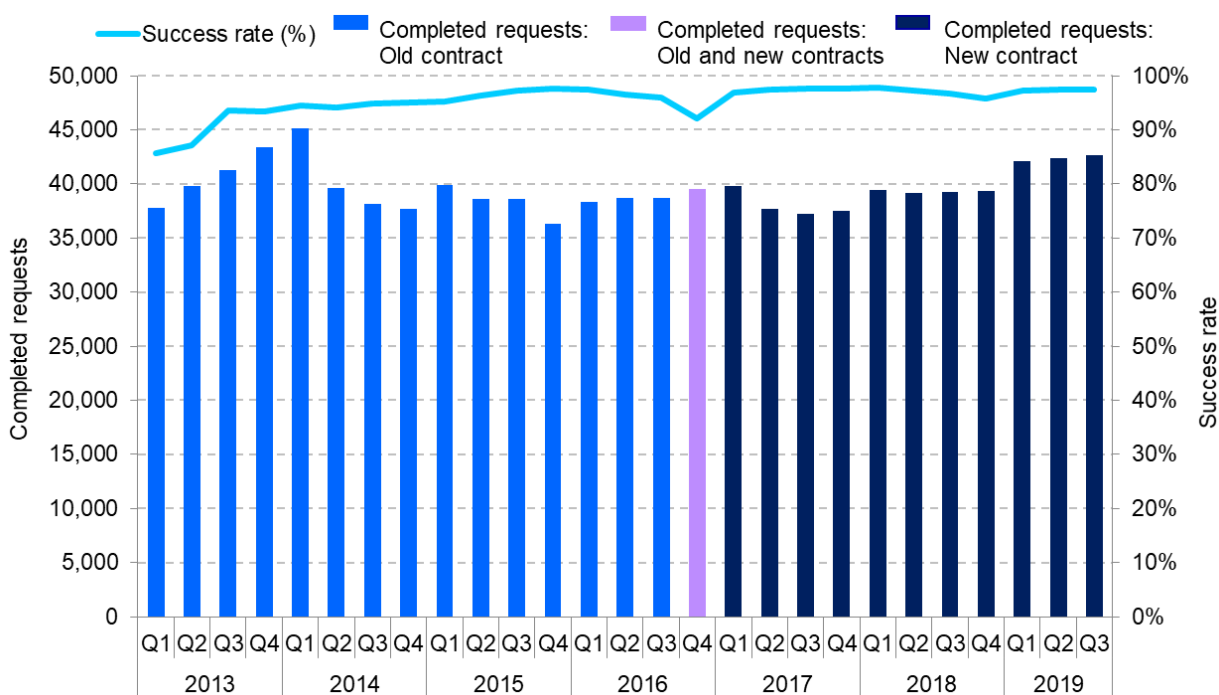
The success rate of requests remained stable at 97%, whereas the number of completed language service requests has increased by 9% compared to Q3 2018.

### Completed service requests

The overall number of requests in Q3 2019 has increased by 9% since Q3 2018, the highest volume of quarterly completed requests under the new contract (since Q4 2016).

Criminal court requests continue to account for the largest proportion of completed language service requests (41% in Q3 2019). There have been increases in both criminal (8%) and civil and family (17%) completed requests compared to Q3 2018, whereas the number of requests from tribunal courts has remained stable.

**Figure 6: Number of completed language service requests and overall success rate, Q1 2013 – Q3 2019 (Source: Table L1)**



### Success rate

The overall success rate of requests has remained broadly stable since 2017, at 97%. The success rate for non-DPSI<sup>11</sup> languages has remained the lowest of all service types since Q4 2016 and in Q3 2019 it was 90%, compared to 98% for standard languages and 98% for special services.

### Complaints and complaint rate

<sup>8</sup> The statistics under the new contracts are 'Experimental Statistics' – the series remains in the testing phase and is not yet fully developed.

<sup>9</sup> The number of requests that were fulfilled divided by the total fulfilled and unfulfilled (excludes cancellations).

<sup>10</sup> These figures relate to the 'new contract', comprising of data from two separate suppliers, thebigword Group Ltd for face to face interpretation and Clarion UK Ltd for non-spoken languages (special services).

<sup>11</sup> The Diploma in Public Service Interpreting (DPSI) is a standard qualification required of interpreter; languages covered by it are termed 'Standard' languages. Those not covered in the DPSI require separate qualifications and are termed 'non-DPSI' languages.

The number of complaints (507) has increased compared to Q3 2018 but is down on the previous quarter (564) - this followed a spike in complaints for Q2 2019 up 48% on levels in Q1 2019. Tribunals continue to account for most complaints (60%) despite only accounting for 29% of total service requests in Q3 2019. Despite the increase in the number of complaints, the complaint rate remained stable at 1%.

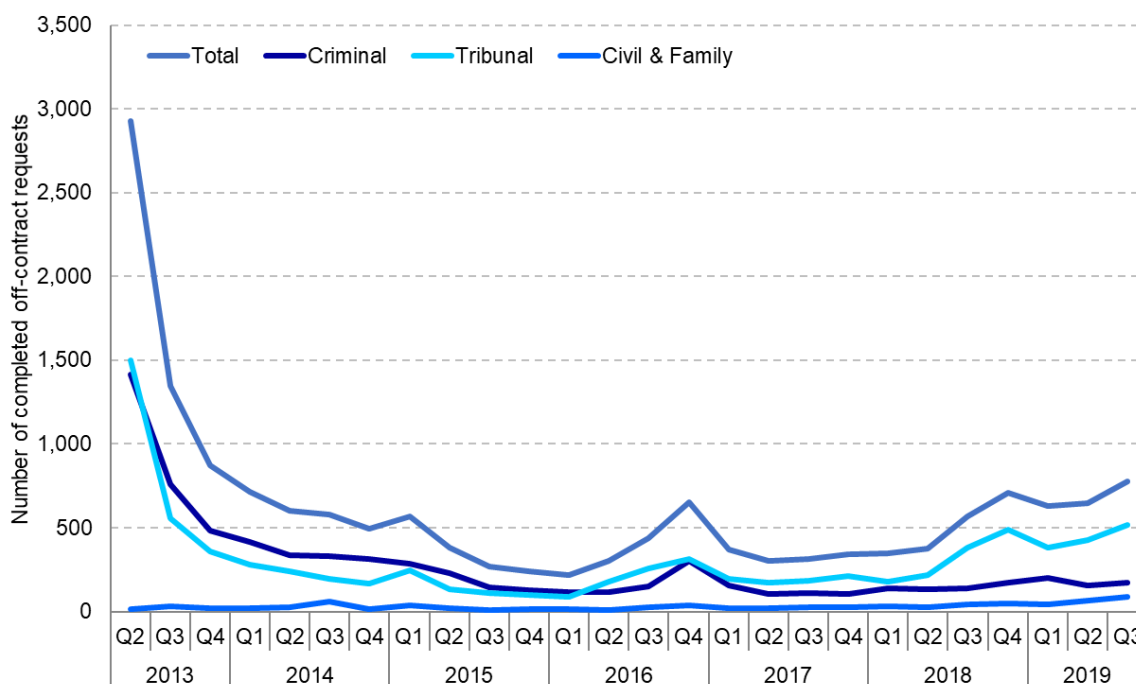
In Q3 2019, 'no interpreter available' was the largest complaint category, accounting for 44% of complaints. Sharp increases were seen in complaints due to 'interpreter conduct' (106 complaints) and 'operational issues' (100 complaints), accounting for 21% and 20% of total complaints respectively.

### 'Off-contract' requests

The number of off-contract requests in Q3 2019 (778) increased, up 37% compared to the same quarter of the previous year (568). This is the highest level of 'off-contract' requests seen following the introduction of the new contract in Q4 2016.

Approximately two thirds (67%) of 'off contract' requests were made by tribunal courts. The changing trend over the last year continues to be mostly attributed to the changes in the number of requests involving immigration tribunals, which increased again this quarter.

**Figure 7: Completed 'off-contract'<sup>12</sup> language service requests by requestor type, Q1 2014 – Q3 2019 (Source: Table L3)**



<sup>12</sup> 'Off-contract' request are language service requests fulfilled directly by the Ministry of Justice out of or 'off' the language service contracts currently in place. This occurs when a contractor (thebigword group Ltd or Clarion UK Ltd) has been unable to fulfil a booking. As the process for recording off-contract requests has not changed between contracts, they remain official statistics and are not experimental.

## 7. Further information on criminal courts data

The latest data presented in this publication are provisional. Final data for each calendar year is published in June, following further data cleaning and the incorporation of additional cases not available in our original extracts.

### Accompanying files

As well as the bulletin, the following products are published as part of this release:

- Two technical guides providing background information.
- A set of overview tables, covering each section of this bulletin.
- Pivot tools and underlying data which feature further breakdowns of published data.

### National Statistics status

National Statistics status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value. This bulletin recently underwent a compliance check with the Office for Statistics Regulation and retained its National Statistics status in January 2019.<sup>13</sup> All official statistics should comply with all aspects of the Code of Practice for Statistics. They are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the Authority's regulatory arm which considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate. It is the Ministry of Justice's responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected for National Statistics. If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with the Authority promptly. National Statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored.

### Experimental Statistics status

Experimental statistics are produced under the remit of the Code of Practice for Statistics. They are also produced impartially and are free from political influence<sup>14</sup>.



### Future publications

Our statisticians regularly review the content of publications. Development of new and improved statistical outputs is usually dependent on reallocating existing resources. As part of our continual review and prioritisation, we welcome user feedback on existing outputs including content, breadth, frequency and methodology. Please send any comments you have on this publication including suggestions for further developments or reductions in content to the contacts listed below.

### Contact

Press enquiries should be directed to the Ministry of Justice press office:

Tel: 020 3334 3536 Email: [newsdesk@justice.gov.uk](mailto:newsdesk@justice.gov.uk)

Other enquiries and feedback about these statistics should be directed to the Justice Statistics Analytical Services division of the Ministry of Justice:

Damon Wingfield, Head of Criminal Justice System Statistics, Ministry of Justice, 10 South Colonnade, London, E14 4PU Email: [statistics.enquiries@justice.gov.uk](mailto:statistics.enquiries@justice.gov.uk)

**Next update:** 26<sup>th</sup> March 2020

**URL:** <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/criminal-court-statistics>

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Alternative formats are available on request from [statistics.enquiries@justice.gov.uk](mailto:statistics.enquiries@justice.gov.uk)

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/correspondence/compliance-check-on-court-statistics/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/monitoring-and-assessment/code-of-practice/>