










Criminal court statistics quarterly, England and Wales, April to June 2020

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

Main points

COVID-19 and associated actions impacted on most criminal court measures	A significant decrease in criminal court receipts and disposals has occurred in the current quarter, with figures dropping to unprecedented low levels. As a result, the latest data is unlikely to be representative of previous trends.
Magistrates' court: large increase in outstanding cases	 Receipts and disposals fell sharply, down 36% and 62% respectively on Q2 2019. As disposals fell by more than receipts, outstanding cases continued to rise, up 44% to around 422,000 cases.
Crown Court: fall in receipts and disposals	 In Q2 2020 there were 45% fewer receipts and 50% fewer disposals compared to Q2 2019.
Crown Court: continued increase in outstanding cases	 The volume of outstanding cases increased by 25%, from 34,277 in Q2 2019 to 42,707 in Q2 2020, continuing increases seen since 2019.
Crown Court: waiting times increased	 The median waiting time for all cases increased to 7.3 weeks, up 38% compared to Q2 2019 (5.3 weeks) but well below the peak seen in 2015 (12.1 weeks).
Vacated trials: Increase in volumes	 Vacated trials at magistrates' courts and Crown Courts increased, up 166% and 38% respectively compared to Q2 2019.
Enforcement: Financial impositions fell	 Total financial impositions fell to £54m, down by 65% in Q2 2020 compared with Q2 2019. The total value of outstanding financial impositions remained at £1.2 billion in Q2 2020.
Interpreters: completed requests decrease	 The number of completed requests in Q2 2020 (6,775) fell by 84% compared to the previous year, with around a third of requests being cancelled.

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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Statistician's comment

“This report covers data to the end of June 2020, although courts continued to carry out urgent business and make more use of remote audio and video technology, the impact of COVID-19 response remains clear to see. Workload and trial efficiency estimates at both the magistrates' courts and the Crown Court show that receipts and disposals have fallen, while both outstanding cases and trial vacations increased sharply.

It is expected that outstanding case and trial vacation volumes will maintain these higher levels while the limited operation of the criminal courts¹ remains in place and the gradual reintroduction of jury trials at the Crown Court from 18th May 2020² continues. Published management information from Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service (HMCTS) show that outstanding case volumes at both magistrates' courts and the Crown Court remain above pre-COVID baselines between the end of June 2020 and the week ending 23rd August 2020.³

The impact can be seen for other published measures which are calculated at the point that a case completes in the courts, such as the increase in average waiting time, as well as associated court functions such as financial enforcement collection and language service provision.

The significantly reduced volumes of cases being processed at the criminal courts as a result of the operational restrictions following the COVID-19 response mean that the data is unlikely to be representative of trends in previous periods.”

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/hmcts-weekly-operational-summary-on-courts-and-tribunals-during-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>

² <https://www.judiciary.uk/announcements/jury-trials-to-resume-this-month/>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/hmcts-weekly-management-information-during-coronavirus-march-to-august-2020>

1. Changes to note

COVID-19 and future publications

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused MoJ to have to change its data gathering, access and release practices, focusing efforts on priority analysis and statistics. [Our statement](#) explains this further. Of particular note, we temporarily paused access to the Police National Computer earlier this year, to minimise non-essential travel by our analysts. Whilst access has resumed now, work is being resumed on a prioritised basis.

As a result, and in line with guidance from the Office for Statistics Regulation, the decision has been made to delay the publication of all linked end-to-end criminal court timeliness data in this publication. We will keep users updated of any further changes via our published release calendar.

Consultation on Crown Court data

A proposed change to the way in which we process and publish our Crown Court data was put forward alongside the previous edition of this release. Users' views were invited on these changes. We can confirm that no concerns were raised and that the changes proposed have been carried forward into this edition.

These introduced changes reflect the development and implementation of more streamlined data flows within the MoJ, the removal of duplication across analytical teams and opportunities to move to a more consistent and coherent approach to how we publish Crown Court data.

Data developments

- Representation status at the Crown Court (Tables AC10 – AC12)

Following changes to the administrative systems at the Crown Court, that completed in September 2019⁴, estimates of defendants representation status at the Crown Court are not available for this release. It has not been possible to accurately replicate the existing methodology and produce robust estimates in time for this release following changes to the way that data are recorded.

It is our intention to develop and test a new methodology that maintains our high professional standards and ensures that accurate, consistent series are available to all. We will provide further updates regarding the availability of a consistent back series in subsequent publications.

- Timeliness estimates for 2020

As highlighted above, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it has not been possible to produce criminal court timeliness estimates for Q1 and Q2 2020. Data to the end of December 2019 remains the latest available estimates.

We will continue to review arrangements and are also working at developing alternative methodology to calculating end-to-end timeliness and will keep users informed. We remain committed both to the wellbeing of our staff, and to providing the best and most accurate information we can, serving the public good at a time when it is needed the most.

⁴ For more information relating to the impact of the administrative changes at the Crown Court please refer to the [Criminal court statistics quarterly Q4 2019](#) report

For further information regarding the extent and impacts of the data developments detailed here please see the [Guide to criminal court statistics](#).

Failure to appear warrants

This is the fourth 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>

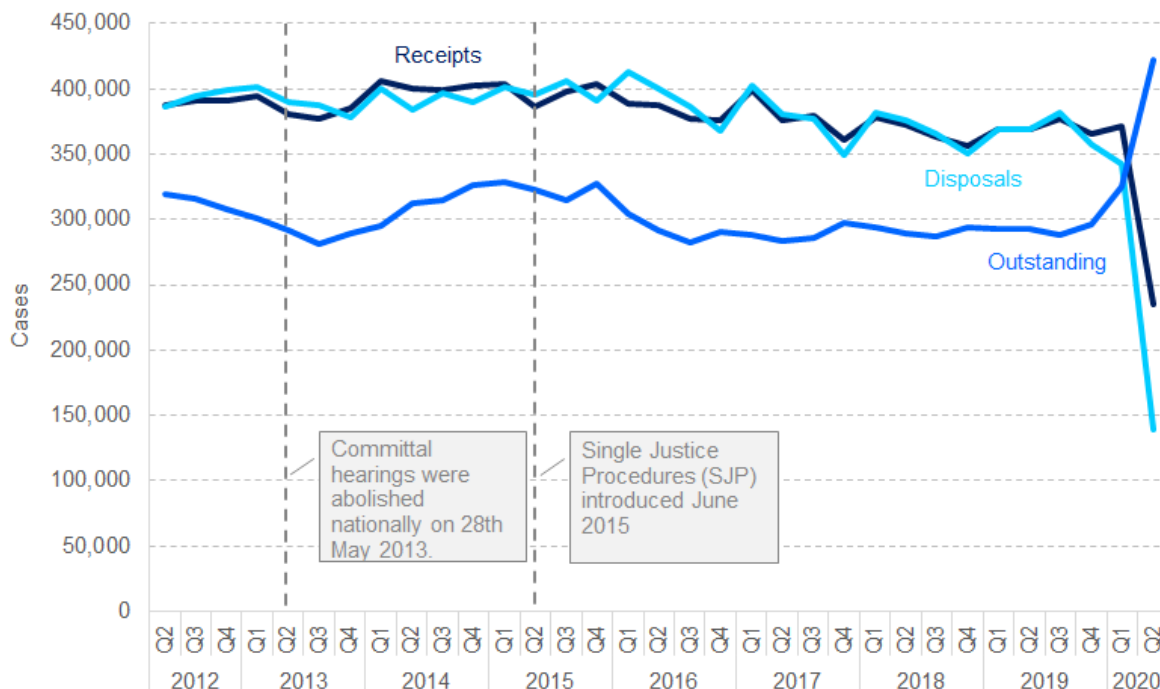
Feedback continues to be sought regarding the experimental FTA statistics and can be directed to: HMCTS_Analysis_and@Justice.gov.uk

2. Criminal cases in the magistrates' courts

Criminal cases receipts and disposals at the magistrates' courts fell sharply, while outstanding cases jumped to a series high.

Receipts and disposals fell by 36% and 62% respectively on Q2 2019. Outstanding cases increased by 44% on the previous year, up to around 422,000 cases following the review of court arrangements due to the COVID-19 pandemic response.

Figure 1: Magistrates' courts caseload, Q2 2012 – Q2 2020 (Source: Table M1)



Magistrates' court caseload

In Q2 2020 overall receipts and disposals fell sharply on the previous year following the review of court arrangements on the 23rd March 2020⁵.

- Receipts fell by over a third in Q2 2020 compared to the previous year. This fall can be seen mostly in summary non-motoring (down 67%) and summary motoring cases (down 24%). The volume of receipts for trial cases have tended to remain broadly stable, falling by only 2% compared to Q2 2019.
- The volume of cases disposed of more than halved in Q2 2020 compared to the previous year. The fall in disposals is seen across all case types, with a 55% fall in trial case disposals. The largest proportionate fall was seen for summary non-motoring cases, down 82% on the previous year, this follows the suspension of Single Justice Procedure work until late-May 2020.⁶

The outstanding caseload at the magistrates' court increased by 44%, from 292,871 in Q2 2019 to 421,539 in Q2 2020, well beyond the previous quarterly peak (328,291 cases in Q1 2015). The annual increase is true across all case types but the largest proportionate increase was seen in trial cases (up 61% on the previous year).

⁵ <https://www.judiciary.uk/announcements/review-of-court-arrangements-due-to-covid-19-message-from-the-lord-chief-justice/>

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/single-justice-procedure-court-lists>

The latest published [HMCTS management information](#) provides weekly volumes of receipts, disposals and outstanding cases for all cases types at the magistrates' courts (e.g. including civil and enforcement in addition to criminal cases).

The data to the week ending 23rd August 2020 shows that weekly receipts and disposals remain below pre-COVID baselines (down 42% and 38% respectively). However, both have tended to increase since mid-April, with disposals above receipts in August. As such outstanding case volumes have started to reduce from a peak of 525,059 at the end of July to 517,782 at the week ending 23rd August 2020 – remaining 27% higher than a pre-COVID baseline of 407,129.

Trial efficiency

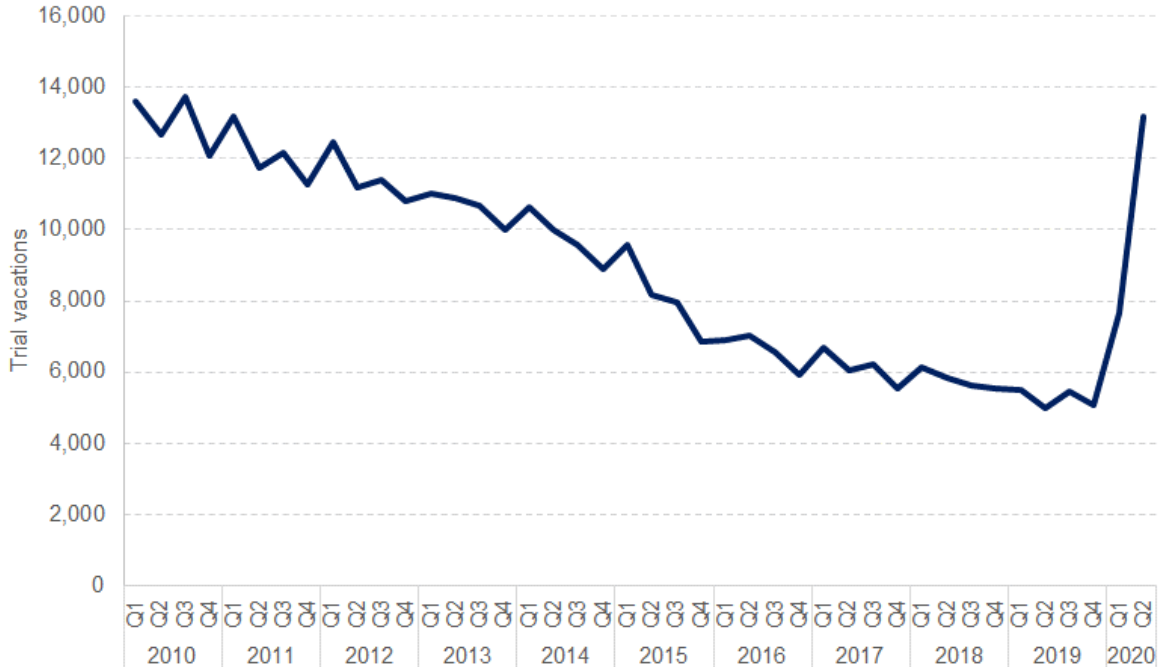
The total number of trials in magistrates' courts reached historical lows in Q2 2020 following the suspension of trial hearings as part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Q2 2020 the number of trials listed fell by 94% on Q2 2019 to only 1,715. Of these trials, the proportion that are effective, ineffective or cracked has remained stable in the latest quarter.

Vacated trials are trials which have been removed from the listing before the date of the trial, they are counted in the period the vacation happened rather than the date when they were due to be listed (e.g. as for effective, cracked and ineffective estimates).

Most trials were vacated and required rescheduling following the COVID-19 pandemic response. In Q2 2020 there were 13,208 vacated trials, more than double the volume seen in the previous year (up 166%) and 72% more than levels seen in Q1 2020.

Figure 2: Magistrates' courts vacated trials, Q1 2010 – Q2 2020 (Source: Table M2)

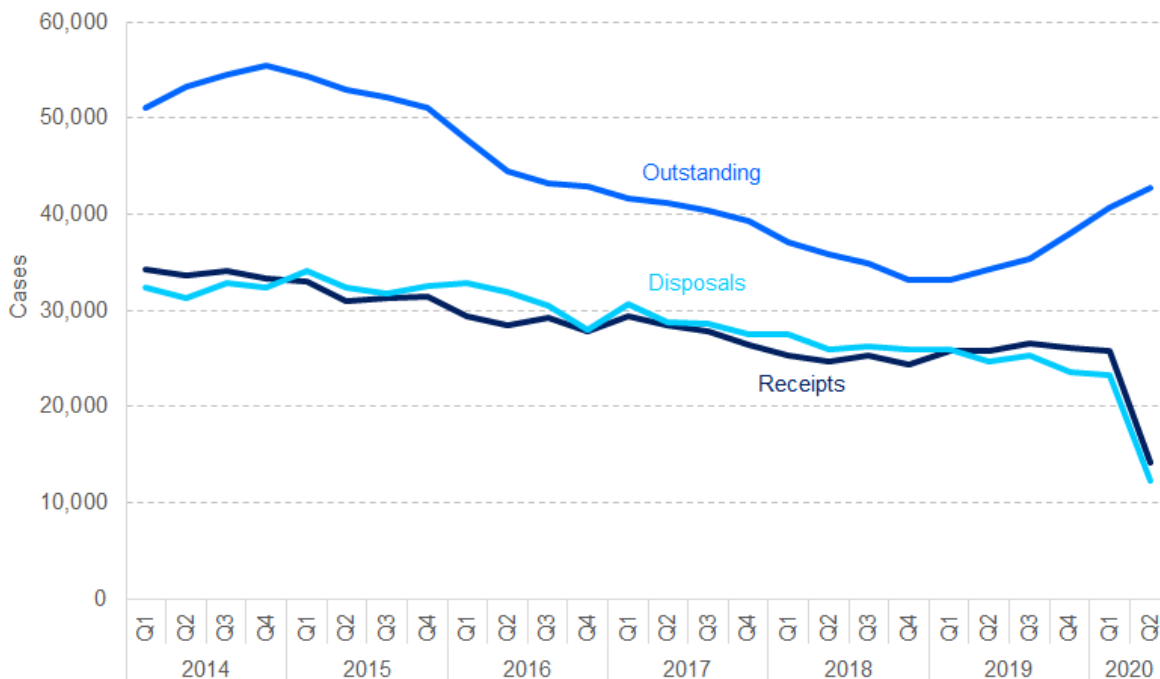


3. Criminal cases in the Crown Court

The volume of outstanding cases at the Crown Court continued to rise, while receipts and disposals fell to historical low series following the COVID-19 response.

In Q2 2020 there were 45% fewer receipts and 50% fewer disposals compared to Q2 2019. The volume of outstanding cases increased by 25% over the same period, from around 34,277 in Q2 2019 to 42,707 in Q2 2020.

Figure 3: Crown Court caseload, Q1 2014 – Q2 2020 (Source: Table C1)



Crown Court caseload (Table C1)

On 23rd March 2020 jury trials were suspended⁷ and the operational capacity of the court estate was reduced as part of the ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The phased reintroduction of jury trials during May 2020 continues, with gradually increasing caseloads at the Crown Court from a low in April 2020 evident in the latest HMCTS management information.⁸

In Q2 2020, there has been a decrease in both case receipts and disposals, the greater falls seen in disposals compared to receipts has led to the continued increase in outstanding case volumes.

- The volume of case receipts into the Crown Court fell by 45% compared to the previous year. The fall is true across all case types, with a 36% fall in 'for trial' case receipts.
- Similarly, the volume of disposals halved, from 24,740 cases in Q2 2019 to 12,338 cases in Q2 2020. As with receipts, the fall can be seen across all case types, with 47% decrease in 'for trial' disposals.

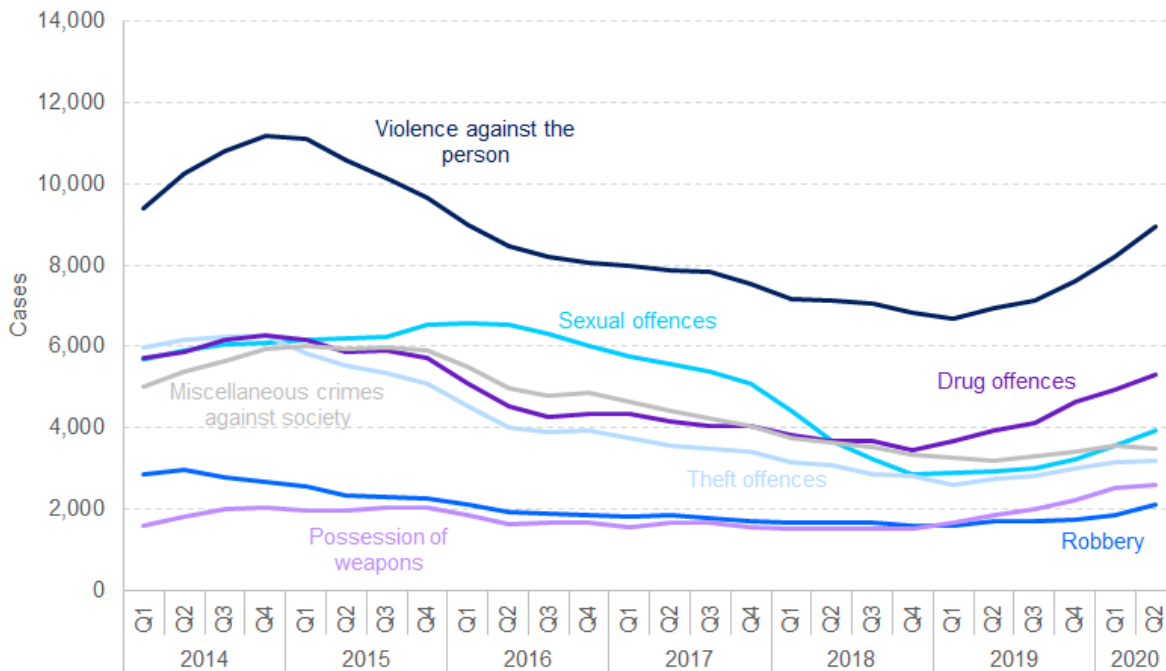
At the end of Q2 2020 there were 42,707 outstanding cases at the Crown Court, an increase of 25% on Q2 2019 (8,429 cases). This is the highest level of outstanding cases seen since the end of 2016 and continues the consistent increases seen since Q1 2019.

⁷ <https://www.judiciary.uk/announcements/review-of-court-arrangements-due-to-covid-19-message-from-the-lord-chief-justice/>

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hmcts-management-information>

- The increase can be seen across all case types to varying degrees, with a 29% increase in outstanding 'for trial' cases – compared to 6% for sentence cases and 15% for appeals.
- The increase in 'for trial' cases compared with the previous year can be seen across all offence groups to varying degrees, excluding 'fraud offences'. The largest proportional increases on the previous year were seen for possession of weapons (39%), drug offences (up 35%) and sexual offences (34%).

Figure 4: Outstanding trial cases by selected offence groups, Q1 2014 – Q2 2020
(Source: cc_rdos_tool)



The latest published [HMCTS management information](#) provides weekly volumes of receipts, disposals and outstanding cases for all cases types at the Crown Court.

The data to the week ending 23rd August 2020 shows that weekly receipts and disposals have both increased from lows in mid-April and receipts are close to pre-COVID baseline. Receipts have tended to remain higher than disposals, as such outstanding case volumes continue to increase, up 18% to 46,467 from a pre-COVID baseline of 39,331.

Trial efficiency

Prior to the impact of COVID-19, the volume of trials at the Crown Court has tended to fall since 2015, from around 39,000 trials listed to 24,000 in 2019. In Q2 2020 there were 124 trials listed because of the COVID-19 impact. As the volumes are so small compared to previous periods it is not possible to draw any conclusion regarding trends in the rate of effective, cracked or ineffective trials during this period. Any comparisons should be interpreted with caution.

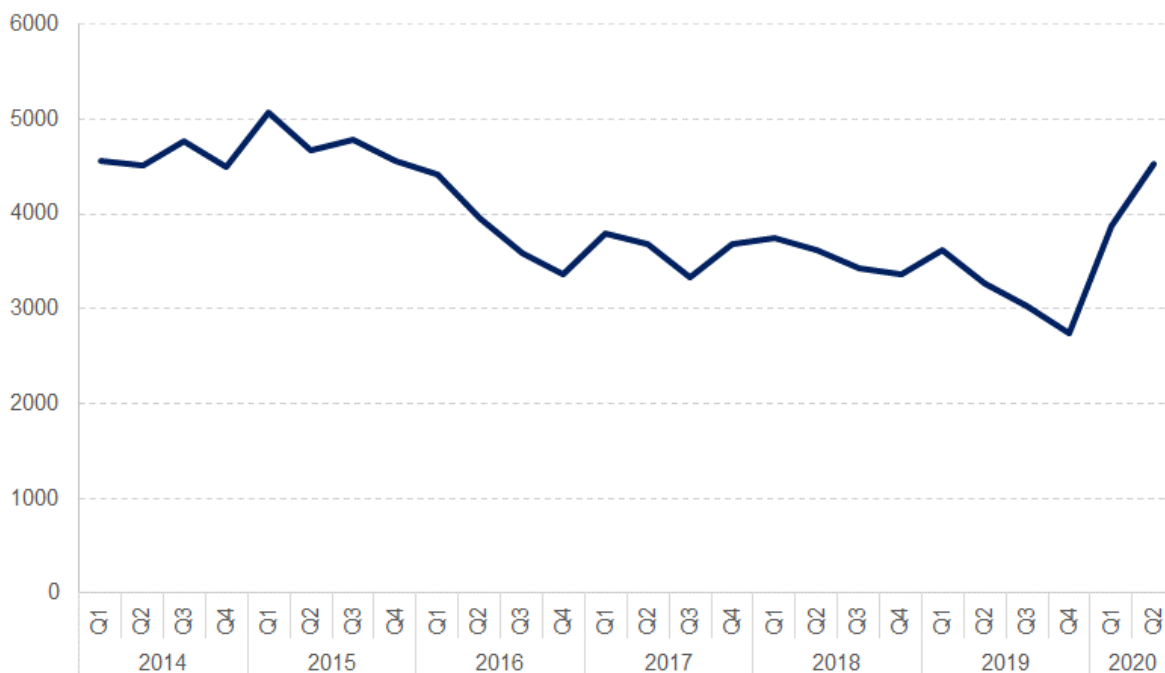
The volume of vacated trials⁹ has increased from a series low in Q4 2019. In Q2 2020 there

⁹ Vacated trials are trials which have been removed from the listing before the date of the trial, they are counted in the period the vacation happened rather than the date when they were due to be listed (e.g. as for effective, cracked and ineffective estimates).

were 4,529 vacated trials, up 38% compared to Q2 2019 and 17% on Q1 2020 - back to levels previously seen in 2015.

Trial levels in the latest period are historically low but jury trials have started to resume in a number of Crown Courts from late-May 2020.¹⁰

Figure 5: Vacated trials at the Crown Court, Q1 2014 – Q2 2020 (Source: Table C2)



Guilty plea rates

For defendants dealt with in trial cases at the Crown Court, the guilty plea rate¹¹ in Q2 2020 (80%) has increased markedly compared to Q2 2019 (68%).

Given the sharp falls in the volume of defendants dealt with and the suspension of jury trials, it is difficult to draw conclusions from this. It is likely that the guilty plea rate increase is caused by the restricted ability of courts to progress jury trials (e.g. not guilty cases) as part of the COVID-19 response.

Average waiting and hearing time at the Crown Court

Overall, the median average waiting time¹² for defendants dealt with at the Crown Court increased from 5.3 weeks in Q2 2019 to 7.3 weeks in Q2 2020. The increase in the latest period follows consistent falls since 2015 and the waiting time remains below the peak levels previously seen (12.1 weeks). The increase is not seen in all case types and can be mostly attributed to trial cases where a guilty plea was entered, increasing from 5.3 to 7.9 weeks.

The median hearing time¹³ for trials where a not guilty plea was entered, has increased sharply in Q2 2020, up 29% on Q2 2019, from 11.5 to 14.9 hours.

The reduction in overall volumes of defendants dealt with and cases closed, as a consequence of the restrictions on court activity, make it difficult to draw any firm conclusions regarding the observed trends in average waiting and hearing time.

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/courts-and-tribunals-tracker-list-during-coronavirus-outbreak>

¹¹ Guilty plea rate is the number of defendants pleading guilty to all counts as a proportion of those with a plea.

¹² The waiting time is the duration between a case being sent to the Crown Court and the first main hearing.

¹³ The hearing time is the time a case spends being heard in the Crown Court, including preliminary hearings, main hearings, and hearings where a sentence is given to a defendant.

4. Timeliness

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused MoJ to have to change its data gathering, access and release practices, focusing efforts on priority analysis and statistics. [Our statement](#) explains this further. Of particular note, we temporarily paused access to the Police National Computer earlier this year, to minimise non-essential travel by our analysts. Whilst access has resumed now, work is being resumed on a prioritised basis.

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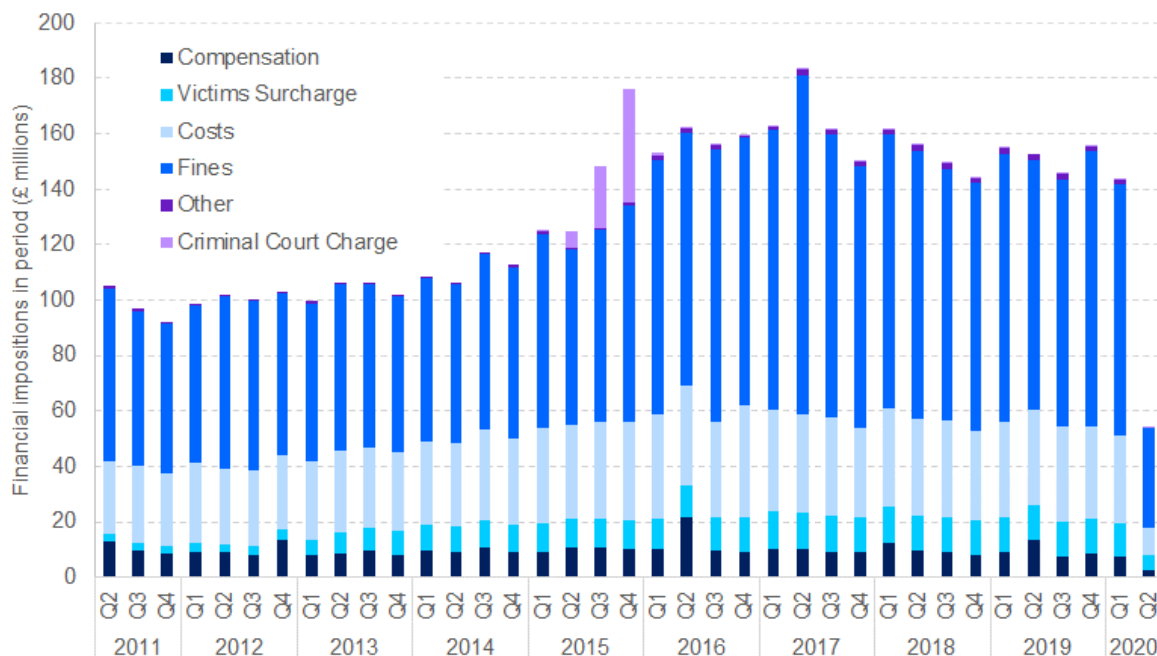
We will continue to review arrangements and are also working at developing alternative methodology to calculating end-to-end timeliness and will keep users informed. We remain committed both to the wellbeing of our staff, and to providing the best and most accurate information we can, serving the public good at a time when it is needed the most.

5. Enforcement of financial impositions

Total financial impositions fell sharply in Q2 2020

Total financial impositions fell to £54m in Q2 2020, down by 65% compared with Q2 2019. The total value of outstanding financial impositions remained at £1.20 billion in Q2 2020.

Figure 6: HMCTS management information: Financial impositions by imposition type, England and Wales, Q2 2011 – Q2 2020 (Source: Table A2)



Financial impositions and amounts paid by imposition type

Following the impacts of the COVID-19 response the overall value of impositions fell by around £98.7m on Q2 2019, with falls against all imposition types. The majority of this is largely due to decreases in fines, where the value of fines imposed fell by £54m, down 60% compared with Q2 2019.

Outstanding financial impositions

In Q2 2020, the total value of financial impositions outstanding in England and Wales was £1.20 billion, up 4% on Q2 2019.

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

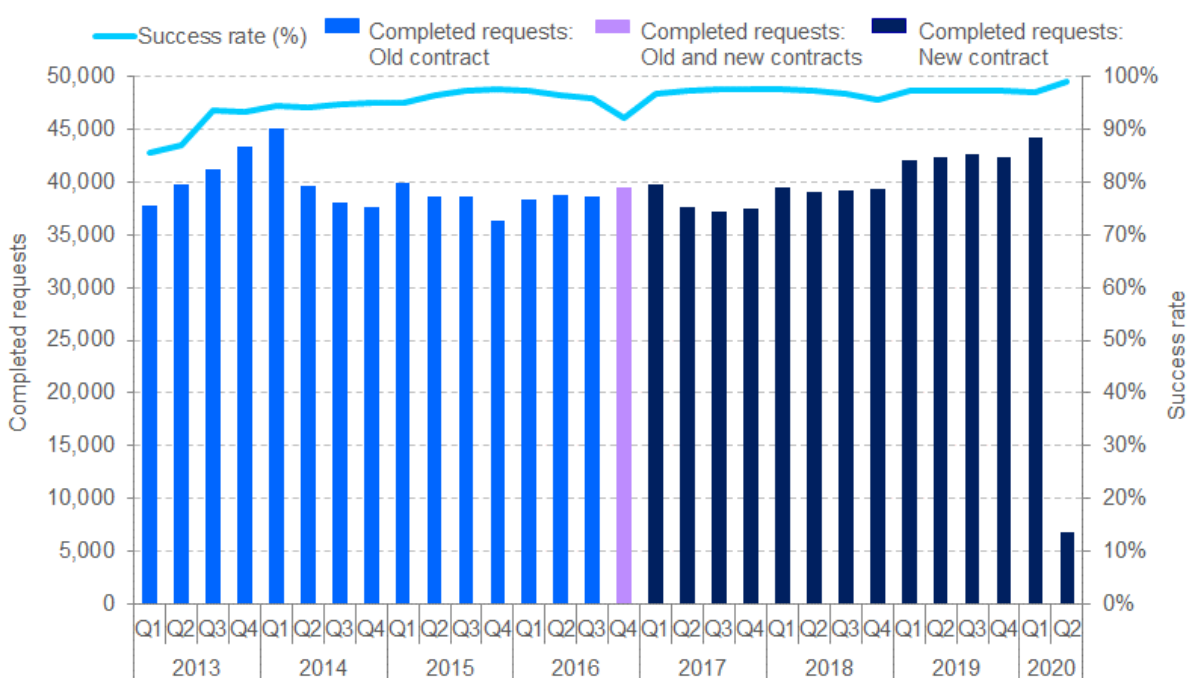
The number of completed language service requests fell sharply and the success rate increased, with a third of requests cancelled.

The success rate of requests has increased compared to Q2 2019 up from 97% to 99%, while a third (34%) of all requests were cancelled, up from 17% in Q2 2019. The number of completed requests has fallen by 84% on Q2 2019.

Completed service requests

The number of completed service requests in Q2 2020 (6,775) fell sharply compared to Q2 2019, down 84% as a result of the COVID-19 impact on the courts system.

Figure 7: Number of completed language service requests and overall success rate, Q1 2013 – Q2 2020 (Source: Table L1)



Success rate

The overall success rate of requests was 99% in Q2 2020, representing a two-percentage point increase on Q2 2019 (97%). The sharp fall in completed requests following the COVID-19 pandemic response has seen the proportion of cancelled bookings double, from 17% in Q2 2019 to 34% in Q2 2020.

Complaints and complaint rate

Similar to completed service requests, the number of complaints has decreased markedly from 563 in Q2 2019 to 96 in Q2 2020. The overall complaint rate remains stable at 1%.

'Off-contract' requests

The number of 'off-contract' requests in Q2 2020 fell by 89% compared to the Q2 2019, from 647 to 74.

The reduction in overall volumes of language service requests and complaints, as a consequence of the restrictions on court activity imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic response make it difficult to draw any firm conclusions regarding the observed trends.

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 and standalone quality guide.
- 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 2019.¹⁴ 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 influence¹⁵.



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

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

Next update: 17th December 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

¹⁴ <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/correspondence/compliance-check-on-court-statistics/>

¹⁵ <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/monitoring-and-assessment/code-of-practice/>