

# YOUTH ENGAGEMENT STATISTICS FOR NORTHERN IRELAND APRIL 2020 TO MARCH 2021

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# 1 Executive Summary

- This bulletin presents data on cases relating to young people (aged 10 to 17 years) coming into formal contact with the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland for the year 1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021. It provides some detail on those referred for the Youth Engagement process, alongside information on the time taken for that process to complete and the subsequent outcomes. The first bulletin in the series was produced for the year to April 2019. Like the rest of the justice system, the Youth Engagement process was impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and that is reflected in the numbers reported in this publication.
- There were 2,267 cases relating to young people coming into formal contact with the criminal justice system in 2020-21. This is a decrease of 456 (16.7%) from 2019-20.
- The Public Prosecution Service (PPS) assessed 49.4% (1,121) of cases suitable for resolution through the Youth Engagement process and 47.9% (1,085) as not suitable.
- The majority (75.5%, 1,712) of young people coming into formal contact with the justice system in 2020-21 were male.
- Over half, (51.4%, 1,166) of cases in 2020-21 were in relation to those aged from 16 or 17 at the time of their offence. The remaining 48.6 % (1,101) were aged 10 to 15 at the time of their offence.
- Of those assessed by PPS as not suitable for Youth Engagement, 50.7% (550) were deemed suitable for prosecution and 48.7% (528) were assessed as requiring no further action.
- The most frequent outcome, 41.2% (462) was a Youth Conference.
- All of the cases (100.0%, 68) removed from the Youth Engagement process were returned to the PPS for a further decision on how the case was to be progressed.
- The median time for a case to be dealt with through the Youth Engagement process in 2020-21 was 78 days, an increase of 29 days from the median time recorded in 2019-20.
- Legal representation, while offered to individuals, was declined in the majority (83.3%, 695) of cases by the family.
- Of those who participated in a Youth Engagement clinic and responded to the survey question, 98.3% (118) of young people stated the clinic 'helped them understand the choices available to them'.

## 2 Context

Young people coming into contact with the criminal justice system may; go through the formal court process, be dealt with through an out-of-court diversionary disposal; or have no further action taken.

The Public Prosecution Service (PPS) decide which route may be appropriate for each young person dependent upon the circumstances of the case and the seriousness of any offence involved.

Those deemed suitable to be dealt with by an out-of-court diversionary disposal may be progressed through a process called Youth Engagement (YE). In most cases, where PPS decides that a young person's case can be dealt with outside the court system, the young person will be asked to attend a YE clinic. The aim of the clinic is to make sure that young people have all the information they need to help them decide what to do.

At the clinic, the young person, their parent(s)/guardian(s) and solicitor meet with youth justice workers from the Youth Justice Agency (YJA) and the police (PSNI). They let the young person know what the PPS has decided in their case, what it means and the options available to them. A solicitor can help guide the young person through the process and explain things like the crime they have been accused of and the nature of any relevant evidence in the case.

## 3 Youth Engagement Process

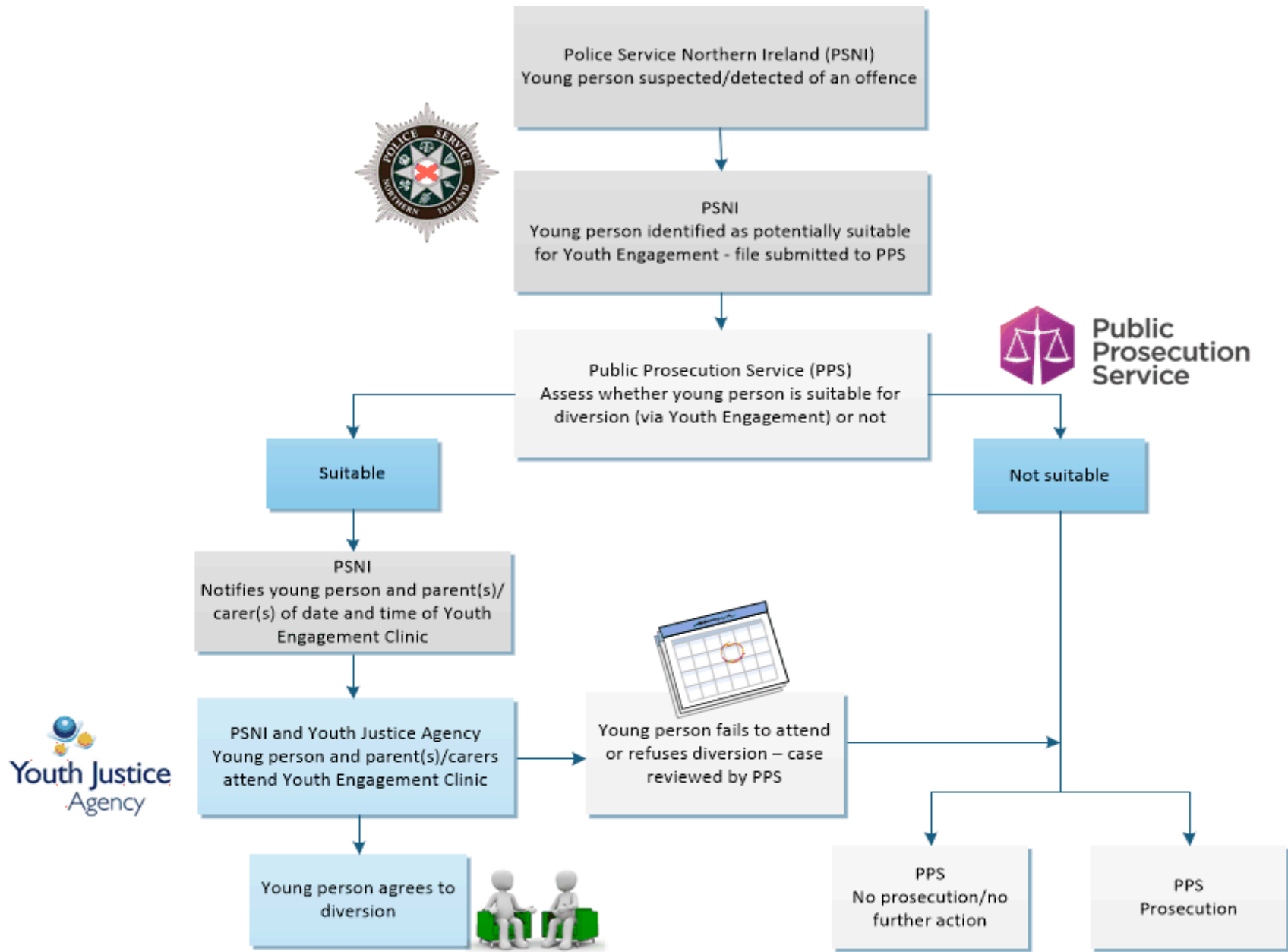
This flowchart shows the YE process from the point PSNI identify the young person suspected/detected of an offence. Once this has happened, PSNI will assess if the young person is suitable for YE or not. If they are assessed as suitable, a file is submitted to PPS with this recommendation.

The PPS will assess whether the young person is suitable for diversion or not. At this point, if they are regarded as not suitable, the young person will follow one of two paths:

1. the PPS will decide there should be no prosecution and therefore no further action or;
2. the PPS decide to pursue prosecution at court.

Should PPS decide the young person is suitable for the YE process, then PSNI will notify the young person and parent/carer of the date and time of a Youth Engagement Clinic. PSNI and YJA meet with the young person at the clinic. A diversion can be agreed at this point.

However, if the young person fails to attend or refuses the diversion, the case is returned to PPS to be reviewed. The case may then be processed for prosecution or, upon further reflection, no further action may be taken.



# 4 Youth Engagement Initiative

## 4.1 Tripartite Initiative

Youth Engagement is a tripartite initiative across Northern Ireland, involving PSNI, PPS and YJA. It was introduced following the conclusion of a pilot exercise in 2013. Its objectives are to:

1. assist with the diversion away from court, of young people who admit to low-level offences, into a reparative or diversionary process, with the option of support or intervention at an earlier stage;
2. support young people accused of a crime to make better informed decisions;
3. enhance the rehabilitative and restorative benefits of the disposal, by ensuring that youth cases are resolved as swiftly as possible;
4. improve processing times for youth cases that are unsuitable for diversionary action.

## 4.2 Timely Resolution

Overall, these objectives contribute to speeding up the criminal justice system. This has been a priority for the Department of Justice (DoJ) since the devolution of responsibility for policing and justice in April 2010, both for cases resulting in out-of-court diversionary disposals and for cases dealt with at court.

The efficiency of the criminal justice system is important for victims, witnesses, their families and communities, in terms of building confidence, as well as demonstrating legitimacy of the rule of law. Additionally, early resolution of cases can also help offenders understand the implications of their actions. The timely completion of cases, commensurate with the principles of a fair and just process, contributes to delivery of an effective and efficient justice system.

The Covid-19 pandemic however, has impacted on the levels of Youth Engagement clinics that could be held, as well as on other parts of the justice system. This has meant that, for a large part of 2020-21, cases were not able to proceed through the system at a rate they might otherwise have done.

## 4.3 About this Report

This bulletin, published annually, presents data on cases relating to young people coming into formal contact with the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland during the year 1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021. It provides detail on those referred for the YE process, alongside information on the time taken for that process to complete and on subsequent outcomes. Detail on the structure of the population concerned is also included. Some comparison has been made with figures from the other years for which this information has been available.

This publication is based mainly on data from Causeway Data Sharing Mechanism (DSM1). Data were extracted primarily based on records contained on the Criminal Records Viewer (CRV). The CRV is held on DSM1 and utilises data which originated in PSNI, PPS and from Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS). DSM1 is an interconnected information system, launched as a joint undertaking by the Criminal Justice Organisations (CJOs) in Northern Ireland.

To complete the dataset, data relating to YE clinic dates and outcomes are sourced from YJA Management Information Systems and matched with the information from DSM1. Additional information relating to legal representation at clinics, as well as victim involvement, is sourced from the PSNI. Findings from a survey conducted on participants upon completion of the YE process, have also been included.

The figures reported in this bulletin relate to cases prosecuted by the PPS on behalf of PSNI, Harbour Police, Airport Constabulary or the National Crime Agency (NCA). The period covered by this bulletin is based on the date of charge (for charge cases) or date accused informed (for summons cases). The data relate to young people aged under 18 at time of offence.

Details of data coverage, quality and methodology are detailed in Appendix 1. Data in all tables and charts in the bulletin, along with supplementary data, are available from the DoJ website in the accompanying spreadsheet.

The next update, covering the 12 months to 31 March 2022, will be published in November 2022. A full [publication schedule](#) is available on the DoJ website.

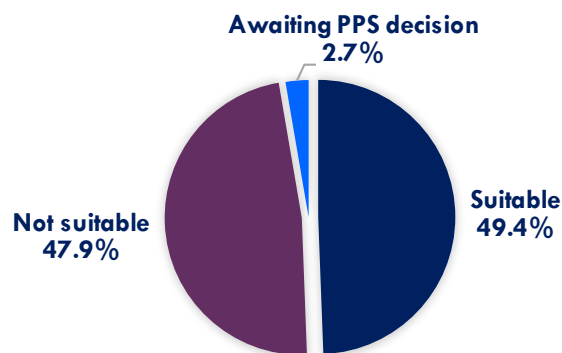
# 5 Findings

## 5.1 Overview

There were 2,267 cases relating to young people coming into formal contact with the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland during the year 1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021. The total number of referrals decreased by 16.7% from 2,723 in 2019-20.

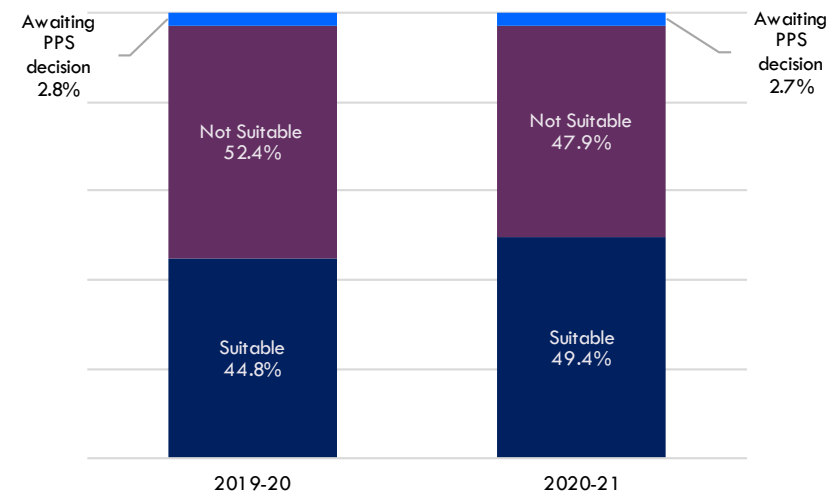
In 2020-21, PPS assessed 49.4% (1,121) of cases involving young people that were referred to them as suitable for resolution through the YE process and 47.9% (1,085) as not suitable. The figures for 2019-20 were 44.8% (1,221) and 52.4% (1,427) respectively.

Figure 1: Cases assessed as suitable/not suitable for Youth Engagement



At the end of September 2021, when data for 2020-21 were reviewed, 2.7% (61) of cases were still awaiting a decision by PPS on whether they were suitable for YE. This is a half a percentage point decrease in the numbers awaiting PPS decision, comparing 2019-20 to 2020-21. (Figures 1 and 2 and Table 1 in accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

Figure 2: Cases assessed as suitable/not suitable for Youth Engagement by year





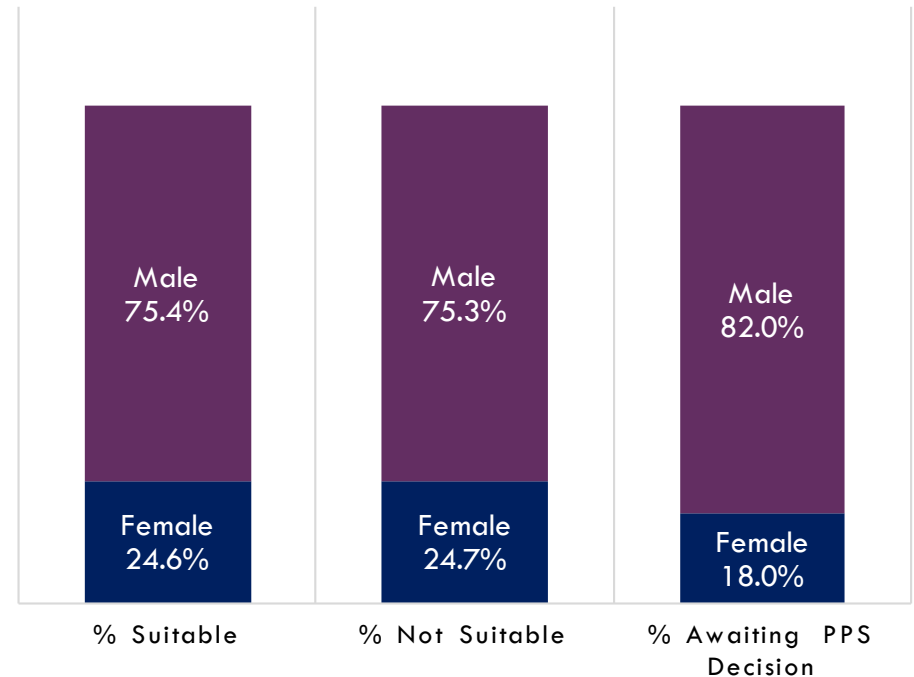
## 5.2 Numbers of Referrals for Youth Engagement by Gender

The majority of young people (75.5%, 1,712) coming into formal contact with the justice system in 2020-21 were male and 24.5% (555) were female. Of all those adjudged suitable for the YE process, males made up 75.4% (845) while females made up 24.6% (276). The proportion of males adjudged not suitable for the YE process was slightly lower, at 75.3% (817) whilst 24.7% (268) of females were adjudged not suitable for YE. (Figure 3 and Table 2 in the accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

Proportionately, females were more likely (48.3%, 268), to be assessed as not suitable for YE, in 2020-21 compared to males (47.7%, 817). The proportion of females (49.7%, 276) assessed as suitable for YE was slightly higher in 2020-21 than that for males (49.4%, 845).

At the end of September 2021, when data for 2020-21 were reviewed, males made up 82.0% (50 out of a total of 61) cases where PPS had yet to issue a decision on how these cases were to proceed.

Figure 3: Youth Engagement referrals by gender



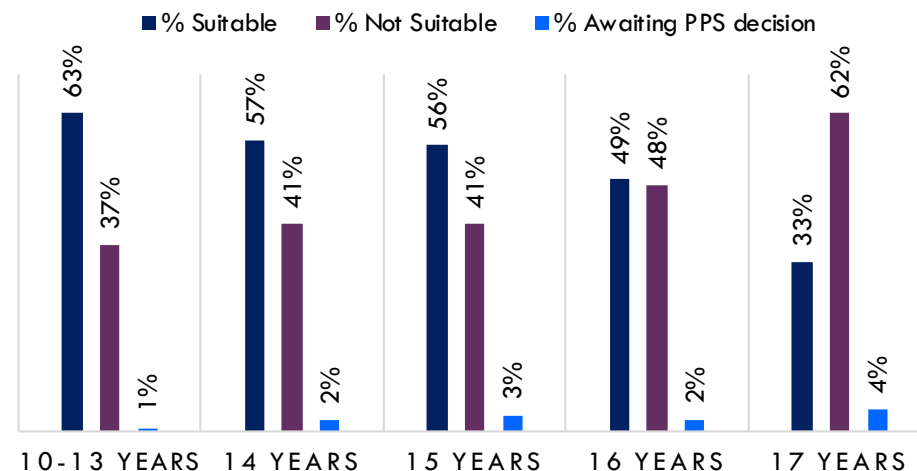
## 5.3 Numbers of Referrals for Youth Engagement by Age

Just over half (51.4%, 1,166) of cases in 2020-21 involved young people aged 16 or 17 at the time of their offence (23.7% and 27.7% respectively). The remaining 48.6% (1,101) of cases were made up of those aged from 10 to 15 years. (Figure 4 and Table 3a, 3b and 3c in the accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

Young people aged 16 and 17 at date of offence, made up 42.4% (475) of all cases assessed as suitable for YE. They also made up the majority of cases assessed as not suitable 60.1% (652).

Under 16s were more likely to be assessed as suitable for the YE process, than not, with 58.7% (646) of young people in this age group being assessed as suitable for YE. Conversely, only 40.7% (475) of young people aged 16 to 17 at date of offence were assessed as suitable for YE. Young people aged 17 made up the largest proportion overall of those assessed as not suitable (392, 36.1%).

Figure 4: Youth Engagement referrals by age



## 5.4 Cases Assessed as Not Suitable for Youth Engagement by PPS

Of the 1,085 of cases assessed by PPS as not suitable for progression through the YE process, 50.7% (550) were sent forward for prosecution at court, whereas in 48.7% (528) of the cases, PPS decided that there should be no further action. Additionally, 0.6% (7) of cases were assessed as not suitable for YE for other reasons, such as the young person agreeing to participate in the Northern Ireland Driver Improvement Scheme. (Table 4 in the accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

## 5.5 Outcomes of Youth Engagement Clinics

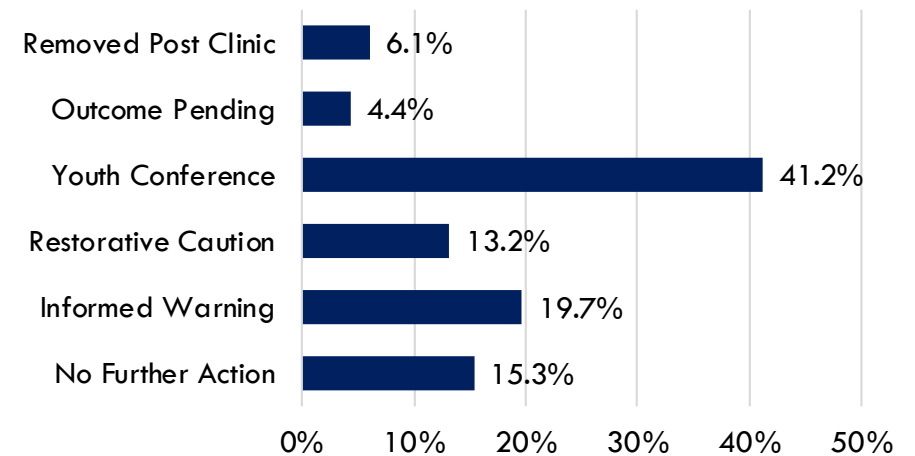
In 2020-21, 41.2% (462) of the 1,121 cases assessed by PPS as suitable for YE, resulted in a youth conference plan. A further 19.7% (221) of cases resulted in an informed warning and 13.2% (148) of cases resulted in a restorative caution being issued. The corresponding percentages for these outcomes in 2019-20 were 40.0%, 20.6% and 17.0% respectively.

The remainder of the cases, those which did not result in a youth conference plan, restorative caution or informed warning, were either returned to PPS for further consideration post-clinic (6.1%, 68) or resulted in a decision of no further action being taken (15.3%, 172). This latter figure increased from 7.5% (92) in 2019/20.

The number of cases where an outcome of the YE clinic was pending rose to 75 cases (6.1% of the total) in 2019-20 but has fallen in the current year to 49 cases (4.4%). The figure for 2018-19 clinic outcome pending was 2 cases (0.2%). The higher than usual figure for 2020-21 is likely due to the continuing effect of the delay introduced to the justice system as a result of the lockdown which occurred due to the Covid-19 pandemic. (Figure 5 and Table 5 in the accompanying [spreadsheet](#))

Of the 68 cases returned to PPS post-clinic, all were recorded as returned to PPS for further decision regarding either prosecution or no further action. (Table 8 in the accompanying [spreadsheet](#))

Figure 5: Youth Engagement – reasons not suitable



## 5.5 Outcomes continued

A youth conference plan was the most common outcome for both males and females as a result of participation in the YE process, with 43.0% (363) of males and 35.9% (99) of females receiving this outcome in 2020-21. The second most common outcome for both males and females was an informed warning, with 19.3% (163) of males and 21.0% (58) of females receiving this outcome. A restorative caution was the outcome for 13.1% (111) of males and 13.4% (37) of females, as a result of participation in the YE process in 2020-21. No further action was the outcome for 20.3% (56) of females compared to 13.7% (116) of males in 2020-21.

Regardless of age, the most common outcome for young people going through the YE process is a youth conference plan, an outcome associated with 41.2% (462) of all cases in 2020-21. This was the outcome for 36.9% (92) of 10-13 year-olds and 46.4% (123) of 16 year-olds. Informed warnings were received in 19.7% (221) of all cases, ranging from 14.7% (39) for 16 year-olds to 24.9% (62) for 10 - 13 year-olds. While a restorative caution was the outcome in 13.2% (148) of all cases in 2020-21, the proportion varied across age groups, with this being the outcome for 12.3% (22) of 14 year olds, compared to 16.2% (34) of 17 year olds.

No further action was the outcome for 16.9% (42) of cases involving 10-13 year olds but for only 13.2% (35) of cases involving 16 year olds in 2020-21.

Additionally, 4.5% (8) of cases involving 14 year olds were removed for the YE process post-clinic, in comparison to 9.1% (24) of cases involving 16 year olds. (Table 6 to 7 in the accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

## 5.6 Time Taken for Completion of YE Process

While it is important to examine outcomes for young people coming into formal contact with the justice system, the length of time taken for cases to process through the system, in a sense the efficiency of the criminal justice system, is also important for victims, witnesses, their families and communities, in terms of building confidence, as well as demonstrating legitimacy of the rule of law. Additionally, early resolution of cases can also help young people understand the implications of their actions.

For the above reasons, this report includes information on the time taken for cases to complete the YE process, as well as in relation to the individual constituent stages. For a variety of reasons cases can take differing times to complete and because of this, it was decided to report both the time taken to process 50% (the median point) and the point at which 80% of cases have been completed.

## 5.7 Median Time Taken for Completion of Youth Engagement Process

In 2020-21, the median time taken for cases, i.e. the time for half of such cases, to complete the YE process, from the date an individual was charged or informed to the Youth Engagement first clinic date, was 78 days (49 days in 2019-20). While 80% of cases were completed within 138 days (96 days in 2019-20), the longest time taken for a case to complete the YE process in 2020-21 was 534 days. Both the median number of days and 80<sup>th</sup> percentile have increased in each of the three years for which there was data. (Figures 6a and 6b and Table 9a to 9c in the accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

### Stage of Process

Stage 1 - Date accused informed to date file submitted to PPS

Stage 2 - Date file submitted to PPS to date of PPS decision

Stage 3 - Date of PPS decision to date of clinic (1st appointment)

End to End - Date 'accused informed' to date of clinic (1st appointment)

Figure 6a: Time in days for stages in the Youth Engagement process, 2020-21 (Median)

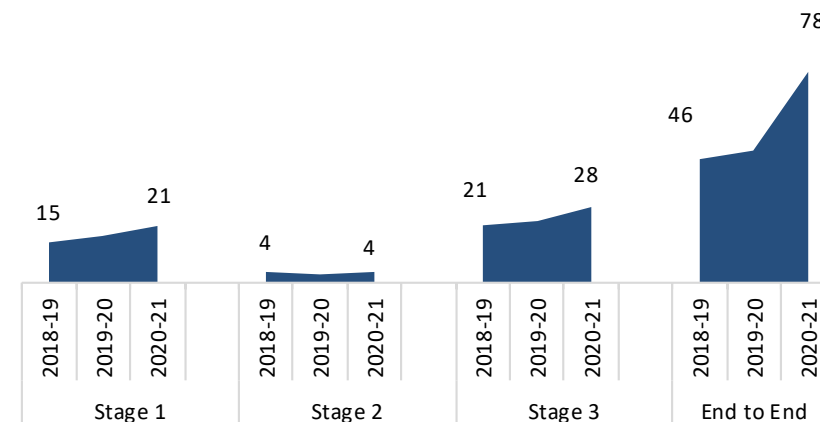
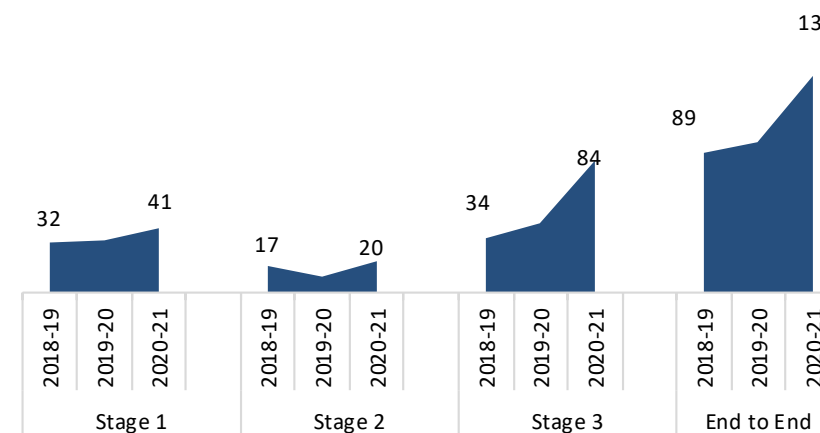


Figure 6b: Time in days from date accused informed to date of clinic, 2018-19 to 2020-21 (80<sup>th</sup> Percentile)

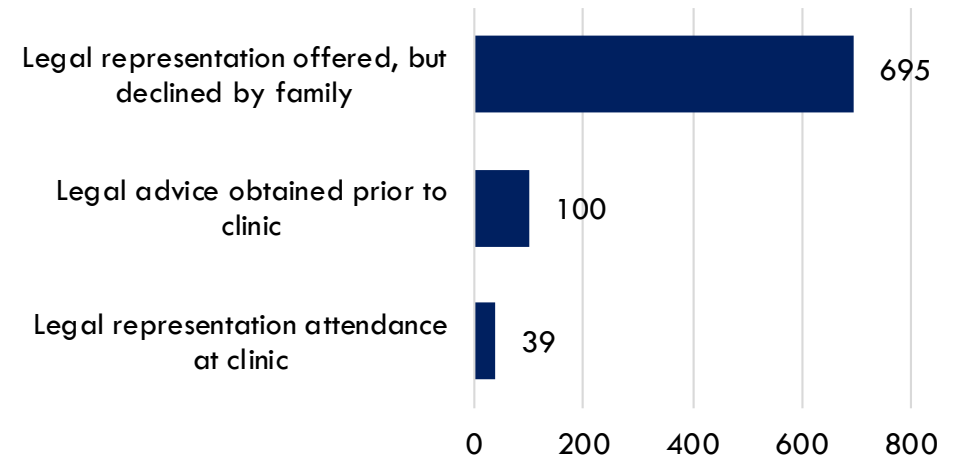


## 5.8 Legal Representation at Youth Engagement Clinics

As part of the YE process, all young people are offered legal representation, to help guide them through the process and explain things such as the crime they have been accused of and the evidence that can be used against them.

During the year 2020-21, legal representation, while offered, was declined by the young person or their family in 83.3% (695) of cases (2019-20, 80.1%). Legal advice was obtained prior to the clinic in 12.0% (100) of cases (11.0% in 2019-20) and in the remaining 4.7% (39) of cases (8.9% in 2019-20) the young person had legal representation present at the YE clinic. (Figure 7 and Table 10 in the accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

Figure 7: Number of cases with legal representation at clinics



## 5.9 Victim Involvement in Youth Engagement Process

Where the outcome of a YE clinic is a restorative caution, there is an opportunity for the young person and their parents to meet with the victim and anyone else who has been affected by the crime. Everyone is given a chance to talk about the impact the crime has had on them. There is a signed written record of the meeting, with the young person agreeing to apologise, take part in work to make amends to the victim or community, or go to classes to address their offending behaviour.

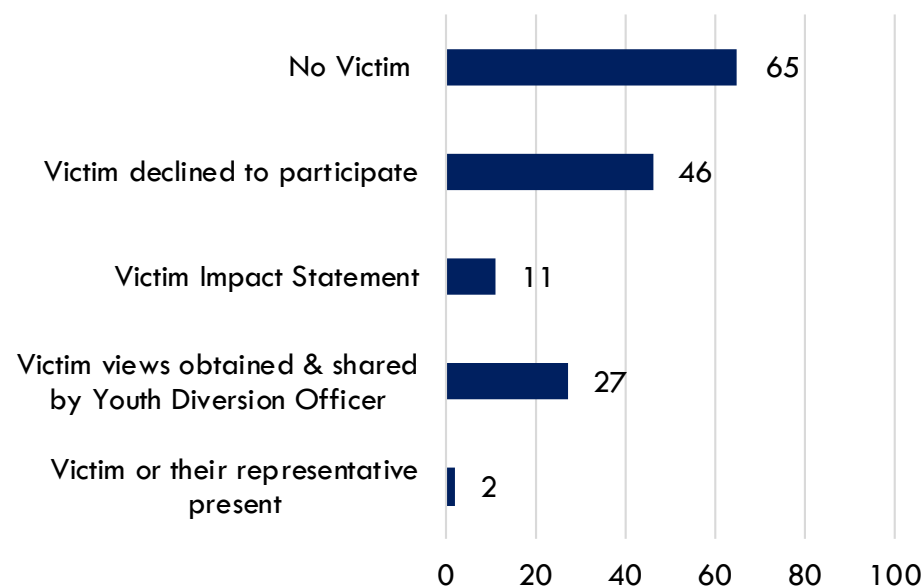
## 5.10 Victim Involvement Data 2020-21

In 2020-21, for clinics where the outcome was a restorative caution, there were 86 cases (94 in 2019-20) where a victim was associated with the offence committed. In 2.3% (2) of these cases, the victim or their representative was present. This is a decrease of 3 cases from 2019-20 when 5.3% (5) of cases had a victim or their representative present. There was a slight increase in the number of cases where the victim's views were obtained and shared with the young person involved by the Youth Diversion Officer (YDO); 27 (31.4%) cases in 2020-21 compared to 24 (25.5%) cases in 2019-20. In 11 (12.8%) cases, a victim impact statement was shared with the young person concerned, a decrease from the 17

(18.1%) recorded in 2019-20. There was a decrease in the number, though not in the overall proportion, of cases in which the victim declined to participate in the YE process, from 48 (51.1%) cases in 2019-20 to 46 (53.5%) cases in 2020-21.

The remaining 65 cases in 2020-21 related to offences where there was no victim. (Figure 8 and Table 11 in the accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

Figure 8: Number of cases with victim/representative involvement (Restorative Cautions only)



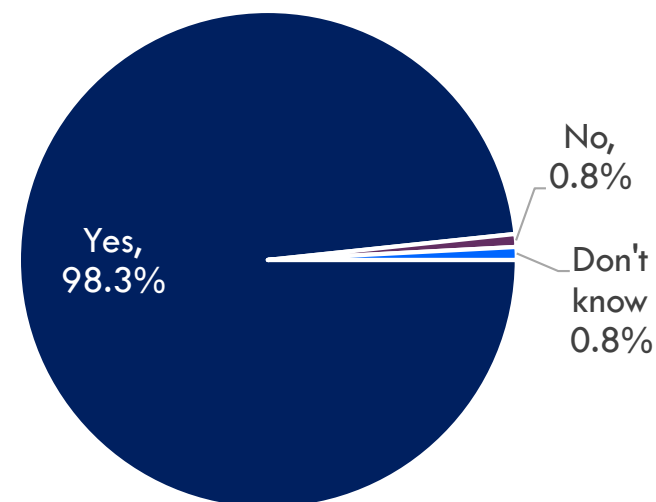
# 6 Youth Justice Agency Youth Engagement Survey

Youth Justice Agency complete a Youth Engagement Clinic Satisfaction Survey for both the young people attending the clinics and the parents/carers of the young people. During 2020-21 there were 120 responses from young people and 104 from parent/carers. Those surveyed may not have provided answers to all questions and figures are therefore based on the number of responses for each individual question.

## 6.1 Young People Survey 2020-21

Of the 120 who responded to the question, 98.3% (118) of young people stated the YE Clinic “helped them understand the choices available following the meeting”. (Figure 9 and Table 12 in the accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

Figure 9: It (YEC) helped me understand the choices available following the meeting

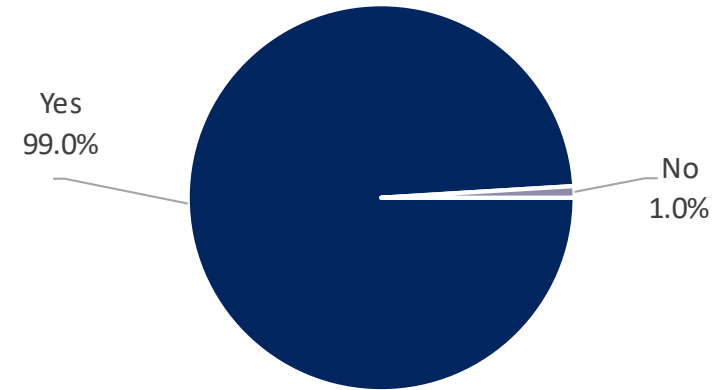




## 6.2 Parents/Carers Survey 2020-21

Of the 104 who responded to the question, 99.0% (103) parents/carers stated the YE Clinic helped them “understand the choices available to the young person concerned following the meeting”. There was one response stating ‘No’ in answer to the question, with none stating they were ‘Not sure’. (Figure 10 and Table 13 in the accompanying [spreadsheet](#)).

Figure 10: It (YEC) helped the young person understand the choices available following the meeting



# Appendix 1 (methodology and counting rules)

## What are we counting?

The figures reported in Tables 1–9 of this bulletin relate to cases prosecuted by the PPS on behalf of PSNI, Harbour Police, Airport Constabulary or the National Crime Agency (NCA). The period covered by this bulletin is based on the date of charge (for charge cases) or date accused informed (for summons cases). The data relate to young people aged under 18 at time of offence.

Tables 10 and 11 are based on Youth Engagement clinics which happened within the year 2020-21.

After the Youth Justice Agency has engaged with children via a Youth Engagement Clinic, they conduct a satisfaction survey in order to monitor their services. The survey is issued to both the children and their parents/carers by telephone, post, and in person. The analysis within Tables 12 and 13 of this publication is based on survey responses (not the date of the clinic) collected between April 2020 to March 2021 and completion of the survey is optional.

All tables relate to young people aged under 18 at time of offence. Where an offender has been charged with, or accused of, several offences on the same occasion, only one offence, the principal offence, is counted. The

principal offence is generally the most serious offence in terms of the potential penalties in law and is set in each case at the time the file is submitted to PPS from police.

This bulletin does not include cases where young people coming into contact with the police are dealt with by way of an informal out-of-court community resolution. These resolutions allow officers to use their professional judgement and discretion in managing low level and local crimes and are therefore dealt with differently. Information on numbers of community resolution notices issued are published separately by PSNI.

## Data source and coverage

The data for Tables 1–9 in this bulletin were taken from the Causeway Data Sharing Mechanism (DSM1). They were extracted primarily based on records contained on the Criminal Records Viewer (CRV). The CRV is held on Causeway and utilises data which originates in the PSNI, PPS and from Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS). Causeway is

an interconnected information system, launched as a joint undertaking by the Criminal Justice Organisations (CJOs) in Northern Ireland.

Data relating to Youth Engagement clinic dates and outcomes, sourced from the YJA Management Information System, are matched with the information from Causeway, to complete the dataset. Information in relation to legal representation at clinics, as well as in relation to victim involvement, reported in Tables 10 and 11, is sourced from PSNI. Information on satisfaction with the Youth Engagement process, reported in Tables 12 and 13, is sourced from the YJA.

Full details of data relevance, accuracy, timeliness, accessibility, coherence, user need, cost and confidentiality is available in the [accompanying background quality](#) report. Details of the data quality checks and processes that DoJ has in place are available in the [Quality Assurance of Administrative Data \(QAAD\)](#) document on the DoJ website.

## Interpreting the data

Figures reported relate primarily to the numbers of young people coming into the justice system: whether they are deemed suitable or not suitable for Youth Engagement and the reason why. For those assessed as suitable, some analysis is provided on the outcomes of subsequent Youth

Engagement clinics held, alongside a breakdown on the time taken for relevant stages within the process to complete.

The figures reported are based on individual cases however, some young people may, legitimately, be counted more than once in the figures reported. For example, in 2020-21, the 2,267 cases reported relate to 1,482 young people. Where a young person comes into contact with the justice system on more than one occasion, in relation to separate cases, these have been counted separately.

For the purposes of this publication, scheduled clinic dates are taken as those on which the clinic occurred or which were scheduled but on which the defendant did not attend. They do not include dates which were scheduled but were listed as postponed.

Figures reported in Table 9 relate primarily to the average time taken from the date the young person was charged, or informed they were to be prosecuted, to first date set for the Youth Engagement clinic. The form of average reported on in this bulletin is the median, or the value at which 50 percent of cases were completed. Figures for the time taken to deal with cases at the 80th percentile (the time in which 80% of cases were dealt with) are also reported. The median is used as a measure of average in this report as a relatively small number of cases may have taken a significantly long time. Using the median to find the midpoint in the series avoids any possible skew caused by outlying, longer cases.