



Criminal court statistics quarterly, England and Wales, October to December 2023

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

Main points

Magistrates' court: outstanding caseload increased



Case receipts increased by 4%, while disposals fell on the previous quarter. Disposal volumes were lower than receipts, resulting in outstanding cases increasing by 7% on the previous quarter to 370,731 at the end of Q4 2023.

Crown Court: outstanding caseload increased



Receipts (down 4%) and disposals (down 1%) fell compared to the previous quarter. Disposals remained below receipts, so the outstanding caseload increased 1% on the previous quarter to 67,573 at the end of Q4 2023.

Crown Court: rise in outstanding cases open for a year or more



The volume of outstanding cases that had been open for a year or more rose to 18,045 – this represents 28% of outstanding cases – slightly below the series peak (29%).

Effective trial rates stable



The effective trial rate at the magistrates' courts and Crown Courts remains in line with the previous 3 quarters (41% and 42% respectively).

Offence to completion duration increased on average for magistrates' court cases



The median time from offence to completion at the magistrates' court rose slightly on the previous quarter (from 178 to 182 days) and remains above pre-COVID levels (174 days in Q1 2020).

Offence to completion duration reduced on average for Crown Court cases



The median time from offence to completion at the Crown Court decreased slightly on the previous quarter (from 382 to 366 days) but remains above pre-COVID levels (254 days in Q1 2020).

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-statistics>

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Statistician's comment

This report covers the period to the end of December 2023.

The volume of receipts and disposals in the Crown court remain high, with receipts at their second highest quarterly value since 2020, and disposals at their second highest quarterly value since 2019. Receipts remain higher than disposals and so the outstanding caseload has grown in the latest quarter.

The effective trial rate remains stable in both magistrates' and Crown Courts; and the average length of time from offence to completion (end-to-end timeliness) increased slightly at magistrates' courts, but fell in the Crown Court.

1. Changes to note

Future publication plans

We will be publishing a one-off annex containing key metrics used to monitor the impact of changes to the Magistrates' Sentencing Powers alongside the June release of the Criminal Court Statistics Quarterly. This meets a previous departmental commitment and will include data on Crown Court receipts, disposals, outstanding cases and prison population from January 2020 to May 2023 (June 2023 for prison population).

For future publications we plan to remove commentary currently included as chapters 5 and 6 covering **Enforcement of financial impositions**. We will continue to publish the data from these chapters as **tables A1 to A4** within the document Criminal court statistics quarterly (tables). Any users with concerns about the removal of commentary on these data should contact criminal_court_sta@justice.gov.uk.

Common Platform and reform to criminal court data

'Common Platform' is a new digital case management system for the magistrates' and Crown Courts. The system seeks to streamline data collection, data accessibility and improve the way criminal cases are processed across the Criminal Justice System. It will eventually replace the existing 'legacy' criminal court systems Libra (magistrates') and XHIBIT (Crown), with a single, streamlined system.

The roll out across criminal courts began in September 2020 and was completed in July 2023. The new system is now live at all magistrates' courts and Crown Courts in England and Wales. All new criminal court cases are now entered on Common Platform. Cases that began prior to that court transitioning to Common Platform will remain on the 'legacy' system (i.e. LIBRA or XHIBIT).

Most measures relating to defendants dealt with at magistrates' courts and Crown Courts include both 'legacy' and Common Platform estimates. This includes all key breakdowns in published tables and associated data tools such as receipts and disposals for example.

Methodologies are as similar as possible however there are areas of known difference. The 'legacy' and 'new' data systems are fundamentally different, they do not record information in the same way and as such it is not possible to exactly replicate the existing published methodologies. We are monitoring the opportunities to improve the availability and coverage of published data as case volumes increase on Common Platform.

Areas of known difference that impact the statistics in this release include: the allocation of case type (such as triable-either-way, indictable only, committed for sentence and appeal), the inability to account for case transfers, main hearing allocation and changes to case ownership.

We will continue to develop data processes from the new system in collaboration with HMCTS and partner agencies. As we continue to develop these solutions, some series may be disrupted, with an increased likelihood of revisions to data in future.

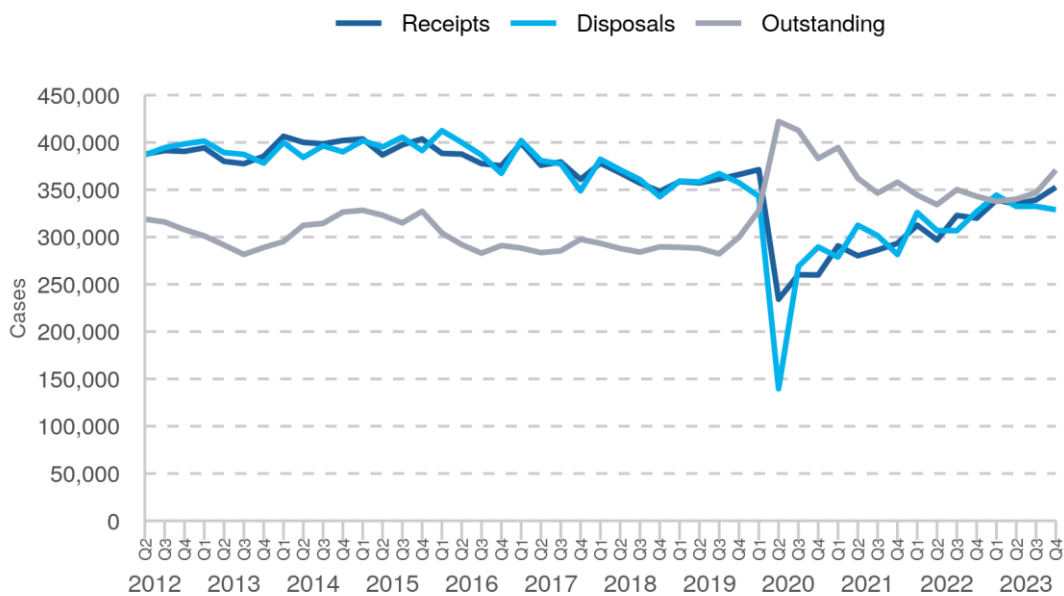
We are committed to ensuring that published statistics remain accurate, robust and coherent for users during the operational transition of data systems at the criminal courts. For further information regarding the extent of the differences summarised above please see the [Guide to criminal court statistics](#).

2. Criminal cases in the magistrates' courts

Outstanding caseload at the magistrates' courts increased as disposals volumes remained below case receipts.

Receipts increased 4% on the previous quarter while disposals fell slightly. Disposals were below receipts and as a result the outstanding caseload increased by 7% on the previous quarter.

Figure 1: Magistrates' courts caseload, Q2 2012 – Q4 2023 (Source: Table M1)



Magistrates' court caseload

Receipts and disposals have both tended to rise from series lows in Q2 2020 when the initial measures were put in place to manage the immediate risks of the COVID-19 pandemic in courts¹²³. The levels remain a little below those seen prior to the pandemic.

- Receipts into the magistrates' courts increased by 10% compared to the previous year and were higher (4 per cent) than in the previous quarter. The annual increase was driven by a 14% increase in receipts for summary motoring offences.
- Disposals at the magistrates' court increased by 1% on the previous year and fell by 1% on the previous quarter.
- At the end of December 2023 there were 370,731 outstanding cases at the magistrates' courts. This represents a 7% increase on the previous quarter (346,898) and a 12% decrease on the series peak seen in Q2 2020 (422,156).

The latest [HMCTS management information](#) provides monthly volumes of receipts, disposals and the open ('outstanding') caseload for all case types at the magistrates' courts (e.g., including civil and enforcement) beyond the published period. The data to January 2024 shows that the open caseload increased – up 1% on the previous month.

¹ <https://www.judiciary.uk/announcements/message-from-the-lord-chief-justice-latest-covid-19-restrictions/>

² <https://www.judiciary.uk/announcements/review-of-court-arrangements-due-to-covid-19-message-from-the-lord-chief-justice/>

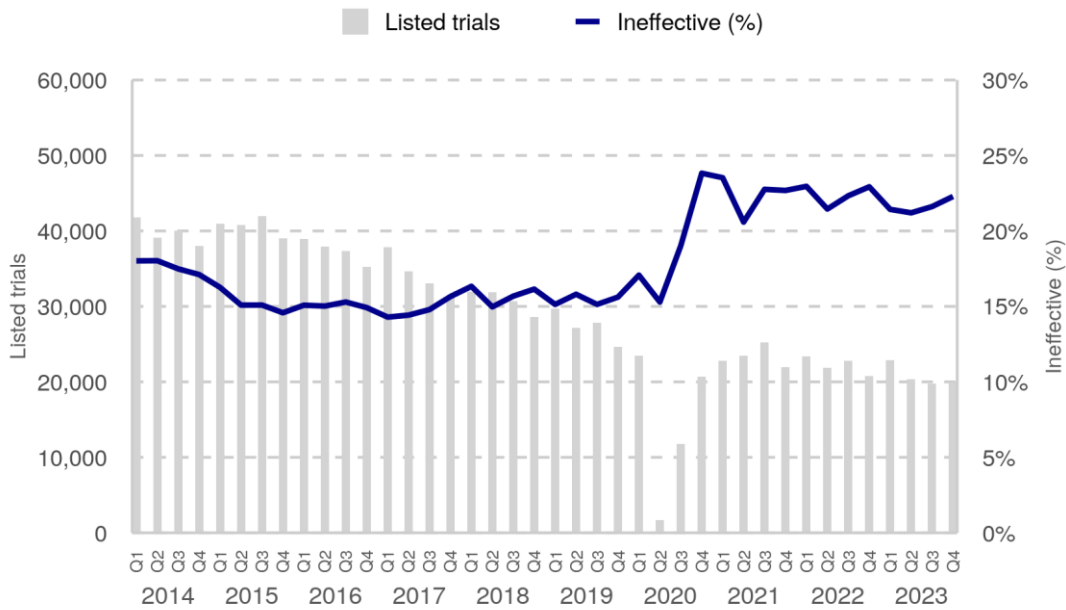
³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/more-face-to-face-hearings-as-courts-reopen>

Trial efficiency at magistrates' court

There were 19,893 trials listed for Q4 2023, this represents a 4% decrease on the previous year (20,750).

- Of trials listed for Q4 2023, the proportion that were effective was 41% (down from 42% in the last quarter). The cracked rate was 37% and ineffective rate 22% – the ineffective rate remains above pre-COVID levels (~15-17%).

Figure 2: Magistrates' courts listed trials and ineffective trial rate (%), Q1 2014 – Q4 2023 (Source: Table M2)



3. Criminal cases in the Crown Court

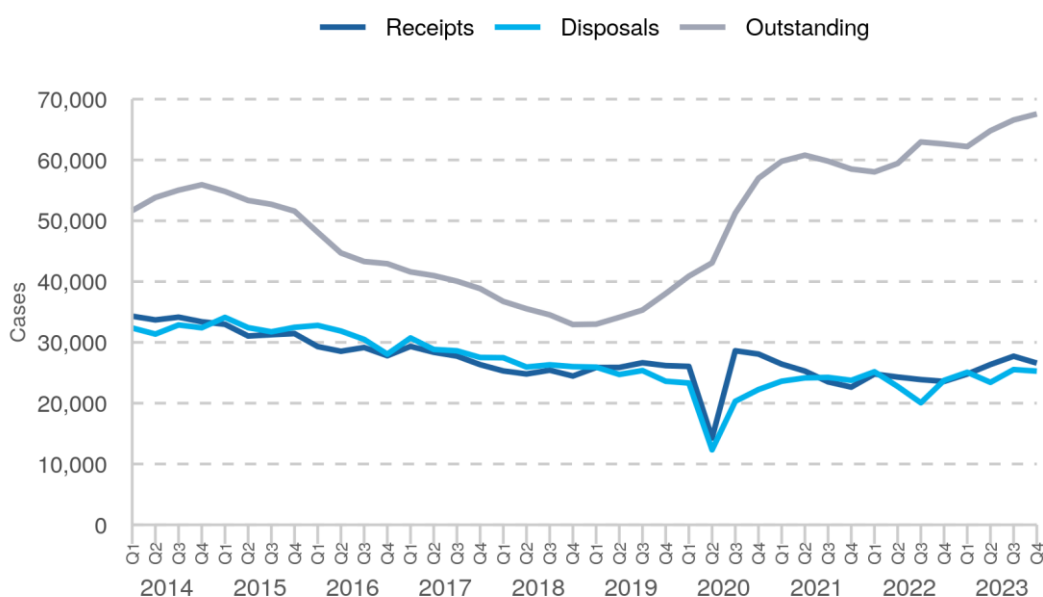
Increase in the outstanding caseload at the Crown Court

Receipts and disposals fell compared to the previous quarter – both remain above volumes seen a year ago. There were more receipts than disposals, so the outstanding caseload increased, up by 1% on the previous quarter.

Crown Court caseload

The increased throughput from the magistrates' courts as part of the initial recovery from the pandemic response saw the volume of receipts at the Crown Court exceed pre-COVID levels in late 2020. Following a slight decline, receipts have since returned to levels comparable to those pre-COVID.

Figure 3: Crown Court caseload, Q1 2014 – Q4 2023 (Source: Table C1)



Following the initial phased reintroduction of jury trials⁴ disposals have gradually increased from a series low in Q2 2020 and returned to pre-COVID levels in Q1 2022. The Criminal Bar Association industrial action, starting in April 2022, contributed to disposals falling in Q2 and Q3 2022. Following the resolution of that industrial action in October 2022⁵, disposals increased.

- There were 26,593 case receipts into the Crown Court in Q4 2023. This is down 4% on the previous quarter but 13% above levels seen in Q4 2022.
- There were 25,269 case disposals at the Crown Court in Q4 2023. This is a 1% fall on the previous quarter but 6% above levels seen in the previous year.
- There were 67,573 outstanding cases at the end of December 2023. This is up 1% on the previous quarter (66,578 cases) and 8% above the previous year (62,628 cases).

⁴ <https://www.judiciary.uk/announcements/jury-trial-sites-4/>

⁵ <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2022-10-12/HCWS317>

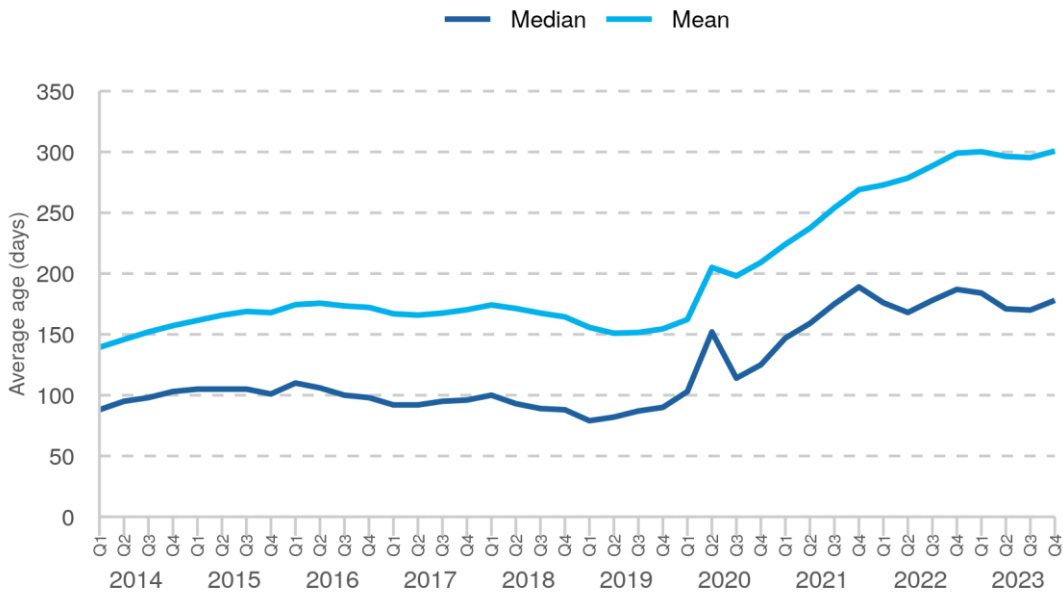
The latest published [HMCTS management information](#) provides monthly volumes of receipts, disposals and the open ('outstanding') caseload for all case types at the Crown Court. The data to January 2024 show a further small increase (1%) compared to December 2023.

Analysis of the outstanding caseload at the Crown Court – official statistics in development

To address additional interest in the outstanding case estimates at the Crown Court we are continuing to publish 'official statistics in development' providing estimates of the average length of time (days) that a case has been outstanding.

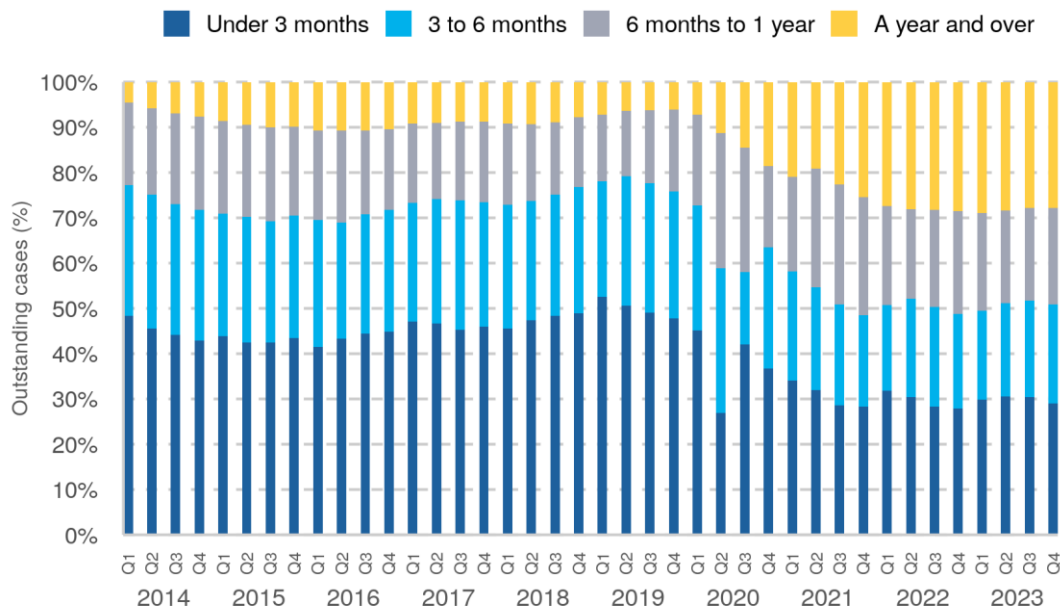
The age of an outstanding case is calculated from receipt at Crown Court to the end of the reporting period.

Figure 4: Age of outstanding cases at the Crown Court, Q1 2014 – Q4 2023 (Source: Table O1)



The average age of an outstanding case has increased markedly on pre-COVID levels. Both the median and mean averages have fluctuated slightly in recent quarters but remain close to series peaks. In Q4 2023 the median age of all outstanding cases decreased by 8 days on the previous quarter, from 170 days to 178 days.

Figure 5: Proportion of outstanding cases at the Crown Court by grouped age, Q1 2014 – Q4 2023 (Source: Table O3)



At the end of Q4 2023 there were 18,045 cases that had been outstanding for a year or more. This number has increased since the pandemic and whilst the increase has slowed in recent quarter it continues to account for 28% of the outstanding caseload in the latest quarter.

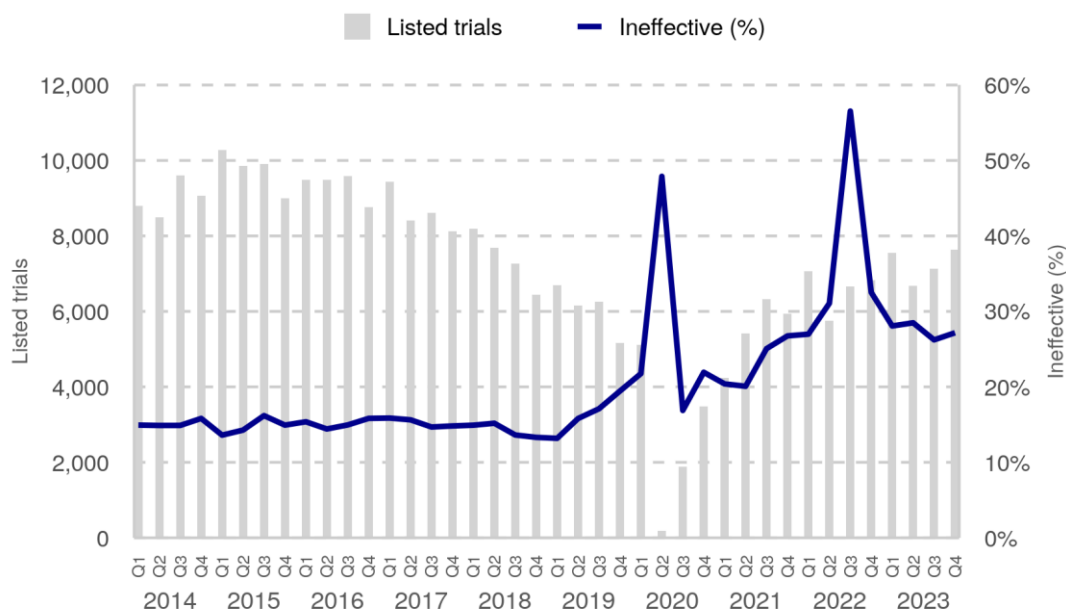
- Within the 'year or more' grouping there were 6,523 cases which had been outstanding for two years or more – this accounts for 10% of the outstanding caseload.

Trial efficiency at Crown Court

There were 7,634 listed trials in Q4 2023 - an increase of 7% on the previous quarter and 12% above levels seen in the previous year.

The effective trial rate was unchanged on the previous quarter at 42%, this is similar to recent quarters, having recovered from a series low seen in Q3 2022 (25%). The cracked trials rate of 31% was a 1 percentage point decrease on the previous quarter and the ineffective trial rate increased by 1 percentage point to 27% and remains above pre-COVID levels (~13-19%).

Figure 6: Crown Court listed trials and ineffective trial rate (%), Q1 2014 – Q4 2023
 (Source: Table C2)



The defence or prosecution not being ready was the largest reason for ineffective trials, accounting for 22% (450 trials) in Q4 2023. This follows sharp falls in the volume of ineffective trials due to defence advocate availability following the conclusion of the Criminal Bar Association action in October 2022.

Guilty plea rate

The guilty plea rate⁶ increased sharply following the immediate COVID-19 response and the suspension of jury trials at the Crown Court. More recently it has fallen back to pre-COVID levels as the volume of ‘not guilty plea’ cases being disposed of has increased.

- In Q4 2023 the guilty plea rate was 65%, unchanged on the previous quarter.
- There were 3,266 defendants dealt with in Q4 2023 who entered a not guilty plea (e.g., went to trial) – this is an increase of 1% on the previous quarter and 22% higher than Q4 2022 reflecting the return to levels prior to the Criminal Bar Association industrial action and COVID.

Average waiting time at the Crown Court

The waiting time estimates are a ‘lagged measure’ and defendants are counted at the point of their case being disposed of. As such the waiting time estimates provide a ‘backwards’ look at the durations spent between receipt and main hearing at the Crown Court.

The median waiting time⁷ for defendants dealt with at the Crown Court was 9.1 weeks in Q4 2023. This represents a 3% increase on the previous quarter (8.9 weeks), but a 7% decrease on the previous year (9.9 weeks). Waiting times remain well above pre-COVID levels (5.3 weeks in Q1 2020).

⁶ Guilty plea rate is the number of defendants pleading guilty to all counts as a proportion of those with a plea.

⁷ The waiting time is the duration between a case being sent to the Crown Court and the first main hearing.

- The median waiting time for defendants dealt with in 'for trial' cases where a not guilty plea was entered was similar to the previous quarter, at 41 weeks. This remains well above pre-COVID levels (25.4 weeks in Q1 2020).

Average hearing time at the Crown Court

The hearing time estimates are a 'lagged measure' and cases are counted at the point of disposal. As such the hearing time estimates provide a 'backwards' look at the duration of hearings at the Crown Court.

The median hearing time⁸ of 'for trial' cases where a not guilty plea was entered increased by 3% on the quarter to 12.4 hours and was similar to Q4 2022. In contrast, in 'for trial' cases where a guilty plea was entered the median hearing time was 1.2 hours a similar level to the previous quarter and year.

⁸ 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

Timeliness increased at the magistrates' court but decreased at the Crown Court

The median time from offence to completion for cases completing at the magistrates' court increased by 2% but decreased at Crown Court by 4%.

The timeliness measures are based on defendants whose cases have been completed and as such are 'backwards' looking measures of timeliness between offence and completion at the relevant criminal court jurisdiction.

Official statistics in development using a new data linking methodology have been developed using the Ministry of Justices open-source statistical '[Splink](#)' package to provide updated end-to-end timeliness estimates.

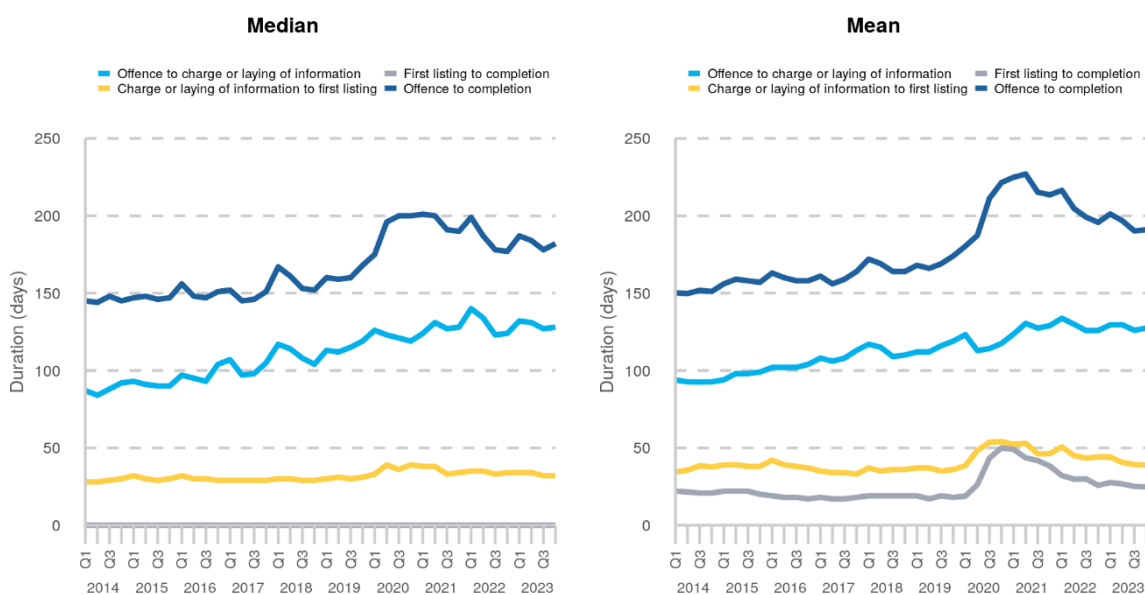
Alongside the gradual development of the end-to-end series we will continue to best meet user demands via more granular data on separate ('unlinked') timeliness estimates for magistrates' courts and Crown Court.

- *Magistrates' court timeliness estimates (T1 – T3)* – providing estimates of the time from offence to completion for defendants dealt with at the magistrates' courts.
- *End-to-end timeliness estimates (T4)* – providing estimates of the time from offence to completion for defendants dealt with at Crown Court.
- *Crown Court timeliness estimates (E1 – E2)* – providing estimates of the time from case receipt at the Crown Court to completion.

Magistrates' courts timeliness

Timeliness at the magistrates' courts measures the time from an offence being committed through key stages of the criminal justice system including charge, first listing and subsequent completion of a defendant's case at the magistrates' court.

Figure 7: Average number of days from offence to completion for defendants dealt with at the magistrates' courts by stage, Q1 2014 – Q4 2023 (Source: Table T3)



The median duration from offence to completion at the magistrates' courts has tended to fall back from series highs of around 200 days seen in late 2020 and early 2021. The latest quarterly estimates increased slightly on the previous quarter, from 178 days in Q3 2023 to 182 days in Q4 2023.

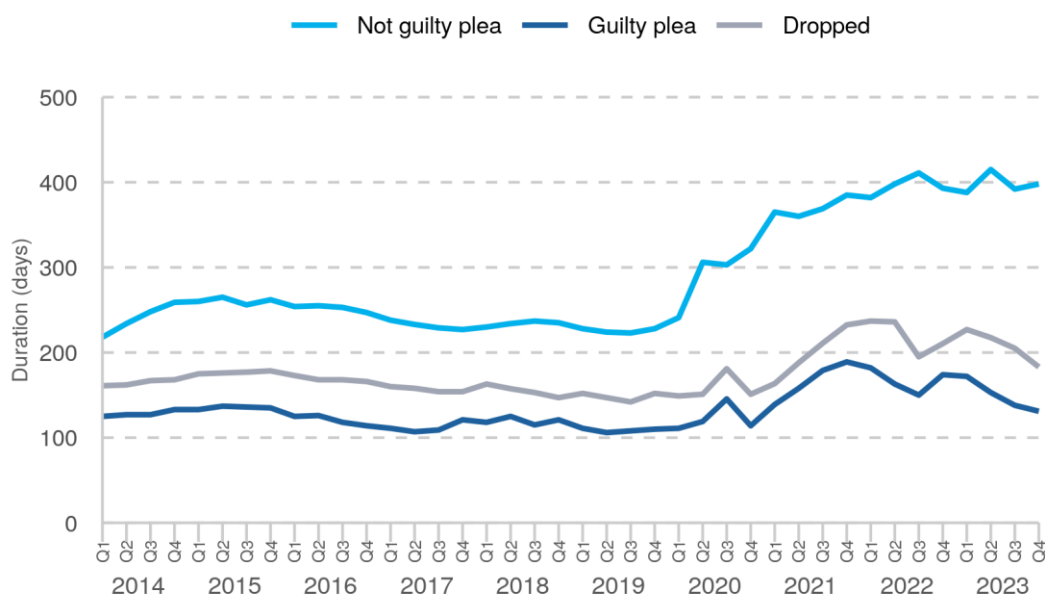
- 'Pre-court': the median time from 'offence to charge' increased by 1% to 128 days, whilst time from 'charge to first listing' was unchanged on the previous quarter at 32 days.
- 'At court': the median estimate remained stable at 0 days, where the first listing and completion occur on the same day. The mean duration remained at 25 days – this follows sharp increases seen over the COVID period and a peak of 50 days in Q4 2020. This latest estimate remains above pre-COVID levels (e.g., 19 days in Q1 2020).

Crown Court timeliness - official statistics in development

'Unlinked' timeliness estimates at the Crown Court are measured from the point of a case entering a Crown Court, reaching a main hearing and then completing at court. This data series remains in development and is considered **"official statistics in development"**. Data presented here is not produced on the same basis as linked end-to-end timeliness data.

The median duration from case receipt to completion at the Crown Court for all cases was 125 days. This represents a 5% decrease on the previous quarter (132 days).

Figure 8: Median duration from receipt to completion in 'for trial' cases by plea at the Crown Court, Q1 2014 – Q4 2023 (Source: E2)



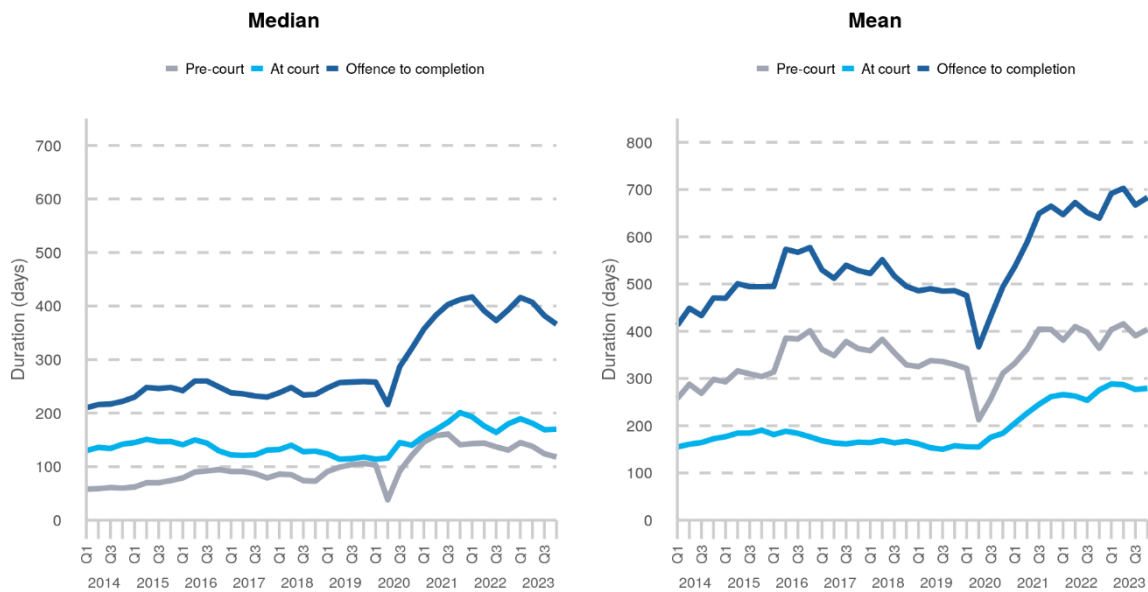
In 'for trial' cases where a not guilty plea was entered, the median duration from receipt to completion increased by 2% on the previous quarter (from 392 to 398 days). For guilty pleas, the median duration fell (by 5%), from 138 to 131 days.

End-to-end timeliness

The median duration from offence to completion for defendants dealt with at the Crown Court fell by 4% down from 382 days in Q3 2023 to 366 days in Q4 2023.

The latest median estimate of 366 days remains well above pre-COVID levels (258 days in Q1 2020).

Figure 9: Average number of days from offence to completion for defendants dealt with at the Crown Court, Q1 2014 – Q4 2023 (Source: T4)



- 'Pre-court': the median time from 'offence to first listing' decreased by 5% from 124 days in Q3 2023 to 118 days in Q4 2023.
- 'At court': the median time from first listing at the magistrates' courts to completion at the Crown Court increased slightly, from 169 days in Q3 2023 to 170 days in Q4 2023. The latest estimate is well below the series peak seen in Q4 2021 (201 days) but remains well above levels seen pre-COVID (114 days in Q1 2020).

5. Enforcement of financial impositions

Total financial impositions fell

The total value of financial impositions made in Q4 2023 was £170.2 million, down 1% on Q3 2023 (£172.4m) and down 52% on the previous year (£355.9m).

The total value of outstanding financial impositions was £1.59 billion in Q4 2023, up by 2% on the previous quarter (£1.56 billion).

Financial impositions and amounts paid by imposition type

In Q4 2023 the total value of impositions decreased compared to the previous quarter (down 1%). The latest imposition figure is 52% below that seen in the previous year, driven by a fall of 65% in fines and 40% in costs. There were 3 large value impositions in Q4 2022 which account for the higher than usual value for the previous year vs. latest.

Outstanding financial impositions

In Q4 2023, the total value of financial impositions outstanding in England and Wales was £1.59 billion, up 2% on the previous quarter and 12% on the previous year.

The amount of outstanding financial impositions is now nearly 3 times the amount in Q1 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.

As part of our commitment to provide the best service for users, we continually review our outputs against user needs balancing quality and value. We are planning to remove commentary on this section from the next publication, Q1 2024 due to be published in June. The tables will continue to be published. We welcome feedback on this proposal and you can contact us via this address: criminal_court_sta@justice.gov.uk

6. Official statistics in development: Language interpreter and translation services

The number of completed language service requests fell on the quarter but increased on the year.

There were 47,841 completed requests in Q4 2023, down 1% on the previous quarter (which was a series peak). The success rate fell by 1 percentage point to 95%.

Completed service requests

The volume of completed service requests decreased to 47,841. Completed requests were up 10% on the same quarter in the previous year (43,530).

Figure 10: Number of completed language service requests and overall success rate, Q1 2014 – Q4 2023 (Source: Table L1)



Success rate

The overall success rate in Q4 2023 was 95% - this is a small (1 percentage point) fall compared to the previous quarter.

Complaints and complaint rate

The number of complaints has remained low since Q2 2020, with 189 complaints made in Q4 2023. This was an increase on the previous quarter (146) but remains well below levels seen pre-COVID (436 complaints in Q1 2020). The overall complaint rate was 0.4% in Q4 2023 and has remained below 1% since Q3 2020.

'Off-contract' requests

The number of 'off-contract' requests in Q4 2023 fell by 48% having risen 11% in the previous quarter. This remains above the average seen across the series.

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.

Accredited official statistics status

National Statistics are [accredited official statistics](#) that meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value. Accredited official statistics are called National Statistics in the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007. These accredited official statistics were independently reviewed by the Office for Statistics Regulation in January 2019.⁹ They comply with the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the Code of Practice for Statistics and should be labelled as accredited official statistics. It is the Ministry of Justice's responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected for accredited official statistics. If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with the Authority promptly. Accredited official statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored.

Official statistics in development status

Official statistics in development are official statistics that are undergoing a development; they may be new or existing statistics, and will be tested with users, in line with the standards of trustworthiness, quality, and value in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). Until September 2023, they were called 'experimental statistics'. Official statistics in development are developed under the guidance of the Head of Profession for Statistics (HoP). The goal is to develop statistics that can, in due course, be produced to the standards of the Code.¹⁰



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. In particular, see the financial enforcement section of this publication for some future planned changes. 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 'Data & Analysis: Courts and People' division of the Ministry of Justice:

Criminal Courts and Sentencing Data and Statistics,
Ministry of Justice, 10 South Colonnade, London, E14 4PU
Email: criminal_court_sta@justice.gov.uk

Next update: 20th June 2024

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

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Alternative formats are available on request from criminal_court_sta@justice.gov.uk

⁹ <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/correspondence/compliance-check-on-court-statistics/>

¹⁰ <https://code.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/>