



Transparency Data

Crown Court open caseload projections: 2025 to 2029, England and Wales

Background

This document contains information relating to the Ministry of Justice's projections for the Crown Court open caseload. The projections are produced primarily for use as an aid for policy development, capacity planning and resource allocation within the Ministry of Justice and His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service. They are being published as they are a key input to the Independent Review of Criminal Courts.

Open caseload projection

The number of open cases in the Crown Court is projected to increase to between 99,000 and 114,000 by the end of March 2029, with a central estimate of 104,500 (Table 1). At the end of March 2025, there were 76,957 cases open in the Crown Court, according to the latest published statistics¹.

The projected growth is primarily driven by a combination of two factors:

- increases in demand associated with police and prosecutorial activity leading to more cases entering the Crown Court open caseload.
- Without further intervention, court activity is not able to keep pace with demand. This leaves cases spending more time in the open caseload.

Under the central demand scenario, new demand entering the Crown Court increases each year, and is estimated to be equivalent to 130,000 sitting days of work per annum for the court to process by 2028/29 (Table 2). This is in addition to an estimated 127,000 sitting days associated with Crown work already in the open caseload at the start of 2025/26.

¹ [Criminal court statistics quarterly: January to March 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

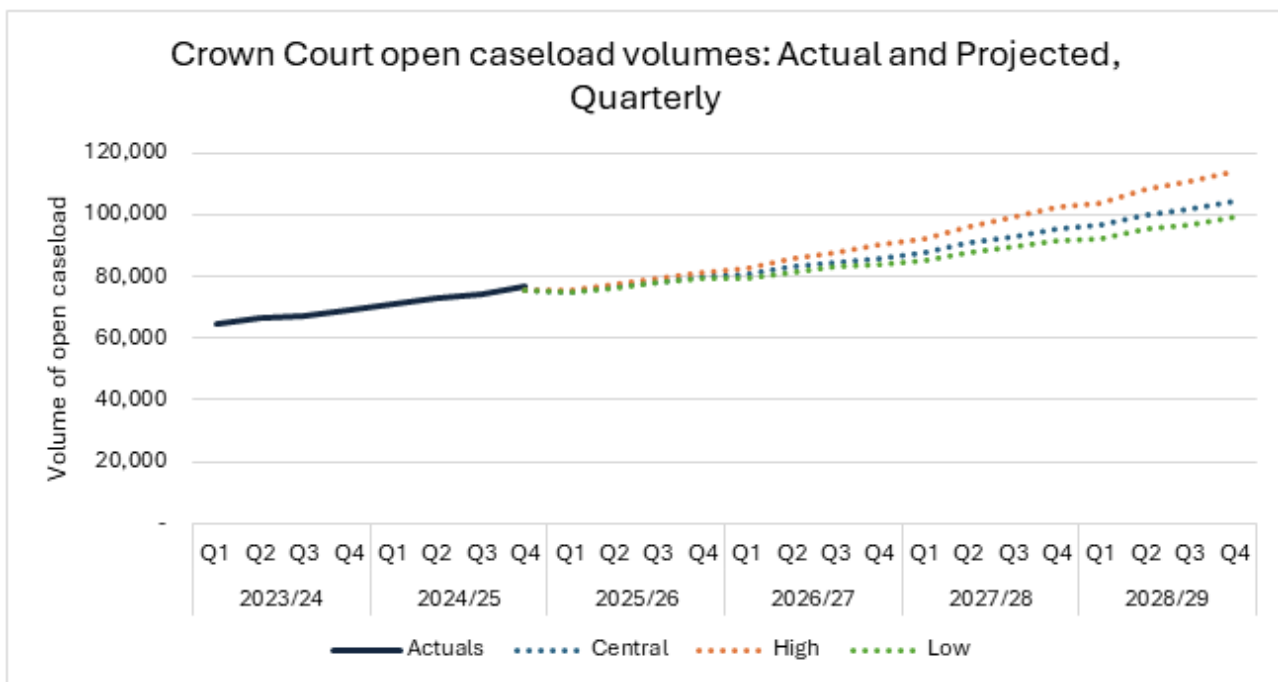


Figure 1 Chart showing Crown Court open caseload volumes with actual and projected figures for 2023/24 to 2028/29

The latest available data at the time of the projections being produced was for the end of December 2024. With the release of the Criminal court statistics quarterly: January to March 2025², the open caseload is seen to increase more rapidly than projected over Q1 2025 and at the end of March 2025 was around 1,500 cases above projection. This variation is due to the Crown Court sitting slightly fewer days than anticipated over 2024/25³ and a higher volume of cases entering the court than expected over Q1 2025.

Supplementary information

The projections presented in this report were prepared over Q1 2025, using the best available data from Crown Court systems at the start of this period.

Projections are derived using the methodology detailed in the Technical Guidance 1: Modelling Methodology: [Prison Population Projections: 2024 to 2029 - GOV.UK](#).

Assumptions:

The modelling assumptions were agreed through consultation with policy and operational experts at the MoJ, His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS), the Home Office, and the CPS. The assumptions are based on analysis (where reliable data is available), and on expert judgement from stakeholders.

The projections account for any estimated impacts of government announcements, changes to legislation and guidance which took place before early 2025 (e.g. the extension of Magistrates' court sentencing powers⁴) as a result it does not take account of recommendations made in the Independent Review of Criminal Courts (IRCC).

² [Criminal court statistics quarterly: January to March 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

³ [HMCTS management information - March 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

⁴ [Increased sentencing powers for magistrates to address prisons crisis - GOV.UK](#)

Assumptions on the future demand drivers from police and prosecutorial activity are consistent with those in the [Prison Population Projections: 2024 to 2029](#). Two key drivers are expected to lead to increases in charges and court demand over the next three to five years:

- Rising levels of officer experience, which is likely to improve case outcomes and charge rates;
- Increases in investigator numbers - enhancing capacity to progress cases at the serious end of the crime spectrum;

Scenarios have been refreshed to account for observed changes in the volume and type of demand entering the Crown Court over the 12 months to November 2024:

- Low upstream demand: Assumes demand remains at the level observed in the 12 months to Nov-24.
- High upstream demand: Assumes 1% of the originally estimated 10% increase in demand included in the prison projection is reflected in latest actuals – leaving 9% increase on the levels observed in the 12 months to Nov-24 and 2029/30.
- Central upstream demand: Assumes a 5% increase in court receipts on the levels observed in the 12 months to Nov-24 over the same period.

Crown Court sitting days assumed in the projections for 2024/25 and 2025/26 were chosen to align with MoJ announcements on sitting days^{5,6}. At the time the projections were produced, decisions on sitting days had not been made for future years. Therefore, no change was assumed, and the 2025/26 allocation (110,000 days) was held constant over the remainder of the projection period.

Workload estimates are calculated using average hearing times, controlling for receipt type, offence group, and the route cases take through the court (e.g. whether a plea is entered, and at what stage). The assumed distribution of case routes for each cohort of cases are based on actual disposal patterns from 2018 and 2019—a period when the system was in a more stable state. This approach helps control for potential bias introduced by any case prioritisation effects while caseload grows, which may not reflect the full range of work entering the system.

Adjustments are made to account for observed behavioural changes since that baseline period—for example, the increasing trend of pleas being entered later in court proceedings.

The estimate of 127,000 days of work in the open caseload at the start of 2025/26 uses the same modelling principles but applied to actual receipts and disposals from the end of December 2019; the difference between projected demand arriving and actual disposals is used to estimate the composition of the open caseload e.g. in terms of number of trials needed. This leads to a higher average hearing time for cases already in the open caseload, compared to those newly arriving into court. This reflects the fact that cases currently in the open caseload are typically more complex than average to process. For

⁵ [2,000 extra sitting days to help address courts crisis - GOV.UK](#)

⁶ [Swifter justice for victims as courts sit at record level - GOV.UK](#)

example, the proportion of cases requiring a trial – the primary driver of extended hearing time – increases as cases progress through the system.

Assumptions relating to activity within the Crown Court – for example efficiency, and patterns of activity across different areas of work within the court are based on observations in the data over the 12 months to the end of November 2024.

Uncertainty

The presented open caseload range illustrates the potential impact of varying the level of demand entering the court but is not intended to reflect the full range of uncertainty surrounding the projections, which are also sensitive to:

- Wider changes in policing or crime than covered by the demand scenarios where a complex set of factors, most with high degree of uncertainty, influence the number of type of cases entering the Crown Court.
- Funding and sitting day allocation decisions.
- The efficiency of the court system and the type of work undertaken in the court.
- Changes in behaviour of people within the system – particularly the rate and timing of pleas entered by defendants, or the listing practices of the judiciary.
- The projections are also sensitive to potential future policy changes, such as any recommendations set out as part of the IRCC and the government's response to those recommendations.
- There is also uncertainty associated with the modelling approach, which is a simplification of a complex real-world system and data. While the modelling draws on the best available data at the time of conducting the analysis, it can be subject to change and revision over time.

A further discussion surrounding uncertainty in the Crown Court modelling is available in Section 2 of the Prison publication published at [Prison Population Projections: 2024 to 2029](#).

Accompanying files

Data tables

Contact

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

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ministry-of-justice/about/media-enquiries>

Non-Press enquiries relating to this publication should be sent to:

rowanne.halliwell@justice.gov.uk

URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/crown-court-open-caseload-projections-2025-to-2029>

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