

[REDACTED]

FOI 50/24-25

3 June 2024

[REDACTED]

I refer to your email dated 2 May 2024 in which you requested information relating to sexual offences. Your request has been dealt with under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Freedom of Information Act 2000

The Freedom of Information Act creates rights of access for any person making a request for information to a public authority. The rights of access are twofold. First, to be informed by the public authority if it holds information of the description specified in the request, and if that is the case, secondly, to be provided with that information. These rights are subject to important limitations, which are designed to achieve a proper balance between the right to know and considerations of law and policy in the broader public interest.

You had asked the following:

1. The total number of sexual offences case files received by the PPS annually for the last 5 years.
2. The total number of sexual offences case files that met the test for prosecution for the last 5 years.
3. The conviction rate for sexual offences for the last 5 years.
4. The total number of sexual offences cases currently awaiting trial in Northern Ireland.
5. The average wait time for a sexual offences case to make it to court.

Please be advised that figures for the financial year 2023-24 cannot be provided as they will form part of an upcoming Official Statistics publication (due for release in Autumn 2024). Therefore the responses below focus on the five financial years (1 April to 31 March) from 2018/19 to 2022/23.

In response to question 1, please see Table 1 below which provides data in respect of the numbers of files received by PPS involving a sexual offence.

Table 1: Files Received by PPS involving a Sexual Offence

Year	Numbers of files received (All sexual offences)
2018/19	1,594
2019/20	1,684
2020/21	1,568
2021/22	1,509
2022/23	1,858

In response to question 2, please see Table 2 below which details the numbers of decisions issued in cases involving a sexual offence, and the percentage where the Test for Prosecution was met.

Table 2: Prosecutorial Decisions Issued by PPS (No. of Suspects) in Cases involving Sexual Offences and % where the Test for Prosecution was Met

Year	Numbers of decisions issued (All sexual offences)	% where Test was met (for any sexual offence)
2018/19	1,721	23.9%
2019/20	1,755	24.7%
2020/21	1,766	23.6%
2021/22	1,540	31.6%
2022/23	1,981	23.9%

In respect of question 3, please see Table 3 below which details the conviction rates (in the Magistrates' and Crown Courts) for sexual offences.

Table 3: Conviction Rates for Sexual Offences

Year	Conviction Rate – Conviction for at least one sexual offence (%) Crown Court	Conviction Rate – Conviction for at least one sexual offence (%) Magistrates' Court
2018/19	57.3%	56.9%
2019/20	64.1%	68.6%
2020/21	67.0%	53.1%
2021/22	67.6%	64.2%
2022/23	65.7%	62.5%

In response to question 4, please be advised as of 2 May 2024 there are 139 suspects currently listed for trial. However, it should be noted that this figure is subject to change as court listings can be added and amended by the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service (NICTS) at any given time.

In response to question 5, please be advised that PPS does not record this data, therefore, in terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, we can confirm that under Section 1(1)(a) of the Act, the PPS does not hold the requested information.

However, while it is not possible to produce data for the average time taken for a sexual offence case to go to court, please see Table 4 below which provides the median number of days between receipt of file by the PPS and issue of decision (by type).

Table 4: Median (Calendar) Days between File Receipt and Issue of Decision

Year	All sexual offences - Indictable Prosecution*	All sexual offences - Summary Prosecution**	All sexual offences - No Prosecution
2018/19	256	45	65
2019/20	255	20	44
2020/21	293	16	25
2021/22	274	28	25
2022/23	272	36	48

* Prosecution in the Crown Court. Includes time taken for the preparation of committal papers which contain the evidence to be presented to the Crown Court. It may also include time for consideration of duties of disclosure / any applications to be made to the court.

** Prosecution in the Magistrates' Court.

Note: All decision types include the time taken for police to respond to 'Decision Information Requests' (i.e. requests for further information).

If you are dissatisfied in any way with the handling of your request, you have the right to request a review in accordance with our review procedure. You should do this as soon as possible or in any case within two months of the date of this response and you can do so by writing to the Head of Policy and Information, Public Prosecution Service, Belfast Chambers, 93 Chichester Street, BELFAST, BT1 3JR or alternatively by sending an e-mail to info@ppsni.gov.uk. You should state the grounds on which you are requesting the review.

Alternatively, you may wish to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

Yours sincerely,

**Information Management Team
Public Prosecution Service**

Independent, fair and effective