

# Youth Engagement Statistics for Northern Ireland, 2018/19

I.Graham and J.Liddicoat  
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Department of  
**Justice**

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Produced by Analytical Services Group,  
Department of Justice

For further information write to:

**Analytical Services Group,**  
**Financial Services Division,**  
**Department of Justice,**  
**Level 3, Block B,**  
**Castle Buildings,**  
**Upper Newtownards Road,**  
**Stormont Estate,**  
**Belfast BT4 3SG**

**Telephone: 028 9052 0188**

**Email: [statistics.research@justice-ni.x.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:statistics.research@justice-ni.x.gsi.gov.uk)**

This bulletin is available at:

**[www.justice-ni.gov.uk](http://www.justice-ni.gov.uk)**

Feedback on this publication can be provided directly to Analytical Services Group at the email address listed above.

## 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 2018 – 31 March 2019, providing some detail on those referred for the youth engagement process, alongside information on the time taken for that process to complete and on subsequent outcomes.

- Of the 2,822 cases relating to young people coming into formal contact with the criminal justice system in 2018/19, 40.4% (1,139) were deemed suitable by the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) for resolution through the youth engagement process, with 57.3% (1,618) cases assessed as not suitable.
- The majority of cases involving young people coming into formal contact with the justice system in 2018/19 involved males, (76.5%, 2,160).
- Almost half, 1,403 (49.7%) of cases involving young people coming into formal contact with the justice system in 2018/19 were for those aged 16 or 17 at the time of their offence, compared to 1,419 (50.3%) who were aged 15 or younger.
- Of those assessed by PPS as not suitable for youth engagement, 47.8% (774) were deemed suitable for prosecution and 51.0% (825) were assessed as requiring no further action.
- The most common outcome from youth engagement clinics was a youth conference plan, with 49.5% (564) of young people following this route. Informed warnings were the outcome for 18.9% (215) of young people attending youth engagement clinics, with restorative cautions being the outcome for 17.7% (202) of young people.
- The median time taken for cases to reach completion via the youth engagement process was 46 days. 80% of all cases had completed within 89 days.
- Legal representation was present, or legal advice received prior to youth engagement clinics in 26.5% (245) of cases in 2018/19. In 73.5%, legal representation was offered, but declined by the family or young person concerned.

- For clinics where a restorative caution was the outcome and where there was a victim, they participated in 80.0% (72) of cases through their presence, sharing of their views or via victim impact statement.

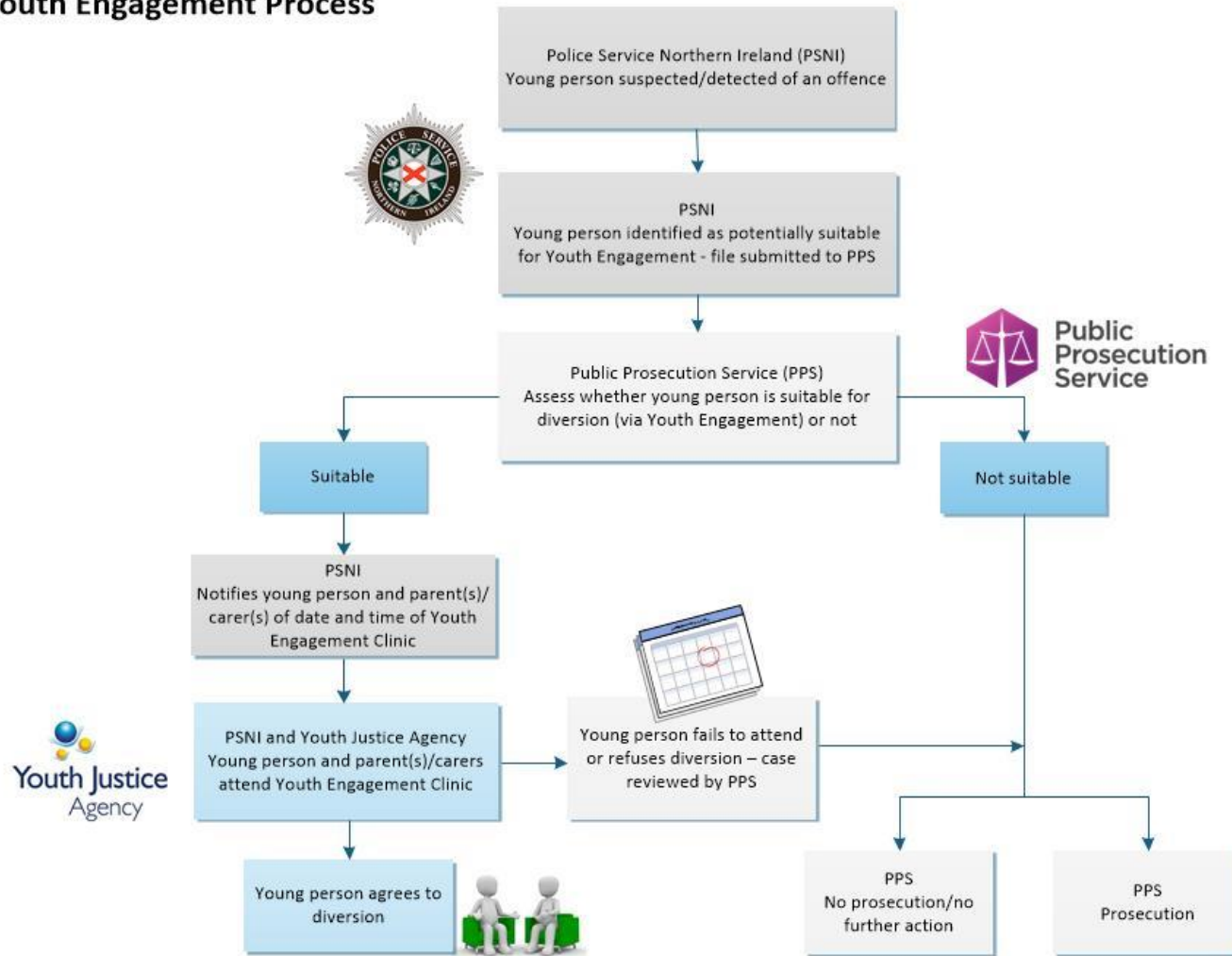
# 1 Context

## 1.1 Background

Young people coming into contact with the criminal justice system may go through: the formal court process; be dealt with via an out-of-court diversionary disposal; or receive a no further action decision. The Public Prosecution Service (PPS) make a decision on which route may be appropriate for a young person, depending on the circumstances of the case and on 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 the PPS decides that a young person's case can be dealt with outside the court system, the young person will be asked to go to a youth engagement 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) or 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 explain 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 evidence that can be used against them. Detail on the steps within the youth engagement process is outlined in the following diagram.

# 1 Context

## Youth Engagement Process



# 1 Context

Youth engagement is a tripartite initiative across Northern Ireland, involving the Police Service of Northern Ireland (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.

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. Improving the efficiency of the justice system has been included as a priority under Outcome 7 ('We have a safe community where we respect the law, and each other') of the Northern Ireland Civil Service Outcomes Delivery Plan launched in June 2018.

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.

# 1 Context

## 1.2 About this Report

This bulletin 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 2018 – 31 March 2019. It provides detail on those referred for the youth engagement 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. This is the first year this information has been available and it is anticipated that it will be published annually.

The data upon which the publication is based are used to inform policy decisions within the DoJ and by other criminal justice partners, as well as to inform responses to questions from other Government organisations, answers to Northern Ireland Assembly questions and queries from the general public.

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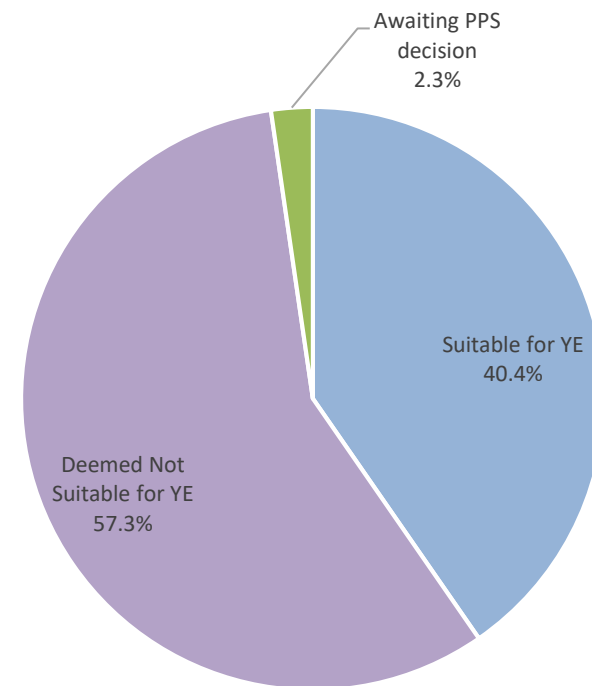


## 2 Findings

### 2.1 Overview

There were 2,822 cases relating to young people coming into formal contact with the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland during the year 1 April 2018 – 31 March 2019. Of these, 40.4% (1,139) were deemed suitable for resolution through the youth engagement process by the PPS with 57.3% (1,618) of cases assessed as not suitable. At the end of September, 2.3% (65) of cases were still awaiting a decision by PPS, on whether they were suitable or not. (Appendix 1, Table 1).

Figure 1: Cases assessed as suitable/not suitable for Youth Engagement, 2018/19



## 2 Findings

### 2.2 Numbers of referrals for Youth Engagement, by gender and age

Of all the cases involving young people referred to PPS in 2018/19, three quarters, 76.5% (2,160), related to cases where the young person in question was male. This proportion was relatively consistent whether the case was deemed suitable for youth engagement (74.9%, 853) or assessed as not suitable (77.3%, 1,251). (Appendix 1, Table 2).

Almost half (49.7%, (1,403)) of cases involving young people coming into formal contact with the justice system in 2018/19 were for those aged 16 or 17 at the time of their offence, compared to 1,419 (50.3%) who were aged 15 or younger. Young people aged 16 and 17 at date of offence, made up 22.5% (635) and 27.2% (768) respectively of all cases referred to youth engagement. This compares to young people aged 10 to 13 at the date of offence, who made up 15.5% (436) of the total.

There was a similar pattern reflected in the age range of young people concerned, in relation to those deemed suitable by PPS for youth engagement, with 22.7% (258) and 22.0% (251) aged 16 and 17 at date of offence respectively. However, those aged 17 at date of offence made up the largest proportion, 30.8% (498) of those assessed as not suitable for youth engagement, whilst only 13.4% (217) of those aged 10 – 13 at date of offence were assessed as not suitable. (Appendix 1, Table 3).

## 2 Findings

### 2.3 Cases assessed as not suitable for Youth Engagement by PPS

Of the 57.3% (1,618) of cases assessed by PPS as not suitable for progression through the youth engagement process, 47.8% (774) were sent forward for prosecution at court, whereas, in 51.0% (825) of the cases, PPS decided that there should be no further prosecutorial action. Additionally, 1.2% (19) of cases were assessed as not suitable for youth engagement for other reasons, such as the young person agreeing to participate in the Northern Ireland Driver Improvement Scheme. (Appendix 1, Table 4).

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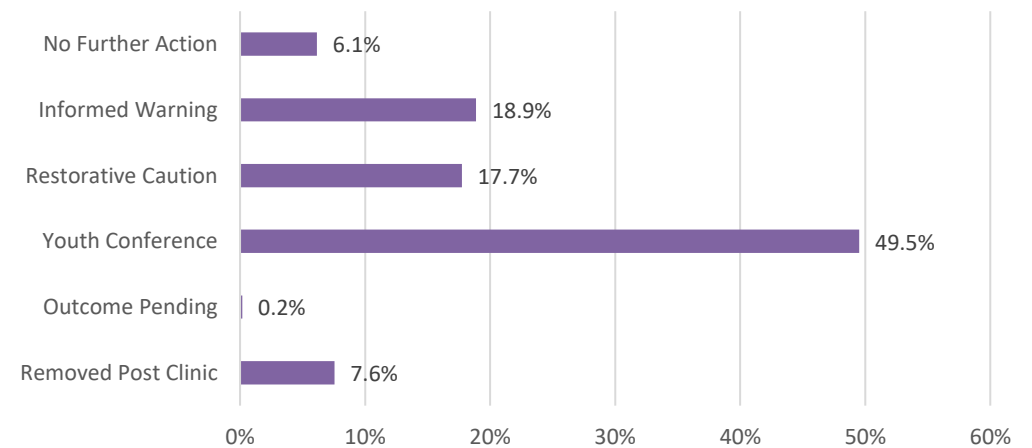
## 2 Findings

### 2.4 Outcomes of Youth Engagement Clinics

In 2018/19, 49.5% (564) of the 1,139 cases assessed by PPS as suitable for youth engagement, resulted in a youth conference plan. A further 18.9% (215) of cases resulted in an informed warning and 17.7% (202) cases resulted in a restorative caution being issued. Additionally, 6.1% (70) of cases resulted in a decision of no further action being taken but 7.6% (86) of cases were returned to PPS for further consideration post-clinic. Of the 86 cases returned to PPS post-clinic, 18.6% (16) were recorded as being returned due to non-attendance, whereas 81.4% (70) were recorded as returned so that PPS could consider a prosecutorial or no further action decision.

In relation to gender of young people receiving an outcome at clinics, 52.5% (448) of males were subject to a youth conference plan, 18.6% (159) received a restorative caution and 16.6% (142) an informed warning. For females, 40.6% (116) were subject to a youth conference plan, 15.0% (43) received a restorative caution and 25.5% (73) an informed warning. However, only 6.7% (57) of males had their cases returned to PPS for consideration post clinic, compared to 10.1% (29) of females. No further action was the outcome for 8.4% (24) of females, compared to 5.4% (46) of males.

Figure 2: Outcomes of Youth Engagement Clinics, 2018/19



## 2 Findings

Regardless of age, the most common outcome for young people going through the youth engagement process is a youth conference plan, an outcome associated with 43.1% (91) of cases for those aged 10 – 13 and 54.3% (140) for those aged 16 at the date of offence. For young people aged 17, 23.5% (59) received a restorative caution, compared with 14.2% (30) of cases involving 10 – 13 year olds. For those aged 16 at the date of their offence, an outcome of no further action only occurred in 2.3% (6) of cases, compared to 11.8% (25) of cases where the young person involved was aged 10 – 13. (Appendix 1, Tables 5 to 8).

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## 2 Findings

### 2.5 Time taken for completion of Youth Engagement 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 youth engagement 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.

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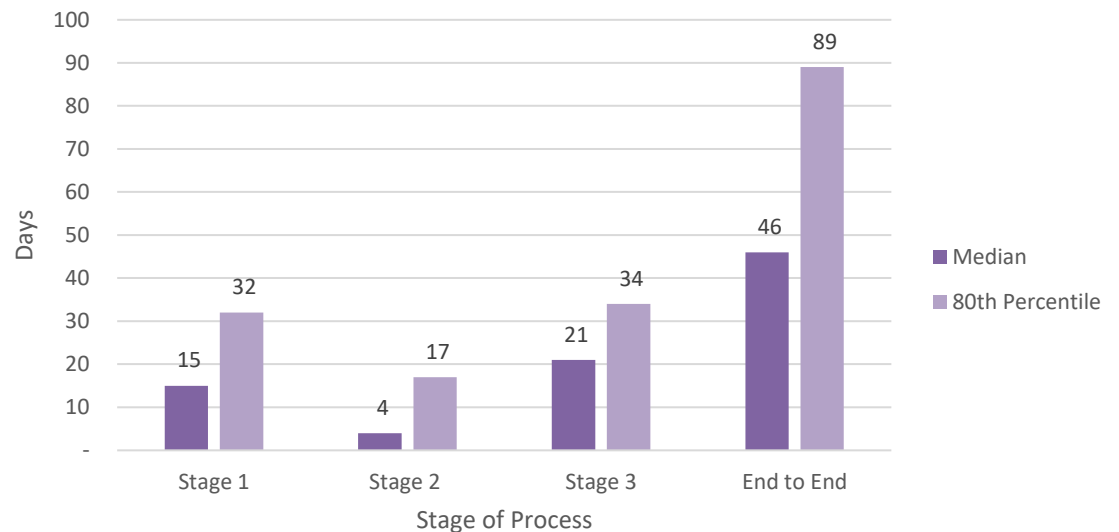


## 2 Findings

In 2018/19, the median time taken for cases, i.e. the time for half of such cases, to complete the youth engagement process, from the date an individual was charged or informed to the youth engagement first clinic date, was 46 days. While 80% of cases were completed within 89 days, the longest time taken for a case to complete the youth engagement process was 509 days.

For Stage 1 of the process, the median time taken from the date a young person was charged or informed to the date a file was submitted from PSNI to PPS, was 15 days. This stage is completed for 80% of cases within 32 days. For Stage 2 of the process, the median time from when PPS received a file to the date they made a prosecutorial decision was 4 days, with this stage being completed for 80% of cases within 17 days. For Stage 3 of the process, the median time taken from the date PPS made a prosecutorial decision to the first youth engagement clinic date was 21 days, with this stage being completed for 80% of cases within 34 days. (Appendix 1, Table 9).

Figure 3: Time in Days for Stages in the Youth Engagement Process, 2018/19



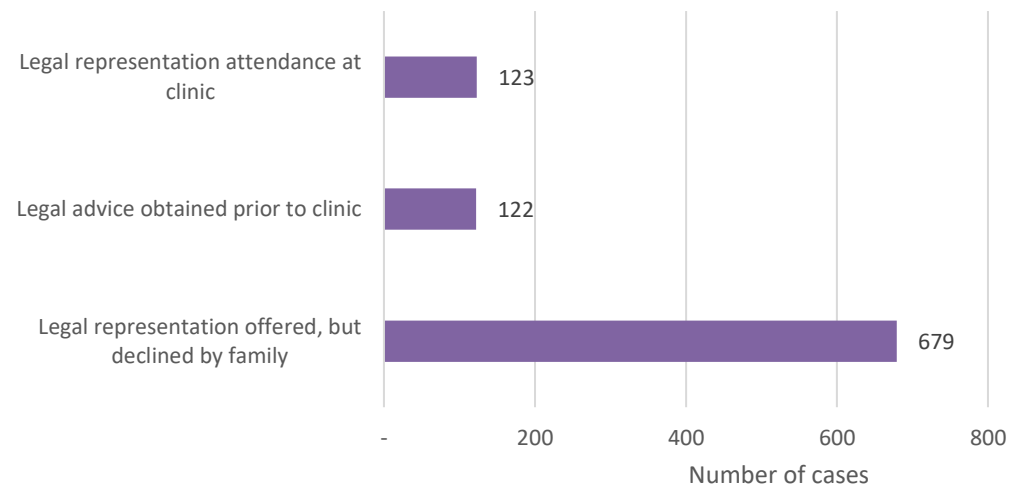
## 2 Findings

### 2.6 Legal Representation at Youth Engagement Clinics

As part of the youth engagement 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 2018/19, legal representation, while offered, was declined by the young person or their family in 73.5% (679) of cases. Legal advice was obtained prior to the clinic in 13.2% (122) of cases and in a further 13.2% (123) of cases, the young person had legal representation present at the youth engagement clinic. (Appendix 1, Table 10).

Figure 4: Cases where there was Legal Representation at Clinics, 2018/19





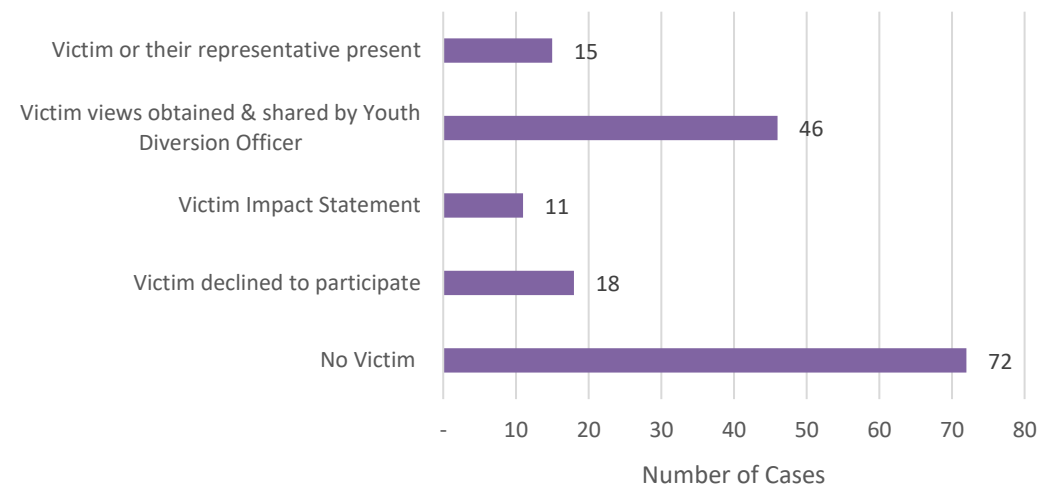
## 2 Findings

### 2.7 Victim Involvement in Youth Engagement Process

Where the outcome of a youth engagement 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.

In 2018/19, for clinics held where the outcome was a restorative caution, there were 90 cases where there was a victim associated with the offences committed. In 16.7% (15) of these cases, the victim or their representative was present and in 51.1% (46) of cases, the victim's views were obtained and shared with the young person involved by the Youth Diversion Officer (YDO). In 12.2% (11) of cases, a victim impact statement was shared with the young person concerned and in 20.0% (18) of cases, the victim declined to participate in the youth engagement process. The remaining 72 cases related to offences where there was no victim. (Appendix 1, Table 11).

Figure 5: Cases with Victim/Representative Involvement – Restorative Cautions only, 2018/19



## Appendix 1

**Table 1: Youth Engagement Referrals and Cases Assessed as Not Suitable for Youth Engagement, 2018/19**

All	Suitable for YE		Assessed as Not Suitable for YE (see Table 4)		Awaiting PPS decision		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
<b>Total</b>	1,139	40.4%	1,618	57.3%	65	2.3%	2,822	100.0%

**Table 2: Number of Youth Engagement Referrals and Cases Assessed as Not Suitable for Youth Engagement by Gender of Young Person Involved, 2018/19**

Gender	Number of cases				% of cases			
	Suitable for YE	Assessed as Not Suitable for YE (See Table 4)	Awaiting PPS decision	Total	Suitable for YE	Assessed as Not Suitable for YE (See Table 4)	Awaiting PPS decision	Total
Female	286	367	9	662	25.1%	22.7%	13.8%	23.5%
Male	853	1,251	56	2,160	74.9%	77.3%	86.2%	76.5%
<b>Total</b>	1,139	1,618	65	2,822	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**Table 3: Number of Youth Engagement Referrals and Cases Assessed as Not Suitable for Youth Engagement by Age of Young Person (at offence), 2018/19**

Age (at offence)	Number of cases				% of cases			
	Suitable for YE	Assessed as Not Suitable for YE (see Table 4)	Awaiting PPS decision	Total	Suitable for YE	Assessed as Not Suitable for YE (see Table 4)	Awaiting PPS decision	Total
10 - 13	211	217	8	436	18.5%	13.4%	12.3%	15.5%
14	189	234	5	428	16.6%	14.5%	7.7%	15.2%
15	229	305	20	554	20.1%	18.9%	30.8%	19.6%
16	258	364	13	635	22.7%	22.5%	20.0%	22.5%
17	251	498	19	768	22.0%	30.8%	29.2%	27.2%
Not Known	1	-	-	1	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	1,139	1,618	65	2,822	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**Table 4: Reasons Cases Assessed as Not Suitable for Youth Engagement, 2018/19**

Cases Assessed as Not Suitable for Youth Engagement	Prosecution	No Further Action	Reason Unknown/other	Total
Number of Cases Assessed as Not Suitable	774	825	19	1,618
Percentage of Cases Assessed as Not Suitable	47.8%	51.0%	1.2%	100.0%

**Table 5: Outcomes of Youth Engagement Clinics, 2018/19**

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Number of Cases</b>	<b>% of Cases</b>
No Further Action	70	6.1%
Informed Warning	215	18.9%
Restorative Caution	202	17.7%
Youth Conference	564	49.5%
Outcome Pending	2	0.2%
Removed Post Clinic (see Table 8)	86	7.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,139</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Table 6: Outcomes of Youth Engagement Clinics by Gender of Young Person Involved, 2018/19**

<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Number of cases</b>			<b>% of cases</b>		
	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Total</b>
No Further Action	24	46	70	8.4%	5.4%	6.1%
Informed Warning	73	142	215	25.5%	16.6%	18.9%
Restorative Caution	43	159	202	15.0%	18.6%	17.7%
Youth Conference	116	448	564	40.6%	52.5%	49.5%
Outcome Pending	1	1	2	0.3%	0.1%	0.2%
Removed Post Clinic (see Table 8)	29	57	86	10.1%	6.7%	7.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>853</b>	<b>1,139</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Table 7: Outcomes of Youth Engagement Clinics by Age of Young Person (at offence date), 2018/19**

Outcome	Number of cases by age of young person involved							% of cases by age of young person involved						
	10 - 13	14	15	16	17	Age not known	Total	10-13	14	15	16	17	Age not known	Total
No Further Action	25	14	11	6	14	-	70	11.8%	7.4%	4.8%	2.3%	5.6%	0.0%	6.1%
Informed Warning	48	29	45	45	48	-	215	22.7%	15.3%	19.7%	17.4%	19.1%	0.0%	18.9%
Restorative Caution	30	30	36	47	59	-	202	14.2%	15.9%	15.7%	18.2%	23.5%	0.0%	17.7%
Youth Conference	91	102	120	140	110	1	564	43.1%	54.0%	52.4%	54.3%	43.8%	100.0%	49.5%
Outcome Pending	-	1	-	1	-	-	2	0.0%	0.5%	0.0%	0.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.2%
Removed Post Clinic	17	13	17	19	20	-	86	8.1%	6.9%	7.4%	7.4%	8.0%	0.0%	7.6%
Total	211	189	229	258	251	1	1,139	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**Table 8: Reason for Removal from Process Post-Clinic, 2018/19**

Outcome	Number of Cases	% of Cases
Did not attend	16	18.6%
Diversion refused	-	0.0%
Returned for PPS Decision	70	81.4%
Total	86	100.0%

**Table 9: Time in Days for Stages in the Youth Engagement Process, 2018/19**

Stage of process	Median	80th Percentile	Minimum	Maximum
Stage 1 - Time in days from date accused informed to date file submitted to PPS	15	32	-	283
Stage 2 - Time in days from date file submitted to PPS to date of PPS decision	4	17	-	249
Stage 3 - Time in days from PPS decision date to date of clinic (1st appointment)	21	34	-	414
End to End - Time in days from date 'accused informed' to date of clinic (1st appointment)	46	89	8	509

**Table 10: Cases where there was Legal Representation at Clinics, 2018/19**

Cases	NI Total
Legal representation attendance at clinic	123
Legal advice obtained prior to clinic	122
Legal representation offered, but declined by family	679

**Table 11: Number of Cases with Victim/Representative Involvement – Restorative Cautions only, 2018/19**

Cases	NI Total
Victim or their representative present	15
Victim views obtained & shared by Youth Diversion Officer	46
Victim Impact Statement	11
Victim declined to participate	18
No Victim	72

**Source:** Department of Justice

**Notes:**

1. Tables 1 to 9 relate to cases where the suspect was reported within the period specified.
2. Figures relating to 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.
3. To allow full information to be provided without the need for suppression, figures for males in Tables 2 and 6 include a small number of young people for whom gender was not recorded or who identified as transgender.
4. Figures in Tables 5 - 9 relate to cases recorded in the 'Suitable for YE' column in Table 1.
5. Figures in Table 9 relate to the number of calendar days between the listed dates for each stage.
6. Figures relating to legal representation and to victim participation in Tables 10 and 11 are supplied by PSNI. They relate to clinics which occurred within the period specified.
7. Table 11 shows victim representation for those clinics resulting in a restorative caution only.

## Appendix 2 – Methodology and Counting Rules

### 1.1 What are we counting?

The figures reported in Tables 1 – 9 of this bulletin relate to cases where the date of charge (for charge cases), or date accused informed (for summons cases) falls within the year specified, where the case was prosecuted by the PPS on behalf of PSNI, Harbour Police, Airport Constabulary or the National Crime Agency (NCA). Those in Tables 10 and 11 are based on youth engagement clinics which happened within the year 2018/19. 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](#), as these allow officers to use their professional judgement in managing low level and local crimes through the use of discretion and, therefore, are dealt with in a different way. Information on numbers of community resolution notices issued are published separately by PSNI.



## 1.2 Where are we getting the data?

The data for 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 originated 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, is sourced from PSNI.

## 1.3 Data quality and validation

While the relevant CJOs from which the data used are sourced have a vested interest in maintaining the accuracy of data within their management information systems, a number of accuracy, quality assurance/validation procedures have been conducted upon the dataset used to compile this data series, to ensure the data extracted are accurate, complete and fit for the statistical purposes for which they are to be used. Both automated and manual checks have been carried out, at individual case level and data corrected, where possible, to ensure that:

- key fields are complete and logical;
- a general check of the data as a whole suggests no other anomalies.

Examples of some of the changes made to the dataset as part of the validation process for 2018/19 included: the removal of 63 duplicate records, 4 cases were amended where the defendant had an incorrect date of birth recorded and in one case, the date of offence was corrected.

Nevertheless, users should be aware that the statistics contained in this publication originate from various administrative data sources, which have different purposes, aims and objectives and are kept for non-statistical purposes, e.g., CRV is maintained for reviewing and vetting individuals' criminal records.

## 1.4 Interpreting the data

Figures reported relate primarily to the numbers of young people coming into the justice system: whether they are deemed suitable for youth engagement; deemed 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 relating to young people coming into formal contact with the justice system. However, some young people may, legitimately, be counted more than once in the figures reported. For example, in 2018/19, the 2,822 cases reported relate to 1,840 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 per cent of cases were completed. Figures for the time taken to deal with cases at the 80<sup>th</sup> 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.

### 1.5 Statistical coverage

The data included in the bulletin are based on cases where a young person was charged or informed by police in relation to an offence during the year 1 April 2018 – 31 March 2019. Statistical coverage is restricted to those criminal cases which were considered by PPS on behalf of the PSNI, the NCA, the Airport Constabulary or Harbour Police. Cases involving young people, where the complainants were government departments, public bodies and private individuals are not included, as their prosecution is beyond the remit of the DoJ. The operational structure of the justice system in Northern Ireland does not equate to that of England and Wales, Scotland or the Republic of Ireland, and therefore no comparisons have been made between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK and Ireland.