

31 March 2025

REFERENCE: FOI25\36

Dear Madam,

Thank you for your request for information dated 23rd March 2025, as detailed below.

‘I would like to request statistical data on sentencing for fraud-related offences in Northern Ireland over the past five years (from 2020 to 2025). Specifically, I seek information on:

1. The total number of individuals sentenced for fraud-related offences each year.
2. The number of those individuals who received a custodial (prison) sentence.
3. Of those who received a custodial sentence:
 - How many were first-time offenders?
 - What were their age ranges (e.g., 18–25, 26–40, 41–60, 60+)?
 - What was the amount involved in the offence (if available)?
 - What other factors affected sentencing ie Restitution (if available)
4. The total number of individuals who received a suspended sentence for fraud-related offences. How many were first-time offenders?’

The information you have requested in relation to convictions, custodial sentences suspended sentences, age groups and first time entrants is provided below. The most recent year for which information is available is 2024.

Convictions, Custodial disposals and Suspended imprisonment disposals for fraud offences, 2020 – 2024

Year	Convictions	Custodial sentence	Suspended sentences
2020	415	52	151
2021	500	75	175
2022	405	71	105
2023	387	67	122
2024	502	84	191

Age groups of those who received a Custodial sentence after a conviction for a fraud offence, 2020 – 2024

Age group	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
under 18	*	-	-	-	-
18 - 24	10	11	13	11	10
25 - 29	9	13	7	10	10
30 - 39	22	29	28	25	41
40 - 49	5	16	16	15	14
50 - 59	#	#	3	#	#
60 and over	*	*	4	*	*
not known	-	-	-	-	-
Total	52	75	71	67	84

Note:

1. Figures for convictions relate to initial disposals at court. Appeals are not included.
2. Figures relate to defendants who were convicted at court for at least one of the offences specified.
3. Age is at date case was dealt with.
4. Figures for 2024 are based on management information and should be considered provisional.
5. Figures for disposals relate to main disposal imposed in a case.

* means a figure of less than 3 has been treated under rules of disclosure.

means a figure of 3 or more has been treated to prevent disclosure of a small number elsewhere.

Of those who received a custodial disposal over the period 2020 – 2024, 48 were for first offences. Of those who received a suspended custodial disposal over the period 2020 – 2024, 197 were for first offences.

Information in relation to the amounts defrauded in the offences committed, and in relation to factors that affected sentencing, is not held as part of Departmental prosecutions and convictions datasets, although this information may be held as part of court records for individual cases.

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives you two rights of access when you write to us asking for information. You have the right to know whether we hold recorded information falling in scope of your request, and you have the right to receive this recorded information subject to cost limit or exemption.

In this instance, in relation to questions about the amounts defrauded in the offences committed and, in relation to factors that affected sentencing, the DoJ has estimated that to locate, retrieve and extract the information that might be relevant to your request would involve work considerably more than the appropriate limit. This is due to the fact that details of this information is not held on the Department's prosecutions and convictions datasets and to obtain this information would involve a manual search of the relevant court records. The appropriate limit is specified in regulations and for central government is set at £600. This represents an estimated cost of one person spending 24 working hours, at a cost of £25.00 per hour, to determine whether the Department holds the information, and then retrieve and extract that information.

Records show there were 349 cases dealt with at courts in the 2020-2024 period. It is estimated that the additional amount of work required to extract, validate and aggregate data on the detail of the information requested, would be in excess of 87 hours. At a cost of £25 per hour, this equates to over £2,175, which is higher than the appropriate limit. Further, it should be noted that, whilst it may be possible to narrow the scope of your overall request to bring it within the cost limit by, for example, reducing the time period to

be covered for the specified court case details, any resulting information would be exempt from disclosure under S32 Court Records exemption of FOIA.

Information in relation to factors that affect sentencing more generally, is a matter for Office of the Lady Chief Justice. You can write to the Lady Chief Justice at:

Lady Chief Justice's Office
Royal Courts of Justice
Chichester Street
Belfast
BT1 3JF

Email: LCJOffice@judiciaryni.uk

If you are unhappy with the result of your request for information you may request an internal review within two calendar months of the date of this letter. If you request an internal review please do so in writing stating the reasons to the address above.

If following an internal review you were to remain dissatisfied you may make a complaint to the Information Commissioner and ask the Commissioner to investigate whether the DoJ has complied with the terms of the FOIA. You can write to the Information Commissioner at:

Information Commissioner
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

The Commissioner will not investigate a complaint unless an internal review procedure has been carried out.

Further details on the role of the Information Commissioner and the handling of appeals can be found at: www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk

If you wish to discuss this please contact the Freedom of Information Team using the contact details provided at the top of the first page. Please remember to quote your reference in any correspondence.

Yours sincerely

Freedom of Information Manager