

# Trends in criminal justice spending, staffing and populations

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## Introduction

This UK Justice Policy Review Focus looks at trends in key data about the criminal justice systems in each jurisdiction of the UK. It covers the main criminal justice institutions of the police, courts, probation and prison. The aim is to provide reliable, accessible data on trends in areas such as criminal justice spending, staffing, and the populations subject to criminal justice sanctions. It will be useful to policy makers, practitioners, researchers and anyone else with an interest in the criminal justice system in the UK.

## How to understand the data

The data we provide in this briefing gives a rough sense of the overall 'size' of the criminal justice system, in terms of funding, workforce and people processed by criminal justice institutions. Trends in these areas will be affected by a variety of complex interrelated factors, both within the criminal justice system and without. For instance, the number of people prosecuted in the courts will in part depend on the number of police officers available to arrest people in the first place, which in turn will depend on police budgets. On the other hand, the number of people arrested will

depend, amongst other things, on demographic factors such as the size of the specific populations targeted by the police.

Where possible we present data covering the period from 2005-2006 to 2015-2016 to get a meaningful understanding of current trends. The financial year 2015-2016 is the most recent year for which comparable data for each jurisdiction is available. All data is taken from official government sources. Data tables and a full list of references are available from our website.

## Spending

This section focuses on criminal justice spending in the five years to 2015-2016. Figures 1, 2 and 3 show real terms spending on police services, law courts and prisons in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland between 2011-2012 and 2015-2016. Figures 4-6 show how much of total criminal justice expenditure each component made up. They are compiled from data produced by the Treasury for international comparison and attempt to be inclusive of spending by all government departments. They therefore include local as well central sources of expenditure.

Figure 1. Criminal justice spending in England and Wales

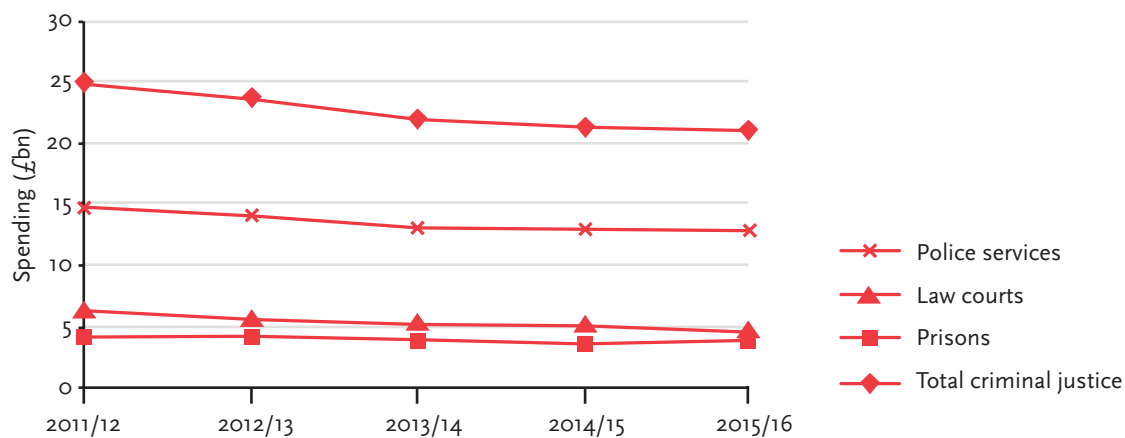


Figure 2. Criminal justice spending in Scotland

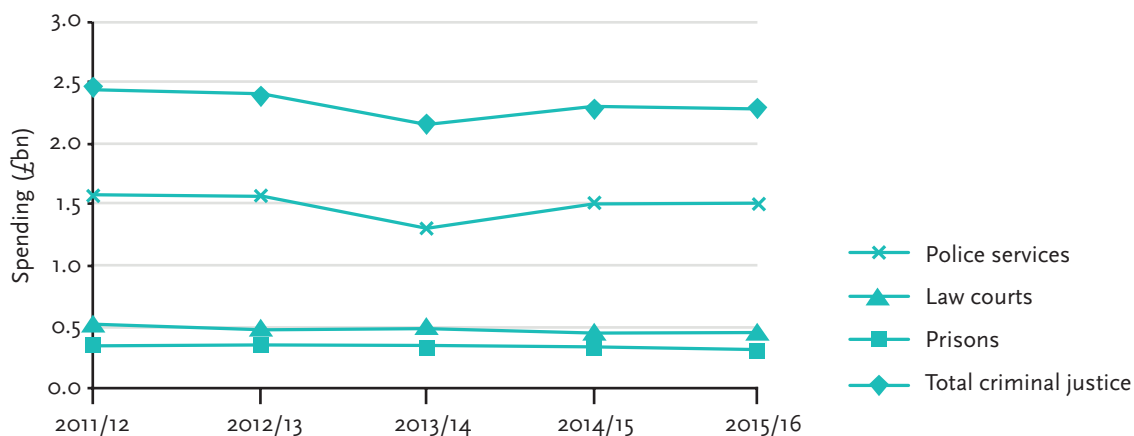
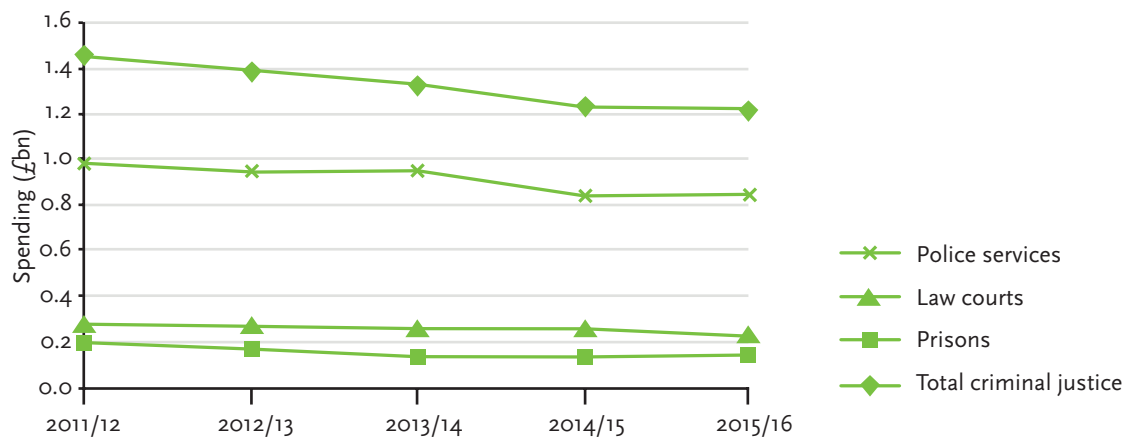


Figure 3. Criminal justice spending in Northern Ireland



Footnote

Real terms figures have been adjusted using GDP deflators as at September 2017.

Figure 4. Proportion of total criminal justice spending in England and Wales each component makes up, 2015-2016

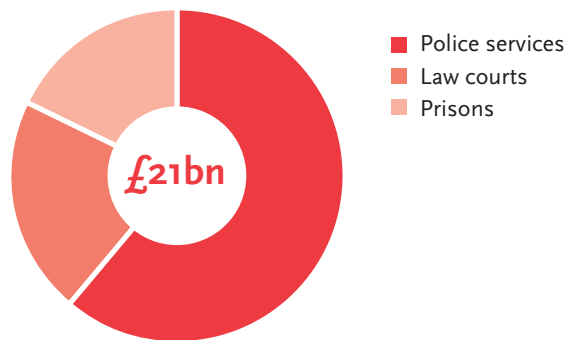


Figure 5. Proportion of total criminal justice spending in Scotland each component makes up, 2015-2016

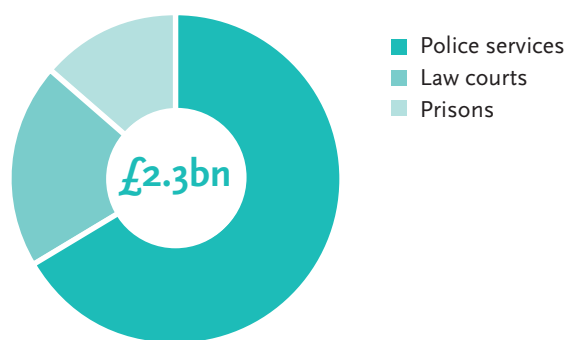
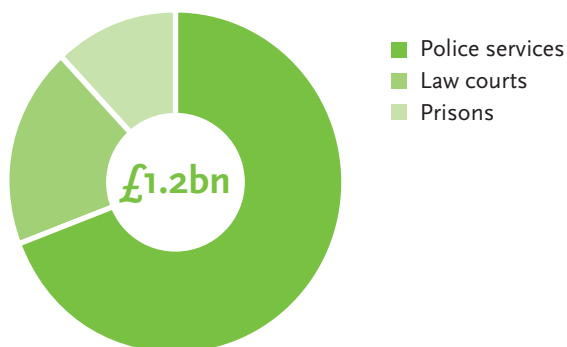


Figure 6. Proportion of total criminal justice spending in Northern Ireland each component makes up, 2015-16



All jurisdictions have faced real terms decreases in criminal justice expenditure over the five-year period. Spending in England, Wales and Northern Ireland was cut by around 16 per cent. Scotland faced less of a squeeze, with total criminal justice spending down 6.4 per cent.

The biggest reductions in England and Wales were to spending on law courts, which has fallen by almost a third since 2011-2012. Police services in this jurisdiction also faced significant cuts in expenditure of 12.6 per cent, although most of this fall occurred between 2011-2012 and 2013-2014, with spending declining at a much slower rate since then. Spending on prisons declined by far less, relative to the other two areas of criminal justice, falling by only 5.3 per cent since 2011-2012, and in fact rising by 8.8 per cent between 2014-2015 and 2015-2016. Prisons did however face significant real terms spending cuts between 2009-2010 and 2011-2012.

Spending cuts in areas of criminal justice in Scotland were less marked than in England and Wales. Spending on police services was cut by only 3.9 per cent in the five years to 2015-2016. Prison and law court spending both fell by around 11 per cent over the period.

Spending cuts were significant in all areas of criminal justice spending in Northern Ireland. Prisons fared the worst, with expenditure down more than a quarter between 2011-2012 and 2015-2016, although spending in this area has been relatively stable since 2013-2014. Spending on law courts was cut by nearly a fifth over the five years to 2015-16, and police services by 13.9 per cent.

Spending on police services is by far the largest component of criminal justice expenditure in all three jurisdictions, making up roughly two thirds of the total in each.

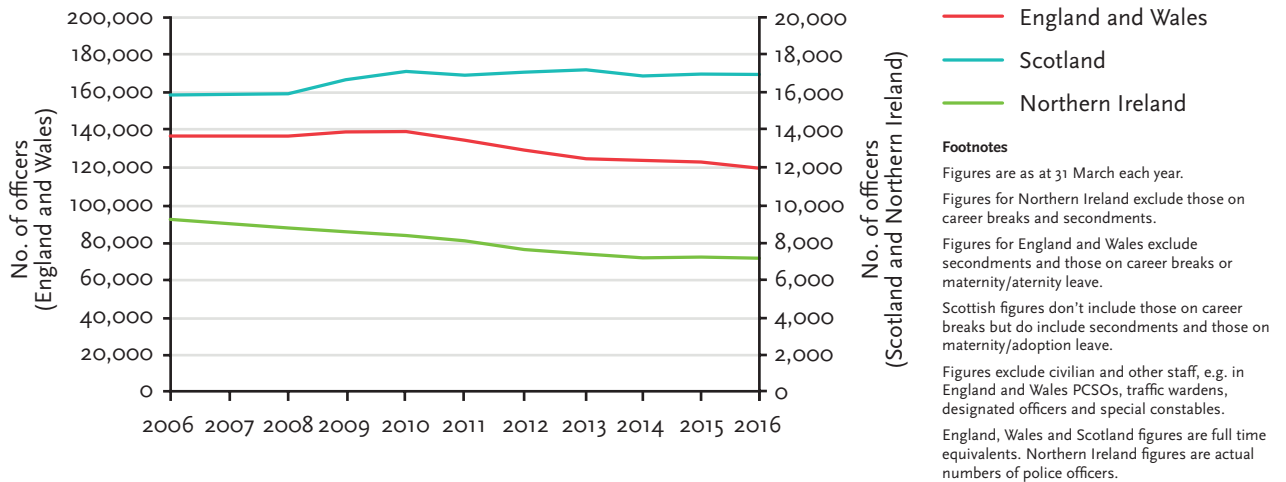
## Staffing

In this section, we examine the numbers of police, prison and probation staff over time, as they reflect changes in criminal justice policy overall as well as in the size and shape of the specific institutions.

Both England and Wales and Northern Ireland have seen reductions in police officer numbers since 2006 (Figure 7). In England and Wales officer numbers were stable until 2010 when the

coalition government took office and began to impose cuts to police budgets. Since then the number of officers has fallen by 14.3 per cent. Officer levels in Northern Ireland fell consistently between 2006 and 2014, with less marked reductions since. Over the 11-year period Northern Ireland lost nearly a quarter of its police officers. Scotland on the other hand has only seen half a per cent fall in police officers numbers since 2010, with numbers in fact rising by about seven per cent since 2006.

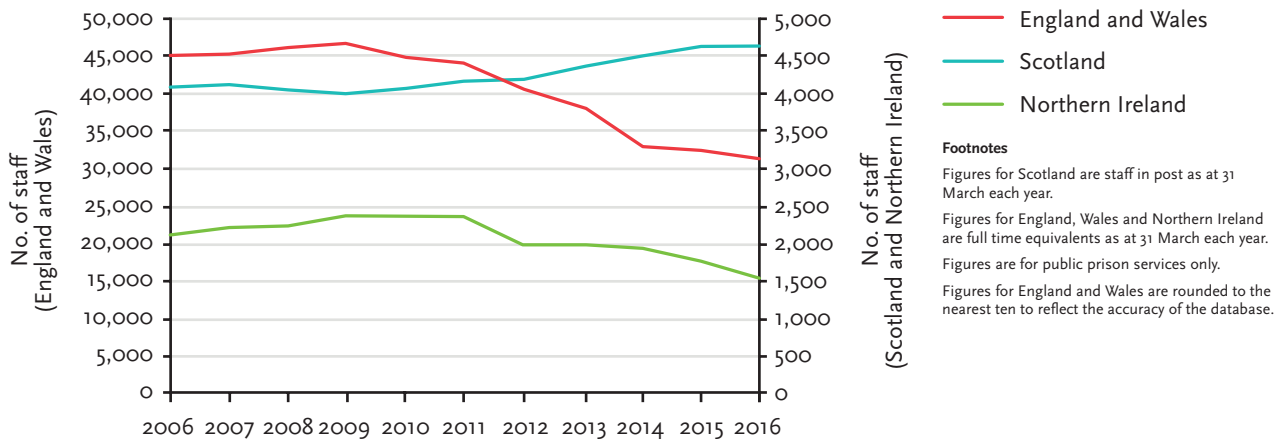
**Figure 7. UK police officer numbers**



Prison staffing cuts in England, Wales and Northern Ireland since 2010 (Figure 8) have been far greater than cuts in police officer levels, both falling by around a third. These falls have slowed since 2014 in England and Wales, as the Ministry of Justice began a recruitment drive amid

widespread criticism that staffing and budget cuts had led to increases in suicides, self-harm and violence in prisons. Again, contrary to trends in the other jurisdictions, prison staffing in Scotland has increased by about 14 per cent since 2010, with sustained increases since 2009.

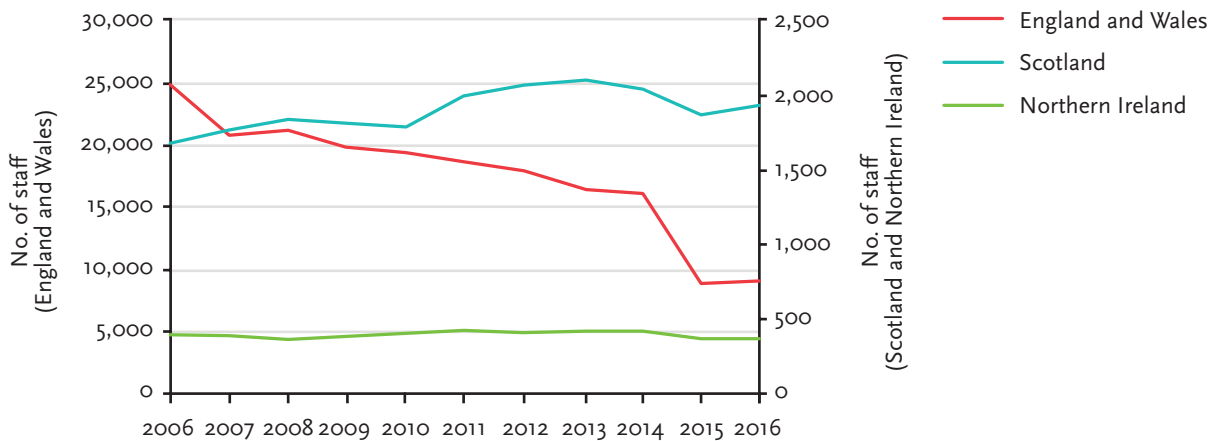
**Figure 8. UK prison service staffing**



Probation staffing levels in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (Figure 9) have fallen significantly since both 2006 and 2010. The enormous drop in probation staff in England and Wales between 2014 and 2015 reflects the transfer of a large proportion of the probation service to the private sector. Private Community Rehabilitation Companies are now responsible for supervising around 60 per cent of the

probation caseload, with the remaining 40 per cent supervised by the public National Probation Service. The government is not responsible for the management of Community Rehabilitation Company staffing levels and so data is not routinely published. Staffing levels did, however, fall consistently between 2006 and 2014, reducing overall by just over a third.

Figure 9. UK probation staffing



**Footnotes**

Figures for England and Wales from 2006 to 2009 are as at December each year. Figures thereafter are as at 31 March each year.  
Figures for England and Wales for 2014 onwards are not comparable to previous years due to the transfer of around half the probation workforce to the private sector. Due to recording changes the England and Wales figure for 2013 is also not comparable with previous years.  
England and Wales figures are full time equivalents.

Scotland figures up to and including 2010 are whole time equivalents, after which they are headcounts and are rounded to the nearest ten.  
England, Wales and Northern Ireland figures are for total probation staff. Scotland figures are for the social work services criminal justice staff.  
Scotland figures are as at first Monday in October up to and including 2010, and afterwards are as at December each year.  
Figures for Northern Ireland are average number of staff employed in financial years.

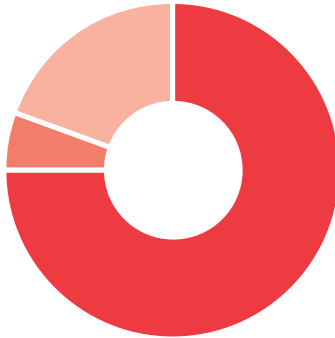
After rising by 8.5 per cent between 2006 and 2011, probation staffing levels in Northern Ireland remained stable up to 2014, before falling by 13.5 per cent up to the most recent year. Similarly, numbers of Criminal Justice Social Workers in Scotland, the equivalent of probation officers, rose

by a quarter between 2006 and 2013, and fell by about 10.5 per cent between 2013 and 2015.

As with spending, we can see that the police make up the overwhelming majority of the criminal justice workforce (Figures 10-12).

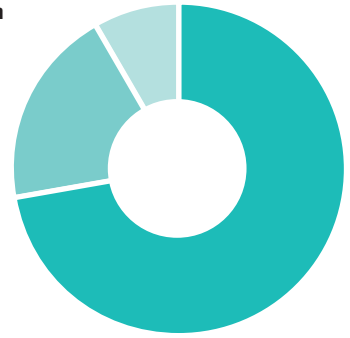
**Figure 10. Proportion of total criminal justice workforce in England and Wales each component makes up, 2016**

- Police
- Probation
- Prison



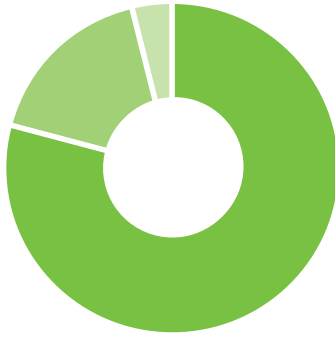
**Figure 11. Proportion of total criminal justice workforce in Scotland each component makes up, 2016**

- Police
- Prison
- Probation



**Figure 12. Proportion of total criminal justice workforce in Northern Ireland each component makes up, 2016**

- Police
- Prison
- Probation

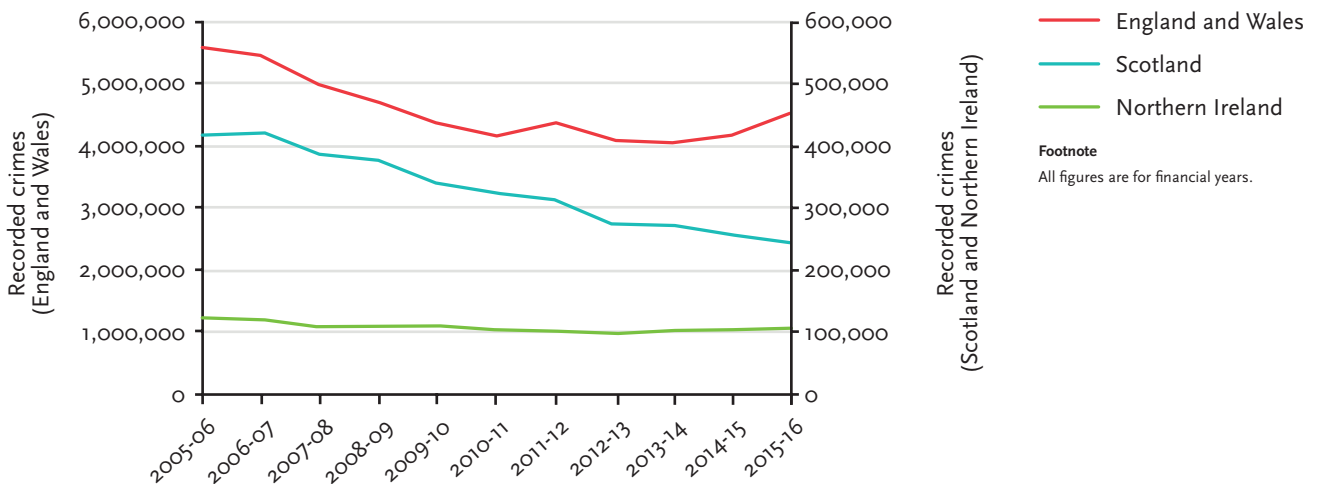


## Criminal justice process

The first figure in this section shows police recorded crime: alleged law breaking brought to the attention of the police and recorded as a crime incident. As a measure of ‘crime’ its limitations have been well rehearsed. It reflects changes in police recording practices and their targeting of particular law-breaking activity, and fails to capture incidents not reported to the police. It does however provide the material on which

the criminal justice system works, and offers an insight into a large proportion of incidents that come to the attention of such a system. Figure 13 shows crimes recorded by the police between 2005-2006 and 2015-2016. All jurisdictions have witnessed falls over the period, with drops of around two fifths in Scotland, a fifth in England and Wales and 13 per cent in Northern Ireland. Sustained rises in recorded crime have occurred in Northern Ireland since 2012-2013, and in England and Wales since 2013-2014.

**Figure 13. UK police recorded crime**



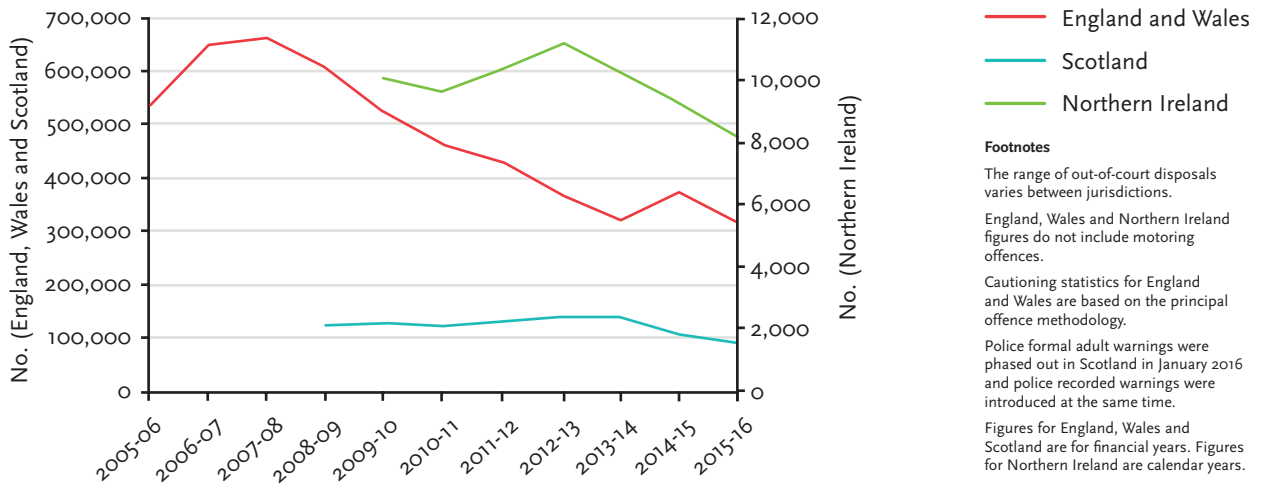
Footnote  
All figures are for financial years.

Figures 14 and 15 show out-of-court disposals and prosecutions and convictions, giving a sense of the overall number of cases processed by the criminal justice system.

Use of out-of-court disposals has fallen significantly in each jurisdiction. After peaking in 2007-2008,

use of these sanctions in England and Wales fell sharply, halving by 2015-2016. Similarly, after rising steadily until 2013-2014, out-of-court disposals issued in Scotland declined by more than a third. Since peak use of these sanctions in Northern Ireland in 2012-2013, levels have fallen by over a quarter.

Figure 14. UK out-of-court disposals

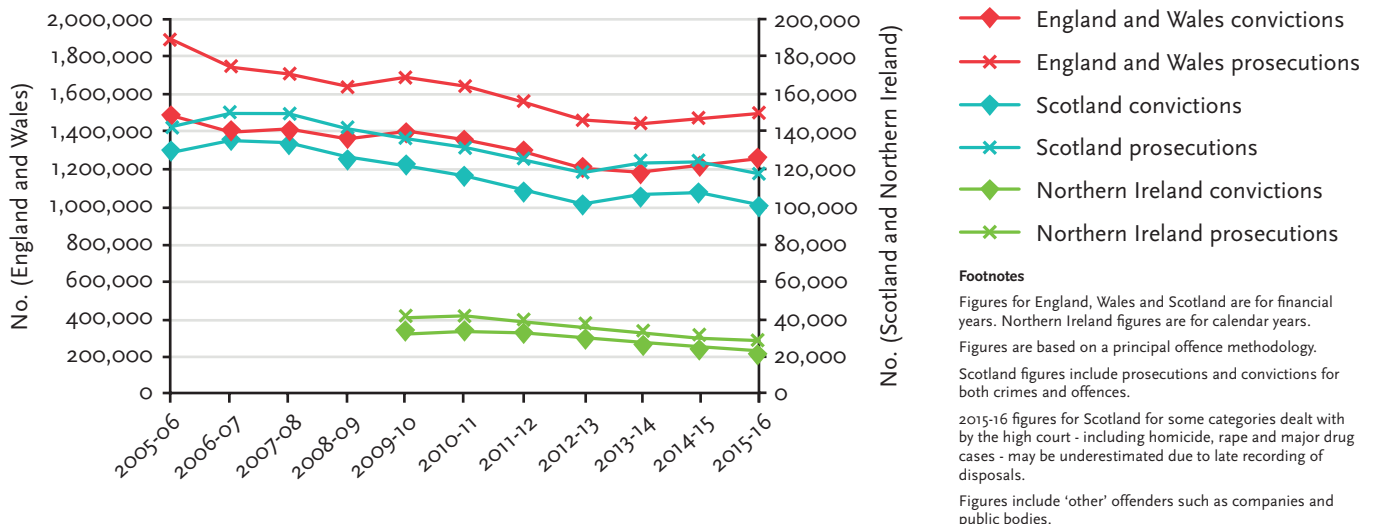


Prosecutions and convictions in the courts (Figure 15) have declined in every jurisdiction over the periods for which data is available.

Between 2005-2006 and 2015-2016 England and Wales saw falls in prosecutions and convictions of 21 per cent and 16 per cent respectively. In

Scotland, both fell by around a fifth. Recent years have, however, seen an upturn in prosecutions and convictions in England and Wales, rising two and four per cent each since 2012-2013. The largest reductions occurred in Northern Ireland, where there were nearly a third fewer prosecutions and convictions in 2015-2016 than in 2010-2011.

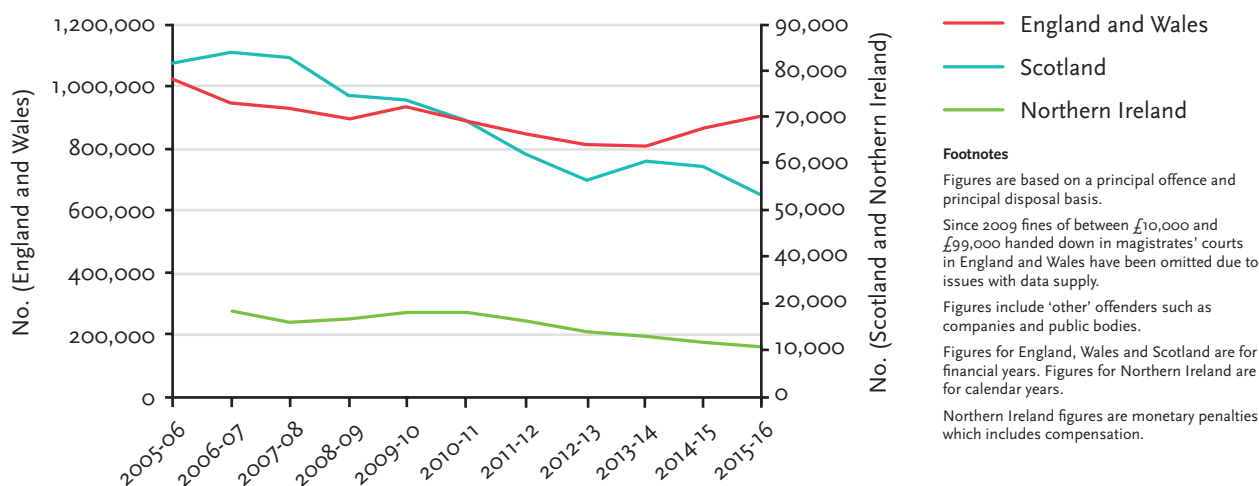
Figure 15. UK prosecutions and convictions in courts



Figures 16-18 show trends in the three main court-imposed sanctions: fines, and prison and community sentences. Fines are by far the most common court-imposed sanction, with nearly a million issued across the UK in 2015-2016. Use of court-ordered fines has reduced across the board over the last

decade. In England and Wales, there were 12 per cent fewer fines issued by the courts in 2015-2016 than in 2005-2006, and in Scotland, two fifths fewer over the same period. Similarly, in Northern Ireland, court-ordered fines declined by just over two fifths between 2006-2007 and 2015-2016.

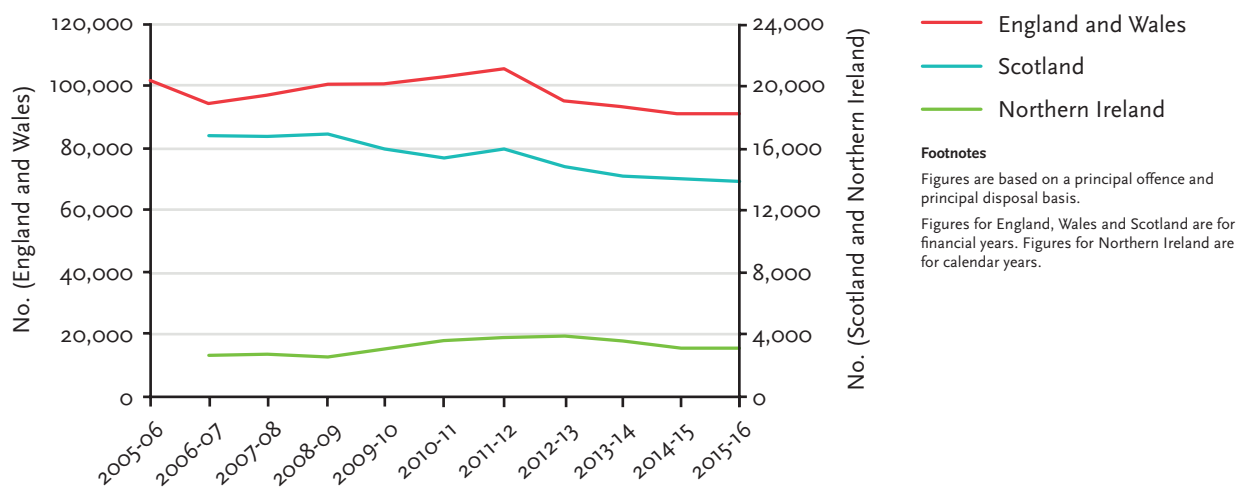
Figure 16. UK court-ordered fines



Numbers of prison sentences handed down by the courts in England, Wales and Scotland decreased in the decade up to 2015-2016. Between 2005-2006 and 2015-2016 there was an 11 per cent fall in sentences of immediate custody in England

and Wales. In Scotland, prison sentences fell by nearly a fifth between 2006-2007 and 2015-2016. Northern Ireland bucked this trend, with an increase in prison sentences of a fifth between 2006-2007 and 2015-2016.

Figure 17. UK prison sentences

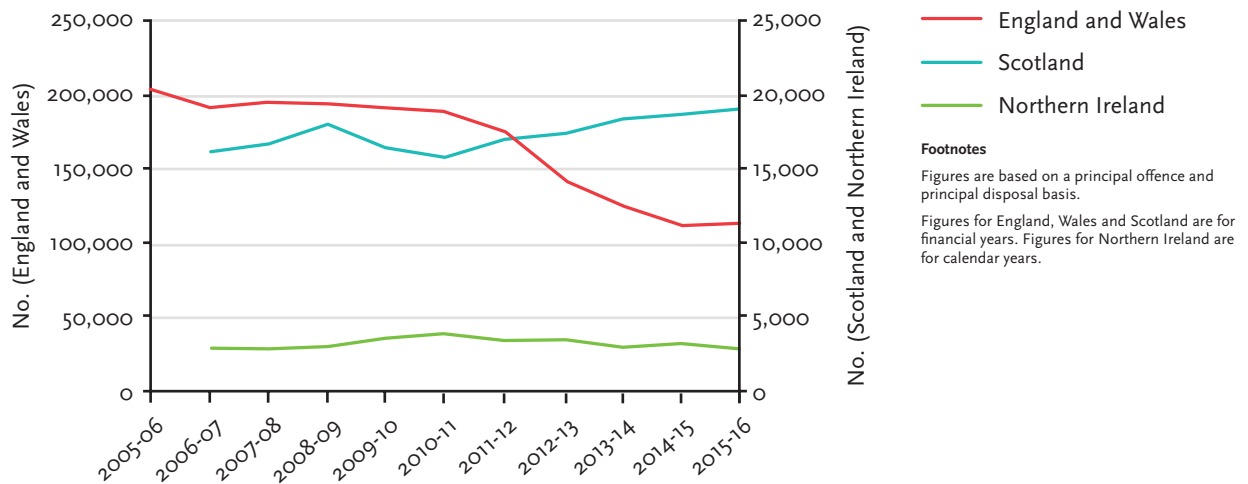




Trends in community sentences diverged across the three jurisdictions in the 10 years to 2015-2016. England and Wales saw a dramatic decline of 45 per cent in the number of these sentences handed down in the courts between 2005-2006 and 2015-2016, falling very sharply after 2010-2011. Courts in Northern Ireland increasingly issued community sentences up until 2010-11, with

numbers imposed rising by nearly a third between 2006-2007 and 2010-2011. Since 2010-2011 use of this sanction in Northern Ireland has fallen by a quarter, back to levels seen before the rise in the late 2000s. In Scotland, there were nearly a fifth more community sentences handed down in 2015-2016 than in 2006-2007.

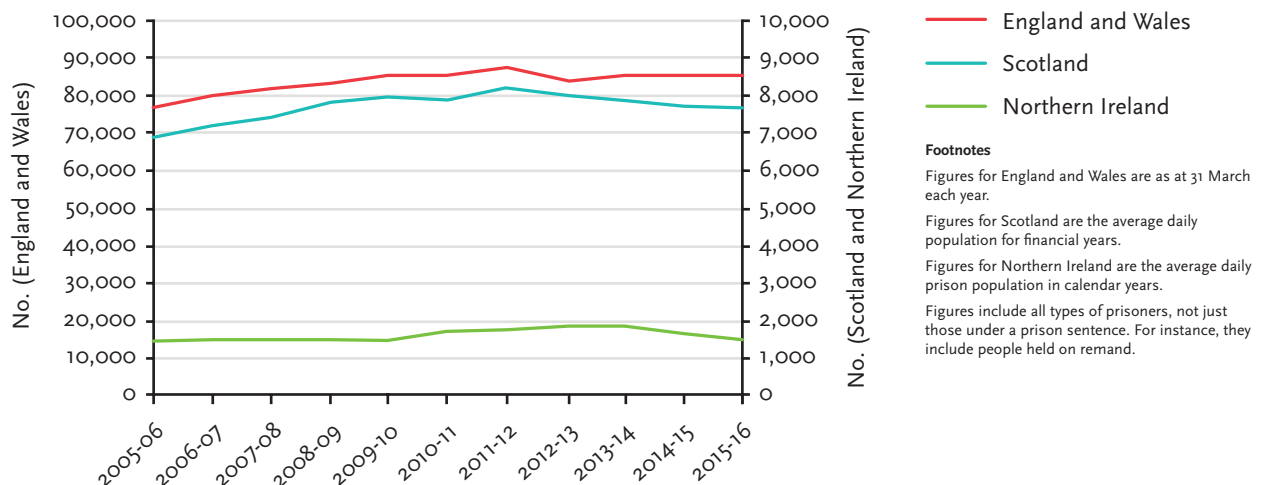
Figure 18. UK community sentences



Daily prison populations in all three criminal justice jurisdictions increased between 2005-2006 and 2015-2016. England and Wales and Scotland saw prison population rises of 11 and 12 per cent respectively. Northern Ireland's prison population meanwhile saw a much more modest rise of 3.5 per cent. These overall trends mask some fluctuations over this time period. Scotland's prison population rose by nearly a fifth between

2005-2006 and 2011-2012, but saw consistent falls in subsequent years, totalling around six per cent overall. The custodial population in Northern Ireland was stable between 2005-2006 and 2009-2010, but then rose by a quarter between 2009-2010 and 2013-2014. This was followed by a decrease of nearly a fifth between 2013-2014 and 2015-2016.

Figure 19. UK daily prison population



## Conclusion

Overall the data outlined in this briefing paints a picture of a contraction in the overall size of the UK criminal justice system. This is reflected in both the size of the institutions, with spending and staffing levels reducing, and in the volume of cases processed by these institutions.

There is some divergence between the trends in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and Scotland with regards to expenditure and staffing. For instance, spending on police services, law courts and prisons has decreased in every jurisdiction, although these reductions were generally less marked in Scotland. Police officer numbers, prison and probation staffing fell significantly in England, Wales and Northern

Ireland, in contrast to Scotland where they all increased. The police continue to make up the largest component of criminal justice spending and staffing, by some way.

Long term trends in the number of criminal justice cases processed by the criminal justice systems converged in all jurisdictions. Police recorded crime, out-of-court disposals, prosecutions, convictions, court-ordered fines and prison sentences in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland all fell in the decade to 2015-2016. The number of people in prison on any given day rose in every jurisdiction. Community sentences imposed by the courts fell in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, but increased consistently in Scotland.

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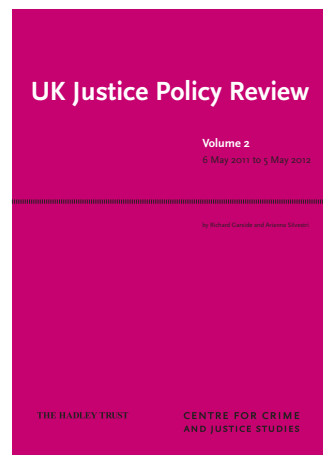
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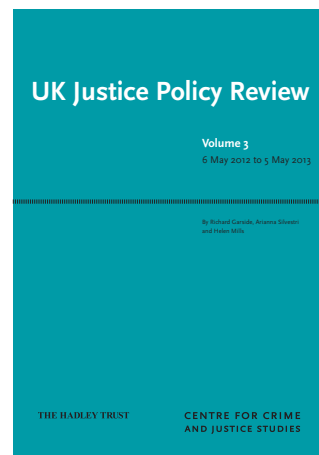
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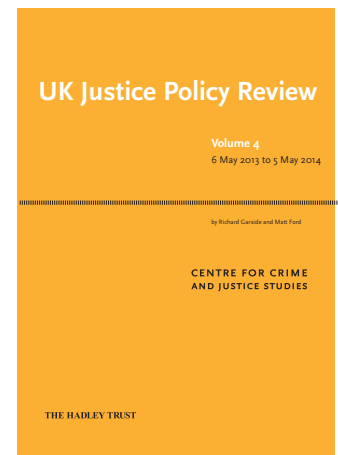
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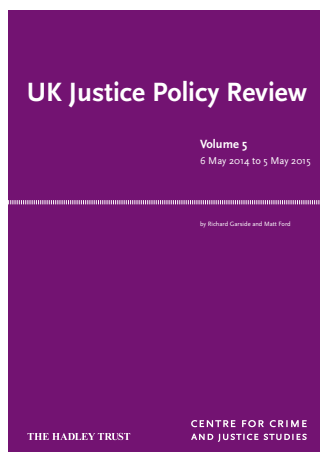
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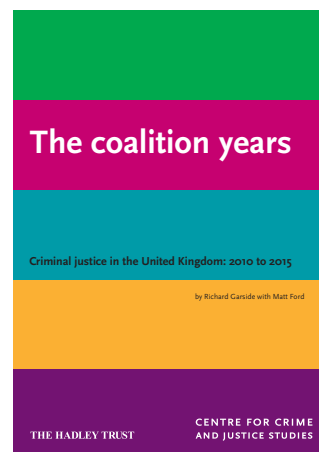
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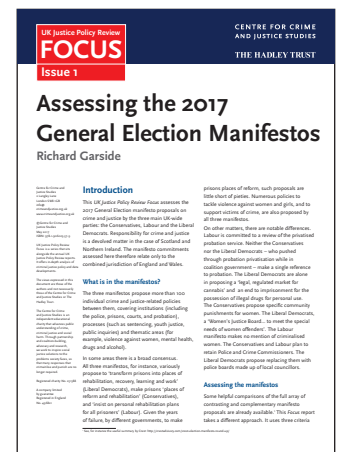
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