



Ministry of
JUSTICE

National reoffending measures – a guide

An explanation of the headline
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The 'Make Communities Safer' Public Service Agreement has provided the Ministry of Justice with the opportunity to broaden the range of reoffending data collected, and reflects the government's focus on protecting communities from the harm caused by crime and, in particular, by the most prolific and serious offenders.

The national target for this public service agreement is to reduce the adult and juvenile reoffending rate by 10% between 2005 and 2011.

Until 2006, reoffending statistics only showed how many offenders committed further offences following commencement of a community sentence, or release from prison for adults. For juveniles it included offenders commencing pre-court disposals, non-custodial court disposals or release from custody.

The figures continue to show the proportion of offenders who reoffend, but now also show how many reoffences are committed - that is the frequency of reoffending, as well as including data on how many serious reoffences are committed. The definition of 'serious' covers a small number of reoffences and includes crimes such as serious violence (grievous bodily harm, murder, manslaughter), and serious sexual offences. This provides a better measure of the impact our programmes have with those offenders who cause most damage to our communities.

These reoffending measures look beyond the simple assessment of whether someone reoffends or not and reflects the balance between serious and prolific reoffenders, offenders who commit a small number of reoffences and those who do not reoffend at all.

How the statistics are measured

The measure does not track all the offenders in a given year, but instead looks at a 'cohort'. The cohort is made up of all offenders discharged from a custodial sentence or starting a community sentence in the first three months of each calendar year (January to March) – for juveniles the cohort also includes those receiving an out-of-court disposal (reprimand or final warning) and other court convictions. This cohort usually consists of between 40,000 and 60,000 offenders.

The results drawn from the cohort are not representative of reoffending over the whole year¹ but provide a point of comparison which can be used to indicate progress in reducing reoffending. The same time period is used each year to ensure consistent and fair comparisons can be made over time.

Data is obtained from the Police National Computer on whether or not the offender is proven to have reoffended during a one-year follow up period, the number of offences they have committed and the number of serious offences committed.

The frequency of reoffending is produced by calculating the number of proven reoffences per 100 offenders. The same applies for reoffences classified as serious. Calculating a frequency per hundred offenders allows comparisons to be made from one year to another despite fluctuations in the size of the cohort.

What the old (2002 Spending Review) measure shows

The 2002 Spending Review target was to reduce reoffending by 5% between 2000-2006. The measure looked at the proportion of offenders who reoffended, rather than the number of reoffences committed (between 2000 and 2006). This was measured within a given period (two years for adults, one year for juveniles) following a community sentence being given; or on release from prison, or a pre-court disposal, non-custodial court disposal or release from custody for juveniles.

Under this measure, the reoffending rate was compared against a 'predicted rate'. If the rate was lower than predicted, then reoffending had fallen. The predicted reoffending rate was worked out based on how statistically likely offenders are to reoffend. This was based on factors such as age, gender, and criminal history.

Timing

The changes introduced for reoffending statistics from 2006 reduced the time it takes to report adult reoffending data. Under the current measures, the period of time over which reoffences by adult offenders are recorded has been reduced from two years to one year.

¹ This reflects that offenders included in the January to March cohort, would also appear again if a full year cohort was taken, and therefore there would be issues of double counting. In addition, there may be seasonal differences in offence types and reoffending that may impact on results in different quarters.

The time allowed for convictions to be made and processed has also been reduced from nine months to six months. This provides the Ministry of Justice with a more timely measure of adult reoffending and allows us to align reporting of the adult and juvenile reoffending data.

Comparisons over time

The national adult reoffending results published in May 2009 are the last time that figures reporting against the 2002 Spending Review target will be published. The 2002 Spending Review target covered the period 2000-2006, with the May 2009 publication releasing the adult figures for the final year (2006). The final juvenile results under the old measure were published in 2008.

The 10% reduction target included in the 'Make Communities Safer' Public Service Agreement replaces the 2002 Spending Review target, and means that future reoffending results will no longer include figures using the old measure of reoffending. Therefore, the results for 2008 (which are due for publication in early 2010) will include reoffending figures calculated with the frequency of reoffending measure as the main headline result. The report will also include data on the number of serious offences committed, and will continue to include a one year measure of the proportion of offenders who reoffend compared to a predicted rate.

While a change in the measure has been brought in for the 2005-2011 period, in order to ensure reoffending figures are as transparent as possible, previous reoffending results made under the old measure for 2000-2004 (to 2005 for juveniles) have been recalculated using the new measure, in order that fair comparisons can be made from 2000 to present.

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