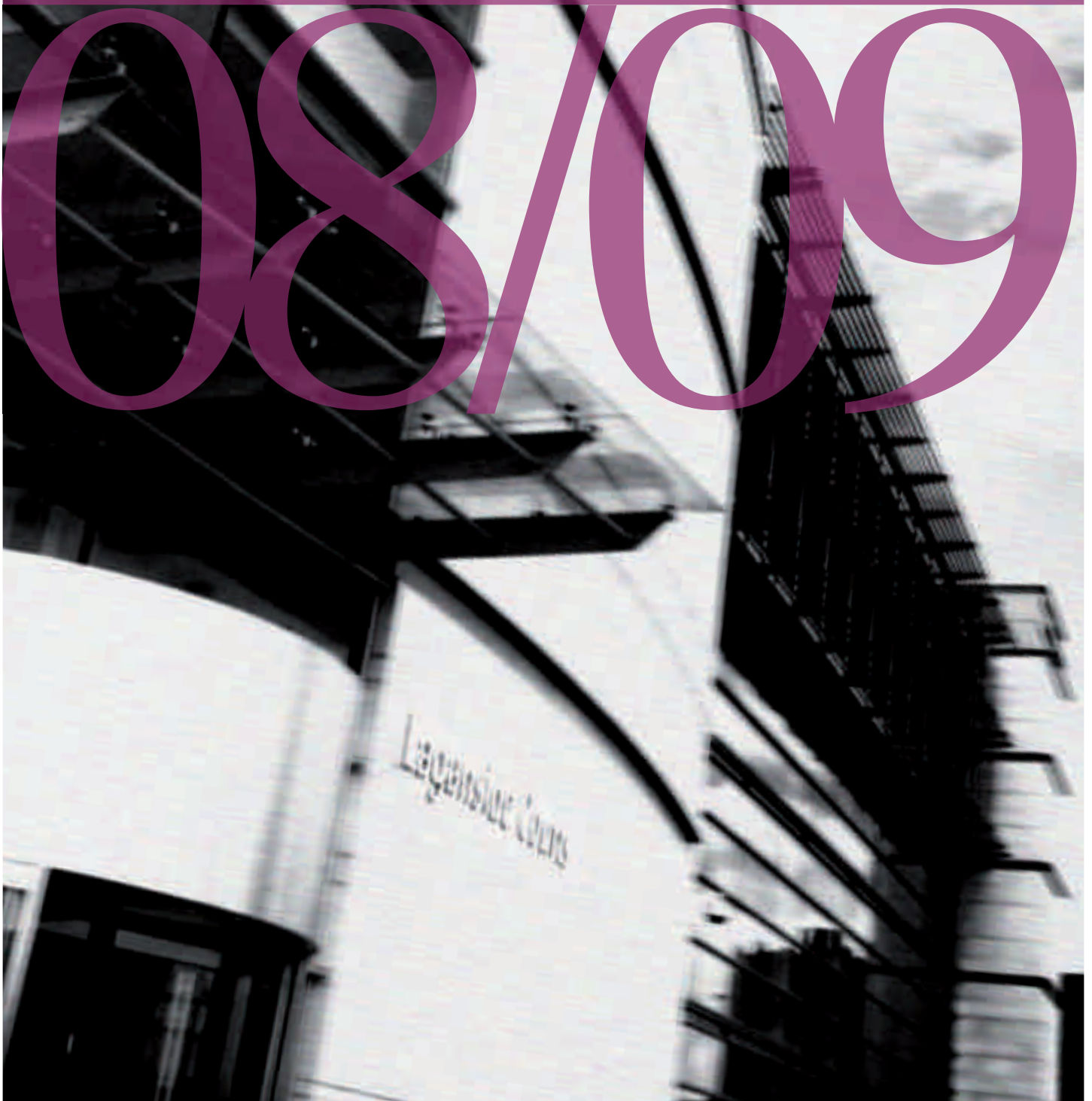


NORTHERN IRELAND COURT SERVICE

# Annual Report

serving the community through the administration of justice

08/09



Annual report presented  
to Parliament by the Lord  
Chancellor and Secretary  
of State for Justice in  
pursuance of section 68A  
of the Judicature (Northern  
Ireland) Act 1978

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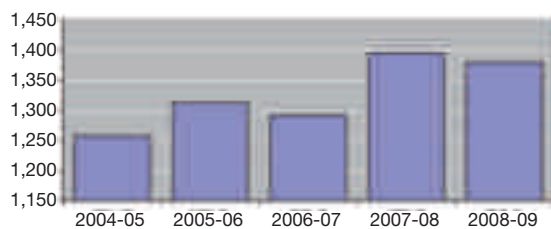
# 2008/09 Highlights

## Court & Tribunal Business

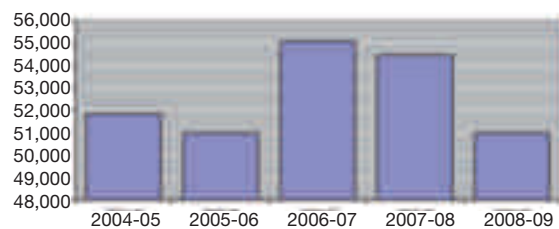
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- The Northern Ireland courts deal with 88,650 cases
- Crown court business declines marginally this year (-1%) following a substantial rise between 2004/05 and 2007/08
- Magistrate's adult business also experiences a slight decline between 2007/08 and 2008/09 (-6%) following a marked increase in the years between 2004/05 and 2007/08
- The number of youth defendants dealt with in the magistrates court has increased since 2004/05 however this financial year has seen a slight decline. The number of youth court defendants has fallen from 3,350 (in 2007/08) to 3,011 (in 2008/09) - a fall of 10%

Crown Court cases

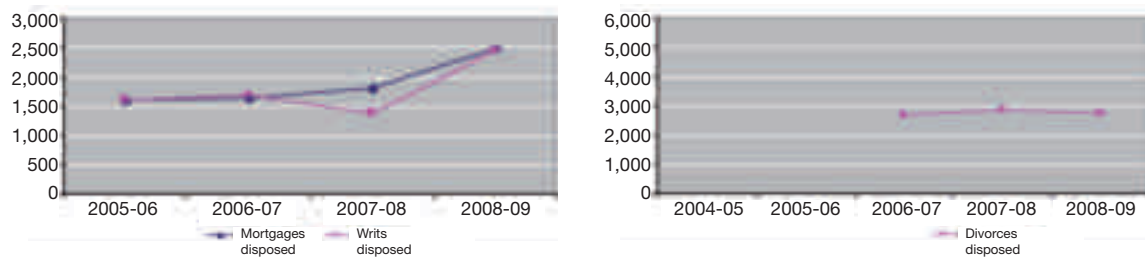


Magistrate's adult defendants



- Civil business has experienced a substantial rise over the past 5 years with the steepest increase in the 2008/09 financial year. Civil business has increased by 14% overall. Queens Bench writs and originating summons have experienced a 38% rise, with mortgage cases experiencing a 77% rise

- In family business, this financial year has seen a marginal increase in Children Order applications (5%). Divorce business disposed has remained steady over the past 3 years
- Tribunal performance is measured for the first time - 1,978 cases are disposed of



## Promoting confidence in the Criminal Justice System

- Stakeholders and the general public are asked for their views on allowing more people to have an opportunity to serve on juries
- Case Progression Officers are appointed at all courts to help to reduce avoidable delay in criminal cases when they reach court
- The Court Service assist the Assembly & Executive Review Committee by providing evidence on the transfer of justice powers to the NI Assembly
- A handbook for 'Victims and Witnesses' is published, providing a step by step guide to the Criminal Justice process
- Criminal Justice Week receives extensive media coverage, including a televised interview with the Lord Chief Justice and filming by NEELB TV for use as a teacher resource
- The Northern Ireland heat of the National Magistrates' Court Mock Trial Competition is filmed by the BBC.
- Almost 150 school visits take place at courts throughout Northern Ireland as part of our outreach strategy

## Delivering Responsive Customer Services

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- All 21 courthouses in Northern Ireland achieve the new Cabinet Office 'Customer Service Excellence' Standard
- A new Business Modernisation and Customer Service Strategy is published, setting out how we plan to develop our business until 2010/11
- Improved access to justice through web-based services continues as over 30% of Small Claims cases are initiated online, and 99% of public searches are carried out online
- The media get improved access to information through online case information, in support of the open justice principle
- The Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS) ICT business platform is extended to enable the secure electronic exchange of information with other public sector organisations, including HMRC and the Social Security Agency
- New video conferencing and evidence display facilities are installed in courtrooms across the province in support of our Court Technology Programme
- Public consultation on proposals to establish 'Hearing Centres' at a number of court venues
- A free legal advice service for people facing housing repossession proceedings is provided in the Royal Courts of Justice and Laganside Courts

## Access to Justice

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- Consultations on changing the way the legal profession are remunerated for their work in 'very high cost' criminal cases and proposals on introducing standard fees in criminal legal aid work in magistrates' courts are issued
- Demand for the provision of interpreters in court cases increases by over 82%



By The Rt Hon  
Jack Straw MP,  
Lord Chancellor and  
Secretary of State  
For Justice.

# Foreword

My role as Lord Chancellor requires me to ensure that an efficient and effective system exists to support the business of the Supreme Court, county courts, magistrates' courts and coroners' courts in Northern Ireland.

Government places a strong emphasis upon the public sector to apply the highest principles of efficient, customer-focused, business delivery. The Northern Ireland Court Service continues to drive forward this agenda as is evidenced by the impressive delivery of its performance standards targets.

The year under review shows that the organisation continues to press ahead with new technological solutions to business challenges using its court based IT programme, the Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS).

The award of the Customer Service Excellence Standard to all of Northern Ireland's 21 courthouses is a clear testimony to the positive experience of court users and the service delivered by front-line staff.

This has been a good year for the Court Service and one about which it can feel justly proud. Whether through innovation, the ability to respond to new business challenges, or the continuous development of customer relations, it bears the hallmark of a dynamic, responsive and constantly evolving organisation.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jack Straw". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jack Straw MP  
Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State



# Introduction



By The Director, David Lavery

The year under review has been one of significant achievement.

As a business, we have moved, literally, to unify our central staff within a new purpose-designed office building at Laganside House in Belfast's 'Legal Quarter'. This streamlines our headquarters operations and makes sound business sense in both administrative and efficiency terms.

Meanwhile we are pressing ahead with arrangements to assume responsibility for Northern Ireland's tribunals as requested by the Northern Ireland Executive.

In last year's Annual Report I said that the very successful Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS), our purpose-built information technology court business platform, will be used to innovate and not just automate court business. ICOS is already showing the potential to do this through the creation of Public Court Lists Online - a new case information and tracking service which came online in April.

Work is also at an advanced stage in respect of the Causeway Programme which will support information-sharing among the various criminal justice organisations in Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Court Service takes pride in the professional way in which it meets the needs of its customers. This was recognised this year by the award of the Customer Excellence Standard, the successor to

Chartermark. It was a worthy achievement by staff and one which reflects highly upon this organisation and its values.

Through our investment in new technology, today's customer has many more options when it comes to accessing our services. Business can be transacted by telephone, by email and over the internet meaning that journeys to court buildings are no longer always necessary.

Senior representatives from Court Service were invited to give evidence to members of the Assembly & Executive Review Committee at Stormont in March of this year. This was a very positive and useful experience and we continue to engage with the Committee on a regular basis.

Meanwhile the onset of the economic downturn saw Court Service taking an important lead in providing help to those homeowners facing repossession who do not have legal representation. The Court Service now provides facilities at Laganside Courts and the Royal Courts of Justice for a free legal advice service provided by the Housing Rights Service.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "David A. Lavery". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

D. A. Lavery



# Who we are

The Northern Ireland Court Service is the Lord Chancellor's department in Northern Ireland. It is a separate and independent Civil Service.

## Our role is to:

- Provide administrative support for the Northern Ireland courts, ie. The Supreme Court (Court of Appeal, High Court and Crown Court), the county courts, magistrates' courts and coroners' courts;
- Provide administrative support for tribunals;
- Enforce civil court judgments through the Enforcement of Judgments Office; and
- Support the Lord Chancellor in discharging his Ministerial responsibilities in Northern Ireland including responsibility for judicial appointments and legal aid.

We are accountable to Parliament at Westminster through the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice at the Ministry of Justice, the Rt Hon Jack Straw MP. The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, at the Ministry of Justice, Bridget Prentice MP, has day-to-day responsibility for the courts in Northern Ireland.

The Director of the Court Service is Head of Department and Principal Accounting Officer. He is supported by a Management Board responsible for the following areas:

- Court Operations
- Tribunal Reform
- Public Funded Legal Services
- Policy & Legislation
- Finance

An organisational structure for the department is attached at Annex A.

## Court Operations

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The key objective of this Division is:

To deliver quality services which meet the needs of our customers.

Court Operations is responsible for:

- providing administrative support for criminal, civil and family court business and the Coroners Service;
- the Enforcement of Judgments Office which provides a centralised service for the enforcement of civil court judgments;
- business modernisation;
- customer service improvement;
- judicial support and liaison, including sponsorship of the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission; and
- business support functions, including human resources.



*Jacqui Durkin*  
*Head of Court Operations Division*

## Tribunal Reform

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The key objective of this Division is:

Modernising the administration of tribunals in Northern Ireland.

Tribunal Reform Division is responsible for:

- the delivery of the tribunal reform programme to achieve a unified tribunals service;
- the efficient running of existing tribunals; and
- the establishment of new tribunals.



*Siobhan Broderick*  
*Head of Tribunal Reform Division*



*Paul Andrews  
Head of Public Funded  
Legal Services Division*

## Public Funded Legal Services

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The key objective of this Division is:

To deliver cost effective legal services for those who cannot otherwise afford access to justice.

Public Funded Legal Services Division supports the Lord Chancellor in the provision of legal aid in Northern Ireland and is responsible for:

- sponsorship of the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission;
- legal aid reform in partnership with the Legal Services Commission; and
- legal aid policy.



*Laurene McAlpine  
Head of Civil Policy  
Division*

## Policy & Legislation

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The key objective of this Division is:

To deliver high quality policy and legal advice to Ministers and the Court Service.

Policy & Legislation Division is responsible for:

- advising the Lord Chancellor on the policy and legislative framework within which the Northern Ireland courts operate;
- preparing legislation for which the Lord Chancellor is responsible in Northern Ireland;
- giving legal advice to the Court Service;
- supporting the planning for devolution; and
- providing the secretariat to the Court Rules Committees.



*Geraldine Fee  
Head of Criminal Policy  
Division*

# Finance

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The key objective of this Division is:

Delivering a controlled financial and commercial environment, achieving value for money.

Finance Division is responsible for:

- the management and oversight of the Department's finances and capital investment strategy, including the court estate;
- procurement services;
- audit and risk management;
- the Court Funds Office;
- records and information management; and
- corporate communications.



*David Thompson  
Finance Director*



# Organisational Aims and Values

## Our Organisational Aim is:

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“Serving the community through the administration of justice”

## Corporate Values

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We aim, at all times, to demonstrate the following corporate values:

**Integrity:**

to interact with our customers with the highest degree of integrity, promoting an atmosphere of honesty and trust

**Openness:**

to undertake our work in an open and transparent manner

**Professionalism:**

to conduct our business to the highest standards

**Accountability:**

to be responsible for delivering a high quality service to the public

**Fairness:**

to treat everyone fairly

We have incorporated our Corporate Values into our performance management system for staff so that we can continuously measure the way in which we demonstrate our values.

# How we are Structured

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There are **21 courthouses** across Northern Ireland, the largest being Laganside Courts and the Royal Courts of Justice in Belfast. All of our courthouses have achieved the new **Customer Service Excellence Standard**.

This year we relocated our headquarters departments to a new building, bringing together all our central administrative operations. Laganside House is located in the heart of Belfast's Legal Quarter, beside Laganside Courts and the Royal Courts of Justice.

While our core business is the provision of administrative support for the courts in Northern Ireland, we are also responsible for:

- the **Enforcement of Judgments Office (EJO)** - which provides a centralised service for the enforcement of civil court judgments;
- the **Coroners Service for Northern Ireland**, which is headed by a High Court Judge as Presiding Judge for the Coroners Service and comprises a full-time coroners judiciary;
- the **Court Funds Office** - which manages funds held in court on behalf of minors and patients;
- a number of **tribunals** including:
  - the Office of the Social Security and Child Support Commissioners;
  - Pensions Appeal Tribunal;
  - Traffic Penalty Tribunal;
  - Northern Ireland Valuation Tribunal;
  - Criminal Injury Compensation Appeal Panel for Northern Ireland.

# Our Staffing and Resources

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## Staffing

The Court Service staff complement for 2008/09 was 776 posts, the majority of which are in front-line services at the 21 courthouses throughout Northern Ireland and in the Enforcement of Judgments Office.

The Court Service recognises that a committed and skilled workforce is fundamental to the successful achievement of corporate goals and to the delivery of a quality service. During the year a Workforce Strategy (2008-2011) and associated Action Plan was published, to support the achievement of corporate objectives by ensuring that the organisation maintains an affordable staff complement, that is appropriately skilled to meet existing and future business needs.

As part of our Career Management Strategy, we initiated a trainee accountant scheme, to enable talent to be recognised and developed internally.

A number of people management policies are available which are based on best public sector practice. These include family friendly policies, offering those with caring responsibilities flexibility in working patterns, such as part-time, job-sharing and term-time working arrangements.

Further information on our staff complement can be found at Annex B.

We are in the final year of our current Employment Equality Plan, which supports our commitment to achieve a 'workforce reflective of the community that we serve'. We continue to attract applicants from under-represented groups in our recruitment schemes, which is a key target within the current plan. The composition of our workforce compares favourably with the 2001 Census figures. We are currently developing a new three-year Employment Equality plan covering the period 2010 to 2012.

## Learning and Development

We continue to invest in the training and development of our staff. New courses were delivered to senior managers to develop skills in drafting submissions, ministerial correspondence, dealing with the media and presentational skills. An accredited management induction course was introduced for newly promoted middle managers, leading to a Level 5 Diploma through the Institute of Leadership and Management. We have retained our internal NVQ Centre Status, and continue to offer all administrative and managerial staff NVQ accredited learning and development which is relevant to our business and services.

In addition to availing of opportunities for development during working hours, many staff received financial and other support in pursuing further education in their own time, on a variety of topics relevant to their work, through our 'Assistance to Study' scheme.

## Resources

We receive our funding from Parliament and our resources for 2008/09 were:

	2009/10 £m
Resource Total	149.7
Near Cash	131.5
Non Cash	18.2
<b>Capital</b>	<b>8.1</b>

We have developed a Financial Operating Plan to help us manage our financial allocation for the three years 2008/9, 2009/10, 2010/11. Our Capital Strategy Investment Board oversees the management of our capital funding.

Further details of our resources, and how they were deployed during 2008/09, can be found at Annex C. The Court Service also produces Annual Resource Accounts and a copy of these can be found on our website [www.courtsni.gov.uk](http://www.courtsni.gov.uk).

## Sponsorship Role

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The Court Service is the sponsor department for two Non Departmental Public Bodies – the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission and the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission.

The **Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission** was established in 2003 and is responsible for the provision of publicly funded legal services under the Legal Aid Scheme.

The **Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission** was established in 2005 and is responsible for judicial appointments up to and including High Court Judge.

The Legal Services Commission and the Judicial Appointments Commission publish their own Annual Reports and Corporate Plans. Their websites can be found at [www.nilsc.org](http://www.nilsc.org) (NI Legal Services Commission) and [www.nijac.org](http://www.nijac.org) (NI Judicial Appointments Commission).

Further information on these Non Departmental Public Bodies, including advisory bodies for which the Court Service currently has responsibility is attached in **Annex D**.



## Support for the NI Judiciary

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The Court Service provides administrative support for the Northern Ireland judiciary. There are 69 salaried members of the judiciary across the various judicial tiers. In addition there are more than 300 lay magistrates and part-time deputy judges.



*Sir Brian Kerr*

The Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland is President of the Courts of Northern Ireland and Head of the Judiciary. In addition, he is responsible for:

- Assigning the judiciary to the courts, listing business within the courts, and determining sitting times;
- Dealing with complaints against members of the judiciary. The Code of Practice on Complaints and Protocol on Judicial Discipline are published on the Court Service website;
- Maintaining arrangements for the welfare, training and guidance of the judiciary;
- Representing the views of the Northern Ireland judiciary to Parliament and to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The Lord Chief Justice, Sir Brian Kerr, is supported by the Presiding County Court Judge (His Honour Judge Burgess, Recorder of Belfast), the Presiding District Judge (Magistrates' Courts), Mrs Fiona Bagnall, and the Presiding Lay Magistrate, Mr David Moore.



*Mr Karamjit Singh*

## Judicial Appointments Ombudsman

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Mr Karamjit Singh CBE was appointed Judicial Appointments Ombudsman for Northern Ireland in September 2006. The Ombudsman's role is to investigate complaints from applicants for judicial appointment where maladministration or unfairness is alleged to have occurred. The Ombudsman's Annual Report can be found at [www.nijao.gov.uk](http://www.nijao.gov.uk).

# Business Performance

The Court Service Business Plan for 2008/09 contained four overarching strategic aims:

- Delivering responsive customer services
- Improving access to justice
- Promoting confidence in the justice system
- Supporting an independent judiciary

We published a number of performance targets in our 2008/09 Business Plan in support of these strategic aims. The following sections of this Annual Report explain what we did during 2008/09 to achieve these strategic aims.

# Delivering Responsive Customer Services

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## Business Improvement

During this period we developed a new **Business Modernisation and Customer Service Strategy** which sets out the Court Service's vision of how we plan to develop our business until 2010/11 in order to deliver high-quality customer services.

We have continued to modernise the way in which court business is transacted in order to meet the expectations of all court users.

We extended our **ICOS** (Integrated Court Operations System) ICT business platform to enable the secure electronic exchange of information between the Court Service and other public sector organisations.

The Court Service is a partner in the **Causeway Programme** which will underpin electronic information sharing between the criminal justice organisations in Northern Ireland. The technical solution is currently undergoing rigorous trials, and is planned to 'go live' later this year.

The **Courtroom Technology Programme** saw the implementation of new video conferencing and evidence display facilities across the province.

Increased access to justice through new technology provides greater convenience for our customers and reduces the need for them to physically attend a courthouse. For example, almost one third of all small claims court cases are now initiated online without the claimant having to go to the court office.

## Hearing Centres

The Court Service has consulted on proposals to establish 'Hearing Centres' at a number of court venues. Hearing Centres will open on court sitting days and on these days will provide a full range of court office services. A summary of the consultee responses will be published by Summer 2009.

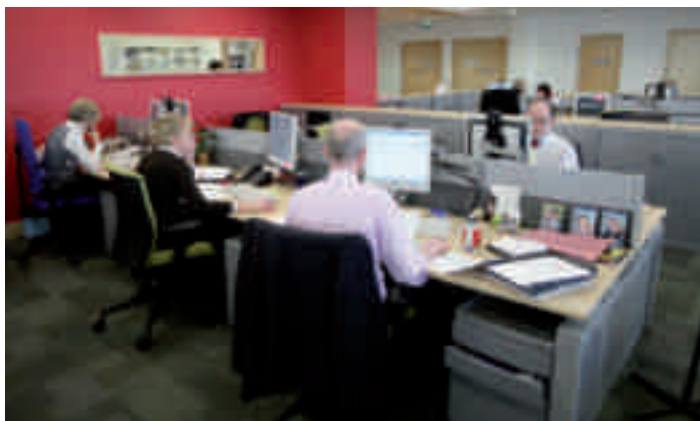
## Court Boundaries

In anticipation of the local government boundary changes, which will come into effect in 2011, we initiated a review of our existing court boundaries. We have developed a number of options. These will be subject to full public consultation during 2009/10.

## Court Estate

During the year an extensive refurbishment programme was completed in the Court Estate. The redesign and upgrade of family waiting and consultation areas alongside improved courtroom, jury and custodial facilities delivered significant environmental and customer focused improvements.

In 2008, the Northern Ireland Court Service headquarters was relocated to a new, specifically designed administrative centre. Situated within the Legal Quarter of Belfast, Laganside House provides modern, efficient and flexible accommodation, bringing together all headquarters departments for the first time. The open plan design will help us to achieve efficiencies in service delivery and revenue costs.



## Customer Service

Our 21 courthouses achieved the new **Customer Service Excellence Standard** this year. We are one of the first government departments to achieve this award in Northern Ireland. We carried out a ‘mystery shopper’ exercise, to provide an objective measurement of our customer performance against service standards. The results were very positive, and action plans have been developed to ensure continual improvement in customer service performance.

We worked closely with the **Housing Rights Service** to establish a free legal advice service for anyone facing repossession proceedings and who come to court without their own legal representation. We provide this facility at the Royal Courts of Justice and Laganside Courts.

## The Enforcement of Judgments Office

The Enforcement of Judgments Office (EJO) provides a centralised service for all aspects of the civil judgment enforcement process in Northern Ireland. Its purpose is to enforce orders in relation to the recovery of money, property and goods obtained in the civil courts in Northern Ireland.

The current economic climate has had a considerable impact on the EJO as workload has significantly increased. The EJO continues to apply quality business approaches. In December 2008 it achieved re-accreditation for ISO 9001:2000. This standard promotes continuous review and improvement of organisational processes to ensure customers’ needs are met with a very high level of quality. The office also uses the principles of the European Foundation for Quality Management Business Excellence Model (EFQM), and achieved a “Mark of Excellence” award in January 2008 for excellence in customer service.

The EJO continues to develop its online services to enable customers to process business easily. The EJO case tracking service provides information for creditors, debtors and other interested parties and allows parties to track enforcement progress on-line. The On-Line Debt Register Service allows customers to search judgments held against a person or company in the last six years, which enables informed decisions to be taken prior to enforcement of other cases.

## Service Improvement

We are committed to continuous improvement, and have in place a complaints procedure that enables us to improve the quality of services we provide, and to learn lessons from any mistakes that may have occurred.

During this year, we received **162** complaints across the organisation, which represents an increase of **14%** on the previous year. A total of **92%** of these complaints were investigated and responded to within the target timescale (15 days). Almost three-quarters of complaints resulted in follow-up action to improve customer service delivery. A breakdown of complaints received and action taken is included in the quarterly complaints reports, available in the 'customer service' section of our website ([www.courtsni.gov.uk](http://www.courtsni.gov.uk)).

## Funds in Court

The Court Funds Office manages funds held in court on behalf of minors and patients. The office manages funds for approximately 900 patients and 14,000 minors, administering in excess of £225m investments. During the year we introduced a number of initiatives to improve service delivery.

## Business Continuity

We have in place a framework of business continuity plans, to ensure critical business functions can be maintained.

# Improving Access to Justice

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## Tribunal Reform

The Northern Ireland Executive has endorsed a tribunal reform programme, including the transfer of administrative responsibility for all Northern Ireland tribunals to the Court Service. Operational and staffing arrangements for the transfer have been agreed, and the transfer process will begin during 2009/10.

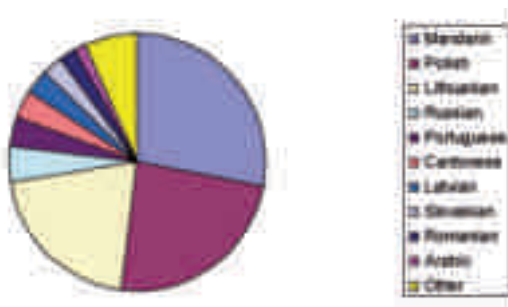
## Public Funded Legal Services

The reform of criminal legal aid was a particular focus during the year with consultation documents being issued on the reform of Very High Cost criminal cases and detailed discussions on magistrates court remuneration. During the year we also worked closely with the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission to develop proposals for the reform of civil legal aid.

## Interpretation Services

We arrange quality interpretation services in court to facilitate access to justice for those for whom English is not their first language. Service providers continue to be engaged to deal with the increasing need for interpreters, the diverse range of languages required and to ensure an appropriate standard of service.

Interpretation Requests by Language 2008-2009



The main languages requested were Mandarin, Polish, Lithuanian and Russian. In total there were just over 3000 requests for language interpretation in courts, which represents a rise of 82% from the total figure for 2007-2008. The figure for last year was 1647.

## Promoting Confidence in the Justice System

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### Court & Tribunal Performance

The Court Performance standards published in our Business Plan for 2008/09 were delivered in partnership with the Northern Ireland judiciary. Tribunal performance targets were included, for the first time.

Our business volumes during 2008/09 were as follows:

	Cases Received	Cases Disposed of
Criminal	56,211	55,362
Civil	26,143	26,888
Family	6,639	6,383
Tribunals	1,933	1,978

Details of our performance in these areas can be found at Annex E.

### Increasing Participation in the Criminal Justice System

During the year we issued a consultation paper seeking views on the desirability of allowing more people to have an opportunity to serve on juries. The consultation paper “Widening the Jury Pool - Increasing Participation in the Criminal Justice System” sought views on the proposal that no-one should be automatically ineligible or excusable from jury service simply because of their occupation. We received a high volume of responses, and a summary of these will be published later this year.

## Tackling Delay in the Criminal Justice System

Tackling delay and the reasons which can cause delay is an important aspect of improving the public's confidence in the criminal system. The Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice in Northern Ireland published a 'Report on Avoidable Delay' in 2006. In response an inter-agency Delay Action Team has been established to implement a Delay Reduction Strategy.

We have appointed a number of **Case Progression Officers** to work closely with the judiciary, prosecution and defence to reduce avoidable delay. The Case Progression Officers are responsible for monitoring the progress of criminal cases when they reach the courts.

## Fine Default

In order to improve the effectiveness of current arrangements for fine enforcement, we operated a **Fines Officer pilot** in the divisions of Belfast and Ards to encourage prompt payment of fines. The results of the pilot show that the number of fines being paid without the need for enforcement action increased by 21% and the number of committal warrants being issued decreased by almost one-third. It has now been agreed to extend the use of Fines Officers throughout Northern Ireland.

We also launched (jointly with the Northern Ireland Office) a consultation on **proposals to address fine default**. The purpose of this initiative is to reduce the number of people sent to prison each year for failing to pay a fine. Responses to the consultation are being analysed and a Government response will be published shortly.

## Victims and Witnesses

We continue to work closely with other criminal justice agencies to fulfill commitments detailed in 'Bridging the Gap', a five year strategy launched in September 2007. This year we contributed to the development of a Victims and Witness handbook, which provides a step by step guide to the Criminal Justice process. We also supported the development of NSPCC premises to establish the first witness link room which is off-site from a courthouse.

## Supporting the Community

The Court Service Outreach Programme coordinates and underpins a commitment to promote and enhance knowledge and understanding about the courts and the wider justice system.

We have continued proactive outreach, maintaining our disability positive action programmes in conjunction with DEL's 'Access to Work' programme and other charitable and voluntary agencies including the Orchardville Society and the Cedar Foundation.

During 2008/09 the Court Service organised a wide range of educational and community based activities throughout Northern Ireland including a range of court visits tailored to meet the needs of schools, colleges, community groups and the general public. We facilitated almost 150 school visits and work placements this year, as well as 5 Duke of Edinburgh group visits across the province.

We continue to support the Citizenship Curriculum in the classroom through our Education Online website. The website provides information about the courts and criminal justice system, and is aimed at primary school, key stage 2 & 3 and post 16 level.

We supported Criminal Justice Week, which this year included the National Magistrates' Court Mock Trial Competition, hosted in Laganside Courts. The BBC accepted an invitation to film this year's Northern Ireland heat of the competition, which will be available on our Education Online website.



We also invited local schools to attend themed open days at 2 court venues. One event was filmed by NEELBTV, and circulated to all schools & posted on our Education Online programme. Filming these events is a major new direction for outreach and will enable teachers to use the video as a learning tool in the classroom.

Criminal Justice Week received a high level of media attention this year, with coverage by BBC Northern Ireland including a televised interview with the Lord Chief Justice. Further information on our outreach and community programmes can be found on our website at [www.courtsni.gov.uk](http://www.courtsni.gov.uk).

## Devolution of Policing & Justice

In March 2009 members of the Court Service Management Board gave evidence to the Assembly & Executive Review Committee on the devolution of policing and justice powers to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

## Northern Ireland Act 2009

The Northern Ireland Act 2009 made a number of changes to the arrangements for the appointment and removal of judges. These new arrangements were made in preparation for the devolution of policing and justice.

## Information Assurance

We recognise information as a key business asset that we need to protect. Information assurance provides this protection by managing risks to the confidentiality, integrity and availability of information so that our business always functions effectively. That assurance, achieved through a number of related policies, guidance and training of staff, is important because it enhances our reputation by instilling the public with greater confidence in how we collect, store, transfer and dispose of their information and all other official information required for our business.

Throughout the period of this annual report we were not required to report any information risk incidents to the Information Commissioner.

We published a revised Publication Scheme in January 2009, in line with the Information Commissioner's Office. This is in compliance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and sets out a range of information that is held by the organisation and released pro-actively into the public domain. Our publication scheme is available on our website ([www.courtsni.gov.uk](http://www.courtsni.gov.uk)).

## ISO 27001 Certification

We achieved re-certification to ISO 27001 following a successful Continuous Assessment Visit (CAV) undertaken by the British Standards Institute in February 2009. ISO27001 is the international standard for security best practice which has recently been mandated by the Ministry of Justice. The NI Court Service was one of the first government departments to achieve certification to this standard, which underpins all Court Service security activity and has ensured that the organisation is well positioned to comply with a wide range of the mandatory security requirements that have been published by Cabinet Office over the last 18 months.

## Supporting an Independent Judiciary

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### Partnership Working

We work in partnership with the judiciary on a wide range of issues as they affect the courts, including the achievement of our court performance standards (this year's performance achievements can be found at **Annex E**).

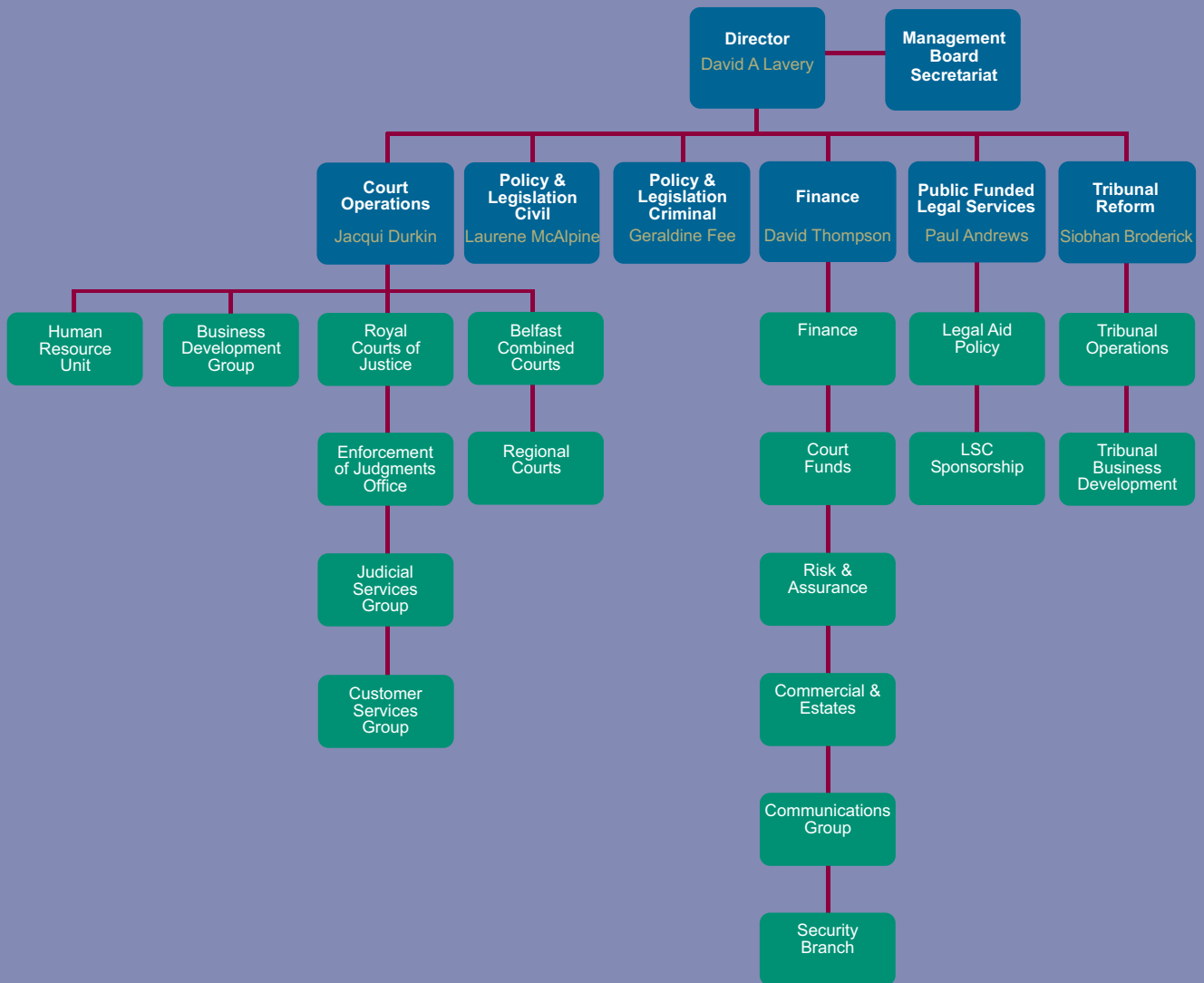
### Judicial Appointments

We support the work of the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission, working closely with the Commission to ensure judicial appointments are made in a timely way in accordance with business need.

We also have in place a Memorandum of Understanding relating to corporate governance with the Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Ombudsman.

# Annexes

# Organisational Structure



## ANNEX B

# Staffing

At end March 2009, the Court Service staffing complement was 776 posts, the majority of whom work within our core business of delivering front-line services at each of our 21 courthouses.

Staff Complement	
Court Operations	570
Policy & Legislation	24
Finance Division	99
Public Funded Legal Services	21
Tribunal Reform	15
Office of the Lord Chief Justice	30
MB Secretariat / Personal Secretaries	9
Management Board	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>776</b>

The majority of our staff join the department at the entry grade of administrative officer. Specialised posts are advertised as required throughout the year. These would include professionally qualified legal and accountancy appointments.

Staff Complement	
Administrative Officer	354
Executive Officer	220
Staff Officer	90
Deputy Principal	51
Principal Officer	42
Grade 6	10
Grade 5	8
Grade 3	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>776</b>

# Resources

## Resources 2008/09

The Northern Ireland Court Service receives its funds from Parliament, supplemented by income from civil court fees.

## Financial Position

This was the first year of the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007 [CSR 07] covering the period 2008/09 to 2010/11. The CSR 07 settlement is a challenging financial settlement for the Northern Ireland Court Service and we have been working closely with HM Treasury to ensure that the settlement is manageable.

Our spending is divided into three different categories:

### Administration:

which supports normal operational or support costs;

### Programme:

which supports the costs of frontline services including the provision of Legal Aid; and

### Capital:

which includes building improvements and major Information Technology programmes.

Resources 2008/09	£'000
<b>Administration Costs</b> (salaries, capital charges, general administrative expenses and maintenance of buildings, computers and other equipment)	16,041
<b>Programme Costs</b> (mainly expenditure of court buildings, juries and administration costs of front-line services)	63,798
<b>Legal Aid</b> (including administrative costs)	86,983
<b>Income</b>	24,772
<b>Net Costs</b>	142,051
<b>Capital</b>	8,132
<b>Consolidated Fund</b> (judicial salaries and related costs)	7,624

Details of the Court Service accounts can be found in our Annual Resource Accounts for 2008/09, which is available on our website [www.courtsni.gov.uk](http://www.courtsni.gov.uk).



## ANNEX D

## Public Bodies 2008/09

The Court Service has responsibility for the following Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs).

### Executive NDPBs

- Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission
- Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission

The Legal Services Commission was established in November 2003 and is responsible for the provision of publicly funded legal services under the Legal Aid Scheme.

The Judicial Appointments Commission was established in June 2005 and is responsible for appointments up to and including High Court Judge.

There were a total of 155 staff employed in the two Executive NDPBs at 31 March 2009 and the combined expenditure for 2008/09 was approximately £88m.

### Advisory NDPBs

- 2 Advisory Committees on General Commissioners of Income Tax\*.
- 8 Advisory Committees on Justices of the Peace.

The Advisory Committees on Justices of the Peace advise the Lord Chancellor on the appointment of Justices of the Peace in Northern Ireland.

### Tribunal NDPBs

Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeals Panel for Northern Ireland.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON NDPB APPOINTMENTS AT 31 MARCH 09				
Total Appointees	Males	Females	Ethnic Minorities	Disabled
108	71	37 34.3%	0	1 (0.93%)

\* These Committees were wound up on 31 March 2009 as part of the ongoing reform of tribunals.

**Please note:** No ethnicity or disability information is held in respect of the Advisory NDPBs.

# Court Performance Standards 2008/09

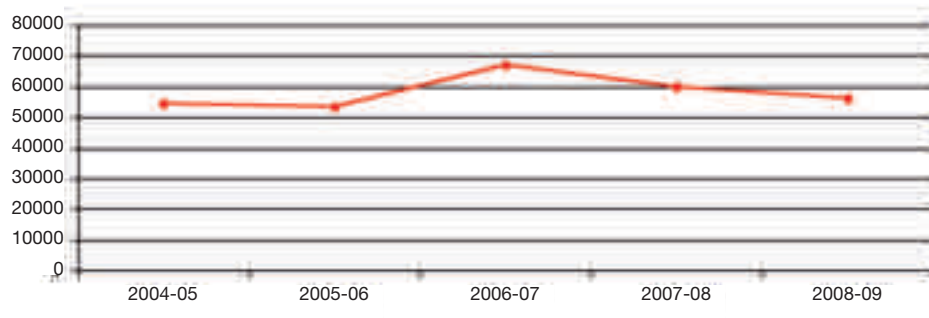
## Criminal Business

To facilitate the efficient disposal of 80% of criminal business<sup>1</sup>

- 80% of Crown Court defendants will be arraigned within six weeks of committal; (In 2008/09 94% was achieved)
- 80% of Crown Court defendants will start their trial within eighteen weeks of committal; (In 2008/09 79% was achieved)
- 80% of Crown Court defendants will be sentenced within six weeks of a plea or finding of guilt; (In 2008/09 75% was achieved)
- 80% of magistrates' courts defendants will have their case disposed of within nine weeks of first listing; (in 2008/09 77% was achieved)
- A finding will be reached within twelve weeks from first listing for 80% of youth court defendants. (In 2008/09 68% was achieved)

The chart below shows the levels of criminal business received over the past 5 years.

Fig 1. Criminal Business Received



<sup>1</sup> These Performance Standards for criminal cases are set by the Lord Chief Justice

## Criminal Court Business -Volumes, Disposals and Performance

<b>Business Volumes Received</b>	<b>2008/09</b>	<b>% difference*</b>
Total criminal business	56211	-6%
Crown Court cases	1251	-14%
Magistrates' adult defendants	52058	-5%
Magistrates' youth defendants	2902	-15%
<b>Business Volumes Disposed</b>		
Total criminal business	55362	-6%
Crown Court cases	1379	-1%
Magistrates' adult defendants	50972	-6%
Magistrates' youth defendants	3011	-10%
<b>Sittings</b>		
Total criminal sittings	6760	+8%
Crown Court	2739	+11%
Magistrates' adult	3473	+7%
Magistrates' youth	548	-1%
<b>Performance against a target of 80% compliance</b>		
Crown Court <sup>2</sup>	79%	+2%
Magistrates' adult	77%	no change
Magistrates' youth	68%	no change

\* compared to equivalent data for the 2007/08 period

<sup>2</sup> Committal to hearing target

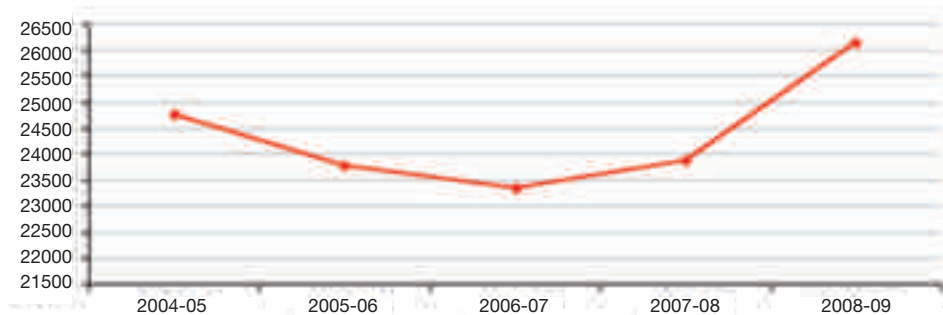
## Civil Business

### To facilitate the efficient disposal of 97% of civil business

- 97% of civil bills will be listed for hearing within eighteen<sup>3</sup> weeks from lodgement of appropriate documentation; (In 2008/09 99% was achieved)
- 97% of small claims default decrees will be processed within five working days of appropriate issue date; (In 2008/09 81% was achieved)
- 97% of mortgage applications will be listed for hearing within six<sup>4</sup> weeks of lodging appropriate documentation; (In 2008/09 100% was achieved)
- 98% of Queens Bench writs set down will be listed for hearing within 17<sup>5</sup> weeks (In 2008/09 98% was achieved)

The chart below shows the levels of civil business received over the past five years.

Fig 2. Civil Business Received



<sup>3</sup> This has changed from twenty weeks in 2007/08.

<sup>4</sup> This has changed from four weeks in 2007/08

<sup>5</sup> This is a new target for 08/09

## Civil Court Business -Volumes, Disposals and Performance

<b>Business Volumes Received</b>	<b>2008/09</b>	<b>% difference</b>
	2008/09	% difference*
Civil Bills (NIDs)	7066	+11%
Small Claims	14024	+10%
Writs set down	1160	-40%
Mortgages received	3893	+37%
<b>Business Volumes Disposed</b>		
Total civil business	26888	+14%
Ordinary Civil Bills	10364	+7%
Small Claims	11591	+8%
Writs disposed <sup>6</sup>	2491	+38%
Mortgages disposed	2442	+77%
<b>Sittings</b>		
Total civil sittings	3189	+6%
County Court	2321	+2%
Queen's Bench	652	+28%
Chancery	216	+1%
<b>Performance against a target of 80% compliance</b>		
Civil Bills <sup>7</sup>	99%	-1%
Small Claims	81%	-18%
Writs set down	98%	-1%
Mortgages received <sup>8</sup>	100%	+9%

\* compared to equivalent data for the 2007/08 period

<sup>6</sup> In Queens Bench a new practice direction came into effect 1/4/08 which set out new procedures for setting down an action for trial. An exercise was carried out to dispose of old cases which were withdrawn or settled out of court.

<sup>7</sup> Target changed from 20 weeks in 2007/08

<sup>8</sup> Target changed from 4 weeks in 2007/08

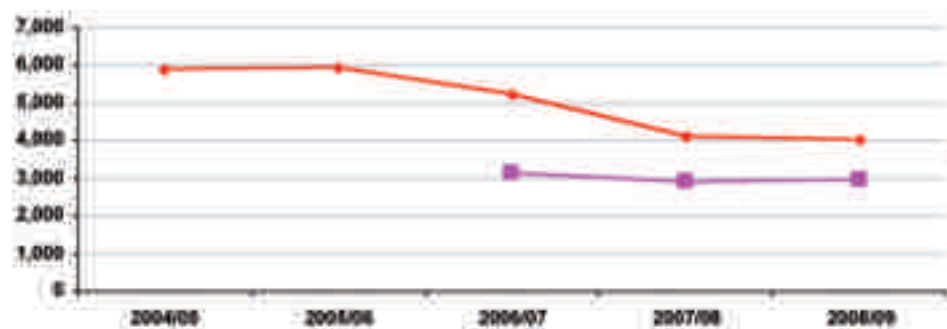
## Family Business

### To facilitate the efficient disposal of 97% of family business

- 97% of Children Order application will be listed for hearing within ten weeks of receipt; (In 2008/09 we achieved 100%)
- 95% of Office of Care and Protection annual case reviews will be carried out within six weeks of receipt of complete Controllers' accounts; (In 2008/09 we achieved 90%)
- 95% of applications under the Mental Health Order will be listed within five weeks of receipt; (In 2008/09 we achieved 91%)
- 95% of divorces will be awarded within 10 weeks of pleading. (In 2008/09 we achieved 94%)

The chart below shows the levels of family business received over the past five years.

Fig 1. Family Business Received



\* compared to equivalent data for the 2007/08 period

## Family Court Business -Volumes, Disposals and Performance

Business Volumes Received	2008/09	% difference
	2008/09	% difference*
Children Order applications	4025	-2%
Divorces received	2940	+2%
Business Volumes Disposed		
Children Order applications	3636	+5%
Divorces disposed	2747	-4%
Sittings		
Children Order	1719	+3%
Performance against a target of 80% compliance		
Children Order	100%	+2%



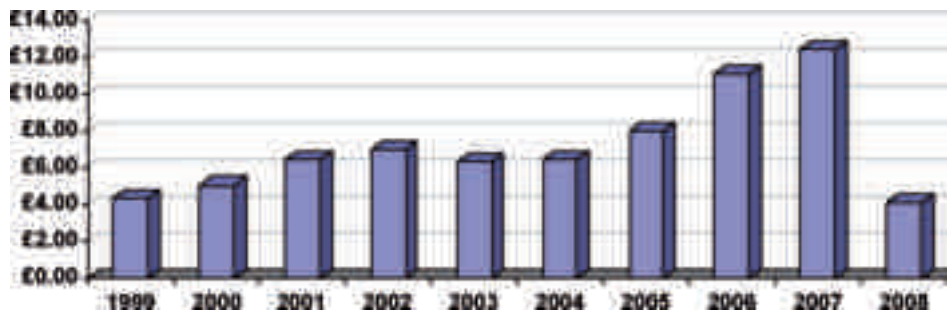
## Enforcement of Judgments Office

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Our targets for the Enforcement of Judgments Office were to:

- Issue 85%<sup>9</sup> of notices of intention within two days of receipt: **94% issued**
- Recover £8.00 in judgment debt for every £1 spent in enforcement fees: **£4.13 recovered**
- Complete 95% of register searches within one<sup>10</sup> day of receipt: **100% completed**
- Recover by payment 65%<sup>11</sup> of total debt lodged: **31% recovered**
- Accept 90% of Enforcement applications within nine days of receipt: **96% accepted**
- Complete 80% of repossessions within one hundred days of allocation to an enforcement officer: **87.4% completed.**

### EJO Debt Ratio Figures 1999-2008



<sup>9</sup> This has changed from 80% in 2007/08

<sup>10</sup> This has changed from two days in 2007/08

<sup>11</sup> This has changed from 85% in 2007/08

## Tribunal Business

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### To facilitate the efficient disposal of tribunal business

- 95% of Northern Ireland Valuation Tribunal cases will be listed within eight weeks of representations from all parties being received (In 2008/09 we achieved 100%)
- 98% of applications for leave to appeal to the Social Security Commissioner will be listed within eight weeks of a direction (In 2008/09 we achieved 100%)
- 90% of Pension Appeals will be listed for hearing within 20 weeks of receipt of the statement of case (In 2008/09 we achieved 48%)
- 95% of Traffic Penalties Tribunal postal/in person applications will be listed within 40 days of receipt of appeal papers (In 2008/09 we achieved 100%)
- 90% of CICAPNI cases will be listed within 13 weeks of agreed papers being received. (In 2008/09 we achieved 92%)

### CICAPNI specific targets:

- To resolve 90% of appeals returned by Presenting Officers Section within six months of receipt (In 2008/2009 we achieved 98%)
- To hear maximum of six and a minimum of four cases per daily hearings session (Achieved in 2008/2009)
- Average cost of each appeal to be maintained below £1k (In 2008/2009 the cost was £790 per case)
- To receive less than 10 complaints per year (In 2008/2009 we received five)
- To receive 15 or less applications for judicial review per year (We received five applications for JR in 2008/09)

Tribunal business performance targets were introduced for the first time this year therefore comparable business volume figures for tribunal business for the corresponding period last year are not available.

# Appendices

## APPENDIX 1

# Court Divisions & Map

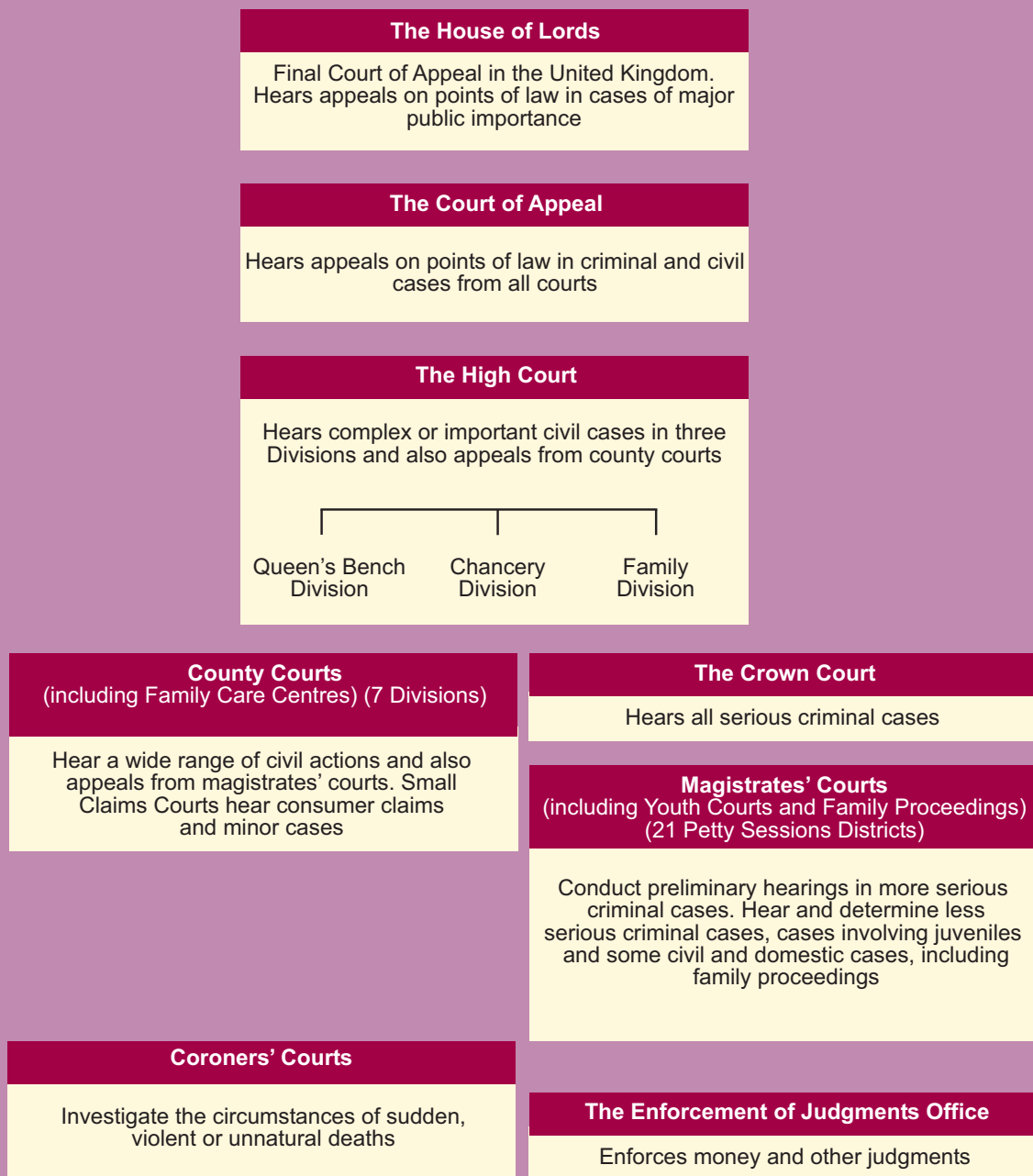


DIVISION	COUNTY COURT DIVISION	PETTY SESSIONS DISTRICT
BELFAST	Belfast	Belfast and Newtownabbey
LONDONDERRY	Londonderry	Londonderry, Magherafelt, Limavady
CRAIGAVON	Craigavon	Craigavon, Lisburn
ANTRIM	Antrim	Antrim, Ballymena, Larne, North Antrim
ARMAGH	Armagh & South Down	Armagh, Banbridge (sitting at Newry), Newry and Mourne
OMAGH	Fermanagh & Tyrone	East Tyrone, Fermanagh, Omagh, Strabane
NEWTOWNARDS	Ards	Ards, North Down, Castlereagh, Down

## APPENDIX 2

# Court Structure

## Court Structure in Northern Ireland



# The Work of the Courts of Northern Ireland

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## The Court of Judicature

### The Court of Appeal

The Court of Appeal sits at the Royal Courts of Justice in Belfast. The Judges of the Court of Appeal are the Lord Chief Justice (who is the President of the Court of Appeal) and three Lord Justices of Appeal. The Court of Appeal hears appeals in criminal matters from the Crown Court and civil matters from the High Court. It also hears appeals on points of law from the county courts, magistrates' courts and certain appeal tribunals.

### The High Court

The High Court sits at the Royal Courts of Justice in Belfast. It consists of the Lord Chief Justice and ten High Court judges. The High Court hears high value and complex civil cases. The High Court comprises three Divisions: the Chancery Division, Queen's Bench Division and Family Division.

### The Crown Court

The Crown Court has exclusive jurisdiction to try offences charged on indictment. Offences tried on indictment are the more serious offences. The Lord Chief Justice is President of the Court and the Lords Justices of Appeal, High Court judges and county court judges all sit in the Crown Court. The Crown Court normally sits at twelve venues throughout Northern Ireland.

### Taxation of Costs

The Supreme Court Taxing Office, which operates under the direction of a High Court Master, is responsible for the assessment of costs payable to solicitors and counsel in respect of all civil cases conducted before the Court of Appeal or the High Court (a procedure known as taxation).

## County Courts

In Northern Ireland there are seven county court divisions. There is a complement of 17 county court judges and four district judges. Civil cases are commenced in the county court if the value of the case is less than £15,000 (or less than £45,000 in equity matters).

Many cases in which the sum involved does not exceed £2,000 will be dealt with by a district judge by way of arbitration, called the small claims procedure, which is primarily designed to resolve simple consumer disputes based on a default procedure. Small claims arbitrations are informal and do not adhere strictly to the rules of evidence and county court procedure. Parties are encouraged to represent themselves rather than engaging solicitors, and legal aid is not available for representation in such cases.

County courts also have jurisdiction to hear applications for adoptions and undefended divorces. The county courts have jurisdiction to determine appeals against decisions made by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland by claimants for compensation under the criminal injuries and criminal damage legislation. Applications for the grant of intoxicating liquor licenses and certificates of registration for clubs are also made to the county courts. In addition to its original civil jurisdiction the county court hears appeals under a number of statutory provisions from the magistrates' courts or from other tribunals.

## Family Business

Four county courts have been designated as Family Care Centres to deal with certain applications or appeals relating to the care or welfare of a child or young person under the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.

## Magistrates' Courts

There are 21 petty sessions districts in Northern Ireland. A magistrates' court (other than a youth court or family proceedings court) is presided over by a Resident Magistrate.

### Criminal Business

Magistrates' courts exercise two basic functions in respect of criminal proceedings:

- 1) the summary trial of relatively minor offences or of indictable offences which may be tried summarily. The vast majority of criminal cases in Northern Ireland are dealt with by the magistrates' courts. A preliminary examination of the case against an accused who is to be tried on indictment in the Crown Court.
- 2) Youth Courts are specially constituted courts of summary jurisdiction composed of a Resident Magistrate and two Lay Magistrates (of whom at least one must be a woman) which deal with criminal matters in relation to children.

### Civil Business

The main types of civil business transacted by the magistrates' courts are debt processes, and applications for certain licenses.

### Coroners Courts

There are four full-time Coroners in Northern Ireland - one of whom is a Senior Coroner. There is also a Presiding Judge for the Coroners Service.

### Social Security Commissioners and Child Support Commissioner

Social Security Commissioners are appointed under the Social Security Administration (Northern Ireland) Act 1992. They hear appeals from Appeal Tribunals in relation to matters arising under the social security system. Child Support Commissioners are appointed under the Child Support Act 1991 and they hear appeals from Child Support Appeal Tribunals. Apart from the Chief Commissioner there is one other fulltime Commissioner.

### The Enforcement of Judgments Office

The Enforcement of Judgments Office (EJO) deals with enforcing money judgments and also enforces other types of civil judgments such as those that are connected with the possession of land and property. It is not a debt-collecting agency.

## APPENDIX 3

## Judicial Complement in Northern Ireland

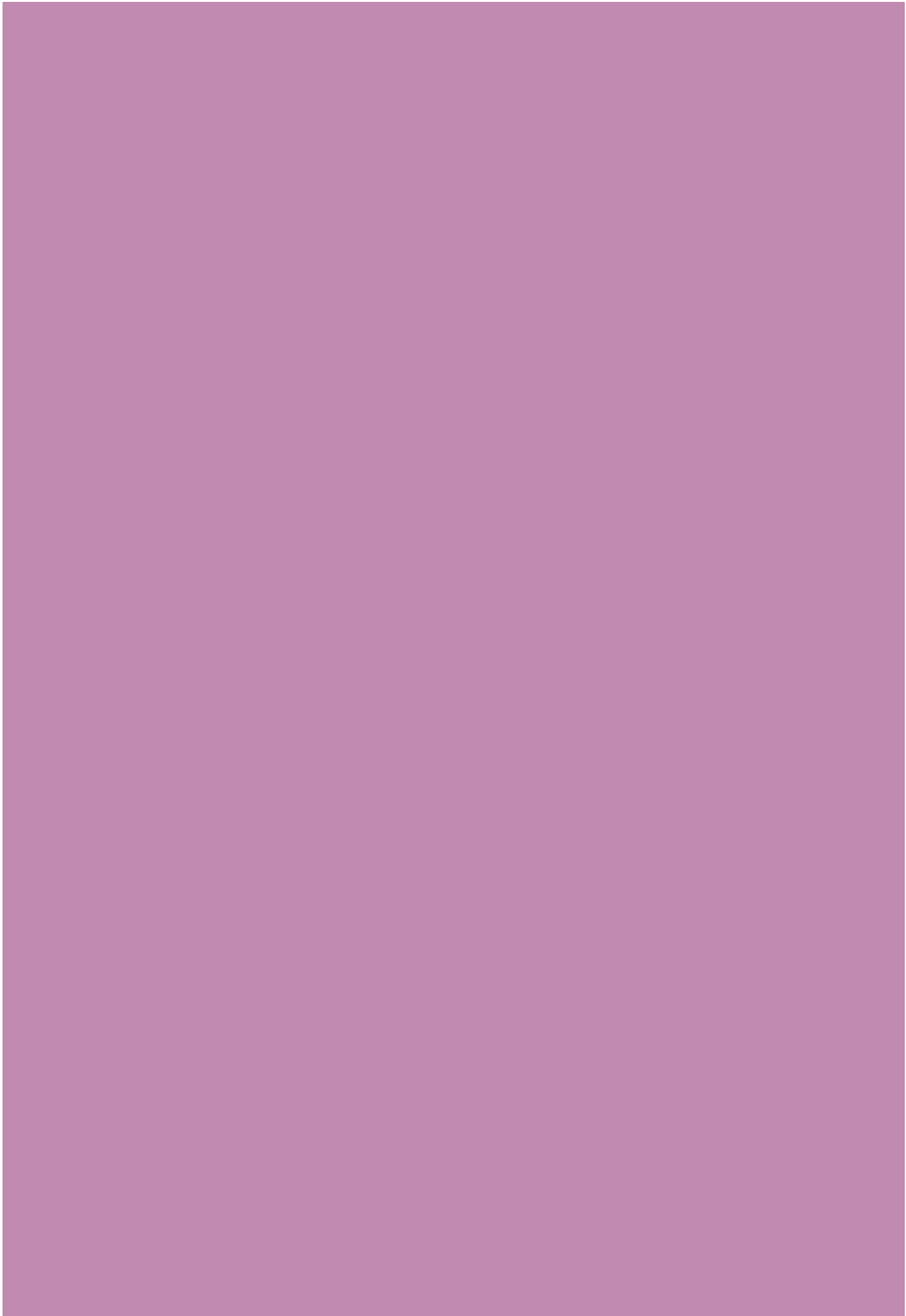
Judicial complement of salaried judicial officers in Northern Ireland as at 31 March 2009

Office	Complement
Lord Chief Justice	1
Lord Justice of Appeal	3
High Court	10
High Court Masters	7
County Court Judges	17
District Judges	4
District Judges (Magistrates' Court)	21
Social Security and Child Support Commissioners	2
Coroners	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>69</b>

Lay Magistrates	229
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Number of Deputy and fee paid Judicial Officers as at 31 March 2009

Deputy Posts	Total
Deputy County Court Judges	26
Deputy District Judges	5
Deputy District Judges (Magistrates' Court)	19



Should you require any further information about the NI Court Service please visit our website at [www.courtsni.gov.uk](http://www.courtsni.gov.uk) or alternatively contact us at our information centre at the address overleaf.

This document will be made available in a wide range of alternative formats. Requests for alternative formats should be made to the information centre.

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