



Northern Ireland

Courts and  
Tribunals Service

[www.courtsni.gov.uk](http://www.courtsni.gov.uk)

# Who we are & what we do



An Agency within

**DOJ**

Department of  
Justice

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serving the community through  
the administration of justice

# serving the community through the administration of justice

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## Who We Are

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The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) is an agency of the Department of Justice (DOJ) in Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) was established on 12 April 2010, as a new unified administration for courts and tribunals.

### Our role is to:

- provide administrative support for all courts and most tribunals in Northern Ireland;
- support an independent judiciary;
- enforce civil court judgments through the Enforcement of Judgments Office;
- manage funds held in court on behalf of minors and patients; and
- deliver effective and affordable publicly funded legal services, where appropriate through sponsorship of the Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission.

## Our Corporate 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

## Strategic Objectives

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Our Corporate Aim is supported by a number of Strategic Objectives, which are:

- To deliver efficient and effective courts, tribunals and enforcement services
- To deliver high quality services that meet the needs of court and tribunal users
- To contribute to public confidence in the administration of justice
- To deliver a controlled financial and commercial environment achieving value for money
- To continuously improve our business processes and services
- To develop and lead our people to achieve our objectives
- To maximise our capacity and capability
- To deliver effective and affordable publicly funded legal services to those who cannot otherwise afford access to justice

## Running the Courts and Tribunals

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We are responsible for the operation of 21 courthouses and a number of tribunal hearing centres across Northern Ireland, including Laganside Courts and the Royal Courts of Justice in Belfast. All of our courthouses have received the Customer Service Excellence Standard in recognition of the high level of customer service provided at these venues.

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

- The Enforcements of Judgments Office (EJO) which provides a centralised service for the enforcement of civil court judgments;
- The Court Funds Office, which manages funds held in court on behalf of minors and patients;
- The Coroners Service for Northern Ireland.

# Courts and Tribunals in Northern Ireland

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## The Court of Appeal

Hears appeals on points of law in criminal and civil cases from all courts

## The High Court

Hears complex civil cases and appeals from appeals from county courts

## County Courts

Hear a wide range of civil actions including small claims and family cases

## The Crown Court

Hears all serious criminal cases

## Coroners' Courts

Investigate unexplained deaths

## Magistrates' Courts

(including Youth Courts and Family Proceedings Courts)

Hears the majority of criminal cases and civil and family cases

## Northern Ireland Tribunals

Social Security & Child Support Commissioners

Appeals Tribunal\*

Care Tribunal

Charities Tribunal

Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeals Panel

Health & Safety Tribunals

Mental Health Review Tribunal

Northern Ireland Traffic Penalty Tribunal

Northern Ireland Valuation Tribunal

Pensions Appeal Tribunal

Rent Assessment Panel\*

Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal

The Lands Tribunal

Tribunal under Schedule 11 of the HSS (NI) Order 1972 (Schedule 11)

\*These tribunals are administered by NICTS under an Agency agreement with DSD

## The Work of the Courts and Tribunals

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### The Court of Judicature

The Court of Judicature in Northern Ireland consists of:

- The Court of Appeal
- The Crown Court
- The High Court



### 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 nine 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 Lord Justices of Appeal, High Court Judges and County Court Judges all sit in the Crown Court. The Crown Court normally sits at 13 venues throughout Northern Ireland.

## Taxation of Costs

The Court of Judicature of Northern Ireland 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. 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 £3,000 will be dealt with by a district judge in the small claims court, which is primarily designed to resolve simple consumer disputes based on a default procedure. Small claims cases 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. Applications for the grant of intoxicating liquor licences 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 district judge (magistrates' courts).

### Criminal Business

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

- (i) 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, including a preliminary examination of the case against an accused who is to be tried on indictment in the Crown Court;

- (ii) Youth courts are specially constituted courts of summary jurisdiction composed of a district judge (magistrates' court) 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 family and domestic cases, debt processes, and applications for certain licences.

### **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. There are also a number of coroner's liaison officers who support bereaved families and liaise with the other agencies involved in the process of death investigation and certification.

### **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.

## Tribunals

In addition to the administrative support for the Courts, the Courts and Tribunals Service is responsible for the following Tribunals:

### **Mental Health Review Tribunal (MHRT)**

The MHRT is an independent judicial body, set up under the Mental Health (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 (the Order) to review the cases of patients who are compulsorily detained or are subject to guardianship under the Order.

### **Office of Social Security Commissioners and Child Support Commissioners (OSSC)**

The Social Security Commissioners and Child Support Commissioners are specialised members of the judiciary appointed to hear and determine appeals on points of law from Appeal Tribunals under the Social Security and Child Support legislation.

### **Pensions Appeal Tribunals**

The Pensions Appeal Tribunals hear appeals from ex-servicemen or women who have had their claims for a War Pension rejected by the Secretary of State for Defence. Appeals to the tribunal are heard under both the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme and the War Pensions Scheme.

### **Northern Ireland Traffic Penalty Tribunal (TPT)**

The TPT hears appeals against Penalty Charge Notices issued by or on behalf of the Roads Service. Penalty Charge Notices are issued against a person contravening a parking restriction.

### **Charity Tribunal**

The Charity Tribunal was established in April 2010 and will hear appeals from decisions made by the Charity Commission in respect of the registration of an organisation as a charity.

### **Health and Safety Tribunal**

The Health and Safety Tribunal was established in April 2010 and adjudicates on appeals by persons aggrieved against licensing decisions made by licensing authorities relating to the issue of, condition applied to, or revocations of asbestos or petroleum-spirit licences.

### **Northern Ireland Valuation Tribunal (NIVT)**

The NIVT hears appeals by home owners against their domestic rates and also hears rate relief appeals, for example: when a review of a property with disabled facilities is disputed by the owner; when a student or young person disputes a review of entitlement to exemption; or when a lone pensioner disputes a review of entitlement to rebate.

### **Care Tribunal**

The Care Tribunal hears appeals against decisions prohibiting or restricting the employment of individuals teaching or working with children or working with vulnerable adults or decisions concerning the registration of social workers.

The Tribunal also hears appeals against decisions relating to the regulation of residential care homes, nursing homes, children's homes, nursing agencies and independent health care providers.

### **Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal (SENDIST)**

The SENDIST considers parents' appeals against the decisions of Education and Library Boards about children's special educational needs, where the parents cannot reach agreement with the Board. It also deals with claims of disability discrimination in relation to children at school.

### **Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeals Panel Northern Ireland (CICAPNI)**

The purpose of the CICAP(NI) is to support the victims of violent crime by determining promptly, impartially, fairly and independently, appeals against review decisions made by the Compensation Agency.

### **Lands Tribunal**

The Lands Tribunal is an expert tribunal established by the Lands Tribunal & Compensation Act (NI) 1964. The Tribunal deals with appeals from a number of bodies and also disputes referred directly to it. The functions of the tribunal include deciding disputes about rent reviews; compensation for compulsory acquisition ranging from the value of city centre premises to unfit houses; rating appeals including appeals from the NIVT; business tenancies including rent, duration and other terms for lease renewals; and restrictive covenants impeding the development of land.

### **Rent Assessment Panel**

Rent assessment committees are constituted from the rent assessment panel, their function is, at the request of a landlord or tenant, to consider if the rent determined by the rent officer is an appropriate rent.

### **The Appeal Tribunal**

The Appeal Tribunal is an independent decision making body responsible for deciding appeals against the decisions of decision makers in the Social Security Agency, Child Support Agency, Inland Revenue, Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Land and Property Services, on entitlement to a range of Social Security benefits and the payment of child maintenance. The Appeals Service provides administrative support to this tribunal.

### **Office of the President of Appeal Tribunals**

The Office of the President (OPAT) provides administrative support to the President of the Appeal Tribunal to carry out his statutory functions. In addition to this the office deals with a large volume of interlocutory applications forwarded by The Appeals Service and provides advice and guidance to Appeals Service staff on the procedural application of the appeal rules for this tribunal.

### **Tribunal under Schedule 11 of the HSS (NI) order 1972 (Schedule 11)**

The function of this tribunal is to enquire into cases where it is represented that continued inclusion of any person in any list of practitioners for the provision of general medical, dental, ophthalmic or pharmaceutical services would be prejudicial to the efficiency of the services in question.

### **UK Tribunals**

The NICTS also provides support in respect of UK wide tribunals which sit in Northern Ireland including the Tax Tribunals, Immigration and Asylum tribunals, the Information Tribunal and the Upper Tribunal Administrative Appeals Chamber.

## Sponsorship Role

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The Courts and Tribunals Service is the sponsor department for one Non Departmental Public Body - the Northern Ireland Legal Services 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.

For further information, visit [www.nilsc.org.uk](http://www.nilsc.org.uk)

## The Judiciary

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The Courts and Tribunals Service provides administrative support for the Northern Ireland judiciary. There are approximately 71 full-time members of the judiciary across the various courts and tribunals judicial tiers. In addition, there are 201 lay magistrates and panels of part-time deputy judges.



The Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland, Sir Declan Morgan, 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, distribution of 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 Courts and Tribunals Service website;
- maintaining arrangements for the welfare, training and guidance of the judiciary;
- representing the views of the Northern Ireland judiciary to the Northern Ireland Assembly and the UK Parliament.

The Lord Chief Justice 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.

## Judicial Complement in Northern Ireland

Lord Chief Justice	1
Lord Justices of Appeal	3
High Court Judges	9
County Court Judges	17
District Judge (Magistrates' Courts)	21
District Judges (County Court)	4
High Court Masters	7
Coroners	4
Social Security and Child Support Commissioners	2
Lands Tribunal Member	1
Appeal Tribunal Commissioners	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>
Lay Magistrates	201

## Our Community

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### Outreach

The Courts and Tribunals Service Outreach programme underpins our commitment to promote knowledge and understanding about the courts and the wider justice system.

Each year we organise a 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.



Our community programmes take place under a number of different themes:

### Work Experience Placements

We provide students from key stage 4 and 5 with first hand experience of the justice system. We also have a range of resource materials for teachers and students, for use in the classroom and for court visits. Each year we facilitate a number of court visits and work experience placements throughout our courts.

## Education Online

We continue to support the Citizenship Curriculum in the classroom through Education Online on our 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.

## Themed Open Days

We have supported Northern Ireland's Criminal Justice Week by inviting local schools to attend themed open days at court venues.

These events offer the children the opportunity to learn more about the courts and the criminal justice system, with representatives in attendance from the police, PPS and NSPCC. We will continue to facilitate open days as part of our Outreach programme.

## Mock Trial Competition

The National Magistrates' Courts Mock Trial Competition is a highlight of the Courts and Tribunals Service's Outreach programme. Each year it involves up to 5,000 young people from England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland heats of the competition are hosted by the NICTS in Laganside Courts.



This event provides young people with an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the justice system in an exciting and innovative way.



## Children & Young People

In support of the 10-year Strategy for Children & Young People, we have developed guidance aimed at children and young people attending civil, family and youth courts, improving the rights of the child or young person involved in the justice system.

Should you require any further information about the NI Courts and Tribunals Service please visit our website at [www.courtsni.gov.uk](http://www.courtsni.gov.uk) or alternatively contact Communications Group

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