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Information Bulletin

No 31

April 2002

CASES COMMITTED TO THE HIGHER COURTS IN 2000: TIME TAKEN TO FINALISE

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This study investigates the time between committal and first hearing in the higher court as well as the time between committal and finalisation for cases committed to the higher courts during 2000. In recognition that this may vary according to the major charge and the reason for committal (ie. for trial or sentence), a breakdown of cases committed to the higher courts according to these two factors is also provided.

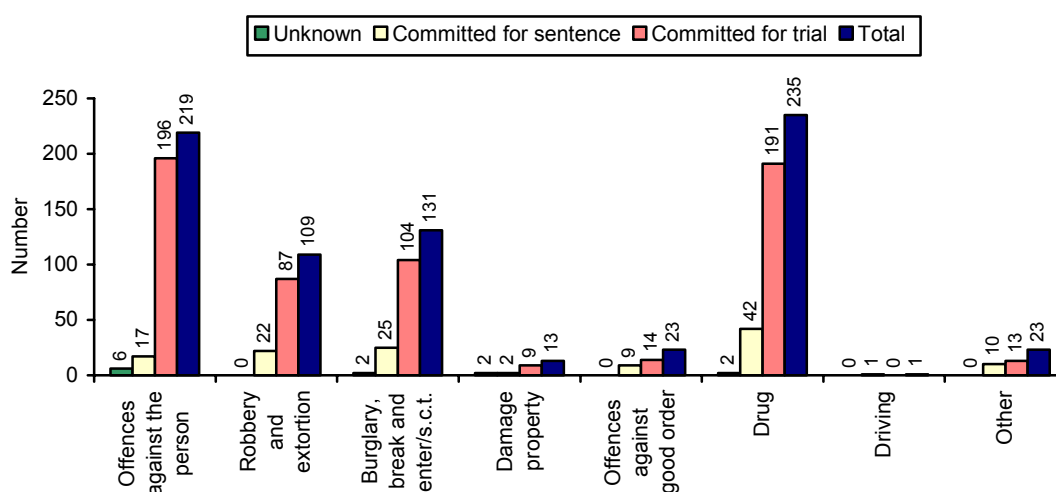
Introduction

This study investigates the time between committal and first hearing in the higher court as well as the time between committal and finalisation for cases committed to the higher courts during 2000. In recognition that this may vary according to the major charge and the reason for committal (ie. for trial or sentence), a breakdown of cases committed to the higher courts according to these two factors is also provided.

Background

There were 754 cases committed to the higher courts in 2000. Of these, 128 were committed for sentence, 614 were committed for trial and in 12 cases the reason for the committal was unknown. Figure 1 details the major offence charged in each case.

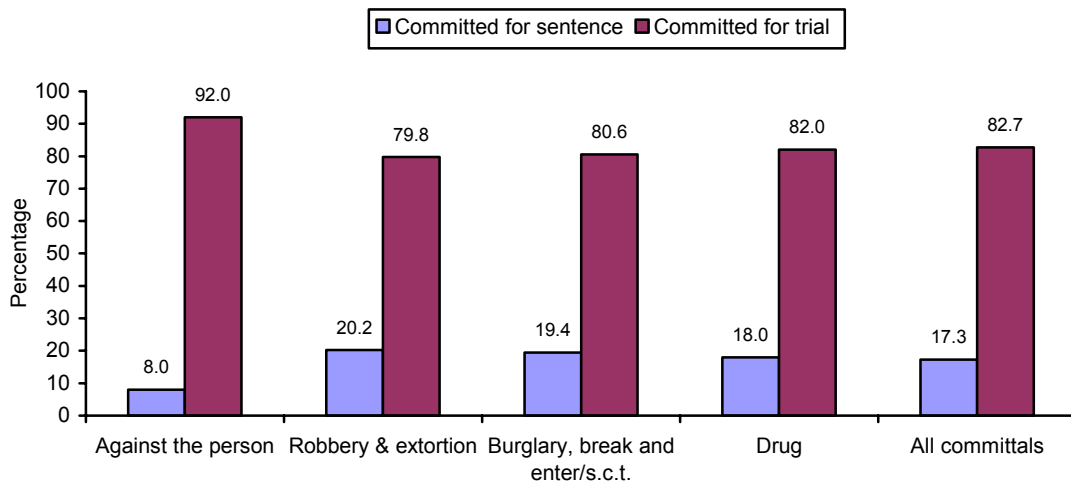
Figure 1 Number of cases committed in 2000 by reason for committal and major offence charged



- As Figure 1 indicates, the majority of cases committed in 2000 involved a *drug offence* as the most serious charge (235 or 31.2% of the total). In a further 219 (29.0%) the major charge was an *offence against the person*. Conversely, there were very few cases committed to the higher courts where the major charge was a *driving offence* (n=1) or a *property offence* (n=13).
- For each offence type, with the exception of the one case involving a *driving offence*, the majority of committals were for trial rather than sentence.

Figure 2 details the proportion committed for trial and sentence according to the major charge alleged. Excluded from this graph are those cases where the type of committal was unknown (12 cases or 1.6% of the total). Also excluded from this graph, because of the small numbers involved, are those cases where the major charge was a *driving offence*, a *damage property offence*, an *offence against good order* or an *other offence*.

Figure 2 Proportion committed for trial and sentence in 2000 by major offence charged

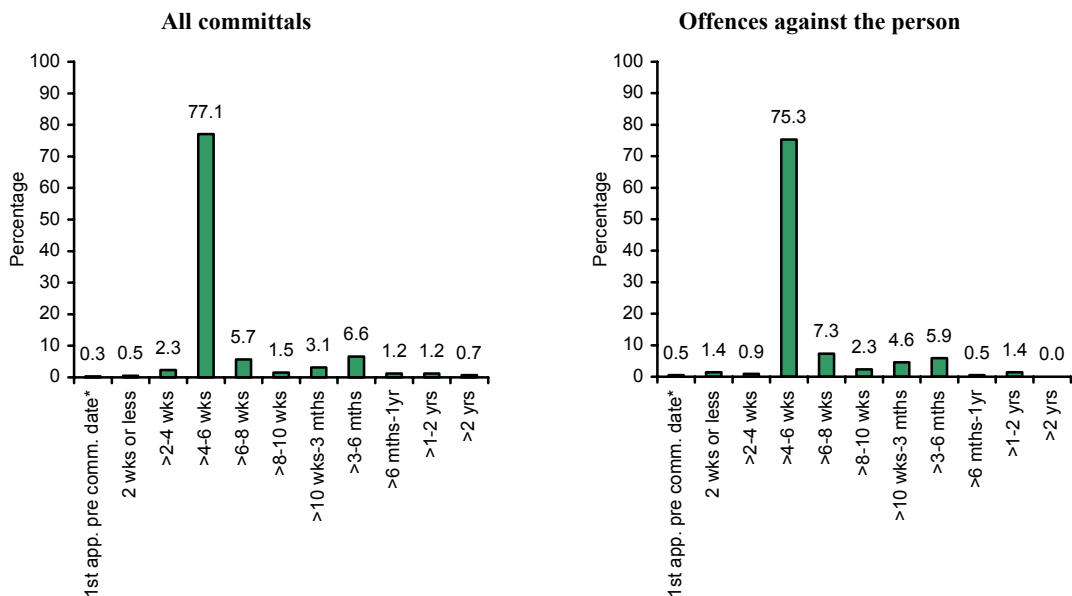


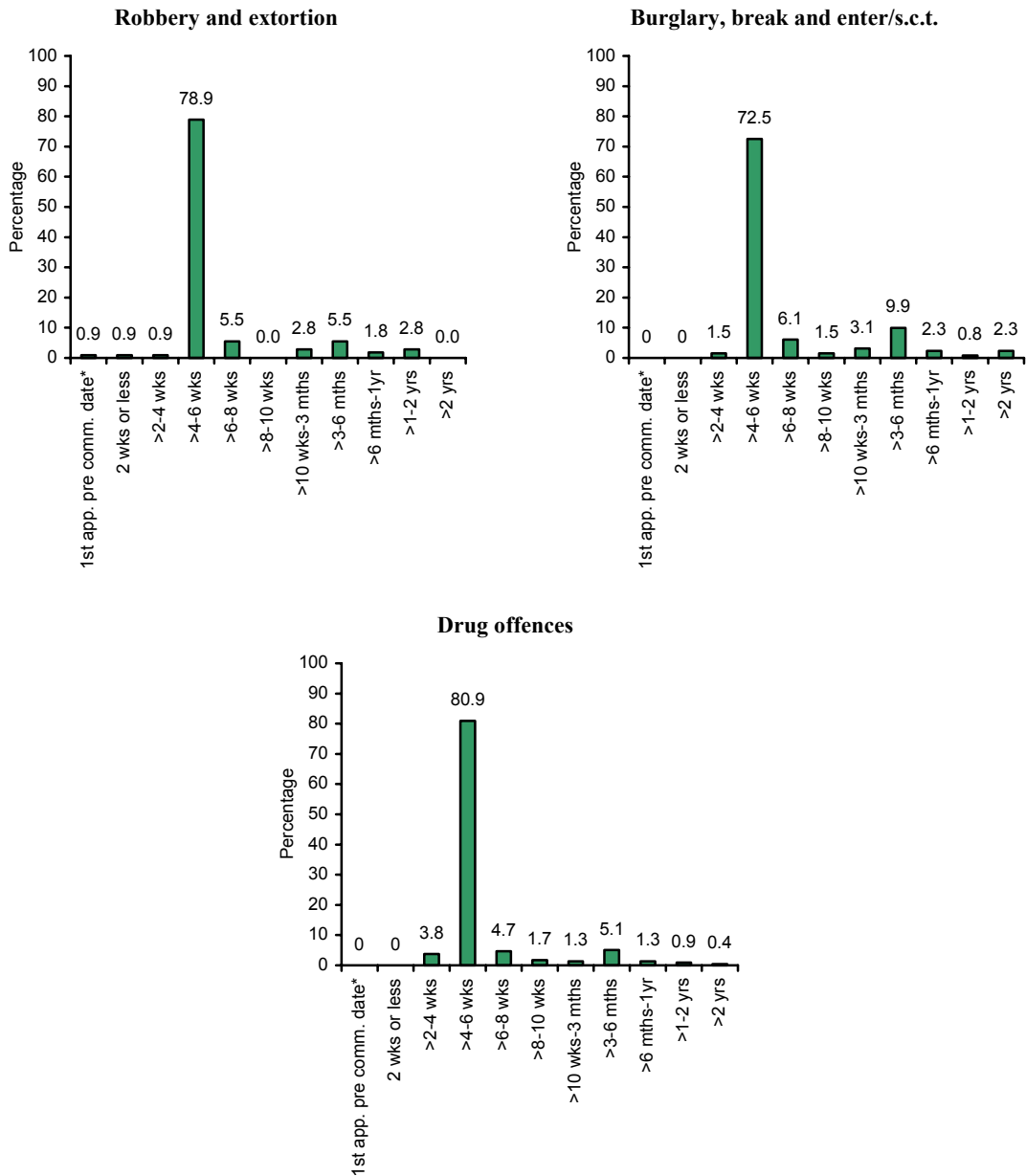
- Where the type of committal was known, the majority of cases committed in 2000 were for trial rather than sentence (82.7% of the total). For each offence type depicted the majority of cases were committed for trial, although, the proportion ranged from 79.8% for *robbery and extortion* to 92.0% for *offences against the person*.

Time between committal and first hearing in the higher court

Figure 3 details the time between committal in the Magistrates Court and the first hearing in the higher court according to the major charge. Again, this graph excludes those cases where the major offence charged was a *driving offence*, a *damage property offence*, an *offence against good order* or an *other offence*.

Figure 3 Cases committed in 2000: time between committal and first hearing in the higher court by major charge



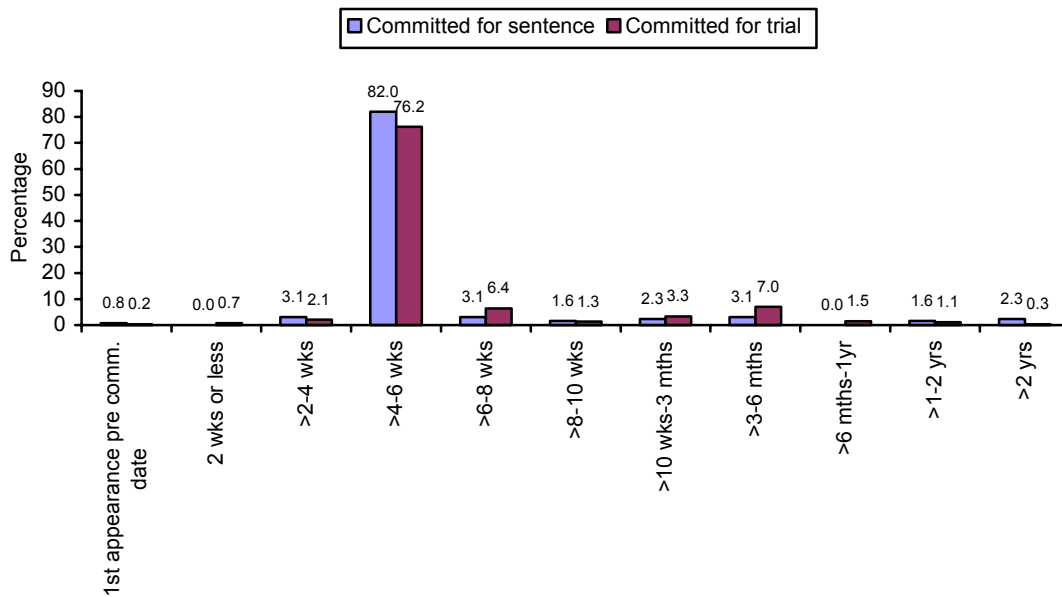


* Because of consolidation practices, in a few instances the date of the first hearing in the Higher Court preceded the committal date in the Magistrates Court. In other words, the matter was committed and added to an existing file in the higher court that had already had a first hearing.

- As Figure 3 indicates, in the majority of cases it took 4 to 6 weeks between committal and first hearing in the higher court (77.1% of the total and over 70% in each offence category).

Figure 4 depicts the time between committal and first hearing in the higher court for those cases committed for sentence and trial in 2000.

Figure 4 Cases committed for sentence and trial in 2000: time between committal and first hearing in the higher court

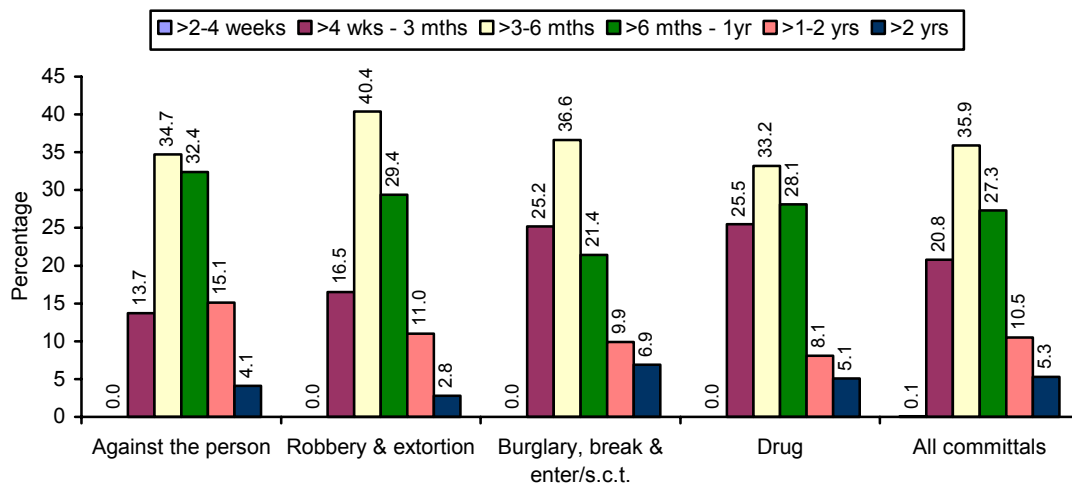


- As Figure 4 indicates, there were no differences apparent in the time between committal and first hearing in the higher court for cases committed for sentence as opposed to those committed for trial during 2000. The majority of cases committed for sentence (82.0%) took 4 to 6 weeks from committal to first hearing in the higher court. Similarly, over three-quarters of cases committed for trial (76.2%) took 4 to 6 weeks between committal and first hearing in the higher court.

Time between committal and disposition

Figure 5 details the time between committal and disposition according to the major offence charged. Again, this graph excludes those cases where the major offence charged was a *driving offence*, a *damage property offence*, an *offence against good order* or an *other offence*

Figure 5 Cases committed to the higher courts in 2000: time between committal and disposition by major charge

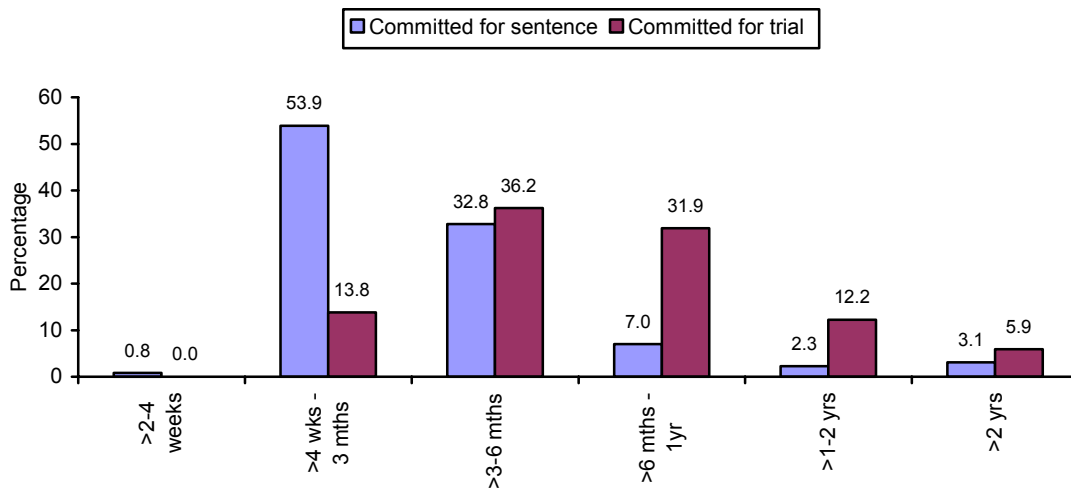


- Overall, most cases took 3 to 6 months from committal to disposition (271 cases or 35.9% of the total). A further 206 cases (27.3%) took 6 months to 1 year. Only one case took less than 4 weeks to reach a disposition (this was an *'other' offence*), while 40 cases (5.3%) took 2 years or longer.

- However, there was some variation depending upon the type of offence involved. For example, a higher proportion of cases where the major charge was a *drug offence* took 4 weeks to 3 months from committal to disposition than did those cases involving an *offence against the person* (25.5% compared with 13.7% respectively).

Figure 6 details time between committal and disposition according to whether the case was committed for trial or sentence.

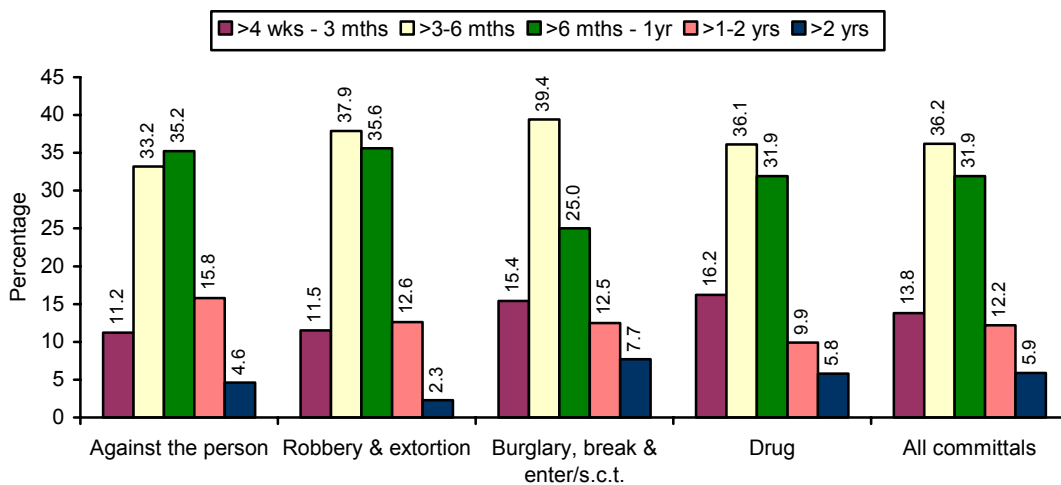
Figure 6 Cases committed for trial and sentence in 2000: time between committal and disposition



- As might be expected, the time between committal and disposition was longer for those cases committed for trial than those committed for sentence. While 31.9% of cases committed for trial took 6 months to 1 year to reach disposition, the corresponding figure for cases committed for sentence was 7.0%. Conversely, 13.8% of cases committed for trial took 4 weeks to 3 months from committal to disposition, compared with 53.9% of cases committed for sentence.

Figure 7 details the time between committal and disposition for those cases committed for trial in 2000 according to the major offence charged. No equivalent data has been presented for cases committed for sentence because of the small numbers in each offence category.

Figure 7 Cases committed for trial in 2000: time between committal and disposition by major charge



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- Overall, 36.2% of cases committed for trial took 3 to 6 months between committal and disposition, while a further 31.9% took 6 months to 1 year. There were no cases that took 4 weeks or less to reach disposition.
 - However, there were some variations depending upon the major charge. For example, 25.0% of cases with a major charge of *burglary, break and enter/serious criminal trespass* took 6 months to 1 year to reach disposition, compared with 35.6% of cases with a major charge of *robbery and extortion*.

Summary

- Overall, these data indicate that of those cases committed to the higher courts in 2000, the majority were committed for trial rather than sentence (82.7% of those were the reason for the committal was known).
- In over three quarters of cases committed (77.1%) it took between 4 and 6 weeks from committal to the first hearing in the higher court. There were no discernible differences in the time involved according to whether the case was committed for trial or sentence (with 82.0% of cases committed for sentence taking 4 to 6 weeks compared with 76.2% of cases committed for trial).
- Of those cases committed to the higher courts in 2000, 35.9% took 3 to 6 months from committal to disposition, while 27.3% took 6 months to 1 year. As might be expected, the time between committal and disposition was generally longer for those cases committed for trial compared with those committed for sentence.