

Easy read summary

Criminal courts backlog



What are the criminal courts?



A **criminal court case** is the legal action at court that decides what should happen when a crime has been committed.

The judge or jury will hear all the evidence and decide if an accused person is guilty or not.



A **backlog** means there are a lot of cases waiting to come to court.

The Covid-19 pandemic created a backlog of criminal court cases.

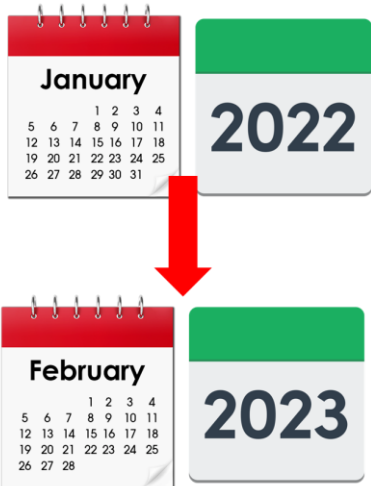


The **criminal justice system** involves a lot of organisations, including the police, courts, legal staff and prisons.

The Scottish Government and partners in the **criminal justice system** have done a lot of work to **reduce** the backlog of criminal trials that built up during the pandemic.



To **reduce** means to have less of something.



In January 2022 there were more than 43 thousand trials waiting to come to court.

In February 2023 this had gone down to 28 thousand.

How is the backlog being reduced?



The Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service and partners have found new and different ways to help reduce the backlog.

This included:



- having jury centres in cinemas to help with social distancing rules – when people had to keep 2 metres apart



- having extra courts so that more trials could take place.



The backlog of summary cases should be cleared by March 2024.



Summary cases include:

- physical attacks
- robbery – when a criminal steals things you own
- driving offences.



The backlog for **solemn cases** will take until March 2026 to be cleared.



Solemn cases include the most serious crime types like murder, rape and other sexual offences.



On average, the most serious criminal cases are taking more than twice as long to come to court now than they were at the start of 2020.



This makes it very difficult for:

- **victims** – people who have experienced crime



- **witnesses** – people who have seen a crime happen



- **accused** – people who are accused of breaking the law.



It is very important that the Scottish Government publishes a 3-year plan to show how work will happen to:

- change how criminal courts work
- keep reducing the backlog.



The Scottish Government and partner organisations need to find ways to deal with:

- making sure legal staff are able to manage the increased pressures on them



- the effect that reducing the criminal courts backlog will have on other parts of the criminal justice system



- different views that people have on the use of new technologies in courts.

Technology is equipment, information and online working.