



KEY FACTS

ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PART 1 OF THE DOMESTIC ABUSE AND CIVIL PROCEEDINGS ACT (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2021

YEAR TWO - PROGRESS REVIEW

APRIL 2025

KEY FACTS



WHAT IS THE DOMESTIC ABUSE AND CIVIL PROCEEDINGS ACT (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2021 AND WHAT CHANGES DID IT MAKE?

- The **Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021** (the Act) came into effect on 21 February 2022.
- The Act created a domestic abuse offence to criminalise a course of abusive behaviour including controlling or coercive behaviour. It introduced a range of aggravating factors to be considered when Judges pass sentence in cases of domestic abuse, with an enhanced sentence available for the domestic abuse offence. A sentence could be increased from the minimum if there were children impacted by the domestic abuse.
- It also meant other offences, like an assault or criminal damage, could be aggravated where it involved domestic abuse.
- The Act also enabled information sharing between the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and education providers through 'Operation Encompass' so children affected by domestic abuse could be better supported.



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WHAT IS THE ANNUAL REVIEW AND WHY DOES CJI DO IT?

- Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJI) was appointed by the Minister of Justice to undertake independent oversight of Part 1 of the Act, as required under Section 33 of the Act. This work was to be completed annually for at least seven years.
- CJI published the **first Review of the Act in April 2024** which made two Strategic and nine Operational Recommendations for improvement addressed to the Department of Justice (DoJ), the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland (PPS), the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) and the PSNI.
- This second Review of the Act, examines progress made against the first Review Report recommendations.
- Inspectors spoke to staff in the PSNI, the PPS, the NICTS and DoJ. They reviewed supporting evidence, data and a self-assessment provided by each organisation to inform their views and reach their judgements on the progress that had been made.



WHAT WERE THE MAIN FINDINGS OF THE FIRST ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE ACT?

If you want to learn more about the findings of the first annual Review of the Act, our Report and Key Facts provide further information.

Visit our website

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WHAT DID INSPECTORS FIND DURING THE SECOND REVIEW OF THE ACT?

- There had been an encouraging and important cultural change in how domestic abuse was understood and dealt with by those working within the criminal justice system, especially among Police Officers and Prosecutors but there remained more to be done.
- Steps had been taken to develop an *Operation Encompass* Information Sharing Agreement between the PSNI and the Education Authority, but this work was at an early stage and required more collaboration. Further discussions were needed with the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland to explore how the project supports, and is supported by, wider safeguarding policy and practices.
- Reasonable progress was made in the development of a PSNI-PPS Prosecution Team approach to domestic abuse. An updated Service Level Agreement on domestic abuse was in place and a Gateway Pilot to improve file quality and support collaboration had started. Additional work was needed to understand options for re-establishing the specialist Domestic Abuse Prosecutor role.
- The DoJ had progressed work to raise awareness of statutory guidance on the Act using existing networks in the criminal justice system, but completion rates for the e-learning course were low. There were plans to refresh the e-learning package and make it more accessible.
- A clear training plan was needed within the PSNI to support the delivery of annual domestic abuse training and Inspectors found no meaningful progress on training with the Contact Management Centre. Plans to review how effective training on the approach to children in domestic abuse cases were at an early stage. This lack of progress was disappointing and data from quality assurance processes did not provide Inspectors with sufficient assurance.
- Efforts by the PPS to develop an IT solution to prevent Section 15 domestic abuse aggravators being missed was positive and had the potential to act as a check to prevent similar PSNI omissions. Plans by the PSNI to publish Section 15 domestic abuse aggravator data as part of DoJ reporting requirements, were well developed at the time of fieldwork for the Review.
- Urgent, collaborative action was needed to ensure accuracy and completeness in the recording of the impact of domestic abuse aggravation on sentencing at Court.

PROGRESS AGAINST RECOMMENDATIONS

The second annual Review of the Act found there was:

- **Good progress** - on two Operational Recommendations;
- **Reasonable progress** - on two Strategic and four Operational Recommendations;
- **Insufficient progress** - two Operational Recommendations; and
- **No meaningful progress** - on one Operational Recommendation Inspectors made in the first Review Report.



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WHAT DO INSPECTORS WANT TO SEE HAPPEN NOW?

- The DoJ, the PSNI, the PPS and the NICTS should continue work to progress each of the Year One Review recommendations. Any work not captured in the Year One recommendations should also continue.
- CJI will return to assess the effectiveness of Part 1 of the Act in 2025, publishing a third Review in 2026. As part of this work CJI is preparing to review all aspects of the legislation, including carrying out a review of police and prosecution case files.
- Inspectors hold the view the annual nature of the Review process should ensure momentum in delivery of the Act is maintained. Continual effort across the criminal justice system is needed to secure the effectiveness of this important legislation.

If you would like to know anything more about us or this inspection please get in touch with:

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