

*These notes refer to the Criminal Justice Act (Northern Ireland)
2013 (c.7) which received Royal Assent on 25 April 2013*

Criminal Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2013

EXPLANATORY NOTES

BACKGROUND AND POLICY OBJECTIVES

Abolition of scandalising the judiciary as a form of contempt of court

23. Scandalising the judiciary (also referred to as scandalising the court or scandalising judges) is defined as any act done or writing published which is calculated to bring a court or a judge into contempt or lower his authority and is a common law offence. A call to abolish the offence arose when, in March 2012, the Attorney General of Northern Ireland obtained leave to prosecute the Rt Hon Peter Hain MP following comments made in his autobiography about a High Court judge. Although the proceedings were withdrawn, the proposed use of the offence attracted considerable media and political attention, with some perceiving it as an attack on free speech.