

*These notes refer to the Justice Act (Northern Ireland)  
2015 (c.9) which received Royal Assent on 24 July 2015*

# Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2015

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## **EXPLANATORY NOTES**

### **BACKGROUND AND POLICY OBJECTIVES**

3. The Act gives effect to the desire of the Minister of Justice to improve the operation of the justice system. At its core are three aims: to improve services for victims and witnesses; to speed up the justice system; and to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of key aspects of the system. In practice, there is considerable convergence between a number of these measures and the provisions will often advance more than one of the core aims.
4. Services and facilities for victims and witnesses are improved by the creation of new statutory Victim and Witness Charters; the introduction of a legal entitlement to be afforded the opportunity to make a victim statement (to be known as a victim personal statement); information disclosure provisions between criminal justice system service providers; and the expansion of video link powers between courts and a number of new locations.
5. The Act tackles delay and speeding up the justice system by introducing Prosecutorial Fines to reduce the number of cases going unnecessarily to court. New arrangements to encourage earlier guilty pleas are introduced and judges will be also be given new case management powers and responsibilities. Committal proceedings are streamlined and prosecutors given the ability to issue summonses directly.
6. The Act also introduces a series of standalone reforms to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and fairness of the system. This includes modernisations of the criminal history disclosure service; the introduction of a single territorial jurisdiction for the county courts and magistrates' courts; the expansion of eligibility for jury service; and the creation of new civil orders to manage the risks posed by violent offenders.