

Press release: More victims and their families get justice

The Attorney General's Office helped more victims and their families get justice last year, after 137 criminals had their sentences increased under the Unduly Lenient Sentence (ULS) scheme.

New statistics out today reveal the Law Officers (Attorney and Solicitor General) referred 173 sentences to the Court of Appeal in 2017 because they believed them to be far too low.

The ULS scheme allows victims of crime, prosecutors and members of the public to ask for certain Crown Court sentences to be reviewed if they think the sentence is far too low. The Law Officers then ask the Court of Appeal to review the sentence to have it increased if they believe the judge made a gross error in sentencing.

Sentences were increased for crimes including murder, manslaughter, rape and other serious sexual offences, causing death by dangerous driving, modern slavery, false imprisonment, child cruelty, burglary, robbery, perverting the course of justice, and drugs.

Of the 137 offenders who had their sentences increased, these related to crimes in the following categories: Rape and serious sexual offences (58), homicide and related (15), acquisitive offences (such as burglary, theft, and fraud) (19), serious assault offences (19), firearm-related (8), drug-related (4), kidnap and false imprisonment (2), and other offences (12).

The Solicitor General Robert Buckland QC MP said:

The Unduly Lenient Sentence scheme allows victims of crime, their families and the public to ask for a review of certain sentences that they believe are far too low.

We only have 28 days from the date of sentencing to refer a case to the Court of Appeal. Unusually, there is no way to extend this deadline – this means we require a referral very early in the process to be able to deal with it in time.

A sentencing exercise is not an exact science and in the vast majority of cases, judges get it right. For an offence there is a range within which a judge might sentence properly. The scheme is available to ensure that the Court of Appeal can review cases where there may have been a gross error in the sentencing decision.

In 2017, 943 referrals were received by the Attorney General's Office, a slight increase from the 837 referrals the previous year. The Attorney and Solicitor General referred 173 sentences to the Court of Appeal that they

thought needed looking at again, compared to 190 in 2016.

137 sentences resulting in increases is a very small proportion of the 80,000 Crown Court cases heard each year, but the ULS scheme is there to allow adjustment of those sentences where an increase is warranted.

The scheme was extended last year to include an additional 19 terror-related offences including supporting extremist organisations, encouraging acts of terrorism or failing to disclose information about a terrorist attack.

The scheme was introduced after public outcry over the lenient sentencing of the offenders involved in the 1986 rape of 21 year old Jill Saward. The victim was brutally raped by a gang of robbers at her father's vicarage.

Anyone can ask for a Crown Court sentence to be reviewed and you can also follow the progress of referrals made to the Attorney General's Office.

There are only 28 days from the date of sentencing to refer a case to the Court of Appeal. This deadline cannot be extended. In order to ensure we have time to properly consider a case we ask that referrals are made early in the process.

The ULS scheme only applies to certain Crown Court offences. Details of the offences that are covered by the ULS scheme are listed on our website.