

principal offences of 'homicides' or 'offences against the person'. Of these 3,484 were for sexual offences including rape; five for homicide and 210 for offences against the person.

Guilty pleas fell slightly from 39.7% in 2012-13 to 35.9% in 2013-14. Of all successful outcomes 59.5% were due to guilty pleas. Discontinued cases have continued to fall and reached the lowest level ever at 13.1% of all prosecuted rape cases.

Out of all reasons for unsuccessful outcomes, the proportion due to jury acquittals<sup>66</sup> has risen year on year - from 56.1% in 2012-13 to 60.3% in 2013-14. More work is planned in 2014-15 (as outlined linked to the National Rape Scrutiny Panel below) with partners to address public awareness and challenge myths and stereotypes, which may have led to high jury acquittal rates in sexual offence cases.

In 2013-14 the recording of the reasons for unsuccessful outcomes was changed to ensure improved accuracy. This has led specifically to more enhanced recording of victim issues. Previously reasons may have been recorded as 'essential legal element missing' or 'unreliable witness'. In 2013-14 we have seen a fall in these reasons (from 4% to 1.5% and 8.1% to 1.3% respectively). In parallel there has been a rise in recording of all unsuccessful outcomes, those due to victim issues rising from 12.5% to 18%; of which 10.8% was due to victim retraction.

Out of *all* cases prosecuted, the proportion that was unsuccessful due to victim issues<sup>67</sup> has risen from 4.6% last year to 7.1%, after remaining constant around 7% (from 2007-2010). Support for victims through the court process is key in reducing retractions and work to improve this was identified through the National Rape Scrutiny Panel is detailed below.

## Timeliness

For the first time, in 2013-14, the timeliness of pre-charge decisions was monitored within the VAWG assurance system. The average number of days to charge in 2013-14 was 39.6 days. This is an average figure, where figures are significantly above this Areas have been asked to draw up plans to improve performance and progress is mapped through the VAWG assurance process. These decisions require meticulous attention and can include the consideration of complex evidence, especially related to the increase in non-recent cases reported. We are now advising on rape cases at the start, rather than the end, of an investigation in order to help the police build stronger cases, which will inevitably lengthen CPS involvement. In addition, time is needed to view victims' often lengthy visually recorded interviews, forensic analysis of communications on social media and phones as well as assessing relevant material such as social services records as part of the prosecution's duty of disclosure.

Timeliness will be addressed in the National Action Plan in 2014-15 following the Rape National Scrutiny Panel, as well as within the VAWG assurance process with Areas, especially where long delays were identified. CPS advises the police at the start of rape investigations and several Areas have introduced police checklists so all investigative

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allocated, have been excluded.

<sup>66</sup> All 'unsuccessful outcomes due to acquittals' outlined in previous reports included 'Jury acquittals' and 'dismissed after full summary trial' – this rose from 56.3% in 2012-13 to 61% in 2013-14.

<sup>67</sup> Unsuccessful cases due to victim retraction; non-attendance or where the victim's evidence does not support the case.



## Rape and Serious Sexual Offence Units

In March 2013, there were 873 specialist prosecutors trained in the merits-based approach to deal with rape prosecutions, out of a total of 2,543 prosecutors (34%); a rise from 29% in March 2011. The specialists worked across Areas carrying out rape prosecutions, but also dealing with other cases. Only six Areas had a Rape and Serious Sexual Offences (RASSO) Unit, with specialists.

By October 2013, RASSO Units were rolled out across all Areas. With the move to RASSO Units, specialist prosecutors were located in the Units to specialise in the prosecution of rape and sexual offences (outlined below). By March 2014, a total of 318 rape specialist prosecutors were allocated specifically to RASSO Units. In addition all Areas had a number of trained specialists outside of the Units. Centrally, 122 specialist rape prosecutors are allocated to CPS Direct (for out of hours services); special crime, organised crime and the Appeals and Review Unit. There was further RASSO training in 2013-14 (held locally and nationally) and a RASSO refresher course for those who undertook their RASSO training in its early days and required an update.

The RASSO Unit minimum standards were extended beyond covering rape, non-summary serious sexual offences (SSO) and penetrative offences (including those in DV situations) to include:

- All Crown Court cases of child sexual abuse;
- Sexual offence cases with multiple victims (to cover Savile type issues);
- Sexual offences with vulnerable adults, due to the complexities and expertise needed;
- Youth court rape and sexual offence cases (all major decisions on youth cases to be taken by rape specialists who are also youth specialists); and
- Those involving allegedly false rape and/or DV allegations.

The RASSO Units charge all the above offences apart from out of hours, when rape specialists in CPSD make charging decisions. A network of Heads of RASSO Units has been developed, with RASSO newsletters.

