



## BAR COUNCIL NEWS UPDATE – WEDNESDAY 21 AUGUST 2019

### Court closures

Daily Mail (print letters column), The Guardian (print and [online](#)), [Evening Standard](#) (print and [online](#) x2), The Sun (print, page 14), PA News Wire, [Law Gazette](#), Grimsby Telegraph (print, page 19), Western Morning News (print, page 26), [Brinkwire](#), [Brighton and Hove News](#)

Nearly half of all crown courts across England and Wales were left empty on Monday, a survey suggests, even though lawyers say they have never known the backlog of criminal cases to be so bad.

Although there is usually a seasonal dip in trials during the summer, the extent of the underuse prompted warnings about delays to justice from the two main legal professional bodies – the Bar Council and the Law Society.

The survey, coordinated by Jonathan Dunne, a Nottingham-based criminal barrister at KCH Garden Square chambers, found that 127 courtrooms out of 260 were sitting idle. In Leicester, for example, four out of six courts were empty. In Snaresbrook, east London, 11 out of 20 were silent.

Richard Atkins QC, the chair of the Bar Council, which represents barristers, said: “That so many crown courts are sitting empty will come as a devastating blow to those victims of crime who are waiting for their cases to come to court or who are waiting for justice to be done to those who have admitted committing crimes against them.

“Whilst I am encouraged by the news that the government intends to increase the number of serving police officers, funding must be provided to ensure that those who are alleged to have committed crimes can be placed before a functioning court without delay. Justice delayed is justice denied.”

### Criminal justice statistics

[Australasian Lawyer](#) – Further reports on Bar Council’s warning over the recently published criminal justice statistics.

Despite crimes increasing, the number of people prosecuted or handed out-of-court disposals has fallen to the lowest level ever, the data showed. Crime reported in England and Wales increased 8% to 5.9 million in the year ending March. The number prosecuted or handed penalties for crimes in the jurisdiction dropped 2% to 1.59 million in the same period.

“These statistics make for grim reading; however, the state of the criminal justice system is far worse than the figures show. The commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service said recently that ‘overall police [crime] detection rates nationally are woefully low’ and that the ‘courts are emptying, not filling.’ If crime is not detected, it cannot be recorded, investigated or prosecuted, so the official figures are just the tip of an iceberg. Criminals are going about their business unchallenged: fraud goes virtually unpunished and is not even included in the statistics,” said Richard Atkins QC, chair of the Bar Council.

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