

## Commonwealth Prosecution Process (Westminster System)

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If it is someone's first offence, and the crime is minor, a person found **guilty** is often **unconditionally discharged**: he or she is set free without punishment. However if the offender is known to the Court a **conditional discharge** (also known as a **suspended sentence**) may be given instead, meaning that the guilty person is set free but if he or she commits another crime within a stated time, the first crime will be taken into account. He or she may also be **put on probation**, which means that regular meetings with a social worker must take place.

A very common form of punishment for minor offences is a **fine** or a certain number of hours of **community service**. For more serious or repeated offences **periodic detention** is given (one day per week, serving hard labour, over a certain number of defined weeks).

Wherever possible, magistrates and judges try not to imprison people. This costs the state money, the country's prisons are already overcrowded and prisons have a reputation for being "schools for crime". Even people who are sent to prison do not usually serve the whole time to which they were sentenced. They get "**remission**" or "**parole**" of their sentence for "good behaviour".

A **parole** system operates to give prisoners, even convicted murderers under certain circumstances, an opportunity to be released "earlier".