

Youth Conference Service

A follow-up review of inspection recommendations

April 2010





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Criminal Justice Inspection
Northern Ireland
a better justice system for all





Contents

List of abbreviations	iii
Chief Inspector’s Foreword	iv
Follow-Up Review	
Chapter 1 Introduction	2
Chapter 2 Progress on recommendations	4
Chapter 3 Conclusion	13





List of abbreviations

CJI	Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland
CJS	Criminal Justice System
CJO	Criminal Justice Organisation
CS	Community Services Directorate (YJA)
DJ	District Judge
IT	Information Technology
NICtS	Northern Ireland Court Service
NIO	Northern Ireland Office
NIVAWS	Northern Ireland Victim and Witness Survey
PBNI	Probation Board for Northern Ireland
PPS	Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
PSR	Pre-Sentence Report
PYOP	Priority Youth Offenders Project
QUB	Queen's University Belfast
RJ	Restorative Justice
S75	Section 75 (of the Northern Ireland Act 1998)
SLA	Service Level Agreement
VCS	Voluntary and Community Sector
YCC	Youth Conference Co-ordinator
YCS	Youth Conference Service
YDO	Youth Diversion Officer (in police)
YJA	Youth Justice Agency



Chief Inspector's Foreword

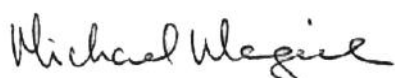
In this review Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJI) assessed how the Youth Conference Service (YCS) of the Youth Justice Agency had progressed with the 14 recommendations made in our first inspection report.

The findings of this review have generally been positive. Eight of the 14 recommendations had been completed, four had been partially completed, whilst two had not been completed with little prospect of completion in the short term.

All of the partially complete recommendations had shown substantial progress and should be fully implemented in the near future. There was little prospect of the recommendation relating to providing training to solicitors being implemented due to budget and resource pressures and the need to prioritise activities.

The remaining recommendation related to the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland (PPS) providing reasons for directing a particular course of action to victims and the YCS. This recommendation was not the direct responsibility of the YCS but there had been little progress with it due to uncertainty over legislation. The issue of providing reasons and communication with victims and witnesses will be the subject of a full CJI inspection of the Public Prosecution Service in 2010-11 and Inspectors will return to this particular recommendation then.

Bill Priestley led this inspection review for CJI and I would like to acknowledge the willing support and openness of everyone who provided information to him during this process.



Dr Michael Maguire

Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice in Northern Ireland

April 2010

Section



Follow-Up Review



CHAPTER 1:

Introduction

In our report on the Youth Conference Service (YCS) published in February 2008, we examined the work of the YCS after a period of stabilisation following on from an evaluation of the initial period of operation led by Queen's University, Belfast (QUB).

A youth conference is designed to give young offenders the opportunity to understand and make amends to their victims for the consequences of their offending and to take steps to stop future crime. It involves victims, the young person's family, the police, the community and supporters to reach an agreed decision on what can be done to put right the harm. From that decision, a conference plan is designed in which the young person agrees to participate.

In contrast with more traditional models of justice, youth conferences seek not only to encourage young people to recognise the effects of their crime and take responsibility for their actions, but also to devolve power by actively engaging victim, offender and community in the restorative process.

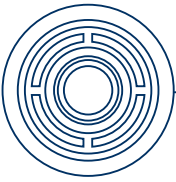
Referrals to the YCS may come from the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland (PPS) as a diversion from prosecution, or from the courts as a court ordered conference following a finding of guilt. Both require the full consent of the

offender to participate in the conference. The resulting conference plan is agreed and affirmed by the PPS or the court. Once a plan has been affirmed, it becomes a statutory order which is monitored by the Youth Conference Co-ordinator.

One of the expected benefits of youth conferencing was that there would be a reduction in re-offending rates for the young persons who go through the scheme. At the time of our original report no figures were available for this but at the time of review fieldwork, the YCS measured its overall re-offending rate at 38.4%. Re-conviction rates for youth offenders who receive custodial sentences are at present around 73%. Other results from the 2006 cohort Northern Ireland Youth Re-offending NIO Statistics and Research Branch indicate that the comparative re-offending rates for disposals involving youth offenders are:

- 52.1% one year rate for all community-based disposals;
- 37.7% overall YCS;
- 47.4% for court ordered youth conferences (more serious offences and persistent offenders);
- 28.3% for diversionary youth conferences; and
- 58.6% for probation orders.

Data for 2007 is presently being processed for publication later in 2010.



Our first inspection report made 14 recommendations for the development of the YCS. The key recommendation was that there should be a review into current practices in youth offending with the aim of developing a clearer and more integrated system with restorative practice at its core. A further 11 recommendations were made which were the responsibility of the YCS. Two recommendations were made that were not the sole responsibility of YCS but involved other organisations such as the PPS and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) in assisting to implement them.

CHAPTER 2:

Progress on recommendations

Recommendation 1

That a full system wide review should be conducted into current practices in youth offending with the aim of developing a clearer and more integrated system with restorative practice at its core.

Status: Completed

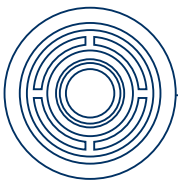
YCS response:

The YJA and Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) have reviewed services for young people who are known to both organisations and under separate Orders, simultaneously, to both organisations. It was agreed, and endorsed by the NIO and Judiciary, that a pilot project be formed with the two organisations for priority young offenders. This commenced on 2 April 2009 for a two-year period. The project delivers the Youth Conference Order and Probation Order through intensive supervision via circles of accountability and a strengthening families model. The project is to be extended to the Juvenile Justice Centre (JJC) to include fewer than 18 remands and sentenced. Restorative interventions will continue through family group conferencing and the Youth Conference. The evaluation of the project will make recommendations for the way forward for youth justice.

The YJA delivers 50% supervision contacts and services for all juvenile Probation Orders in accordance with PBNI standards through a protocol at zero resource cost to PBNI.

Inspectors' assessment:

A review of the services provided has resulted in close partnership work between YCS and PBNI. The Priority Youth Offender Pilot (PYOP) scheme started in April 2009 and will run for two years. The project has restorative practices at its core delivered through 'circles of support' and 'strengthening families' approaches. The project involves staff from PBNI working alongside those from the YCS based at YJA premises. Both sets of staff work with those young people in the greater Belfast area who are categorised as the most challenging in terms of offences committed and re-offending. The initiative is being project managed by a YCS Assistant Director and is overseen by a Project Board jointly chaired by the Chief Executives of the YJA and PBNI. The Board included representatives from the major criminal justice organisations involved. There is a comprehensive communication strategy and Inspectors found that all YCS staff and other stakeholders spoken to during the review were aware of the scheme, its aims and objectives and were very supportive of it. The project is beginning to result in easier flow of



information between the two agencies and a much more coordinated approach to young offenders assessed as being amongst the most challenging. Anticipated benefits have been identified and a benefits realisation package is being implemented. There is planned community involvement by setting up community fora. Young persons involved with the project are regarded as a priority for all agencies involved requiring priority intervention with circles of support and accountability around them. This is a step away from agencies working in silos with a young person who is subject to multiple orders involving the YJA and PBNI. The project is using the skills of staff from both main agencies as well as involving other relevant agencies such as housing and social services. The project had only been running since April 2009 and an interim review will be conducted after the first year. Developments since the project started had included a clearer definition of 'priority young offenders', appropriate training for all staff, and the inclusion of Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre into the project. Inspectors' assessment is that the project has met the terms of the recommendation. The review conducted has resulted in the PYOP which has restorative practices at its core. Further development is anticipated following the evaluation of the project after two years of operation.

Recommendation 2

Inspectors recommend that detailed YCS key performance information should be reported on and published annually commencing at the time of the next YJA annual report.

Status: Completed

Inspectors' assessment:

This recommendation was fully completed at the time of the publication of the first YJA annual report after the original inspection. YCS performance data had been included as a discrete section of the operational reviews of performance and also was reported on in the 'performance against key targets' section. Inspectors are assured that this approach will be continued as the YJA adjusts its structures in the future.



Recommendation 3

YCS conference survey is expanded to include all participants and that it is extended to include the period of time immediately after completion of the plan.

Status: Partially completed

YCS response:

The survey content is assessed by the YJA statistician as lengthy and not fully appropriate for all conference participants. It is under review by the YJA statistician to reframe the questions, and to decide the most appropriate method of completion, collation and analysis. It is anticipated recommendations from the statisticians will be available by end of November. Since the CJI inspection, one survey has been completed with young people, families and victims.

Inspectors' assessment:

This recommendation had been partially completed. The survey content was not appropriate to provide to all participants and the YCS statistician had reviewed the content. At the time of inspection fieldwork, YCS anticipated being able to widen the survey to other participants using amended question banks. Also under consideration at the time was the YCS involvement in the Northern Ireland Victim and Witness Survey (NIVAWS). Together with research being undertaken by QUB and the evaluation work being undertaken as part of the PYOP, the YCS was reviewing how it collected and used information for the best outcomes. This recommendation is assessed as being partially completed and work is continuing to make best use of surveys without placing an inappropriate burden on survey participants or the agency.

Recommendation 4

It is recommended that the YCS reviews its processes for dealing with offending behaviour involving multiple offences in consultation with staff, all its CJS partners and stakeholders in the wider community.

Status: Completed

YCS response:

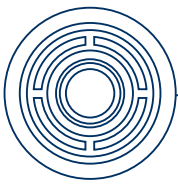
Staff through regular supervision by their line managers are given opportunities to assess how to deliver conference for multiple offences for example simultaneous conferences or back-to-back conferences. The result is each case is assessed on its merits. Staff are encouraged to share experiences of good practice on what works and what doesn't through their team meetings.

An analysis has been made of repeat youth conferences, although this may be different to the 'multiple offences' definition it is of interest to the Judiciary. The figures are:

Number of conferences	Number of young people
1	2147
2-4	833
5-7	159
8-10	60
11-13	19
14-16	4
17-19	2
20	2

When repeat youth conferences occur, a comprehensive youth conference plan is reached taking into account previous plans.





Inspectors' assessment:

There had been a review of practices for dealing with conferences involving multiple offences. This involved staff and a wide range of stakeholders who continue to provide feedback to the YCS on a regular basis. For example, District Judges (DJ), the PPS, and PSNI Youth Diversion Officers (YDOs). The review determined that local conference co-ordinators and managers should retain control over the most appropriate approach to take when faced with a conference involving multiple offences. Inspectors found that the approach was being implemented pragmatically and that support from supervisors and Regional Assistant Directors had been sought on some occasions. Co-ordinators spoken to by Inspectors stated that they felt supported and enabled by the approach as they were able to determine the most appropriate way of dealing with such conferences, based on input from stakeholders and on their own experience. A framework of practice meetings involving Regional Assistant Directors ensured that the YCS shared learning across the organisation so that co-ordinators and managers were kept informed of good practice from other regions. Case-by-case assessment had been identified as being the most appropriate way to determine how to deal with such conferences and co-ordinators were implementing the approach sensibly and based on shared learning and experience. The recommendation is assessed as being completed.

Recommendation 5

It is recommended that YCS staff should be consulted regularly, separate to any performance /accountability meetings, and that findings should be circulated to all staff together with management responses and outcomes.

Status: Completed

YCS response:

Monthly team meetings with the regional staff and their Assistant Director allow staff to be consulted and to bring their views to the Director via the Assistant Director. Quarterly meetings with the regions are held with the Director to discuss areas of mutual interest or concern, seeking the views of staff on practices or developments other than performance measures.

Inspectors' assessment:

This recommendation was made to ensure that staff were consulted on matters other than performance. The recommendation had been implemented through a series of quarterly meetings during which staff were able to raise matters other than practice and performance. Co-ordinators and other staff told Inspectors that they felt that their views were actively sought and that they welcomed the quarterly visits of Directors. Inspectors found that staff believed they could raise any matters at these meetings with no reticence and felt that they were being listened to. Minutes from the meetings including progress on previous matters were published and made available to staff. The recommendation is assessed as being complete.



Recommendation 6

In support of police YDOs, it would be useful if the YCS developed an awareness programme with the PSNI both within the Police College and amongst officers in police Districts.

Status: Partially completed

YCS response:

The YCS deliver training on the above on a seven-week rota to all new recruits in the Police College at Garnerville, and to all recruits six months later in Maydown (outside Derry/L'derry), and in some DCU areas to date for example Dungannon, 'E' District, Foyle, Waterside, Ballymena, and public presentations, that is YDOs (Belfast 2009), Newry, Craigavon and Bangor completed in 2009.

Inspectors' assessment:

This recommendation was made to increase the coverage of the YCS communication strategy to include trainee police officers (Student Officers) and officers on police Districts. There was a continuing commitment to delivering presentations to Student Officers at the Police College. Inspectors found there had been positive feedback from Student Officers and training managers at the College about the usefulness of these presentations. Some police Districts had also received presentations. Feedback from District trainers, YDOs and from other officers on District was also positive. However, due to other commitments, not all police Districts had received the YCS presentations. This recommendation is therefore assessed as being partially complete. The YCS intend to work towards completion and to continue the commitment to Student Officers.

Recommendation 7

It is recommended that as the parent organisation, the YJA should review its operating structures to ensure a more integrated approach to the continued delivery of the YCS, utilising the skills and resources that are available in the other YJA Directorates.

Status: Partially completed

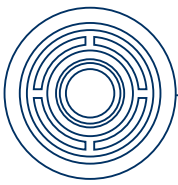
YCS response:

The YJA has completed a review of the process of its service delivery. It plans to implement a structural integration between the two Directorates of Community Services and the Youth Conference Service in 2010. It will restructure to one Directorate, utilising the current skills and resources of both Directorates.

Inspectors' assessment:

This recommendation has been subsumed into a review of the operating structures of the YJA which will be implemented during 2010. The move to one composite Directorate to cover both Community Services (CS) and YCS elements is a blending of different approaches, but should enable the more effective use of resources, and widen the availability of skills to deal with youth offending. In the original report, Inspectors identified that many conference plans were being implemented through the use of CS programmes. The CS Directorate were also at that time, in charge of monitoring the conference plans. A closer working relationship between the separate Directorates should ensure knowledge of such programmes is shared between the YCS and CS elements. Staff members spoken to by Inspectors expressed some concerns about the impending amalgamation, but were supportive of it. Most of the concerns





were in relation to it being seen as a purely a money saving exercise rather than focused on restorative and reparative work with the young people. However, in the present economic climate, staff also said that they understood that agencies must be as efficient and effective as possible within limited budgets. Arrangements for the integration of the Directorates were in an advanced state and should be implemented during 2010. The recommendation is assessed as being partially complete however, integration of the two Directorates in 2010 will fully complete this recommendation.

Recommendation 8

It is recommended that the YCS develop a central repository of organisations and their area of expertise, in relation to the provision of suitable interventions for young people undertaking conference plans. The repository should be regularly updated and made easily available to conference co-ordinators.

Status: Completed

YCS response:

A database of all organisations and their expertise is available to all Youth Conference Co-ordinators (YCC) in a Directorate central electronic file that is updated by YCCs.

Inspectors' assessment:

This recommendation was made to ensure that co-ordinators and managers had direct and easy access to as wide a range of interventions as possible when formulating conference plans. Inspectors spoke with a wide range of YCS staff and all agreed that access to intervention options was now much wider than it was previously and was

more easily accessible. Co-ordinators, both at the centre and in outlying districts told Inspectors that they felt fully supported by having good access to the wide range of programmes and organisations held on the database. They told Inspectors that the database was kept updated by the centre, through co-ordinators constantly supplying current information on organisations and programmes. The recommendation is assessed as being complete.

Recommendation 9

It is recommended that the collection of s.75 data on persons and victims is made mandatory and that such data is actively monitored, analysed and reported to assess the impact of conferencing on all s.75 criteria.

Status: Partially completed

YCS response:

S.75 data for young people commenced collection in June 2009, collation of victims data has not yet commenced. The YJA intends to design a system for collecting victim information. Implementation plans for collating information will commence in 2010.

Inspectors' assessment:

This recommendation was aimed at enabling the collection and analysis of data on victims who attend the youth conference. It is recognised that s.75 data is difficult to collect. However, the recommendation had been partially completed by the routine collection of such information regarding young persons going through the process. At the time of inspection fieldwork, Inspectors found that there was an intention to begin collecting victims data but a system had not yet been

devised to do so. The recommendation is partially complete but still requires substantial work to enable full collection of s.75 data.

Recommendation 10

It would be useful if the effectiveness of training delivered to solicitors by the YCCs was evaluated and results used to further develop such programmes.

Status: Not completed

YCS response

Workload pressures has mitigated against a training programme for solicitors. However, awareness raising events have taken place with solicitors at general awareness events in 2009 for example Bangor, Craigavon and Newry. Events have taken place with the PPS biannually.

Inspectors' assessment:

This recommendation was aimed at widening the communication strategy for the YCS by delivering awareness training to defence solicitors. However, due to resource constraints no further training had been given to solicitors other than at general awareness events. Evaluation had therefore not been possible. At the time of inspection, fieldwork co-ordinators and managers reported that there appeared to be an increasing awareness amongst solicitors of the scheme. Other stakeholders also reported that solicitors appeared to be aware of the scheme, but not the finer details of it. With diminishing resources and prioritisation of initiatives, this recommendation is unlikely to be completed in the short term.

Recommendation 11

It was recommended that the YCS source and deliver appropriate training for staff who are expected to facilitate conferences to deal with sexual offences and that only fully trained, designated YCS staff are approved to handle such cases.

Status: Completed

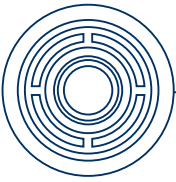
YCS response:

Designated staff have been trained in the AIM2 model for children who commit sexually harmful offences. This training is the same as that for NSPCC and the Trusts¹. Only those staff members who have completed the training are allocated the above type of Youth Conferences.

Inspectors' assessment:

This recommendation is assessed as being completed. Appropriate training had been sourced and delivered and this had been supported by managers and supervisors. Inspectors spoke with co-ordinators who verified that only staff who had completed the appropriate training had been allocated such cases. Co-ordinators felt confident in dealing with the cases allocated to them and gave positive feedback on the training and the implementation of policy by managers. The total number of sexually harmful offences dealt with by YCS had been small. In 2008 the number of referrals had been 22. At the time of inspection fieldwork, the total number for 2009 had reached only 12.

¹ The five Northern Ireland health trusts.



Recommendation 12

It was recommended that the provision of IT support should be reviewed to enable outlying areas to communicate management information and access essential data more effectively.

Status: Completed

YCS response:

The OASIS computer system has been rolled out to all YCS offices.

Inspectors' assessment:

This recommendation has been completed. At the time of inspection fieldwork, OASIS had been rolled out to all districts and was routinely being used by co-ordinators and managers. Co-ordinators and managers told Inspectors that the accessibility of data regarding conferences and management information had greatly increased.

Recommendation 13

It is recommended that directing lawyers in youth cases should set out their reasoning for directing a course of action to the victim and the YCS.

Status: Not completed

YCS response:

This had not been actioned due to uncertainty and a lack of legislative authority to take it forward.

Inspectors' assessment:

This recommendation had not been taken forward by the YCS. The recommendation has also been made with regard to the provision of reasons for a course of action by the PPS in other CJI reports, and will be the subject of a full inspection report 'An inspection of the giving of reasons and communication with victims and witnesses' in 2010-11.



Recommendation 14

It is recommended that the YCS should be supplied with comprehensive data on the previous intervention history of any young person referred for conferencing so that fully informed decisions about later interventions can be made.

Status: Completed

YCS response:

The YCS receives criminal records and reports on the young person referred for the youth conference from PBNI and the Trusts². These reports inform the youth conference plan and are attached to the YCCs reports to the court.

Inspectors' assessment:

Comprehensive reports on previous interventions made in respect of young persons are now supplied to the YCS prior to conference. These include previous offending history and interventions, whether by way of conferences, cautions or court orders. Inspectors were told by co-ordinators that they were confident they had access to all the appropriate information required to enable them to make informed decisions about conference plans. This recommendation is assessed as being complete.


² The five Northern Ireland health trusts.

CHAPTER 3:

Conclusion

Of the total of 14 recommendations YCS had fully achieved eight, and had partly achieved four. One of the remaining recommendations to provide training to solicitors is unlikely to be completed due to budget and resource constraints and the necessary prioritisation of activities. The other recommendation that had shown little progress was regarding the supply of reasons for decisions by the PPS to victims and the YCS. This issue is to be the subject of a full inspection report in 2010-11, and Inspectors will address this recommendation as part of that inspection.

The YCS had achieved the key recommendation to conduct a review of current practice in youth offending and had made much progress in respect of the other recommendations. From the review of practice in youth offending, a pilot scheme dealing with priority young offenders had been developed and was in the first year of implementation. The evaluation of the pilot project will further inform the development of approaches to youth offending in Northern Ireland.



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