



Department of
Justice

www.dojni.gov.uk

Youth Justice Review





What's it all about?

The Minister for Justice here asked a team of experts to look at what happens to young people in the justice system herefor example with the Police and in the courts.

The experts have written a report and have made suggestions for how things might change.

Now, the Minister wants to know what YOU think of their ideas.

This is a very brief summary of the report – if you would like to read the whole document you can download a copy at www.dojni.gov.uk/youth-justice-review. Contact us by telephone at 028 90 526568 or by textphone at 028 90 527668 or by emailing youthjusticereviewteam@dojni.x.gsi.gov.uk to request the report in different formats.

You can tell us what you think of the whole report or just the bits you are most interested in. Please let us have your ideas by 30th December 2011. You can write to us at the same email or by post to:

Youth Justice Unit
Room A4.15
Block A
Castle Buildings
Stormont
BELFAST
BT4 3SG

Your views will help us decide what to do.

THE EXPERTS' SUGGESTIONS

Please read through the suggestions and let us know if you agree or disagree with them and why. Do you have any ideas about what should be done to make things better?

Giving help early

The experts found that some children need to be helped early (when they are young) to make sure that they do not get involved in crime. Some good services here help children and families to stay out of trouble but the Government needs to put more money into this work.

So they suggest that

- ★ **Plans need to be made so that all the services work well together**
- ★ **Government needs to work out how it can put money into the work done with young children and their families.**
- ★ **Government should set up a special unit to help make this work happen and to make sure that it is done well**



The experts found that the police have done a lot of good work recently but some young people do not trust the police and some police officers do not behave well towards young people.

So, they suggest that

- ★ The police should make children and young people more of a priority in their plans
- ★ The police should have training in how to work well with young people
- ★ The police should find a way to help young people raise any concerns or complaints they have about policing

Keeping young people out of the system

The experts found that It is usually better not to bring children and young people into the justice system – it is better if parents can deal with bad behaviour. Rather than going to court, other ways should be used to deal with offending...going to court should only happen if the crime is very serious or if the child says they are not guilty.

So, they suggest that

- ★ The people who decide how a case gets dealt with should make sure that what they do is the best thing for the child
- ★ They should also improve how they communicate with children and their parents
- ★ People who work in the justice system should be trained in children's rights
- ★ It should be agreed that minor offences should be dealt with by parents, schools, and communities or by the local police giving a warning

Bail and remand

The experts found that the law says that children accused of committing an offence should be released (given bail) before their court case except in very special circumstances. But children here are held on remand (kept in a special centre) much more often than anywhere else. And sometimes children who live in care or who can't go home are sent to the Juvenile Justice Centre at Woodlands, which is for children who have broken the law.

So, they suggest that

- ★ **New places should be found for children who need accommodation or protection so that they are not sent to Woodlands**
- ★ **Agencies should work together and do more to make sure that children accused of an offence are given bail and not locked up**
- ★ **Conditions should only be put on bail if it is absolutely necessary and young people and their parents should be involved and told exactly what the condition means**



Youth conferencing gives young offenders the chance to meet their victim and agree what they will do to make up for the harm they have done. The experts found that it works well here in Northern Ireland but could be even better.

So, they suggest that

- ✱ More should be done to encourage victims to take part
- ✱ The time from arrest to completing the conference should be shorter
- ✱ Conference plans should be fair to everyone involved
- ✱ The people in charge of the conference should be able to decide if it is working and if not they should send the case back to court

The experts found that ... in recent years the Youth Court has become a more child-friendly place but there are still some problems

So, they suggest that

- ✱ The guidelines for running the Youth Courts should be looked at and improved to make sure that everyone sticks to them
- ✱ Judges and lawyers who work in the Youth Court should get special training

Delays

The experts found that the amount of time between arrest and a case being dealt with in court is far too long, in all our courts. This leads to serious problems for everyone involved.

So, they suggest that

- ★ **The delays in setting up things like youth conferences should be reduced**
- ★ **Work to reduce delays in the justice system should prioritise young offenders – the lessons learned can then be applied to adults as well**
- ★ **A time limit of 120 days between arrest and having the case completed should be set in a new law**

The experts found that fewer young people are being held in custody here than there used to be, which is good, and the new Juvenile Justice Centre is a good place. But too many children in the care system are ending up in custody and sometimes children have been put into the adult prison at Hydebank Wood.

So, they suggest that

- ★ **Children under 18 should not go to Hydebank Wood**
- ★ **If a child turns 18 while they are in custody decisions about where they are held should be about what they need and what is best for them**
- ★ **Children in care should not be put into custody when this would not happen to a child who isn't in the care system**

Custody
(having to stay in a prison or special centre)

Moving On

The experts found that children in custody are not properly prepared for life after their sentence ends. They can have a criminal record long after they have stopped offending – and this puts employers off giving them a job. Making bad choices when they were very young can ruin the rest of their lives.

So, they suggest that

- * Young offenders should be prepared for the day they will be released by having education, training and work experience – and agencies should help them when they get out of custody**
- * Things that are done to punish small crimes should not give someone a criminal record that employers have to be told about**
- * Young offenders should be able to ask for a “clean slate” – that wipes out their criminal record – when they are 18**
- * More serious offenders should know what their criminal record says and who can see it – they should be allowed to challenge this**



The experts found that certain groups of children were more likely to end up in the justice system ... especially those in care, those with mental health problems and those with drug, alcohol or other problems.

So, they suggest that

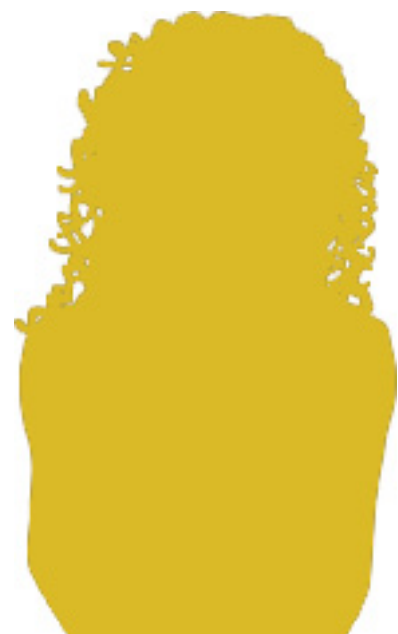
- * The agencies working with these children need to find out more about why this happens
- * The Government Department in charge of health and the care system should take a lead in finding better ways of helping these children

Joined up work at
Government level

The experts found that children who offend sometimes get left out of other services ... the work of different Government Departments needs to be more joined up.

So, they suggest that

- * The First Minister and Deputy First Minister should set up a high level group of other Ministers to make sure that all children have better lives and that all Departments do their bit to make this happen



The experts found that there is a good understanding of children's rights in Northern Ireland but that sometimes other things are seen as more important than what is best for the child. The age at which a child can be prosecuted for a crime is 10 – which they thought was too low.

So, they suggest that

- ✱ **The Youth Justice system should be clear that what it does is about doing the best thing for the child**
- ✱ **A child should not be prosecuted until he or she is 12 years old – in 3 years time the Government should think about raising this age to 14**

Thank you for your help!



Department of
Justice

www.dojni.gov.uk

Youth Justice Unit
Room A4.15, Block A
Castle Buildings, Stormont
BELFAST, BT4 3SG

Telephone: 028 90 526568
Textphone: 028 90 527668
Email: youthjusticereviewteam@dojni.x.gsi.gov.uk



Participation Network
Supporting the Public Sector to engage
children & young people

Participation Network
Children in Northern Ireland
Unit 9, 40 Montgomery Road
Belfast, BT6 9HL

Telephone: 028 90 401290
Email: participation@ci-ni.org.uk