



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS
MÄNNYSTRIE O LEAR



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

RESEARCH SUMMARY

July 2003

THE EDUCATION EXPERIENCE OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN JUVENILE JUSTICE CENTRES

1. BACKGROUND

In 2001, as part of the Criminal Justice Review Implementation Plan, the decision was made to close the Lisnevin Juvenile Justice Centre, near Newtownards and develop a single centre at the Rathgael Juvenile Justice Centre, near Bangor. Current plans are that during 2003 all young people who are either on remand or in custody will be moved to temporary, re-furnished accommodation at Rathgael, pending the building of a new facility on the Rathgael site.

Planning for the new single centre included looking at how best to meet the educational needs of the young people. If these needs were to be met and the appropriateness and continuity of the educational provision ensured, it was important that the potential difficulties were clearly identified and possible solutions explored.

The Department of Education and the Northern Ireland Office therefore commissioned research on the subject from the Graduate School of Education at Queen's University, Belfast. The research was to examine the young people's previous and current educational experiences, their educational expectations, their experiences on release from custody and the support and information requirements of Juvenile Justice Centre (JJC) staff in planning and implementing educational provision. In order to explore these questions the researchers drew on two sources of data:

- ◆ a detailed analysis of the records of a sample of young people placed in the JJs; and
- ◆ focus group discussions and interviews with young people and a range of professional staff.

This summary sets out the main findings of the research and the recommendations emerging from it.

2. THE SAMPLE OF YOUNG PEOPLE

The sample of young people for the analysis of records was drawn from:

- ◆ all young people in custody or on remand on 5 June 2001 at Lisnevin JJC; and
- ◆ all young people admitted to Rathgael JJC from June to December 2001.

The final sample comprised 33 young people (see Table 1). Five (15%) of the sample were female and 28 (85%) were male which compares very favourably with the distribution by gender for young people in JJs in 1999, which was 86% male and 14% female (NIO Juvenile Statistics, 1999).

Table 1: Distribution of Sample by Age

Age on 5 June 2001	Lisnevin				Rathgael			
	Remand		Custody		Remand		Custody	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
13 years	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
14 years	3	0	2	0	0	3	0	1
15 years	2	0	5	0	1	1	1	0
16 years	4	0	6	0	0	1	0	0
17 years	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	11	0	13	0	2	5	1	1

Interviews were conducted with a small sample of 14 young people who were willing to participate in that part of the research. All of the young people were in the JJC's when interviewed. Attempts to locate and speak to some of the young people who had left the JJC's proved impossible.

3. THE SAMPLE OF PROFESSIONALS

Some 62 professionals involved in the education of the young people participated in focus groups and/or interviews, either face to face or by telephone (see Table 2). Small focus groups (maximum four persons and lasting about 45 minutes) were held with the teachers and care staff in the JJC's. Face-to-face interviews of about one hour took place with the key personnel and providers of alternative education provision. Telephone interviews (or on two occasions face-to-face interviews) were held with principals of and/or key teaching staff in schools that the young people had attended. Finally, telephone interviews were held with education welfare and probation officers, with follow up documentary information being provided in these instances.

Table 2: Distribution of Sample by Profession

	JJC's	Other	Total
Teaching Staff	8	5	13
Care Staff	11	3	14
JJC Management (Centres and Board)	2	3	5
Alternative Education Providers (EOTAS, Guidance Units, Whitefield)			9
Education Welfare Officers			7
Probation Officers			14
TOTAL	21	11	62

4. MAIN FINDINGS

4.1 Previous Educational Experience

Given their history it is understandable that most of these young people could be described as disaffected and disillusioned by their experiences of mainstream education. While many had problems with school this was not the only factor leading to their disaffection. In the majority of cases there appeared to be other contributing factors, in particular family difficulties. Few, if any, had recently attended formal education on a regular basis and many had been out of the mainstream school for a substantial amount of time. A complex picture of multiple and fragmented schooling appears to be the norm for most of these young people, with some even from their earliest school days. Professional staff who had been involved in providing this education were, for the most part, in agreement that these young people needed to be in a highly supportive environment.

4.2 Educational Experience and Provision in JJC

The JJC education staff are clearly highly committed and dedicated to teaching these young people. However, they face many difficulties, in particular the requirement to teach the Northern Ireland curriculum without the flexibility of disapplication, an approach that is increasingly open to mainstream post-primary schools. Thus, staff see themselves delivering a curriculum that is not designed to meet the needs of young people who have had an extremely chequered educational career. These difficulties are further exacerbated by other factors which may lead to, or can contribute to, disruption in the classroom. This is particularly true at Lisnevin where the larger numbers do not allow for much individual tuition to take place.

The young people's perceptions of their JJC education provision were varied, with some reporting very favourably about their experiences while others clearly felt that it was not challenging enough. The range of vocational skills training on offer and the opportunity to participate in this was welcomed by most of the group. Hopes for the future were similarly varied, with some reporting that they would wish to try to continue with their education while others suggested there was little value in this.

4.3 What Happens After the JJC?

Of the 31 young people who were followed up (two were omitted from the sample at this stage because they had moved outside Northern Ireland) 29 had returned to the community at the beginning of April 2002 and for the majority their Order had been completed, though four were back in custody due to further offences (see Table 3).

Table 3: Destinations of Sample of Young People at April 2002

Destination	Over School Age	School Age	Total
Employment – full-time	2	0	2
Employment – part-time	2	1	3
Seeking Work	1	0	1
Training	1	6	7
Mainstream School	0	1	1
Alternative Education	0	4	4
Custody – original sentence	0	2	2
Custody – return	1	3	4
Not in work/training/education	5	0	5
No information	0	2	2
TOTAL	12	19	31

Of the total group of 31 there were 12 who were now over school-leaving age and one of this group had been returned to custody for further offences. Of the 11 who had remained in the community two were in full-time employment and two were reported to be in part-time employment with one of these young people also taking part in IMPACT – a car crime prevention programme. One of this group was reported to be actively seeking work, and was in touch with NIACRO, one was on a training scheme, one had been offered a training scheme but refused the option, while the remaining four were not in receipt of any form of training or education.

Of the 19 who were still of school-age, two were still in custody and three had returned to custody. Six of this group would have been eligible to leave school shortly and had been offered vocational training schemes though it was unclear whether all six were attending these schemes. In at least two cases, the schemes

offered were a continuation of the placement prior to the young person's committal. One young person had returned to mainstream school and was working towards GCSEs as well as attending a crime prevention programme, another was in part-time employment (despite being of school-age) and four were attending alternative education provision. There was no indication of any educational input for two of this group.

5. CONSTRAINTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Access to Information

The difficulty in accessing information about a young person's previous educational history is a major constraint for JJC staff in planning and delivering appropriate educational provision. While it is acknowledged that in most cases the young person's educational experiences have been fragmented¹ information does exist which could be helpful.

5.1.1 [Recommendations](#)

JJC staff should identify what information would be most useful to have and the most likely sources from which to obtain it. Improving access to information could be achieved quickly by much closer contact with the Education Welfare Service. Other agencies, such as the Probation Service, which are involved with these young people should be encouraged to record basic information about their educational history on any referral or assessment documentation which goes to the JJC. Consideration also needs to be given to the use of a computerised system of recording information within the JJC which should, if feasible, be compatible with other computerised systems within the education sector.

Many of the young people who are on remand or in custody have had numerous agencies involved in their care. A number of local inter-agency groups with a focus on the needs of young people at risk in the community have been established across Northern Ireland. While the purpose of these groups is to retain young people within the community, they could help to co-ordinate information about young people who are placed in the JJC and provide education staff with a useful link with the 'home' community.

¹ *In this research the tracing of these histories took approximately three months of the researcher's time and even then the records were incomplete.*

5.2 Continuity of Provision

It would appear from the findings that even when the previous education or care history of a young person is known, JJC staff have little opportunity to make contact with previous providers to discuss the young person's needs. Also, there seems to be little opportunity for JJC staff to follow up on progress once the young person returns to the community to complete their Order. This lack of communication means that it is extremely difficult to develop a coherent rehabilitative or educational programme for the individual that will have continuity with experiences prior to admission to the JJC and on release.

5.2.1 Recommendations

In order to develop individual education programmes with some continuity, much closer links must be maintained with the other agencies involved with the young person, both when the young person is placed in the JJC and on return to the community to complete their sentence. These links are essential where young people are expected to return to educational schemes they had been attending prior to receiving their Juvenile Justice Centre Order. Maintaining links might be facilitated through the inter-agency groups mentioned earlier or by the attendance of representatives of appropriate agencies at the final case review held in the JJC prior to a young person's discharge to the community.

5.3 Assessment

The education staff within the JJC have little, if any, opportunity to conduct a thorough assessment of the young person's educational needs, or to discuss with the young person their own perceptions of their needs and their expectations from education. This lack of assessment, together with minimal information about the young person's previous educational history, further limits the preparation of an effective individual education programme. Within mainstream education such an assessment would be made under the Code of Practice for pupils with special educational needs and an individual educational plan drawn up by a school's special educational needs co-ordinator – a person who will have had training in this work and who will have access to educational psychology support. JJC staff had not had this training and had no access to educational psychology services.

5.3.1 [Recommendations](#)

All young people, regardless of whether they are on remand or committed, should have a multi-dimensional assessment of needs conducted on entry to a JJC and before being placed in the education setting. This assessment should include a vocational element as many of the young people are in their last years of schooling. The introduction of a settling-in period during which time a thorough assessment could be conducted should be considered and this would have the added advantage of giving the young person time to adapt to yet another different situation and provide an opportunity to build relationships and trust in a safe, secure environment.

Education staff should have training in the area of special educational needs, (particularly emotional and behavioural difficulties), and have access to educational psychology services as part of preparing individual education plans. All individual plans should be monitored regularly as they are implemented and changes made to reflect progress. There should also be an evaluation of the plan at the end of the young person's period in the JJC which links back to the initial assessment.

5.4 Curriculum

The limitations and inappropriateness of a curriculum which has contributed to the disaffection of these young people was constantly mentioned by the majority of the education staff, as well as those not directly involved. These young people are amongst the most challenging for the education sector and flexibility to innovate in delivering the curriculum is important as a means of engaging them in education.

5.4.1 [Recommendations](#)

The curriculum on offer in the JJC should be reviewed. The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI)'s proposals as presented in their Alternative Education Provision (AEP)² document appears a more appropriate programme for these young people. A curriculum change would facilitate the development of rehabilitative work with the young people as an integral part of the school programme.

² ETI (2002) *Alternative Education Provision, The Education and Training Inspectorate, Bangor: Department of Education.*

Links need to be forged with outside bodies, especially Colleges of Further Education and the Careers Service, to further develop the vocational aspect of the provision within the JJC. As many of the young people are almost of school-leaving age (and some will have already reached this age), the possibility of some form of work experience should be considered, perhaps as part of an on-going programme when the community-based element of the Order is being completed.

5.5 Staff Morale

While all education staff in the JJC are extremely dedicated and committed, they are also disillusioned. This has been partly fuelled by the numerous reviews and surveys of education within the juvenile justice sector over the years all of which have made recommendations, with few, if any, coming to fruition.

The stress levels of staff are increased by the frustrations of an inadequate assessment of the young person's needs, the lack of information about their background and the belief that that they are delivering an inappropriate curriculum. Staff shortages (partly due to staff absence due to stress), poor resources, lack of preparation and planning time and no classroom support were also mentioned as illustrations of how little education is valued in this sector and therefore contributing to low morale. Furthermore, teachers feel completely isolated from the education community and rarely met with colleagues from outside the JJC.

5.5.1 Recommendations

Staff morale was affected by the perception that education as a whole was not valued in the JJC. Protecting the young person's time in school would produce an immediate improvement. In this way, any withdrawal from the classroom of the young person would be by prior arrangement with education staff and managed to minimise disruption to their education. In addition, all teachers should have preparation and planning time during the day with some free periods over and above the directed time. Ways of involving other staff in support within the classroom should be explored.

Staff's feelings of isolation from the wider education community need to be addressed. The link with the South-Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) should continue and teaching staff encouraged to participate in continuing professional development courses offered by the Board. Teaching staff should be

encouraged to explore other continuing professional development avenues offered by Further and Higher Education establishments. This is essential if the identified need for expertise and knowledge in current special needs education pedagogy is to be met by an existing member of the teaching staff.

5.6 Additional Recommendations

The Department of Education has secured resources to allow the appointment of two persons, to be based at the Rathgael JJC, who will undertake liaison with the broader education sector. However, this development will not resolve all the problems and further action is required by government departments. Transfer of responsibility for education at the JJC to the Department of Education would address some of the problems, however, this may not be a realistic option for the present. While responsibility remains with NIO, close collaboration and consultation with the Department of Education has to be a priority and recommendations made by the ETI in their inspection reports of the JJC must be acted on.

6. CONCLUSION

The research was designed to track the educational histories of young people who are placed in a Juvenile Justice Centre and identify their experiences both in the Centre and on leaving it, both from the perspective of the young people themselves and the staff responsible for their care and education. The aim was to make recommendations on how any identified difficulties might be resolved and how the two new liaison posts could best be deployed. As a result of the extremely honest, open and fruitful interviews with all the participants, the findings and resultant recommendations are broader than the initial remit envisaged.

7. SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Audit Commission (1996) *Misspent Youth: Young People and Crime*, London: Audit Commission.

Campbell, S. and Harrington, V. (1998) *Findings from the 1998/99 Youth Lifestyles Survey*, London: Home Office.

Devlin, A. (1995) *Criminal Classes: Offenders at School*, Winchester: Waterside Press.

ETI (2000) *EOTAS/SSPPR Education and Training Inspectorate Report*, The Education and Training Inspectorate, Bangor: Department of Education.

ETI (2002) *Alternative Education Provision*, The Education and Training Inspectorate, Bangor: Department of Education.

Kilpatrick, R. and Barr, A. (2002) *Multiply Suspended Pupils: Their Educational Career and Support Projects Available to Them*, Research Report No 27, Bangor: Department of Education.

Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (2002) *In Our Care: Promoting the rights of children in custody*, Belfast: Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission.

8. THE PROJECT

The Project was undertaken for the Department of Education and the Northern Ireland Office by the Graduate School of Education, Queen's University, Belfast. The cost of the project was £18,000.

9. FULL REPORT

The full report entitled “The Education Experience of Young People in Juvenile Justice Centres” by Rosemary Kilpatrick and Dawn Harbinson is available from the Department of Education upon request.

This paper is a summary of the research report and as such any views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Department of Education or the Northern Ireland Office.

This Research Summary may be photocopied for use within your own institution.

A limited number of additional copies may be obtained from:

Statistics and Research Branch
Room G2, New Building
Department of Education
Rathgael House
Balloo Road
BANGOR
Co Down
BT19 7PR

Telephone: 028 9127 9391
Fax: 028 9127 9594
e-mail: statistics2@deni.gov.uk