



Northern Ireland Independent Custody Visiting Scheme

Annual Report

1 April 2014 - 31 March 2015



NORTHERN IRELAND INDEPENDENT CUSTODY VISITING SCHEME ANNUAL REPORT 2014/2015

Foreword



This publication details the work carried out in 2014/2015 by the Northern Ireland Independent Custody Visiting Scheme. Custody Visitors are volunteers from the community who make unannounced visits (in pairs) to police stations to check on the rights, health and wellbeing and conditions of detention of people being held in custody.

On behalf of the Northern Ireland Policing Board (the Board) I would like to publicly thank all the volunteer members of the Scheme. The Board is extremely proud of its Custody Visiting Scheme and it would not function were it not for the involvement, enthusiasm, commitment and dedication of our volunteers who provide an important contribution to the work of the Board by maintaining independent community oversight on police custody arrangements.

**Anne Connolly – Chair
Northern Ireland Policing Board**

Background

Custody Visiting in the UK came about as a result of Lord Scarman's inquiry into the Brixton disorders in 1981. The Northern Ireland Independent Custody Visiting Scheme was first established in 1991 and was made statutory in 2001 under Section 73 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000.

Role of Independent Custody Visitors

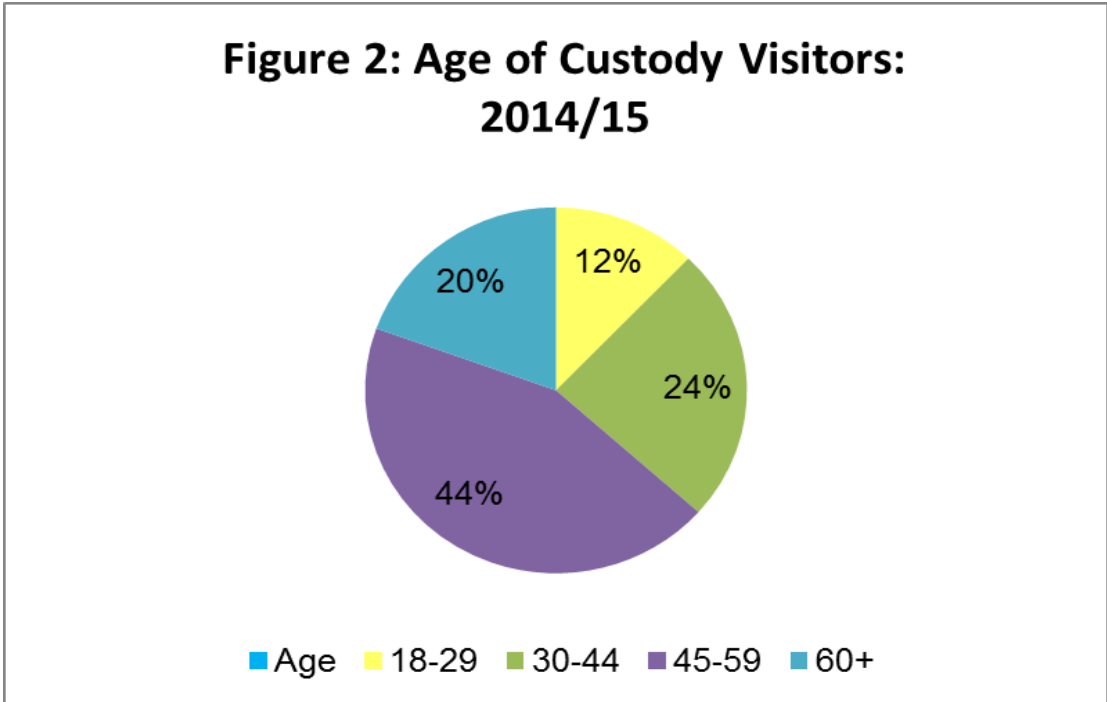
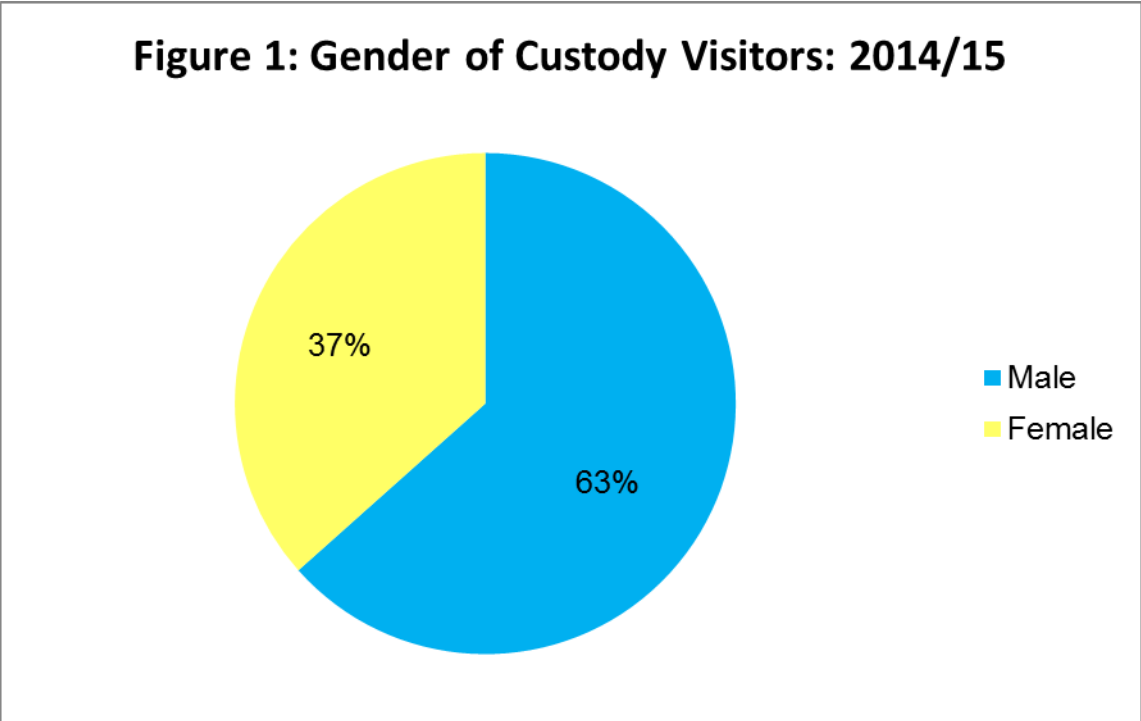


Custody Visitors are independent of the police and the criminal justice system and make unannounced visits to designated police custody suites across Northern Ireland. The Board supports and administers the Custody Visiting Scheme and each quarter the Performance Committee receives a report on the work of the Custody Visiting Scheme. The report highlights any issues raised and the remedial actions taken to address these. The report covers three distinct areas:

- the Rights of the Detainee;
- the Health and Wellbeing of the Detainee; and
- the Facilities and Conditions of Detention.

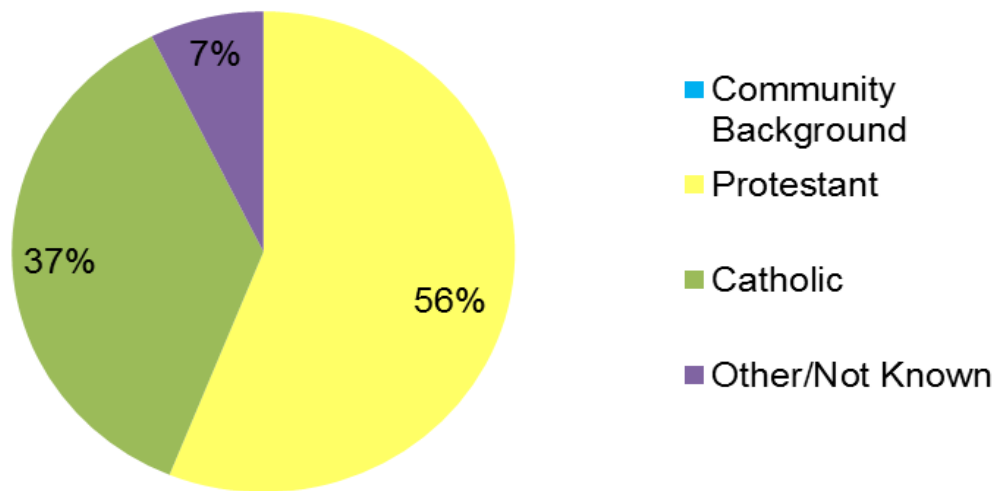
Composition of the Custody Visiting Scheme

At 31 March 2015, there were 41 Custody Visitors. The gender, age and community background is shown in the charts below.¹



¹ The demographics of Custody Visitors cited in this report are based upon information provided voluntarily by the Visitors to the Board.

Community Background of Custody Visitors: 2014/15



In addition to the age, gender and community background of the Custody Visitors:

- 1 volunteer deems themselves to have a disability and 40 deem themselves not to have a disability; and
- 2 volunteers (5%) deem themselves to be Black/Black other and 39 (95%) deem themselves to be White.

Custody Visiting Teams

During 2014/2015 there were four Custody Visiting teams covering Northern Ireland.

These were:

- Belfast/Antrim - responsible for 4 custody suites including the Antrim Serious Crime Suite (SCS);
- North West - responsible for 6 custody suites;
- Tyrone/Fermanagh (Tyfer) - responsible for 4 custody suites; and
- Down/Armagh - responsible for 4 custody suites.

The work of the Custody Visiting Teams during 2014/2015

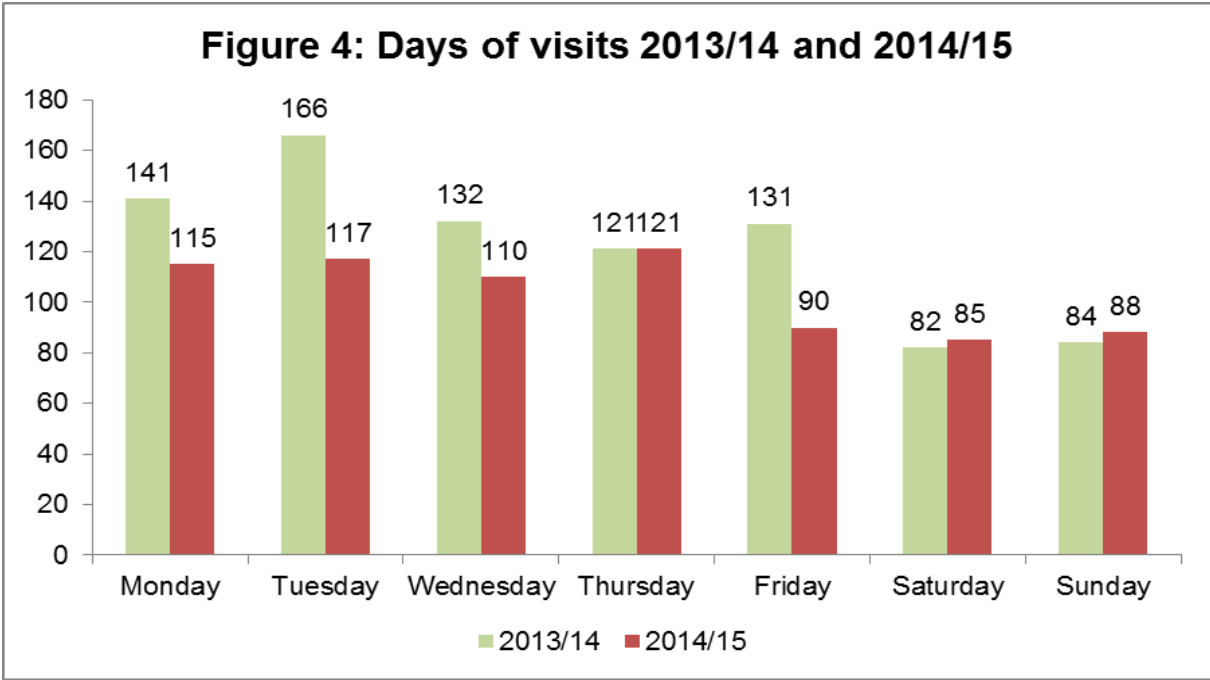


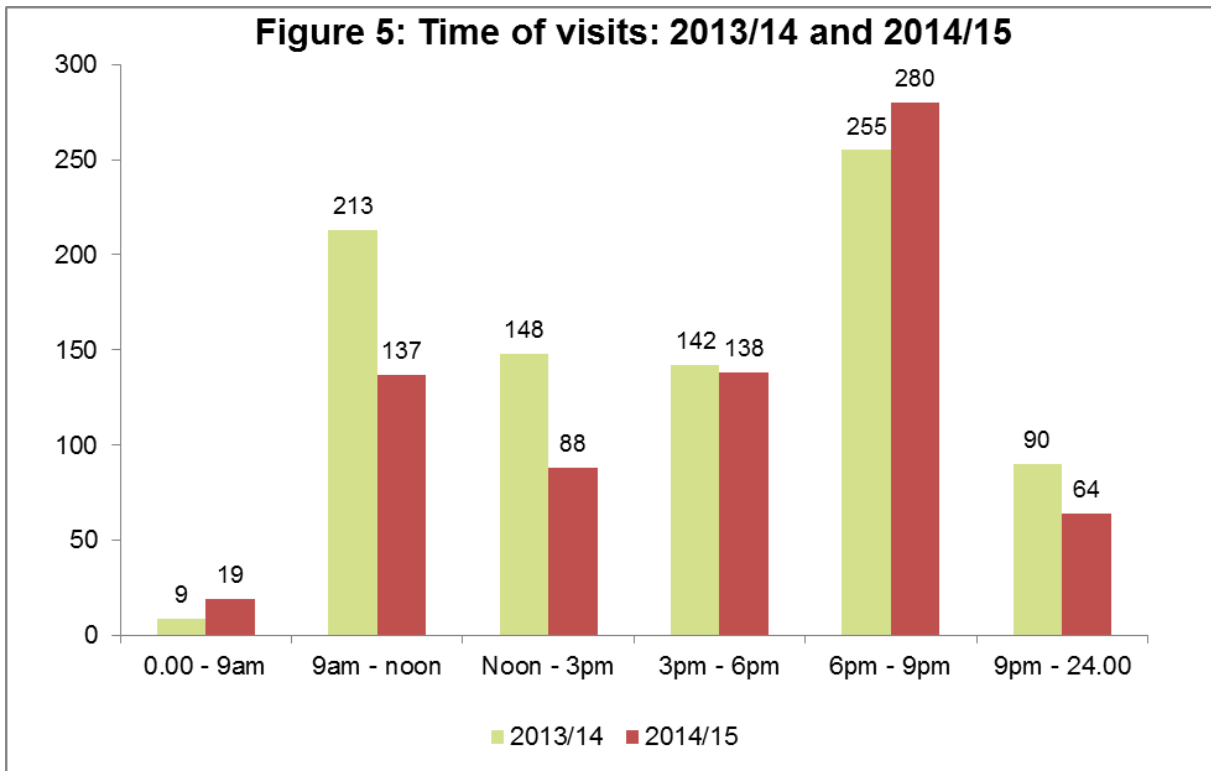
Each year the Board sets a guideline number of custody visits to be completed by each team. During 2014/2015, the guideline number of visits was set at 706 and the actual number of visits made was 726.

The guideline number of visits is set based upon a percentage of the throughput of detainees with the busier suites receiving several visits per month but with the caveat that each designated suite is visited at least once every month.

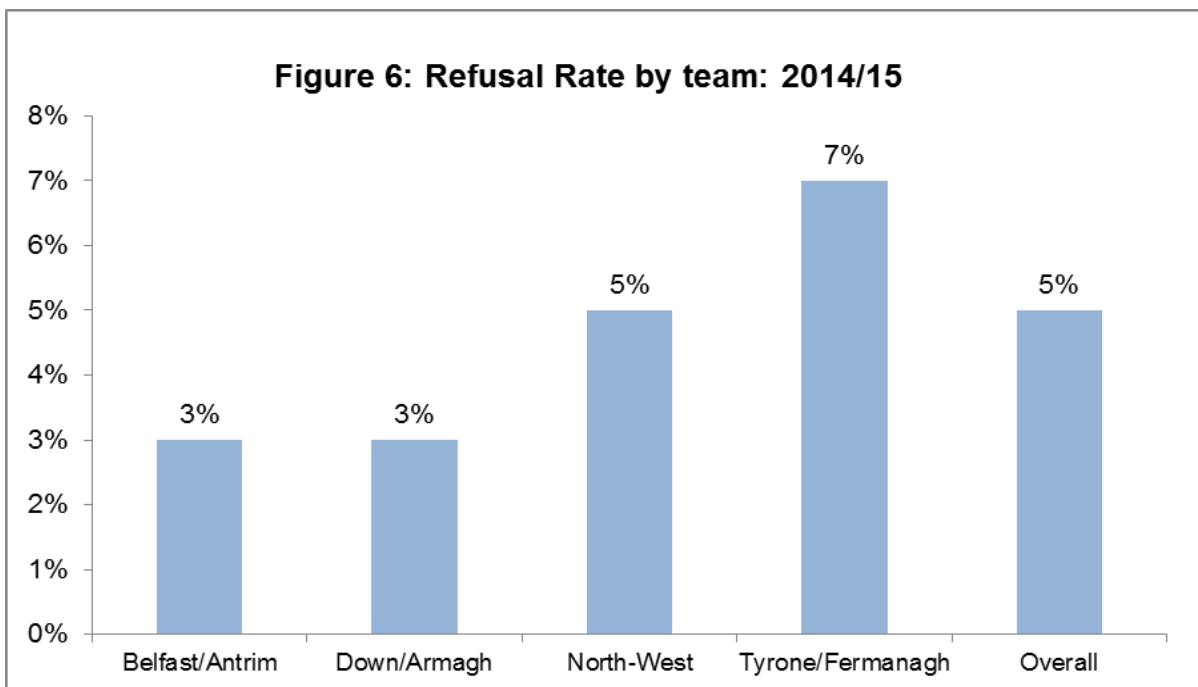
Of the 726 visits made, 705 (97%) were deemed to be valid visits. The main reasons why 21 visits were not carried out were the custody suite was closed (6), the custody suite was busy (6), security issues (3) and unavailability of a Custody Visitor (6).

Visits took place across all seven days of the week and at all times of the night and day. A breakdown of day and times of the total visits in 2014/2015 (and a comparison in percentage terms to 2013/2014) is illustrated in the following tables:



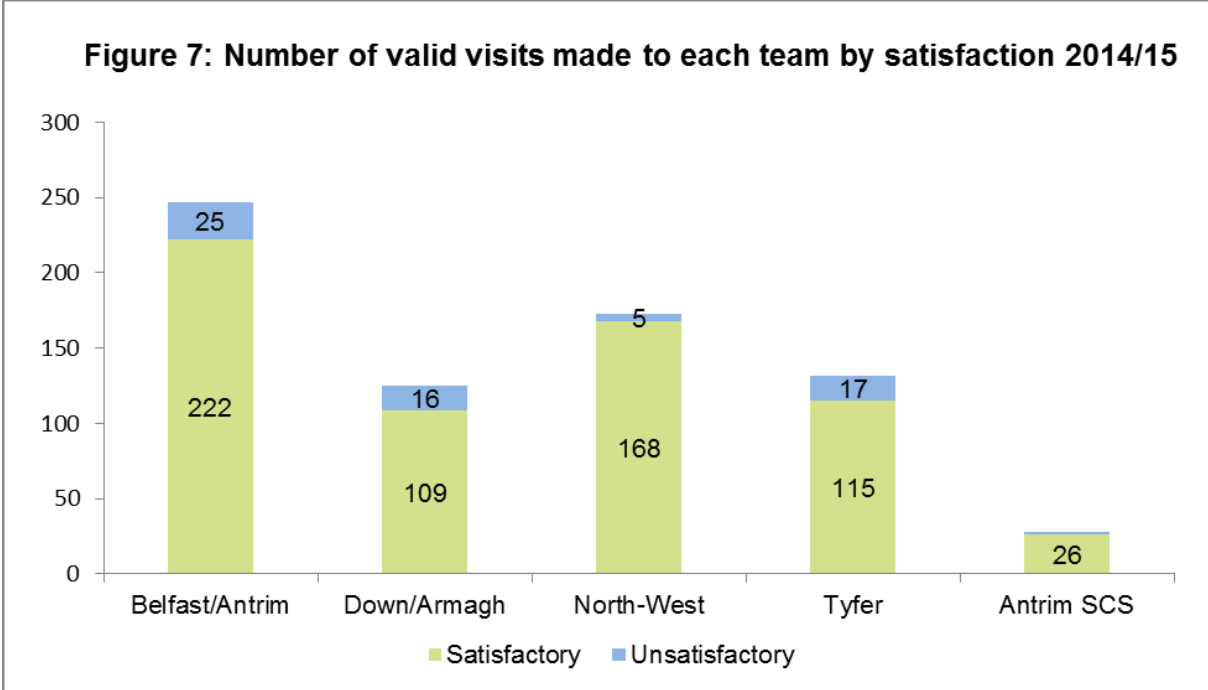


Custody Visitors require the consent of a detainee to talk to them or to see their custody record. There were 1,216 detainees held in custody at the time of the visits in 2014/2015, 540 of whom were spoken to by visitors. A total of 65 detainees refused to be seen and 611 detainees were not seen for other reasons such as being asleep or being with their solicitor. The overall refusal rate was 5%²; which is identical to 2013/2014. A breakdown of refusal rates (by team) is illustrated below:

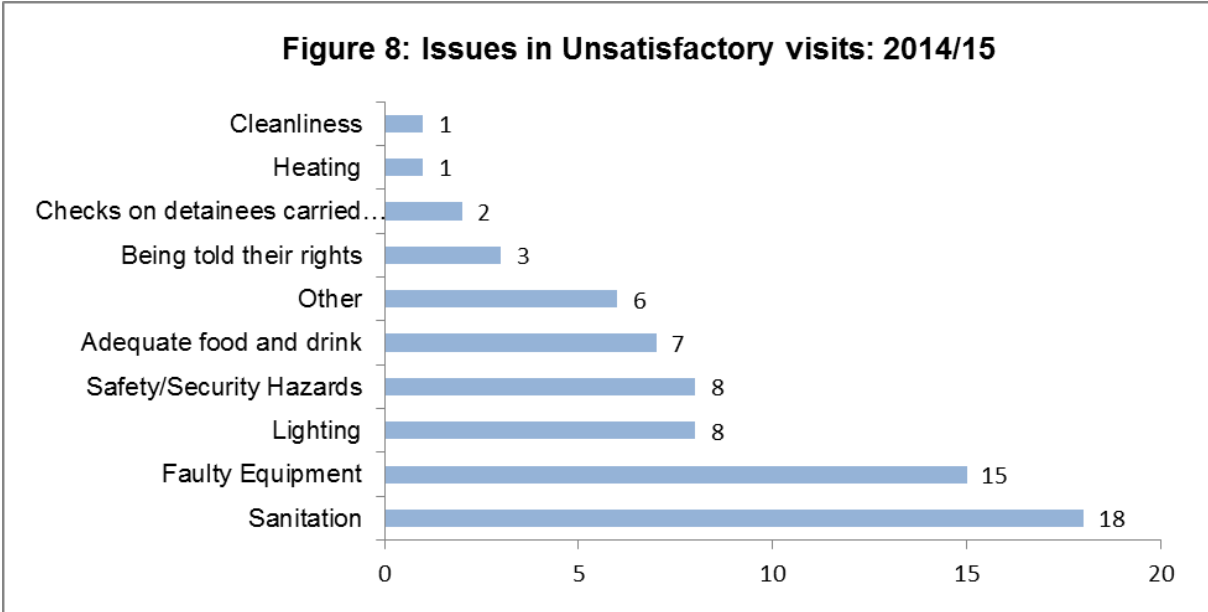


² The refusal rate is calculated as the number of detainees who refused to be seen as a percentage of the number that were held in custody at the time of the visit.

Of the 705 valid visits, 640 (91%) were found to be entirely satisfactory by the Custody Visitors. Of the remaining 65 visits (9%), issues were identified which deemed these visits unsatisfactory. A breakdown of visits completed by each team is illustrated below:



A total of 69³ issues were identified by the Custody Visitors. A breakdown of these issues identified can be found below:



³ The total number of issues identified is more than the total number of unsatisfactory visits because of multiple issues raised for some visits.

All issues identified are brought to the attention of PSNI and the Board so that they can be addressed as soon as possible. The Board has an agreed procedure to follow up on issues of concern which can be escalated to Assistant Chief Constable level if issues are not resolved within the agreed timeframe.

A full statistical breakdown of Custody Visits carried out to each Suite in 2014/2015 can be accessed on the Board's website at:

<http://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/index/publications/custody-visitors.htm>

OPCAT National Preventive Mechanism (NPM)



Throughout 2014/2015, the Scheme continued to fulfil its obligations and commitment to the UK's National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) which is intended to give effect to the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT).

The Scheme is designated as one of the four Northern Ireland bodies that form the NPM, carrying out a system of regular visits to places of detention in order to prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

The work of the UK NPM is coordinated by HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) and we were pleased to welcome a representative from HMIP to our ICV Conference on 26 March 2015 to give our volunteers an overview of the work of NPM. Further information can be found at:

<https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprison/national-preventive-mechanism>.

Training & Development

The Board delivers a range of training and development activities in order to encourage and promote continuous improvement on the Scheme. For example:

- In August 2014 the Scheme welcomed 5 new Custody Visitors on their Induction Training and they commenced visits in September 2014;

- Also in September 2014 the Scheme Manager and Associate Trainer attended Vulnerable Adult Training, facilitated by Volunteer Now; and
- In November 2014 Equality and Diversity Training was delivered to our Custody Visitors, facilitated by Inclusion NI.

Annual Conference 2015



The Annual Conference was held in Newcastle on 26 March 2015. This provided a forum for Custody Visitors to discuss relevant issues and was an occasion to celebrate the work of custody visiting and express the Board's thanks to the volunteers involved in this role.

Board Chair Anne Connolly facilitated the well-attended Conference and speakers included representatives from:

- NI Alternatives – Community based Restorative Justice;
- The Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA) – The future of custody visiting;
- HMIP – Overview of the UK National Preventive Mechanism (NPM);
- Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency (NISRA) – Findings of ICV Survey 2015.



Board Chair, Anne Connolly, also made a presentation to Chief Executive of ICVA, Ian Smith, on his forthcoming retirement. This was in recognition of the significant contribution he made in supporting the development of the Custody Visiting Scheme in Northern Ireland.

The Conference was completed by a charity table quiz where £185 was raised for the Northern Ireland Children's Hospice.

ICVA

The Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA) works alongside Custody Visiting Schemes offering best practice advice in order to acknowledge the commitment of volunteers and promote excellence across the UK. The Northern Ireland Custody Visiting Scheme is represented on the ICVA Executive Board.



The ICVA National Conference took place in Birmingham in November 2014 and three volunteers from the Scheme attended. Further information on ICVA can be found at <http://www.icva.org.uk/>.

More information

If you would like more information about Custody Visiting, or are interested in joining the Scheme, please contact:

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Document Title

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Publication Date

July 2015