



YOUTH INTERVENTIONS:

AN INSPECTION OF THE YOUTH JUSTICE AGENCY'S COMMUNITY INTERVENTIONS

SEPTEMBER 2024

**Criminal Justice Inspection
Northern Ireland**
a better justice system for all



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September 2024

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CDF	Children's Diversion Forum
CJI	Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland
CLC	Children's Law Centre
CRN	Community Resolution Notice
DoJ	Department of Justice
EA	Education Authority
ESD	Earlier Stage Diversion
HMI Probation	His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation
HSC Trust	Health and Social Care Trust
IT	Information Technology
JJC	Juvenile Justice Centre
JJCO	Juvenile Justice Centre Order (Woodlands)
NIAO	Northern Ireland Audit Office
NICTS	Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service
PBNI	Probation Board for Northern Ireland
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
PPS	Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland
QUB	Queen's University Belfast
RoSH	Risk of Serious Harm
The Committee	United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child
VCS	Voluntary and Community Sector

UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
VOYPIC	Voice of Young People in Care Ltd
YCO	Youth Conference Order
YDO	Youth Diversion Officer
YEC	Youth Engagement Clinic
YJA	Youth Justice Agency

TERMINOLOGY

Youth Justice Services/Youth Justice Services Directorate: these terms are used to describe the Youth Justice Agency's community services delivered by the Youth Justice Services Directorate with children, families, carers and victims in the community.

Child Justice System: the term used when referring to the system of criminal justice that relates to children. In Northern Ireland this encompassed children aged 10 to 17 years of age; it is also referred to as the Youth Justice System.

Child/children in care: the term used when referring to children who are cared for by a Health and Social Care Trust, as advised by children with lived experience, *'According to the law, I am a 'Looked After Child'. But, aren't all children looked after by someone? Sometimes, people say I'm LAC. What am I lacking? Are we all lacking? Please don't describe me as a 'looked after child' and never as 'LAC'. Instead, call me a child or young person in care. First and foremost, I am a child or young person. I am also in care. So, the best way to describe me is a child or young person in care.'*¹

Children's home: the term used for a home where children live together in the care of a Health and Social Care Trust. Children with lived experience of care advise that *'Some children and young people in care live together in a children's home. Each home is different, but usually there are a small number of children, who are cared for by a team of adults who work at the home. Remember, while there are people who work there, for the young people who live there it is their home. Does 'residential unit' sound very homely? Better to call it a children's home, or just a home.'*

Lived experience of care: the term used for children who are in or have previous experience of care, *'Even though those of us who are in care, who are leaving care, and who have left care all share a common experience, we are all different. We are all unique. It's not right to think of us as one group, all with the exact same experience of growing up. No matter what age we are, or what stage of our care journey we are at, we are all 'young people with lived experience of care'. By saying I am a young person with lived experience of care, you show that you see me as an individual, whose life story includes time spent living in care.'*

1 *The A – Z of Care in Our Words, VOYPIC: Vocabulary of Young People in Care* available at <https://www.voypic.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Language-of-Care.pdf>

CHIEF INSPECTOR'S FOREWORD

Effective intervention and diversion from offending behaviour and risk of harm can change a child's life. Even one positive role model can make the difference between a child achieving their potential and a life of offending.

We live in a community that has one of the lowest ages of criminal responsibility in Europe. We also live in a community that is in transition and still bears the legacy of paramilitary and organised crime groups and other criminals who are ready to exploit our children and involve them in crime.

This inspection report examines the vital work of the Youth Justice Service in the Youth Justice Agency and the various access routes to the child-centered intervention services they deliver. Some children referred to the Youth Justice Service are becoming increasingly younger, have complex issues and trauma in their lives including lived experience of care, domestic abuse in their home, be neurodiverse or have speech, language and learning challenges. They are spending their childhood in a world influenced by social media and peer pressure having experienced the COVID-19 pandemic, a disrupted education and limited opportunities to socialise and form friendships.

Parents, carers and professionals face challenges in keeping children safe and managing risks of offending.

Youth Justice Services work with criminal justice system, education and social services partners to support children who have multiple needs and are entitled to accessible pathways and interventions that support opportunities for change so they can make better choices. They also support victims and their journey in the criminal justice system.

The work of the Youth Justice Agency and its staff has been pivotal in reducing the number of children prosecuted in the Youth Court with some ending up in detention. Without effective early intervention services more children will be added to the 400 plus children who currently have cases outstanding and may not have access to services to help prevent further offending for some time. A year is a long time in childhood and prompt, quality services are critical to support children and their parents and carers.

I have heard concerns that referring to and involving children with statutory intervention services meant they were unnecessarily drawn into the 'formal' criminal justice system and there was Youth Justice Agency scope creep. This is an area that warrants ongoing scrutiny.

I hope the findings and assessments in this report help inform while also encouraging the required review and better monitoring by the Youth Justice Agency of its work in the area of Earlier Stage Diversion.

This report makes five strategic and five operational recommendations aimed at building on the Youth Justice Agency 'Children First' model while reinforcing the need for the Youth Justice Agency to be an integral part of a shared vision for youth justice in Northern Ireland and meaningful strategic partnerships that deliver synergy, particularly with the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland.

My thanks to the Youth Justice Agency, particularly the dedicated Youth Justice Service staff, who engaged constructively in this inspection and whose commitment ensured the fieldwork could take place.

Jacqui Durkin

Chief Inspector of Criminal Justice
in Northern Ireland

September 2024



Thanks also to the Police Service of Northern Ireland Officers, Department of Justice officials and all stakeholders who engaged with Inspectors.

My particular thanks to the children, parents and carers and *Experts by Experience* who took the time to speak with Inspectors about their experience of being supported by the Youth Justice Agency. I am also grateful to the victims who shared their experiences of Youth Justice Agency support with Inspectors.

Dr Roisin Devlin was the Lead inspector supported by Inspector Maureen Erne, I am grateful for their professionalism and commitment to this inspection.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Northern Ireland the Youth Justice Services Directorate within the Youth Justice Agency provided a range of interventions to children following referral for offending behaviour. It operated with a total of 121 staff across five Teams in the Belfast, Eastern, Northern, Southern and Western Areas of Northern Ireland. This inspection examined its approach to youth interventions. Many strengths in how the organisation supported children, families and victims were found. Recommendations aimed at strengthening strategic ownership and oversight of the overall vision for youth justice and further improve the high-quality services delivered by the Youth Justice Agency are made.

A child-centred approach guided the delivery of youth interventions. The Youth Justice Agency had dedicated staff across all aspects of its Youth Justice Services Directorate. Staff demonstrated motivation and understanding of what was required to help children, families and victims. They were solution-focused, trauma-informed and responsive to offending related needs. Workforce constraints presented the greatest threat to the Youth Justice Services Directorate and its sustainability was being tested. Strong leadership from the Youth Justice Agency in partnership with the Department of Justice was needed to ensure retention of a highly skilled, child-centred workforce. Strategic oversight by the Youth Justice Agency of the Youth Justice Service Directorate's case work quality and trends was also needed to support staff delivering personalised and responsive services for all children.

A new Youth Justice Agency 'Children First' model of practice guided its services and policies. Partnerships in local areas were formed and supported by individual

Youth Justice Services staff. Co-located Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services had brought important benefits in accessing responsive mental health provision. However, this was only available to children within two Health and Social Care Trust pilot areas. A strategic profile providing an overview of and future plan for the organisation's services and partnerships, as well as a comprehensive training needs assessment were important areas for development.

Participation of children, parents and carers was a key strategic priority for the Youth Justice Agency Board, and a new Participation Officer role had been appointed. Children, family and carers spoke highly of the Youth Justice Services' staff, and the support provided. Victims were also complimentary about the assistance from the Youth Justice Services, which had helped build trust and confidence and reduce trauma when engaging with the justice system. More accessible information at the early stages of entering the criminal justice process was highlighted by children and families.

Files reviewed showed strengths and areas for improvement in relation to how well the Youth Justice Agency supported children's needs and safety and managed risk of harm to sustain desistance. Complexities in the lives of children referred to the Youth Justice Agency were apparent, particularly in cases where offending had been related to living in care or where children were transitioning to adult services. Overall, the Youth Justice Agency needed a process to quality assure its case work to support learning and delivery of high-quality services. An evaluation of the new Youth Justice Agency needs assessment tool was required.

There were excellent relationships between Youth Justice Agency Area Teams and statutory partners including the Education Authority, Health and Social Care Trusts, the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland and local Police Service of Northern Ireland Youth Diversion Officers. Strategic engagement between the Youth Justice Agency and the Police Service of Northern Ireland was a gap. Improved understanding and planning for partnership work between the two organisations was needed. There was also an opportunity to review the landscape for community resolutions applicable to children, to examine equity in use and quality of referrals and understand the impact of Police Service of Northern Ireland plans to extend Community Resolution Notices to a wider range of offences.

In 2017 the Youth Justice Agency proposed the development of Earlier Stage Interventions to help support children outside the formal youth justice system

and a vision for this had formed a key element of its Corporate and Business Plans. At the time of the inspection these interventions were delivered through Earlier Stage Diversion. Inspectors found practice had developed iteratively in response to need in local areas. It was viewed positively by statutory partners and children and families. However, strategic grip needed improvement. The Youth Justice Agency needed to ensure children's desistance needs and safety of the child and others was supported in all types of cases referred. It was important that referrals were within scope in accordance with the child's best interests. Independent evaluation of the Children's Diversion Forum had been recently commissioned and this was welcomed. Consideration of opportunities for cross-Departmental resource and service provision by the Voluntary and Community Sector within early intervention would be important.

Data about the operation of the youth justice system had been published, however, there was no evidence that the relationship between datasets was analysed to understand implications for how the system operated overall. There was a solid evidence base to show that solutions to drive improvement for particular groups of children were needed. This included a small number who continually reoffended, those within criminal justice who had lived experience of care and very young children. While the Strategic Framework for Youth Justice provided important direction, the evidence-base for some proposals had not been demonstrated and the Northern Ireland Audit Office call for a transformative strategy remained.

RECOMMENDATIONS

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 1

Within six months of report publication, the Youth Justice Agency, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Department of Justice agree and implement an improvement plan that ensures a shared vision, strategic collaboration and ownership of the vision for youth justice in Northern Ireland with synergy across all relevant strategies, and an effective monitoring framework to ensure the vision is achieved.

Paragraph 2.6

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 2

Within six months of report publication, the Youth Justice Agency should develop effective and regular strategic scrutiny of Youth Justice Services Directorate case work quality and workload trends.

Paragraph 2.9

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 3

Within three months of report publication, the Youth Justice Agency in partnership with the Department of Justice should review the Executive Agency Framework Document to ensure Youth Justice Services Directorate operations are reflected and linked to the provision of high-quality services and retention of a highly skilled child focused workforce.

Paragraph 2.14

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 4

Within six months of report publication, the Youth Justice Agency should develop a strategic profile of its partnerships and an action plan to monitor and improve access to interventions and services across its Youth Justice Services.

Paragraph 2.28

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 5

Within six months of report publication, the Youth Justice Agency, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland should agree an action plan to evaluate the approach to Community Resolution Notices for children. This should ensure regular quality assurance, monitor equity in use, and assess how the needs of children, families and victims are met.

Paragraph 3.54

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 1

Within six months of report publication, the Youth Justice Agency should develop a training needs analysis of current and future training needs to ensure it supports continued delivery of high-quality, personalised and responsive services for all children by its Youth Justice Services Directorate.

Paragraph 2.19

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 2

Within six months of report publication, the Youth Justice Agency should develop a process for regular quality assurance of Youth Justice Services Directorate case work.

Paragraph 2.20

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 3

Within six months of report publication, the Youth Justice Agency should evaluate its new Needs Assessment to include an examination of how well it supports analysis of desistance needs and the safety of the child and others.

Paragraph 3.48

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 4

Within six months of report publication, the Youth Justice Agency should review the approach to Earlier Stage Diversion referrals to ensure all are within scope, and that analysis and recording of offending needs and the safety of the child and others is effective in supporting sustainable desistance.

Paragraph 3.66

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 5

Within three months of report publication, the Youth Justice Agency in partnership with the Probation Board for Northern Ireland should update its guidance on Juvenile Justice Centre Order supervision and develop a mechanism for joint quality assurance of resettlement cases.

Paragraph 3.74

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

YOUTH INTERVENTIONS

- 1.1 In Northern Ireland, the Youth Justice Services Directorate within the Youth Justice Agency (YJA) delivered community-based youth interventions. The YJA was established on 1 April 2003 as an Executive Agency of the Northern Ireland Office. It became an Executive Agency of the Department of Justice (DoJ) on 12 April 2010 when justice functions were devolved from Westminster to the Northern Ireland Assembly. Its focus in delivering youth interventions was '*...to ensure children are exited from the youth justice system at the earliest point with appropriate support and to deliver improved outcomes for young people, families, victims and communities.*'²
- 1.2 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), a legally binding international treaty, set out the rights every child was entitled to without discrimination. Guidance for child justice systems and the development of comprehensive child justice policy, including youth interventions, were outlined by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (the Committee) in its General Comment Number 24.³ This reflected contemporary developments since its first such commentary in 2007. It noted evidence that crime committed by children tended to decrease after the adoption of systems promoting the child's sense of dignity and worth.
- 1.3 Acknowledging protection of public safety as a legitimate criminal justice system aim, it reminded States that, '*children differ from adults in their physical and psychological development. Such differences constitute the basis for the recognition of lesser culpability, and for a separate system with a differentiated, individualized approach.*' The importance of prevention and early intervention with protection of rights at all stages of the system was emphasised.
- 1.4 States required child-friendly interventions which were evidence based, led by individualised assessments, and delivered through a multi-disciplinary approach. Specialised services and effective interagency co-ordination were required. Active involvement of non-governmental organisations in the development and implementation of comprehensive child justice policy was urged and resourced as necessary where appropriate.

² Youth Justice Agency, *Annual Report and Accounts 2022-23*, available at

<https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/publications/youth-justice-agency-annual-reports-and-accounts>

³ Committee on the Rights of the Child, *General comment No.24 (2019) on children's rights in the child justice system*, 18 September 2019 available at https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC/C/GC/24&Lang=en

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC/C/GC/24&Lang=en

1.5 Interventions that avoided resorting to judicial proceedings and referred children away from the formal criminal justice system were supported. Setting out conditions for diversion, the Committee stated, *'The completion of the diversion should result in a definite and final closure of the case. Although confidential records of diversion can be kept for administrative, review, investigative and research purposes, they should not be viewed as criminal convictions or result in criminal records.'*

1.6 Within the context of judicial proceedings, States were advised to adopt social and educational measures as the basis for interventions with well-trained probation or other similar staff to provide guidance, supervision, community monitoring and the possibility of early release from detention. At the same time, diversion was encouraged from the earliest opportunity and at various stages throughout the justice process even after judicial proceedings had commenced.

LOCAL CONTEXT

Age of criminal responsibility

1.7 The age of criminal responsibility influenced how meaningful implementation of the Committee's guidance could be. It encouraged States, *'to take note of recent scientific findings, and to increase their minimum age accordingly, to at least 14 years of age.'* Additionally noted was, *'...developmental and neuroscience evidence [...] that adolescent brains continue to mature even beyond the teenage years, affecting certain kinds of decision-making. Therefore, the Committee commends States parties that have a higher minimum age, for instance 15 or 16 years of age [...].'*⁴

1.8 The low age of criminal responsibility in the United Kingdom had drawn sustained disapproval from the Committee. The DoJ consulted on raising the age in Northern Ireland to 14.⁵ It noted, *'[w]hilst efforts have been made by Justice Ministers, most recently by Minister Long, to secure cross-Executive agreement to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility, there has been insufficient support to progress this issue to date.'*⁶

1.9 While this inspection examined youth interventions for children from age ten, the reality of this overarching context was important. As explained by a parent who met with Inspectors *'[my child] is maturing, going through these years of development. For much of the last few years it was a race against nature, how quickly can [the] brain develop before [they do] something particularly bad that would impact the rest of their life...'*

4 Committee on the Rights of the Child, *Concluding observations on the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland*, 22 June 2023 available at https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2FC%2FGBR%2FCO%2F6-7&Lang=en.

5 DoJ news item and links to access associated documents available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/news/department-justice-publishes-consultation-report-minimum-age-criminal-responsibility>.

6 DoJ, *Public Consultation on Increasing the Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility in Northern Ireland from 10 Years to 14 Years*, October 2022 available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-increasing-minimum-age-criminal-responsibility-ni>.

Youth Justice Review and beyond

- 1.10 The Youth Justice Review 2011 recommended extensive revision of the youth justice system in Northern Ireland. Implementation was assessed by Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJI) in 2013⁷ and 2015.⁸ Various factors indicated that momentum had been lost, *'[o]f the 45 accepted recommendations and sub-recommendations assessed, 26.5 have been achieved (59%) and 18.5 not achieved (41%). This fell short of the Ministerial target to achieve 90% of the YJR [Youth Justice Review] recommendations by 2014.'*
- 1.11 Gaps in evidence to assess the impact and cost effectiveness of youth interventions were highlighted by the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) in 2017.⁹ It made various recommendations including better co-ordination of youth justice services, policy and interventions through a specific Departmental Strategy. In a 2020 follow-up, further development of the new DoJ *Transitioning Youth Justice* Strategy was recommended and improved performance reporting to ensure greater focus on how YJA work impacted children and families.¹⁰ At the time of this inspection, the DoJ/YJA Strategic Framework on Youth Justice had replaced the *Transitioning Youth Justice Strategy*.
- 1.12 *Tracing the Review* was commissioned by Include Youth, NIACRO, Children's Law Centre (CLC) and Voice Of Young People In Care Ltd (VOYPIC).¹¹ Fuelled by concern *'...that the overall trajectory of youth justice policy lacks transparency and strategic direction,'* it tracked developments in youth justice from 2011 to 2021. Key findings related to better promoting children's rights and an overarching concern about a lack of evidence for early interventions within criminal justice and longer-term outcomes for children.
- 1.13 Recommendations relevant to youth interventions included: a comprehensive properly resourced cross-departmental Early Intervention Strategy, early interventions in line with the statutory duty to co-operate in the Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 and adequate resources for the voluntary and community sector (VCS) to provide this including non-criminal justice restorative interventions. Mechanisms to evaluate impacts over time were also urged. These recommendations had not been implemented at the time of this inspection. However, reviews of children's services and ongoing work to deliver and/or consult on proposals for change had continued relevance.

7 CJI, *Monitoring of Progress on Implementation of the Youth Justice Review Recommendations, December 2013* available at <https://www.cjini.org/getattachment/c1e0f527-fef3-439d-a4aa-a6f414a7ff0d/picture.aspx>.

8 CJI, *Monitoring of Progress on Implementation of the Youth Justice Review Recommendations, December 2015* available at <https://www.cjini.org/getattachment/355260de-ceb0-43f8-ad83-e91fee363dd1/report.aspx>.

9 NIAO, *Managing children who offend*, 6 July 2017 available at https://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/files/niauditoffice/media-files/174770%20NIAO%20Managing%20children%20who%20offend_Fnl%20LowRs_5.pdf.

10 NIAO, *Managing children who offend: follow-up review*, 1 December 2020 available at https://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/files/niauditoffice/media-files/244345%20Managing%20children%20who%20offend-%20follow%20up%20review%20Report_%28Cmbnd%20Final%29.pdf.

11 Carr, N. & McAlister, S. (2021) *Tracing the Review. Developments in Youth Justice in Northern Ireland 2011-2021, Include Youth, NIACRO, CLC and VOYPIC*. Available at https://pureadmin.qub.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/263877347/TRACING_THE_REVIEW_PDF.pdf.

Reviews of Children's Regional Facilities and Children's Services

- 1.14 A review of children's regional facilities encompassing the Secure Care Centre at Lakewood, the Juvenile Justice Centre (JJC) at Woodlands, the Donard residential facility at Glenmona and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Unit at Beechcroft had the potential to positively impact the accessibility and nature of youth interventions in the community.¹² The subsequent plan to establish a Regional Care and Justice Campus included proposals for a Northern Ireland Framework for Integrated Therapeutic Care to be adopted within the Campus and community.
- 1.15 Proposals had, however, been overshadowed by funding concerns. For children in particular, the Committee had urged withdrawal of the entire Northern Ireland budget in favour of a child rights-based approach.¹³ The CLC had been recently granted leave to apply for judicial review of the process enacting the Northern Ireland Budget (No.2) Act 2023,¹⁴ and previously signalled concerns about proposals for a regional campus because '*...existing community-based services are not sufficient for the needs of children and young people in this jurisdiction.*'¹⁵
- 1.16 The goal of a regional campus supported by co-ordinated community-based services accessible to all children remained, '*Both departments are clear that, in order to fully deliver a Care and Justice Campus as envisaged by the consultation document, services in the community are as important—indeed, in many cases more important—than those available for children and young people admitted to the Secure Care Centre.*'¹⁶ Existing services' accessibility and gaps were being mapped at the time of the inspection.
- 1.17 More recently a seminal review of children's social care services by Professor Ray Jones had been commissioned by the Department of Health (DoH).¹⁷ Informed by children and families' lived experiences, it challenged the DoH to consider a region-wide children and families Arms-Length Body with children's social care and allied services. A Minster for Children and families driving the multi-agency collaboration envisaged by the Children's Services Cooperation (Northern Ireland) Act 2015 also formed part of this vision.

12 See the Regional Facilities for Children and Young People Programme available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/articles/regional-facilities-children-and-young-people-programme>.

13 Recommendation 11(d) *Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 22 June 2023* available at https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2F%2FGBR%2FCO%2F6-7&Lang=en

14 *In the Matter of An Application by the Children's Law Centre for Leave to Apply for Judicial Review [2024] NIKB 4* available at <https://www.judiciaryni.gov.uk/cases/leave-to-apply-for-judicial-review>

15 *Response to DoH/DoJ Consultation on the Establishment of a Regional Care and Justice Campus, Children's Law Centre February 2021* [get weblink]

16 *DoH/DoJ Establishment of a Regional Care and Justice Campus: Consultation Analysis Report, June 2021* available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/ecjc-consultation-analysis-report.pdf>.

17 *The Northern Ireland Review of Children's Social Care Services Report, Professor Ray Jones, June 2023*, available at <https://www.cscsreviewni.net/publications/report-independent-review-childrens-social-care-services-northern-ireland>.

1.18 Advocating for effective implementation, *the Reimagine Children's Collective* led by charities working with children and families, called for improved collaboration, better use of available resources and effective use of data.¹⁸ It agreed with the recommendation for an Arm's Length Body. At the time of inspection, proposals on next steps arising from the Independent Review of Children's Social Care Services were not yet available. However, the YJA was highlighted along with the Education Welfare Service, and the Education Authority (EA) Youth Services within the options for an Arm's Length Body. It was therefore important context in conducting this inspection.

THE YOUTH JUSTICE AGENCY

Remit

1.19 The YJA aimed to make communities safer by helping children to stop offending. Its remit was related to the aims of the Youth Justice System, which had been set out in the Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 (as amended):

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- (1) The principal aim of the youth justice system is to protect the public by preventing offending by children.
- (2) All persons and bodies exercising functions in relation to the youth justice system must have regard to that principal aim in exercising their functions, with a view (in particular) to encouraging children to recognise the effects of crime and to take responsibility for their actions.
- (3) But all such persons and bodies must also—
 - (a) have the best interests of children as a primary consideration; and
 - (b) have regard to the welfare of children affected by the exercise of their functions (and to the general principle that any delay in dealing with children is likely to prejudice their welfare), with a view (in particular) to furthering their personal, social and educational development.

1.20 The YJA supported children who had offended between the ages of 10 to 17 years old with a range of statutory and non-statutory interventions. In practice, it worked with children older than 17 years in certain circumstances including where the length of the child's order extended beyond this age.

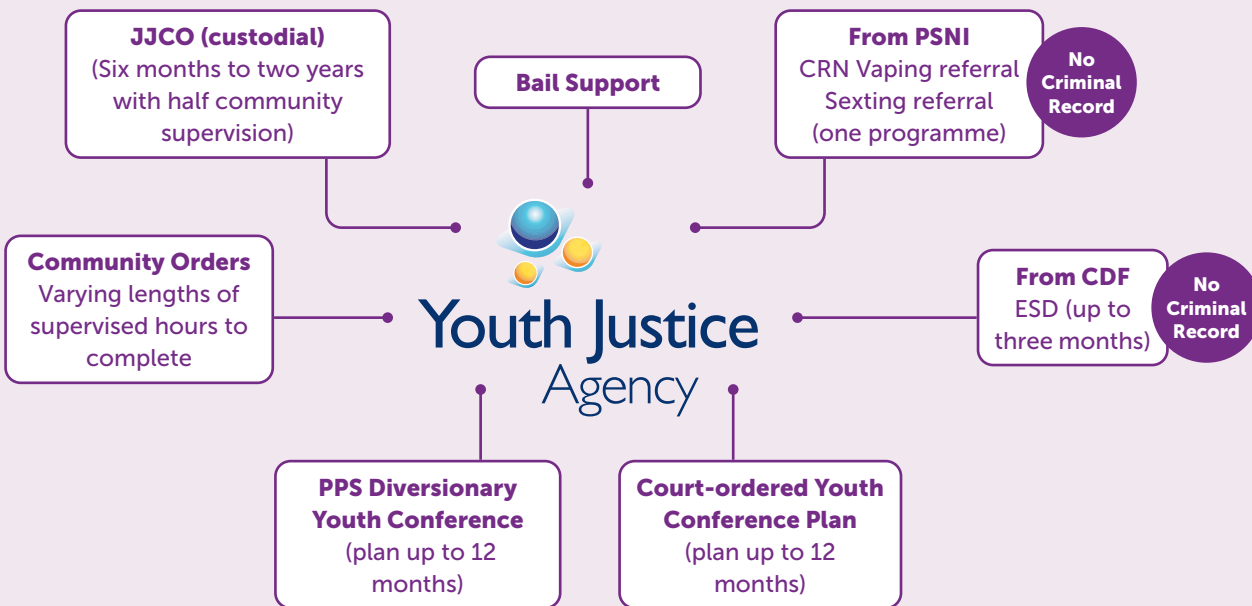
1.21 The YJA had a Youth Justice Services Directorate, a Custodial Service Directorate and a Corporate Services Directorate. This inspection focused on the work of the Youth Justice Services Directorate, which delivered community-based interventions.

18 *Reimagining Children's Social Care Services in Northern Ireland*, by *The Reimagine Children's Collective*, November 2023 available at <https://includeyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/ReimaginingChildrensSocialCareFINALNov23.pdf>.

Types of referral

- 1.22 There was a range of community-based referral types. Statutory referrals (those set out in legislation) consisted of Youth Conference Orders (YCOs) and Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland (PPS) Diversionary Youth Conferences. A small number of community orders were supervised by the YJA, as well as the community element of custodial Juvenile Justice Centre Orders (JJCOs). The YJA supervised these in partnership with the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNi). Court-ordered and diversionary PPS conferences formed the greatest proportion of YJA referrals. All statutory referrals resulted in a criminal record although Diversionary Youth Conferences were an out-of-Court disposal.
- 1.23 Non-statutory referrals, also known as out-of-Court disposals, included Community Resolution Notice (CRN) programmes, and Sexting, and Vaping Referral scheme interventions. These were referred to the YJA from the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). Early Stage Diversion (ESD) referrals were made to the YJA through a multi-agency Children's Diversion Forum (CDF). It included the YJA, the PSNI, Social Services and the EA and supported *'...children on the cusp of or involved in the early stages of offending to help divert them from the formal criminal justice system.'*¹⁹ These ESD interventions had not attracted a criminal record.
- 1.24 Bail support²⁰ formed an element of YJA referrals. It also undertook voluntary work with some children to help with moving on from its Youth Justice Services (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Types of YJA Referral



19 Brown, T, Northern Ireland Youth Justice Agency Workload Statistics 2022/23, 14 September 2023, NISRA / DoJ, available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6502ace55b0738000d029e6d/Youth_Justice_Agency_workload_stats_2022_23.pdf

20 Bail support was offered as alternative to remand in custody in certain cases.

1.25 A Schools Programme that included information sessions to 13,258 children across 56 schools in 2022-23, had been delivered by the Youth Justice Services Directorate. CJI has not inspected this aspect of its work. It was reported in the YJA Annual Report and Accounts pursuant to the YJA Business Plan objectives.²¹

Youth Justice Service Directorate staffing

1.26 The Youth Justice Services Directorate had an opening budget of £5,965,000 for 2023-24 of which £5,083,000 was staff costs and £882,000 non-staff. Its forecast budget was £5,923,000 (£4,936,000 staff costs; and £9,987,000 non-staff). It had a total of 115.82 full time equivalent staff, and a headcount of 121. It reported to the YJA Chief Executive and Board and was headed by a Director with five Assistant Directors assigned to the five YJA areas: Belfast, Eastern, Northern, Southern, and Western. There were seven Business Managers (two in Belfast and Western, and one in the other three); eight Area Managers (three in Belfast, two in Western and one in the other three). The remaining staff team was made up of Practitioners, Co-ordinators, and Administrative staff (see Table 1).

Table 1: Youth Justice Services Directorate Staff

Youth Justice Services Directorate	Full time equivalent	Headcount
Grade 7 (Director)	1.00	1.00
DP (Assistant Director)	5.00	5.00
SO (Business Manager)	6.78	7.00
SO (Area Manager)	8.00	8.00
EO1 (Practitioner)	46.87	48.00
EO1 (Co-ordinator)	26.95	28.00
AO	20.23	23.00
AA	1.00	1.00
	115.82	121.00

1.27 Youth Justice Services practice staff were Practitioners and Co-ordinators and included 30 Social Work and 31 Youth Work qualified staff. Youth Justice Services had experienced a consistent vacancy rate among its practice staff of between approximately 8% and 12%. There were 11 practice staff vacancies in March 2024.

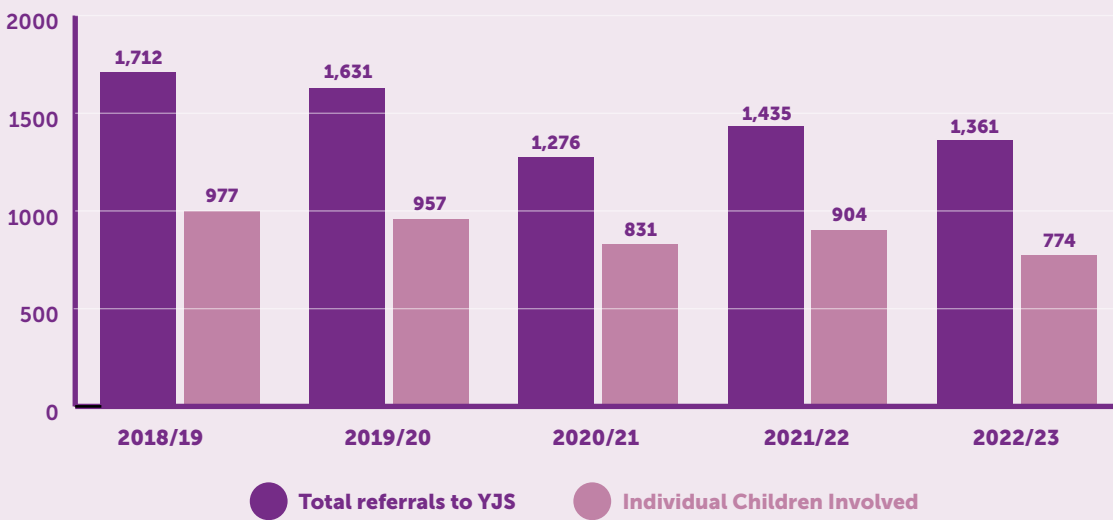
1.28 Co-ordinators were responsible for the delivery of Youth Conferences and Practitioners supervised intervention work with children. Children referred to the YJA for a Court-ordered or Diversionary Youth Conference therefore engaged with a Co-ordinator for Conference completion, whereas the Youth Conference Plan was delivered by a Practitioner. Interventions for other types of referrals for example Community Orders or ESD, were delivered and supervised by Practitioners.

21 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64ba43282059dc00125d2747/E02923152_-_Youth_Justice_Agency_-_Annual_Report_and_Accounts_2022-23_A4_ACCESSIBLE.pdf

Workload patterns

1.29 Five-year trends showed referrals to the Youth Justice Services Directorate had decreased, although the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and criminal justice system recovery continued. As the YJA noted, 'Neither the numbers of children nor the number of referrals have reached the pre-Covid 19 levels in 2019-20 of 957 and 1,631 respectively.'²² (see Figure 2)

Figure 2: Individual children referred and total referrals to YJS, 2018-19 to 2022-23



1.30 Its workload had also changed in relation to the proportions of different referral types. This showed a decrease in Court-ordered referrals over the last five years, the proportion of Diversionary Conferences ranged from 45.7% to 47.6%, and ESD²³ (encompassing CRN Intervention Referrals, Sexting intervention referrals, Vaping Intervention Referrals, and CDF Referrals) had increased overall. Community Orders²⁴ and other referrals²⁵ made up the remainder (see Figure 3).

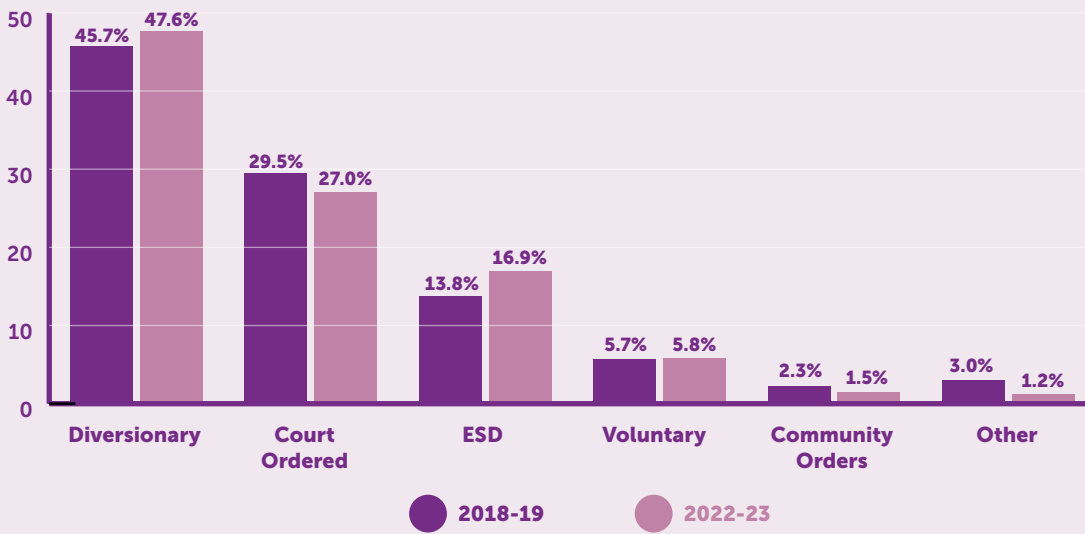
22 Brown, T, Northern Ireland Youth Justice Agency Workload Statistics 2022/23, 14 September 2023, NISRA / DoJ, available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6502ace55b0738000d029e6d/Youth_Justice_Agency_workload_stats_2022_23.pdf

23 Brown, T, Northern Ireland Youth Justice Agency Workload Statistics 2022/23, 14 September 2023, NISRA / DoJ, available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6502ace55b0738000d029e6d/Youth_Justice_Agency_workload_stats_2022_23.pdf.

24 Community order referrals include attendance centre orders, community responsibility orders and reparation order.

25 Other referrals include JJCOs where YJS are involved in supervising the community element, reducing offending programmes, bail support cases and work with PBNI.

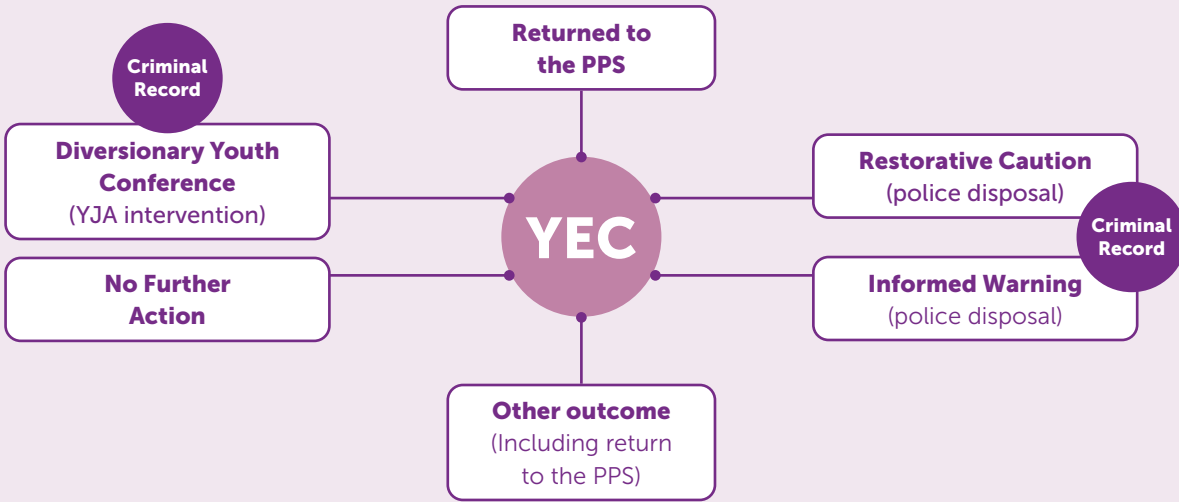
Figure 3: YJS referral type as a proportion of all referrals, 2018-19 to 2022-23



Sources of referral

- 1.31 Perhaps due to its changing nature, the out-of-Court referral landscape was considered complex. Inspectors spoke with different partners and stakeholders who described it as confusing and difficult to grasp.
- 1.32 Diversionary Youth Conferences were referred by the PPS directly to the YJA, or through a Youth Engagement Clinic (YEC). The YJA workload data (see Figure 3) included Diversionary Youth Conferences arising from both referral routes. In some cases, the Court directed a conference plan but reverted to the PPS for reconsideration of diversion. This occurred if, for example, the child had not engaged in a YEC or new information pertinent to the PPS decision was received. In this scenario the referral for a Diversionary Youth Conference still progressed through a YEC or the PPS directly, but inevitably took longer.
- 1.33 YECs operated across Northern Ireland providing information to children, parents or carers about options following referral to the PPS for a prosecution decision. A YEC was attended by a PSNI Youth Diversion Officer (YDO), a YJA Practitioner, the child and a family member/supporter. The child’s legal representative could also attend. In addition to a Diversionary Youth Conference, possible YEC outcomes included an informed warning, a restorative caution (both police led), or No Further Action. Referral back to PPS was also possible (see Figure 4).

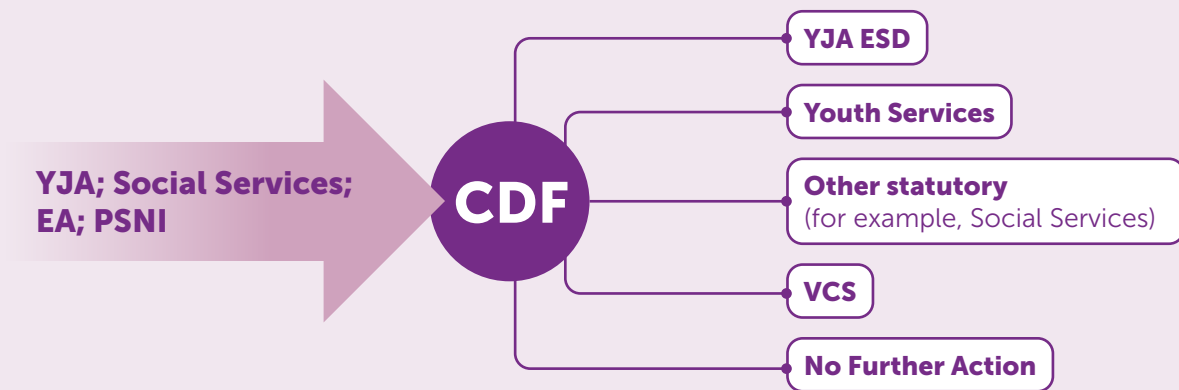
Figure 4: Youth Engagement Clinic (YEC) Outcomes



1.34 CDF referrals originated from the YJA or another statutory partner (the PSNI, Social Services or the EA). With the consent of the child and parent or carer, the YJA referred to the CDF after delivery of an out-of-Court disposal including a CRN programme or a vaping or sexting programme if further support was needed.

1.35 Police offered referral to the FDF in various circumstances including on delivery of an Informed Warning, Restorative Caution, or No Further Action.

Figure 5: CDF Referrals and outcomes



1.36 As Figure 5 illustrates, while referral to the YJA was a possible CDF outcome, no further action or referral to other services were potential alternatives. Monitoring of CDF and ESD referrals is considered further in the Delivery and Outcomes Chapters.

CJI Inspections

- 1.37 From its inception, CJI had undertaken inspections related to youth interventions. Inspections of Woodlands JJC commenced in 2004 and continued routinely in discharge of CJI's membership of the National Preventive Mechanism.²⁶ In addition to assessing implementation of the Youth Justice Review recommendations, CJI had inspected the former Youth Conference Service in 2008 and subsequently the Effectiveness of Youth Conferencing in 2015 with a positive Follow-Up Review in 2019.²⁷ Youth Diversion had been inspected in 2011²⁸ and Early Youth Interventions in 2012.²⁹
- 1.38 More recent thematic inspections that encompassed aspects of the YJA included CJI's examination of the criminal justice system response to child sexual exploitation,³⁰ and its treatment of females in conflict with the law.³¹ Among relevant findings, the YJA was asked to develop an action plan for the establishment of an up-to-date profile of children engaging with it to enable personalised and gender responsive services.
- 1.39 CJI inspections focused on Woodlands JJC, and more broadly on implementation of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Section 75) by the criminal justice system, highlighted scrutiny was required to understand the reasons for a high proportion of Catholic children in custody and children entering the justice system from care.³² Subsequent DoJ commissioned research by Queen's University of Belfast (QUB) on over-representation in the youth justice system is highlighted in the Outcomes chapter of this report.³³

26 Inspections of Woodlands JJC are undertaken by CJI, ETI and RQIA. CJI is one of four designated NPM independent bodies in Northern Ireland along with the RQIA, NI Policing Board Independent Custody Visting Scheme, and the Independent Monitoring Boards. Information about the NPM is available at www.nationalpreventivemechanism.org.uk.

27 CJI, *Inspection of the Youth Conference Service in Northern Ireland, February 2008* available at [https://www.cjini.org/getattachment/f3cad34a-3f8f-49ef-8e02-131d85fa0ff4/Youth-Conference-Service-\(February-2008\).aspx](https://www.cjini.org/getattachment/f3cad34a-3f8f-49ef-8e02-131d85fa0ff4/Youth-Conference-Service-(February-2008).aspx); CJI, *The Effectiveness of Youth Conferencing, March 2015*, and CJI *The Effectiveness of Youth Conferencing Follow-Up Review, April 2019* both available at <https://www.cjini.org/TheInspections/Action-Plan-Reviews-Inspection-Follow-Up-Review/2019/April-June/Youth-Conferencing-1>.

28 CJI, *Youth Diversion, July 2011* available at <https://www.cjini.org/getattachment/2c445c8e-510f-420a-bff4-a9072157e4e4/Youth-Diverson.aspx>.

29 CJI, *Early Youth Interventions, July 2012* available at <https://www.cjini.org/TheInspections/Inspection-Reports/2012>.

30 CJI, *Child Sexual Exploitation in Northern Ireland, June 2020* available at <https://www.cjini.org/TheInspections/Inspection-Reports/2020/April-June/Child-Sexual-Exploitation-in-Northern-Ireland>.

31 CJI, *How the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland Treats Females in Conflict with the Law, November 2021* available at <https://www.cjini.org/TheInspections/Inspection-Reports/2021/October-December/Females-in-Conflict-with-the-Law>.

32 CJI, *An Inspection of the Implementation of Section 75(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, September 2018* available at <https://www.cjini.org/TheInspections/Inspection-Reports/2018/July-September/Equality-and-Diversity-within-the-Criminal-Justice>.

33 McAlister, S., McNamee, C., Corr, ML., Butler, M, *Over-representation in the youth justice system in Northern Ireland: full report, March 2022 DoJ / QUB* available at https://pureadmin.qub.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/377036690/Over_rep_in_YJS_Main_Report_Final_March_2022.pdf.

THE INSPECTION

Framework and standards

- 1.40 This was CJJ's first inspection focusing exclusively on youth interventions provided by the YJA Youth Justice Services Directorate. The CJJ Framework for Inspection was used to examine Strategy and Governance, Delivery and Outcomes.
- 1.41 The approach to inspect Strategy and Governance, and Delivery was adapted from His Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) of Probation's Standards for Inspecting Youth Offending Services.³⁴ Inspectors liaised with HMI Probation colleagues to inform CJJ's approach and consulted with the YJA to adapt the standards for applicability to YJA work. The standards used for this inspection are included in Appendix 2. As the approach had been used for the first time, reviewing suitability with the YJA will be included as part of CJJ's regular post-inspection learning.
- 1.42 As set out in Chapter 2 Strategy and Governance, standards relating to governance and leadership, staff, partnerships and services and information and facilities were assessed. Chapter 3 on Delivery reports on an examination of a sample of Court-ordered conference cases and Diversionary Youth Conferences, as well as ESD policy and provision. The Outcomes Chapter considers official data on the operation of the youth justice system and performance management information from the YJA.

Case files reviewed

- 1.43 Case files reviewed were not representative of all YJA cases but instead sampled from a cohort of referrals. Diversionary Youth Conference and ESD cases were selected from referrals made to the YJA during a one-week period in January 2023, six months prior to notification of the inspection. Court-ordered referrals were mostly sampled from cases referred during September 2022, nine months prior to inspection notification (one was sampled from the January 2023 cohort). This ensured Court-ordered conferences that had concluded by the time of the inspection. At least one Court-ordered and one diversionary conference from each YJA area was sampled.³⁵
- 1.44 A total of 16 case files relating to children referred to the YJA Youth Justice Services were reviewed. Most cases sampled were Court and PPS referred, as these made up the greatest proportion of Youth Justice Services Directorate workload. Seven Court referrals, six Diversionary Youth Conferences, two ESD referrals and one resettlement case were assessed. 16 staff took part in an interview in relation to 12 of the cases reviewed. This included a combination of Youth Justice Practitioners, Youth Conference Co-ordinators, and a Manager (where the Practitioner had been unavailable).

34 HM Inspectorate of Probation, *Inspection standards for youth offending services, May 2021 Effective from July 2021* available at <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2023/11/Standards-for-inspection-youth-offending-services-English.pdf>.

35 There were five Area Teams in Northern Ireland – Belfast, Eastern, South Eastern, Southern, and Western.

1.45 Findings are not characteristic of all community-based cases referred because a representative sample was not used. However, themes are presented according to Inspectors' assessment of the key strengths and areas for improvement in relation to how desistance needs, the safety of the child and others were met across all of the files examined. The assessment, planning and implementation stage of each case was examined. Court-ordered cases included an assessment of how well intervention work was reviewed.

Interviews, focus groups and observations

1.46 Fieldwork for the inspection was undertaken with the YJA between August and October 2023 and with justice and other statutory partners between November and December 2023. All YJA area offices were visited, and a range of staff met with Inspectors. A staff survey was also provided to Youth Justice Services Directorate staff.

1.47 Children, parents and carers and a small number of victims met with Inspectors during visits to different YJA areas, which the YJA Participation Officer and staff facilitated. The YJA parent and carers' group welcomed Inspectors to attend one of their meetings to help inform scoping for the inspection. During both scoping and inspection fieldwork, *YJA Experts by Experience* provided their expertise and reflections for the inspection. Inspectors were grateful for all the time, knowledge and insight provided by the children, their parents and carers, the *Experts by Experience* and those victims and their supporters who met with us.

1.48 Inspectors observed a Youth Court and met with members of the Judiciary. The DoJ, the PSNI, the PPS and the PBNi were among the justice partners who engaged with us. Other stakeholders included representatives from the Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts and the EA. Voluntary organisations and academics met with us during scoping or as part of the inspection fieldwork. More detailed methodology is contained in Appendix 1.

Report structure

1.49 For the most part, the report identifies strengths and areas for improvement from the inspection findings. Given the risk of identification, case examples have not been used. However, general examples of good practice have been highlighted. Anonymised extracts from interviews have been used particularly so that children, families and victims' voices have been included.

CHAPTER 2: STRATEGY AND GOVERNANCE

GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

Governance and leadership supports and promotes the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children.

Strengths

- 2.1 There was a DoJ/YJA Strategic Framework for Youth Justice which outlined the wider youth justice landscape, the role of the YJA and how it worked with children and young people.³⁶ Its four overarching outcomes (children are exited from the system at the earliest point; positive outcomes for those affected by offending; custody as a last resort; and working in partnership) aligned with the YJA's direction, and it reported having been involved in the Framework's development. Pursuant to it, a diversionary option without a criminal record, and a new flexible Order to replace the current mix of Community Orders was being actioned.³⁷
- 2.2 Within the Youth Justice Services Directorate there was a strong, experienced and appropriately qualified management team to support the delivery of services. The Director was a member of the Senior Management Team and attended Board meetings. There were regular Board meetings at which detailed performance management information was presented. Board minutes showed evidence that performance against Business Plan objectives was regularly updated with in-year difficulties and challenges identified.
- 2.3 The YJA six-monthly safeguarding meeting made good links between the distinct needs of certain groups of children and the requirement for broader service development in respect of the YJA Equality and Diversity Plan. Senior Management Team meetings were well attended with an extensive agenda. Assistant Directors led on Portfolio Areas to ensure the Directorate continued to innovate, identify areas for development and staff training needs. Further opportunities for reflection and development were provided through 'Thinking Time.' This was described positively by staff from Senior Management across Area Teams and Corporate Services as an effective staff engagement forum to stay connected and discuss developing strategic issues.

³⁶ DoJ, *YJS Strategic Framework for Youth Justice 2022-2027*, March 2022 available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/strategic%20framework%20for%20youth%20justice%20-%202022%20-%202027.PDF>.

³⁷ Probation Orders, Community Service Orders and Combination Orders, supervised by the PBNI); and Youth Conference Orders, Community Responsibility Orders, Attendance Centre Orders and Reparation Orders (supervised by YJS).

2.4 YJA staff had a good understanding of the role of the Board, whose members visited the different Area offices and met with staff for its monthly meetings. Those who spoke to Inspectors felt involved in the development of its vision and strategy and the new model of practice. This was supported through the Inspection survey findings, which showed that most understood the current YJA vision and strategy quite or very well (34 out of 36, 94%), were very or quite aware of the activities of YJA senior management (33 out of 36, 92%), and mostly updated on strategic issues such as budget, legislation or staffing issues (29 out of 36, 80%). Staff responding also mostly said that they could provide ideas and challenge to their managers sometimes or often (32 out of 36, 89%).

Areas for improvement

2.5 The YJA was represented at senior level in various multi-agency fora, such as the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership and subgroups, Policing and Community Safety Partnerships, the PSNI Youth Champions Forum, and Task and Finish Groups related to the Youth Justice Strategic Framework. Stakeholders reflected positively on this commitment. However, transformation on key issues, such as the age of criminal responsibility and advancing non-criminal justice interventions, had not occurred. The vision for youth justice sought ultimately to prevent children entering the justice system in the first place. The 'owner' driving overall vision, with monitoring to ensure success, was an area for development.

2.6 There was potential for much greater synergy across the numerous multi-agency groups that related to youth justice. At the same time, there were key forums at which youth justice was not represented. Decisions influencing the YJA's work, such as the CRN expansion, were made at the Criminal Justice Board of which the YJA was not a member. The PSNI was the 'front door' to the child justice system, and while the YJA was a partner agency within the PSNI's Children and Young Person's Strategy it had not been consulted on its development. Although the Strategic Framework for youth justice included workstreams with the PSNI, it was owned by the DoJ and the YJA only. There were gaps in the strategic relationship between the YJA and the PSNI, and opportunities to ensure collaborative ownership for youth justice overall needed grasped.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 1

Within six months of report publication, the Youth Justice Agency, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Department of Justice agree and implement an improvement plan that ensures a shared vision, strategic collaboration and ownership of the vision for youth justice in Northern Ireland with synergy across all relevant strategies, and an effective monitoring framework to ensure the vision is achieved.

- 2.7 The YJA Executive Agency Framework Document needed reviewing.³⁸ It defined the responsibilities of, and relationship between, the YJA, the DoJ, Ministers and the Northern Ireland Assembly including financial structure, personnel management and relationships with other agencies. While structures may have remained broadly unchanged, review of its suitability against the changing needs of the Youth Justice Services Directorate, its staff and the scope of work with children, families and victims was required. Seminal reviews and the YJA's current and future role within these, such as the review of Children's Social Care Services, would have benefited from reflection.
- 2.8 Stronger links between strategic oversight and Youth Justice Services Directorate's operational practice was needed. It was important that the YJA was assured about the quality of case work in supporting desistance and the safety of children and others. There was currently no mechanism for the Board to receive assurance on themes Inspectors identified on examining the quality of practice. While the YJA embraced new initiatives and pilots in support of children, families and victims, achieving a balance between innovation and time to embed was important.
- 2.9 Management information showed that workload and capacity varied across YJA areas with different patterns locally in relation to statutory and non-statutory referrals. However, there was no strategic analysis of these patterns to ensure services were responsive to emerging trends. The wider risk of harm from potential net widening because of ESD would have benefitted from inclusion within the YJA's risk register. Ways of delivering CRNs and ESD differed across teams. While this may have been effective, the differences were not understood or planned for strategically.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 2

Within six months of report publication, the Youth Justice Agency should develop effective and regular strategic scrutiny of Youth Justice Services Directorate case work quality and workload trends.

- 2.10 Staff retention was a major constraint that had been appropriately identified in the risk register. Pay differentials meant the YJA was significantly challenged in retaining its dedicated, highly skilled and child-centred workforce. Its alignment with Northern Ireland Civil Service terms and conditions since 1 December 2016 had resulted in pay scales that were increasingly out of sync with those for similarly qualified staff, particularly social workers within the HSC Trusts.

38 DoJ, YJS, *Youth Justice Agency Executive Agency Framework Document*, February 2017.

- 2.11 When Inspectors visited the Belfast Area Team, for example, it had nine Practitioners in post out of a complement of 14. The Western Area Team also had reduced staffing, particularly in respect of Co-ordinators. Some Teams experienced relative stability but change was anticipated due to retirement and the widening pay gap compared to other sectors and the cost of living.
- 2.12 The YJA had developed a Workforce Plan and its proposals including the development of a Senior Practitioner role were welcomed. Decreased statutory work and increased ESD referrals had been forecast. The evidence base for this assumption required further development alongside demand modelling and contingencies for other possible scenarios. Sustainability of the current delivery model may have been challenged if, for instance, Court referrals increased or staffing issues remained unchanged. The importance of controls around increased involvement in ESD also needed to be acknowledged.
- 2.13 There was a recruitment drive for the Youth Justice Services Directorate in Autumn 2023, but the process had not resulted in recruiting the level of staff planned. The Executive Agency Framework commitment to a '*...workforce with the appropriate skills to meet business needs and in which individuals are committed to customer service*' was becoming unsustainably tested. Despite the senior leaders focus on workforce, staff feeling de-valued due to pay disparities was a risk.
- 2.14 The increasing necessity '*for the right people with the right skills in the right places*' had been highlighted by Criminal Justice Inspectorates in England and Wales.³⁹ They urged more focus on recruitment and retention informed by why staff leave; and staff supervision and support reinforced by regular caseload, capacity and capability review. Sustainable solutions needed supported at the highest level alongside review of the Executive Agency Framework Document.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 3

Within three months of report publication, the Youth Justice Agency in partnership with the Department of Justice should review the Executive Agency Framework Document to ensure Youth Justice Services Directorate operations are reflected and linked to the provision of high-quality services and retention of a highly skilled child focused workforce.

³⁹ Criminal Justice joint Inspection, Efficiency spotlight report: the impact of recruitment and retention on the criminal justice system, February 2024, available at <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/cji/inspections/joint-efficiency-spotlight-report-on-recruitment-and-retention/>.

STAFF

Staff are empowered to deliver a high-quality, personalised, and responsive service for all children.

Strengths

- 2.15 There was a dedicated group of staff across all aspects of the Youth Justice Services Directorate who demonstrated motivation and understanding of the work required to help children. Staff showed flexibility to maximise opportunities for engagement and completion of orders. Within all Area Teams, staff were solution-focused and responsive in the delivery of family intervention work to ensure needs were met in a trauma-informed way.⁴⁰ Case managers interviewed as part of the file review demonstrated an in-depth understanding of the children they were working with, their strengths and how to develop these in meeting often complex needs related to offending. They were driven by the value placed on their relationships with children and families.
- 2.16 Just over three quarters of staff (28 out of 36, 78%) in our survey reported workloads were manageable. Methods for allocating referrals in response to increasing areas of work at a local level, for example in relation to CRNs, were reviewed by Business Managers. An Area Manager/Business Manager Forum was described as a useful mechanism for managers across teams and YJA statisticians to discuss work allocations and recording practices together. Administrative staff were adaptive to ensure effective support of this and had been responsive when assistance was required from different Teams.
- 2.17 Training and development needs were considered mostly or fully met by two-thirds of survey respondents (24 out of 36, 66%), and partially met by close to a third (11 out of 36, 30%). The opportunity to access Social Work training was offered to staff who did not already have a Youth Work or Social Work qualification. Almost all staff (35 out of 36, 97%) responding to our survey reported they had the qualifications and skills to undertake their role within the organisation. A disconnect between Youth Justice Services and Woodlands JJC staff had been identified through the YJA's work on its new Model of Practice. Staff welcomed plans to shadow each other's work as an important personal development opportunity. The YJA had been recognised as an important contributor to the development of Trauma-Informed approaches in Northern Ireland.⁴¹ Trauma-informed practice formed a key element of staff development with Trauma-Informed Champions throughout the Area Teams.

40 'Trauma informed: Multiple Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and trauma may contribute to offending behaviour by children and/or make it more difficult for them to address it. All YJS staff are ACE aware and practice in a trauma-informed way' (YJS, *Positive and Progressive Youth Justice: Children First, Youth Justice Agency Model of Practice [undated]* available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/Model%20of%20Practice%20Leaflet%20-%20FinalAccess.pdf>).

41 Mooney, S., Fargas-Malet, M., MacDonald, M., O'Neill, D., Bunting, L., Walsh, C., Hayes, D., Montgomery, L. *We are on a journey: Implementing trauma informed approaches in Northern Ireland, Executive Summary, QUB and SBNI, February 2024* available at <https://www.safeguardingni.org/resources/we-are-journey-implementing-trauma-informed-approaches-northern-ireland-evidence-report>.

2.18 The importance of staff welfare was recognised. YJA Assistant Directors and Area Managers were particularly focused on this. Staff reflected positively on wellbeing days welcoming opportunities to come together in person. This was important for all levels of staff. Most of those responding to the survey said that the frequency of supervision and support was just right (29 out of 36, 80%), of good quality (31 out of 36, 86%); and the annual appraisal system was considered mostly valuable (26 out of 36, 72%). The YJA was examining a Trauma-Informed approach to staff supervision, and this was welcomed. In response to how deeply the death of a child supported by the YJA impacted individual staff members and Teams, guidance had been developed to support staff in this difficult circumstance.

Areas for improvement

2.19 A training needs assessment to ensure Youth Justice Services delivered consistently high-quality interventions was needed. While important training opportunities had been available, for example, through Systemic Family Work⁴² and Compassionate Enquiry, there was no assurance that current and future training needs had been strategically analysed for what the organisation needed. For example, the YJA delivered interventions to address Harmful Sexual Behaviour. Although a small proportion of overall workload, the cases were co-worked and required regular refresher training and substantial expertise. An assessment of training required to ensure continued resource across the organisation would have been beneficial.

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 1

Within six months of report publication, the Youth Justice Agency should develop a training needs analysis of current and future training needs to ensure it supports continued delivery of high-quality, personalised and responsive services for all children by the Youth Justice Services Directorate.

2.20 Guidance for staff supervision was not in place at the time of fieldwork, although had since been developed. Due to temporary staffing changes in some areas, supervision had not been consistently occurring for all staff. In reviewing case records, Inspectors found some gaps in the analysis of how children's needs related to offending. There was not always assurance of sufficient oversight in relation to children's safety and wellbeing, and risk of harm presented to others. There was no evidence that casework was routinely quality assured to check this.

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 2

Within six months of report publication, the Youth Justice Agency should develop a process for regular quality assurance of Youth Justice Services Directorate case work.

42 'Systemic: this means Children's offending behaviour is understood from within its broader social context; work is undertaken by YJS and its partners to address both offending behaviour and its underlying causes' (as above)

2.21 Due to shortages in some areas, staff told Inspectors they had experienced significant workload pressures and this was reflected to an extent in some survey responses. While there was fluctuation in caseloads over time, increased complexity within both statutory and non-statutory work was reported. This was evidenced within case records reviewed and in discussions with staff, children and families. It meant workloads for some staff were challenging even if the number of allocated cases was within expected limits. Case allocation and monitoring tended to be done collaboratively through 'Team Sets' within Area Teams. **However, as an area for improvement, there was potential to explore ways to measure the complexity of work and how this was distributed across statutory and non-statutory referrals.**

PARTNERSHIPS AND SERVICES

A comprehensive range of high-quality services is in place, enabling personalised and responsive provision for all children.

Strengths

2.22 There was evidence of high-quality service provision from Youth Justice Services staff. Important interventions including the AIM 3 risk assessment and programmes for Harmful Sexual Behaviour and Non-Violent Resistance training for parents and carers responding to aggressive and harmful behaviour was supported within Teams. ESD funding had been used to access support for children related to offending needs such as facilitating the purchase of essential equipment for further education or training. The YJA financed this, known as ESD Strand 1 funding, using discretionary spend which was regularly audited, although equity in provision had not been assessed. A ringfenced ESD Strand 2 fund existed for local community groups to deliver group activities promoting community integration with children. A total of £51,314 was provided to 11 community groups in 2022-23. YJA funding for VCS delivery of youth interventions more broadly had not been available for some years.

2.23 There was good knowledge and relationships with service providers in local areas. Staff sourced reparation and community service placements that complimented children's school, work or training hours. There were excellent examples of individual staff arranging placements that related directly to the child's needs and factors associated with offending including collaboration with its charity partner Museums NI. Most staff in our survey said they knew how to access services from partners and providers (34 out of 36, 94%). Where it was relevant to their role, most (26 out of 30, 87%) said that there was sufficient access to services, interventions and partnerships.

2.24 Good local relationships existed with the PSNI YDOs. Both local and strategic links with the PPS were excellent; Prosecutors and YJA staff described open working relationships in the best interests of children. The YJA, PPS and PSNI representatives met often to refine processes for operational practice and enhance timeliness. The Western Area held biannual meetings with the PPS, PSNI and Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunal Service (NICTS) representatives and there was potential for other Areas to replicate this. In cases that had also involved the PBNi, Inspectors found examples of positive working relationships between YJA Practitioners and Probation Officers with each having liaised well to ensure work was appropriately sequenced. The Judiciary reflected positively on engagement with the YJA, and the information provided by its staff to the Court.

2.25 YJA staff worked well with the HSC Trusts and with local children's homes. Review of case records showed YJA staff regularly involved in multi-agency planning for children in the care of the HSC Trust. Two Area Teams had a co-located CAMHS worker. This was beneficial in many respects, for example YJA staff 'screened' for mental health needs with accessibility for children requiring CAMHS support greatly improved. Joint working enhanced mutual learning with benefits beyond the YJA. Youth justice-related expertise had helped the co-located worker in supporting children within the HSC Trust. Links with the EA were positive and there was potential to enhance this at a strategic level, particularly given the different EA services working in partnership with the YJA (including Youth Work, Child Protection Support Service and as a partner on the CDF).

Areas for improvement

2.26 The needs of children mapped against the profile of available partnerships and services, including those delivered by YJA staff, was needed. The YJA had identified capturing third-party referrals as an area for improvement which was promising. The excellent relationships built by staff were vulnerable to change at short notice including when providers experienced budget pressures or changes in personnel. Better links at a strategic level could help monitor and mitigate this. There was opportunity to further explore if local reparation providers with a regional footprint could offer a greater number of placements.

2.27 Sourcing and maintaining relationships with providers formed a significant aspect of Youth Justice Services' work. This had become more challenging in the context of budget cuts and lack of sustainable funding particularly within the VCS. It was important to account for this workload and the impact on availability of responsive provision for children. Staff reported diminished pathways to and resources within other statutory services with increased wait lists for diagnostic and treatment facilities. Delays in accessing statutory and VCS placements for children, particularly for those on shorter term ESD, risked disengagement.

- 2.28 The co-located CAMHS worker was funded through YJA discretionary spend which meant it was not a protected service. The YJA had made a business case for baseline funding. However because it was a pilot in only two HSC Trust areas, not all children could benefit. An independent evaluation would have helped advocate for its longer-term sustainability and cross-Departmental support.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 4

Within six months of report publication, the Youth Justice Agency should develop a strategic profile of its partnerships and an action plan to monitor and improve access to interventions and services across its Youth Justice Services.

- 2.29 Children's criminal records impacted access to training and employment opportunities. The DoJ had not accepted a Youth Justice Review recommendation that diversionary disposals should not attract a criminal record. However, there was a continuing role for the YJA to monitor the ways in which this impacted the volume, range and quality of services to support desistance. One interviewee reflected it was particularly harsh for children whose offending was related directly to the experience of living in care, *'Who challenges the criminal record? Who has fed that back to the DoJ? Are [YJA] strong enough advocates in the strategic level?'*
- 2.30 Links with the PSNI were not sufficiently senior for the YJA to engage strategically in planning and oversight of joint areas of work or areas where there may have been potential for better co-operation. There were insufficient strategic avenues to raise systemic issues that the YJA or the PSNI had been aware of. For example, some staff reported patterns of concern raised by children about searching in police custody; while staff supported children who wished to make complaints and raised issues locally with Area Managers and local PSNI Officers, a strategic avenue was lacking. Some Area Teams had reported increased workload as a result of CRN Referral Scheme referrals and there was scope for the YJA and the PSNI to work together to better anticipate this and understand why this was happening and its impact on future service delivery (see Strategic Recommendations 1 and 5).

INFORMATION AND FACILITIES

Timely and relevant information is available and appropriate facilities are in place to support a high-quality, personalised and responsive approach for all children.

Strengths

- 2.31 Work was supported by an extensive range of policies including the new *Children First* Model of Practice.⁴³ This informed the delivery of interventions across the YJA with the intention of better outcomes for children, families and victims. Policies had either been reviewed or were in the process of being reconsidered against this new model to ensure children's needs were reflected. All survey respondents said that they understood the policies and procedures that applied to their role either quite well or very well (36 out of 36, 100%). There was a YJA Needs Assessment, which the YJA had developed and implemented from January 2023. It was relatively new and staff had undergone training during November 2023.
- 2.32 Staff prioritised relationship building with children, families and victims and this was evident in the flexible approach adopted. There were many examples of meetings in local community facilities, where children lived, and spending time outdoors as an integral part of engaging children. Where relevant to their role, almost all staff who responded to the survey said that where they delivered services to children was safe for staff (33 of 34, 97%). Three quarters of staff in our survey said that the Information Technology (IT) available helped them deliver quality services (27 of 36, 75%). Through meeting with staff, Inspectors heard that the IT system had enabled staff to work remotely and enhanced flexible working.
- 2.33 In our survey, most thought that where they delivered services met children's needs including their safety to some or a great extent (26 out of 36, 81%). Most offices Inspectors visited had soft rooms and space for 'time out' that could be used by children and families. In the Western Area children had designed and decorated one of the rooms, which they named '*Cups of tea n'all.*' In the Northern Area Office, there was a sensory room, 'grab bags' of food items and essential toiletries easily available to children if required and snacks.

The significance of physical environment had been highlighted by research on implementing trauma-informed approaches⁴⁴ and a continued focus on this within YJA existing and new premises was important.

43 YJS, *Positive and Progressive Youth Justice: Children First, Youth Justice Agency Model of Practice [undated]* available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/Model%20of%20Practice%20Leaflet%20-%20FinalAccess.pdf>.

44 Mooney, S., Fargas-Malet, M., MacDonald, M., O'Neill, D., Bunting, L., Walsh, C., Hayes, D., Montgomery, L. *We are on a journey: Implementing trauma informed approaches in Northern Ireland, Executive Summary, QUB and SBNI, February 2024* available at <https://www.safeguardingni.org/resources/we-are-journey-implementing-trauma-informed-approaches-northern-ireland-evidence-report>.

Image 1: YJA Western Area Office



Image 2: YJA Eastern Area Office



Images 3 and 4: YJA Northern Area Office



Areas for improvement

- 2.34 Although there were policies on equality and a YJA Equality Action Plan that CJI had previously recommended,⁴⁵ the full range of equality characteristics was not always included in the YJA case system. Missing values had prevented the YJA from reporting information by religion. Contextual data provided by the YJA for this inspection (see Appendix 4) showed comprehensive information for age and gender but missing data for ethnicity, children in care and child protection status.
- 2.35 CJI had recommended that criminal justice agencies review Section 75 monitoring arrangements and address gaps,⁴⁶ **and this remained an area for improvement for the YJA**. Inspectors acknowledged that the YJA were reviewing its Section 75 pro forma with the aim of enhancing information returns. Policies and guidance needed to ensure greater regard for the full range of diversity needs. For example, on review of case records a written account of how language needs, immigration status or mental health, impacted on assessment of offending needs and planning for interventions would have been important.
- 2.36 Although IT systems helped to deliver quality work, they were cumbersome and required significant input to ensure this. Information was held in different documents and across different databases, and data for performance reports was not easily extracted. The YJA had reviewed the Case Management System, however, the cost of developing a bespoke one was prohibitive and amends to the current functionality had been made. While the YJA risk register had not featured this a high risk, it was important to keep this under review.

45 CJI, *Equality and Diversity within the Criminal Justice System: An inspection of the implementation of Section 75(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998* available at <https://www.cjini.org/getattachment/f2f58a1f-a9f3-449f-a684-567b6db4c667/report.aspx>.

46 CJI, *Equality and Diversity within the Criminal Justice System: An inspection of the implementation of Section 75(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998* available at <https://www.cjini.org/getattachment/f2f58a1f-a9f3-449f-a684-567b6db4c667/report.aspx>.

- 2.37 In areas with a large geographical spread, remote and lone working was potentially more common. Attention to the impact of this on staff wellbeing making opportunities to come together as a team was particularly important. The closure of several offices meant there was no longer a physical presence in some communities. This risked Youth Justice Services' remoteness from the communities staff were working in, as well as safety issues. The YJA reported that supervision meetings with line managers, as well as local team meetings supported staff with any concerns raised about lone working and safety. This was important. However, in a case reviewed, there had been no obvious place to record the fact that safety concerns had informed the arrangements for how staff were supporting a child and this would be important to reflect.
- 2.38 Information Sharing Agreements existed with statutory partners, but it was important these were reviewed. At the time of the inspection, the Information Sharing Agreement with the PSNI was being updated. It was important this covered all relevant matters including the role of CDFs. A formal process through which the PSNI notified the YJA of serious further offences was not in place and this was a matter for both to examine. There was good evidence that HSC Trusts had provided relevant documents, however, at times access needed escalated to Assistant Director level and was also something to keep under review. The Information Sharing Agreement with HSC Trusts was still in draft at the time of the inspection.
- 2.39 The new YJA needs assessment tool was rolled out for use across all Areas. Review of case records showed there were benefits from its focus on children's needs (see further in the Delivery Chapter), but also gaps in the analysis and recording of factors related to safety and desistance needs. The YJA Board required regular assurance that the tool adequately identified children's offending related needs and that corresponding interventions had been available. This was linked to the recommendation for quality assurance and more visibility and oversight of key practice issues by the Board (see Strategic recommendation 2 and Operational recommendation 2).

INVOLVEMENT OF CHILDREN, PARENTS, CARERS AND VICTIMS

Strengths

- 2.40 Participation of children, parents and carers was a key strategic priority for the Board. The Agency had appointed a full-time Participation Officer and the role holder, with Participation Champions in each Area Team, had led several consultations to seek feedback from parents, carers and children on aspects of service delivery.
- 2.41 The YJA was strongly committed to family, carers and children informing the improvement and the co-production of services. A small Expert by Experience User Group had been successfully established and were contributing to service improvement within the YJA and across the youth justice system.
- 2.42 Building and maintaining effective relationships between practice staff and parents, carers and children was a key strength. This was evident from Inspectors' observations, at interviews and was cited by staff and stakeholder organisations as what the YJA did best. Parents, carers and children rated YJA services highly in satisfaction surveys completed at the end of interventions. There was a strong culture of continuous improvement across the YJA, which was informed by the views of parents, carers and children.
- 2.43 YJA staff effectively advocated for parents, carers and children. Access to other statutory services, for example, education welfare, mental health and Social Services had often been facilitated by them. Feedback from parents, carers and children we met during this inspection was overwhelmingly positive about the type and nature of the services the YJA provided. Family support groups were valued highly by families and carers, and a 'Parents and Carers' event organised by the YJA had been positively regarded in terms of support and learning.
- 2.44 Some of the reflections to Inspectors included:

'Struggle has been trying to get the level of engagement from services that my children need. YJA has been massive in working alongside all the other agencies involved with my children.'

Parent

'Absolutely amazing, nice to family, my [relative] couldn't speak English well and they were very good with [them] which I appreciated.'

Child

'The connection of people. Young people don't connect with systems, practices, rules and disciplines, they connect with people and personalities.'

Parent

'I attended a Board meeting with the Agency. It was in the same room as my YDO. They were smiling and looking at me like [I] was good rather than a criminal.'

Expert by Experience

'100% felt involved as [a parent]. Always knew they were only a text message away if we needed them. We've had 3 or 4 different social workers since the start but the same youth justice workers and we speak to them on a weekly basis.'

Parent

'Parents group has protected my sanity – those times when I felt so sad or didn't have the resources to support [my child] anymore. Total lifeline – especially during COVID. To have that independent, person to say what is normal and what needs to be challenged was so helpful. [Family work facilitator] was very good at having those conversations. Felt pushed out by those powerful systems. Shouldn't be the case but she gave me confidence.'

Parent

2.45 Inspectors heard about excellent work with victims and spoke to victims and supporters who highly valued the support provided, describing staffs' professionalism as *'second to none'* and appreciative of their *'immense knowledge.'* The YJA's flexibility around meetings and being kept up to date with the process were noted. As one victim supporter said, *'we weren't just left dangling after the conference.'* Engagement with victims before and after the conference process, including when a youth conference plan was presented at court, had provided victims with confidence and trust through their involvement in the justice process. A victim supporter who had experienced both the process of criminal trial and youth conferencing described the experience with the YJA as *'definitely less traumatic'* than the Court process.

2.46 Through files reviewed, there was evidence of business organisations' engagement with the YJA as victims too. In interviews with Inspectors this was described as extremely valuable. Benefits for the business, its staff and the child as a result of youth conference engagement included opportunities *'to see staff as human beings'* and for staff to know that reparation had been supported. Scope for businesses to facilitate restorative activity that had also been responsive to the child's needs was evident. As one business said, being involved had provided *'a tool and a platform to address problems,' 'feed into the wider prevention piece,'* and *'help the child get on the right path.'* It reflected, *'Throughout any engagement, never had any doubts or anything to doubt [the YJA's] ability to do things. When we have those conferences, it does send a powerful message.'*

Areas for improvement

2.47 Families and children said that more information about the work of the YJA at an earlier stage in the process could have alleviated some of the fear and anxiety when they first engaged with justice agencies. Some statutory partners reflected concerns that children had not always understood the available disposal options until arriving at Court. This may have been compounded by legal complexities and different terminologies used, and reluctance of some children and families to engage. Some parents, carers and children explained the feelings of fear and uncertainty.

"No idea what YJA [was], fearful for [my child]. Myself and wife were very confused."

Parent

"It was a shock and it was anxious. When I first heard didn't know it [was] going to have been as positive as it was. Thought it was going to be more punishment."

Parent

"First heard from police about YJA. I had some idea of YJA – thought it was about locking people up. I felt optimistic that they could help but unsure what to expect."

Carer

I would have liked to know more, sooner to know more to prevent things getting to the stage they have.

Parent

"Didn't like the idea of coming thought it was probation for kids."

Child

"Didn't really have a clue. Was scared. When explained still scared and paranoid. Nervous."

Child

- 2.48 Since November 2023, the YJA had recommenced attending Court in person. Inspectors observed this as an opportunity to meet children and families face-to-face and ensure much needed information about the referral process and next steps was provided. The YJA also reported that video shorts were being produced at the time of the inspection.
- 2.49 Families valued the interventions and support from the YJA. While Social Work trained staff worked in a systemic way and several Youth and Community Work staff within the Youth Justice Services Directorate had been trained in Systemic Practice to Diploma level, it was important to continually appraise this to ensure the sustainability of family work interventions. Engagement with parents, carers and families was an expected part of how staff supported children, however, a mechanism to evidence the level of 'formal family work' provided by YJA practice staff had been developed. This was still being refined and there was not a means to monitor levels of unmet need.
- 2.50 The YJA regularly undertook satisfaction surveys, and this was positive. However, it was difficult to improve services from this type of feedback alone. More information was needed to drive service delivery based on aspects of interventions that worked well and how experiences could be improved. With the commitment to participation, a promising journey had begun to embed children and families' qualitative experiences in service development.

- 2.51 The YJA needed to better reflect its work with victims, including businesses who had engaged with the YJA in respect of offending behaviour against their services or staff. An examination of challenges and points of learning to further improve effectiveness would be important. Monitoring had become 'checkbox' in relation to victim engagement or attendance at a conference. The DoJ/YJA framework document included limited reference to how Youth Justice Services Directorate staff supported victims, and a broader review of this framework document should re-examine this (see Strategic recommendation 3).
- 2.52 Overall, Inspectors were struck by the largely positive nature of engagement and its importance to victims, their supporters, and to businesses, and the quality of this needed reflected too. In cases reviewed and through interviews, opportunities for Police Officer engagement with the YJA when they had been a victim would also be important to explore. More broadly, there was scope for the YJA and the PSNI to examine how to further improve awareness among local Police Officers of Youth Justice Services' role and interventions available to children.

CHAPTER 3: DELIVERY

YJA Youth Interventions' Quality

- 3.1 The quality of youth interventions delivered by the YJA was examined through an assessment of a sample of Court-ordered conference referrals and Diversionary Youth Conferences. Policy for ESD interventions was also considered and two ESD referrals were reviewed. The YJA resettlement work was also examined.

Court disposals

- 3.2 Seven Court-ordered referrals were reviewed by Inspectors. Six cases were referred in September 2022, and one in January 2023. Of these six resulted in a YCO and one a Probation Order. The age range of the children at the time of review was between 12 to 14 years and 19 years of age. Where there was a full assessment (in six cases), the YJA Assessment had been used rather than the newly introduced YJA Needs Assessment tool. A YJA screening tool was used in one case. The reoffending score was medium in six cases and low in one.
- 3.3 Most of the children had multiple prior sanctions. The children had been referred for criminal damage, property related offences and violence against the person. There were breach proceedings in two cases that were considered appropriate by Inspectors. In a further case, the child re-engaged following informal enforcement and there was good evidence of the Practitioner having worked with the child to help reset the direction of the YCO.
- 3.4 Four referrals reviewed were children with lived experience of care. Despite the many multi-agency meetings and processes involved in planning for their care, improving outcomes overall in terms of living arrangements, desistance needs and safety was particularly complex. In one case, multiple offences occurred almost immediately on moving to a children's home and offending continued that was related directly to this context. When the referral was assessed by Inspectors there were several Youth Conference referrals related to over 20 offences and more than 40 matters pending. The YJA recognised the importance of relationships, as the Practitioner explained '*the most important thing for [this child] was building a relationship, try to keep the same worker, ...the child struggled with trust because of ACEs and transitions.*' The cases emphasised the importance of a timely and responsive system that guaranteed the right person at the right time to support children with lived experience of care.

Assessment

Assessment is well-informed, analytical, and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents or carers.

	Yes	No
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	6	1
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	4	3
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	1	6

Strengths

- 3.5 Assessment of desistance⁴⁷ needs was completed well overall. Contact records showed good connections with the child and parents or carers and a focus on building relationships to foster engagement. There was evidence of liaison with other statutory services to assess needs. Where the child had been in custody, good engagement between the JJC and Youth Justice Services staff was evident.
- 3.6 When assessment of the child's safety and wellbeing, and safety of others was done well there was evidence of information from other sources, for example Social Services, education and the PSNI having been made available and considered by the YJA. This worked particularly well when multi-agency support was already in place and the YJA approach had been informed by the various meetings. There was an example of collaboration with the HSC Trust and the PSNI to safeguard against threats to life from a paramilitary-style criminal gang. It highlighted complex abuse evident within some of the inspected cases and the YJA's role in supporting a joint response. The former YJA Assessment included a section on 'vulnerability factors.' When used well, it helpfully summarised the YJA's understanding of the safety and wellbeing concerns for the child.
- 3.7 Special or exceptional meetings (for example, YJA Priority Meeting or regular case management meetings instigated by the Area Manager) had helped in two cases in the assessment of risk of harm, although in one case needed initiated in a timelier manner. Meetings included an account of any risks to the safety of Youth Justice Services staff related to, for example, home visits and any adjustments needed to ways of working. Evidence of relevant factors having been analysed, including more recent alleged offending and prior risk assessments was a feature of assessment in which the safety of others had been well considered.

47 Desistance as used here referred to the ongoing process of moving away from offending behaviour. Reviews of evidence have concluded that 'Neither the 'what works' movement nor 'desistance' research is anywhere close to revealing the secret formula guaranteed to reduce crime...' but was still needed along with 'all the science we can get...' to make sense of crime's complexity (See Maruna, S. and Mann, R., *Reconciling 'Desistance' and 'What Works'*, HMI Probation Academic insights 2019/1, available at <https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2019/02/Academic-Insights-Maruna-and-Mann-Feb-19-final.pdf>).

Areas for improvement

- 3.8 There were gaps in assessment recording and analysis. For example, it was unclear how the outcome of the assessment had been discussed with the child or how the child's and carers views influenced it. 'What Do You Think', a tool that facilitated children to reflect their own perspectives, was underutilised. At times, not all factors related to desistance had been identified and few cases explicitly analysed how the child's needs related to offending. Although there were examples of language needs being considered and staff articulated an understanding of barriers to engagement, it was not clear from the record how the full range of diversity factors had informed assessment.
- 3.9 Gaps in relation to the safety of the child occurred when assessment had not drawn out all relevant factors, and this was more apparent when other agencies were not involved in supporting the child. In four cases concerns about exploitation, the potential for harm arising from relationships with individuals in the child's life or broader concerns about living arrangements were not fully explored at assessment. Pertinent information from multi-agency plans needed better analysed for relevance to the YJA assessment. Records had not shown how information about safety assessed during periods in custody had been used to inform assessment by Youth Justice Services.
- 3.10 Overall risk of harm had not been sufficiently recorded at assessment. In a few cases, despite a Risk of Serious Harm (RoSH)⁴⁸ indicator having been met, there was inadequate rationale for the decision not to complete a full RoSH assessment. In one case, while factors reducing risk of harm were apparent, it was not clear how an earlier RoSH assessment showing a risk of serious harm had been analysed or revisited for the current referral. The YJA screening tool had not included a section to examine RoSH factors and Inspectors considered this inadequate particularly for statutory cases.
- 3.11 At times assessment narrowed on whether the current offence had caused serious harm when a holistic analysis of all relevant behaviours and implications for risk of harm in future was needed. Assessing risk of harm to others was potentially more complex when the child had turned 18 years of age and there were concerns about relationships with other children or adults. Risk of harm considerations needed outlined even when a RoSH was not triggered and this was mostly not evident from the records.

48 The RoSH assessment is an evidence-based judgement assessing the risk of a person committing a further offence causing serious harm. YJS retained the RoSH filter criteria within its new YJS Needs Assessment. In practice, if one or more criterion was met a full RoSH assessment was completed but YJS permitted 'professional override' if assessed appropriate.

Planning*

Planning is well-informed, holistic, and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents or carers.		
	Yes	No
Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	7	0
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	4	2
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	4	2

*As one of the cases was managed mainly by the PBNI it was not reviewed by Inspectors after planning for desistance needs; totals for safety are therefore to six

Strengths

- 3.12 Planning was well informed by factors related to desistance and conference plans involved the child and their parents or carers. Victim input was reflected across all cases considered and conference reports showed excellent evidence of victim engagement and how their input had informed Youth Conference Plans. Planning relied well on the child's strengths and protective factors often making links with prosocial activities that the child was already engaged with.
- 3.13 It was positive where a 'strengths and difficulties' questionnaire had been completed and used to inform planning. This had only been in Teams with a co-located Mental Health Worker. Some Youth Conference Plans were limited to only one or two elements (for example restrictions or reparation), which did not appear to meet the full range of factors related to desistance. However, Inspectors were satisfied that the child's desistance was being supported by the combination of interventions from other ongoing plans. This showed effective sequencing when children were subject to multiple orders.
- 3.14 On balance, planning focused well on keeping the child and other people safe. As in assessment, there was evidence of staff engaging with multi-agency professionals and processes focused on the safety of the child. It was not always appropriate for the Youth Conference Report to reflect all relevant safety factors and a review of the entire case records assured Inspectors that mostly key issues and concerns had been planned for. Planning that took account of the impact of the child's offending on victims with triggers and supports that improved emotional regulation were apparent in some cases.

Areas for improvement

- 3.15 The lack of a coherent, holistic child-centred record or document that captured the totality of planning in one place was a gap, which the new YJA Needs Assessment could potentially remedy. The individualised nature of interventions, timing of delivery in terms of sequencing and priority, as well as the responsible agency for delivery was gleaned from the entirety of the record. For example, where supervision had been agreed, planning for this work was mostly extracted from

contact records rather than a work plan. While the Youth Conference Report showed good evidence of the child having participated in agreeing the Youth Conference Plan, there was no evidence that children had agreed the detail of how this would be achieved. The new YJA Needs Assessment included an intervention plan and there was potential for the YJA to consider how children could be involved in its development.

- 3.16 Gaps in safety planning for the child and others related to an absence of contingency plans should escalation in risk of harm or further offending occur or if the child refused engagement with the conference plan. Disengagement occurred on a few occasions and although the YJA was responsive it was not clear this had been planned for. Records showed where sexual exploitation was a risk to the child, however, interventions to support the child that were being led by the HSC Trust had not featured in YJA plans. There were examples of information about child exploitation risks being available from an early stage not reflected in planning.
- 3.17 As in assessment, planning to address risk of harm factors falling below the RoSH threshold was not well documented even when a criterion on the RoSH filter was indicated. While there was evidence of a Priority Meeting the criteria for initiating this was unclear. The YJA was introducing a new Enhanced Case Management process and there was an opportunity to consider these findings within that.

Implementation and Delivery

High-quality, well-focused, personalised and co-ordinated services are delivered, engaging and assisting the child.		
	Yes	No
Does implementation and delivery of services effectively support the child's desistance?	5	1
Does implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of the child?	4	2
Does implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	5	1

Strengths

- 3.18 Mostly the implementation and delivery of services supported desistance effectively. There was evidence of regular contacts with children, families and other relevant agencies. Staff were determined in their contact with children to facilitate compliance when engagement was an issue. Relationships between the YJA staff and the child was a strength which had encouraged engagement with other statutory services. When enforcement action was required it was used appropriately after opportunities to re-engage had been presented.
- 3.19 The child's safety and wellbeing were supported well in most cases. Multi-agency processes were engaged with and at times instigated by the YJA. Staff liaised well with the PSNI in relation to reports that the child was missing. There was evidence

of the YJA making referrals and commencing individual case planning meetings with management oversight when concerns about the child's safety intensified. Overall Inspectors were satisfied that work delivered to keep other people safe was good and mostly remedied gaps found at assessment and planning stages. There was evidence of involvement with other agencies that was well co-ordinated.

Areas for improvement

3.20 Delivery and implementation worked less well when services or information needed to support desistance was not available or when all relevant factors had not been explicitly set out with appropriate contingencies considered. At times staff discussed contingencies with Inspectors but there was no evidence of this in the record. It was not always evident how diversity needs had been factored into delivery and the extent to which these may have impacted implementation. There was some evidence of ESD funding being used but it was not always apparent if it had been considered. Transition to adult services for example mental health services for children who turned 18 years, was challenging. For older children, the continuity of services into adulthood was an important factor in the successful delivery of services.

3.21 More was needed to ensure concerns were escalated effectively with partner agencies when safeguarding issues arose during delivery of a Court order. In one case, while the YJA was implementing its own process to manage safety concerns, there was not sufficient assurance that the child was actually safe. When risk of harm factors changed this was not always outlined in the case record. It meant that rationale for changes in how supervision was managed, although articulated by staff, was not clearly apparent. Other staff or services relying on information from the record would not be fully informed if the child was referred in the future.

Review

Reviewing of progress is well-informed, analytical, and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents or carers.		
	Yes	No
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	4	2
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	4	2
Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	1	5

Strengths

3.22 Inspectors considered evidence of review on closure and through the entirety of the record. Desistance needs were reviewed at different points throughout the intervention. This was particularly apparent when referrals for subsequent offences prompted review of the assessment document. Reviews were mostly timely. Progress made during supervision sessions and engagement with other services for example education and employment, was clear on the contact record. Management oversight was mostly apparent when reoffending scores (using the old YJA Assessment) crossed the relevant threshold.

3.23 Reviewing led to appropriate actions to support the child's safety. Adjustments to work occurred when concerns about mental health or self-harm had been evident. Although challenging in most cases reviewed, particularly for those children with more complex needs or with lived experience of care, progress was reviewed for readiness to move-on and transitioning away from the YJA was generally done well.

Areas for improvement

3.24 Discussions with Co-ordinators and Practitioners showed management oversight was effective. This was positive but it was not reflected well in the record. This disparity between the record and practice was a gap. While addressed during supervision, evidence of management review should have been evident within records.

3.25 Enforcement reports were limited to a complaint to Court. Completion reports were also limited in detail. This was not sufficient for the purposes of the YJA's records in cases where safety and wellbeing factors for the child or others remained unresolved or required further escalation.

3.26 From the record, although the assessment document was regularly reviewed risk of harm was not. On balance, Inspectors had not disagreed with decisions but evidence of rationale was missing. A clearer link between planned interventions, RoSH rationale and risk of harm to others was needed throughout the duration of the Order. In a few cases there was significant change, new referrals and ongoing work with the child. A review of new and pending matters and how these impacted risk of harm factors would have been beneficial.

3.27 The YJA Priority Meeting provided a helpful synopsis and update on risk of harm factors when used. However, analysis of risk of harm and how this impacted YJA interventions was less evident and supervision had not been reset beyond what the Practitioner was already delivering.

PPS DIVERSIONARY YOUTH CONFERENCES

3.28 Six referrals for a Diversionary Youth Conference were reviewed by Inspectors. The referrals had been made during a one-week period in January 2023. The age range of the children was between 12 and 19 years. For five children this was their first conference. Two of the children had previous out-of-Court disposals and one had a conviction prior to the referral reviewed. Two children had parallel referrals related to subsequent matters.

3.29 Offences included summary motoring, criminal damage, property related offences and violence against the person. The new YJA screening tool had been completed in three cases, a full YJA Needs Assessment in two cases and the old YJA Assessment in one. In all cases where the new Needs Assessment tool was

used the needs score was low. While Inspectors had not necessarily disagreed with this, analysis of all relevant factors associated with offending including maturity and diversity were not always on record.

- 3.30 The YJA was timely in respect of its Youth Conference Reports and intervention work. However, the time from date of offence to YJA referral impacted detrimentally on the benefits of engagement for both the child and the victim in some cases. In one case it was over 17 months from date of offence to the YJA referral. From the record and the interview with the Co-ordinator and Practitioner, this impacted on the Conference's currency, the child's ability to engage and the relevancy of offending-related factors. It highlighted the importance of timely and accessible information and advice and the detriment of YJA engagement when a significant period had lapsed since the offence.

Assessment

Assessment is well-informed, analytical, and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents or carers.		
	Yes	No
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?	6	0
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?	6	0
Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?	5	1

Strengths

- 3.31 Desistance needs were identified well during assessment. A focus on relationship building with children and families was clear from the combination of records considered. Assessment worked well when the child's needs and relationship to offending was well set out. One case demonstrated this very effectively with an explanation of the relationship between the needs factor, the offending behaviour and likelihood of future offending. 'What Do You Think' had been completed for four referrals.
- 3.32 Overall risks to the child's safety and wellbeing had been considered and understood during assessment. Assessment of the risk of the child causing harm to others was good when all relevant records were considered. This was mostly evident across the cases considered.

Areas for improvement

- 3.33 As in Court referrals reviewed, there was no record on the assessment document or elsewhere to demonstrate that the assessment had been discussed with the child and family. Living arrangements, family circumstances and neurodiversity needed better explored in two cases. There was no evidence of 'What Do You Think' being revisited even when it had been completed for a previous offence and not the one being reviewed. Given that it provided a way to understand the child's perspective and views it would be important to review.

- 3.34 Information about the factors impacting assessment of the child's safety and wellbeing was gleaned from information shared by other agencies or records of previous engagements with the YJA. While assured that staff were aware of issues affecting the child's safety, a clear written record of risks to safety and wellbeing as assessed by the YJA would be important. Not all documentation was stored on the system and some scanned documents had been handwritten and were difficult to read.
- 3.35 An analysis of the offence and whether this impacted risk of harm and to who was important and needed included in all cases. There was no explicit statement in the records of the safety of others and nowhere within the YJA screening tool to record an assessment of risk of harm. CJI would expect the YJA to reflect on this in evaluating the new YJA Needs Assessment.

Planning

Planning is well-informed, holistic and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents or carers.

	Yes	No
Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?	6	0
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?	6	0
Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?	6	0

Strengths

- 3.36 Overall, there was evidence of robust and proportionate planning to support the child's desistance. There was evidence of the child and family being meaningfully involved in conference planning and all plans had been informed by the input of the victim. Services identified to support desistance were linked to the child's strengths and there was evidence of continuity being considered, for example linking children to activities in the local area that could continue beyond engagement with the YJA.
- 3.37 Conference plans followed on from areas of need identified at assessment. Where actions agreed had been generic, for example 'supervision with YJA,' there was generally evidence of this being adjusted to take account of the child's specific needs in subsequent planning with the Practitioner.
- 3.38 Planning for the child's safety and wellbeing was done well when safeguarding concerns being considered by other agencies were well documented. There was good evidence of staff considering the child's wellbeing as part of the conference process including different ways to engage when matters being considered were potentially retraumatising. There was sufficient planning to address risk of harm to other people and consideration of further and more serious offences where these had occurred during the time of the Youth Conference Plan.

Areas for improvement

- 3.39 Intervention plans within the new YJA Needs Assessment were good when completed and identified the type of intervention required for the child's needs. However, the content was often generic and while it identified 'family support' for example, the nature of this had not been specified. The responsible agency for delivery, timing and sequencing also needed recorded as part of the plan, and SMART⁴⁹ objectives were required. Again, as in Court- ordered referrals, there was no record of the child having discussed or signed their intervention plan.
- 3.40 While staff who met with Inspectors outlined a clear plan if risks related to safety or wellbeing increased there was no evidence of contingency planning recorded on the system. It was not always clear from the record why referrals had been made to other agencies related to the child's safety and therefore not apparent how the relevant safety factors had been considered in planning. Escalation of concerns where a timely response from other agencies was not apparent needed to be better evidenced.
- 3.41 Like Court-ordered referrals reviewed, records had not specified contingency arrangements to manage any escalation in behaviour or change in factors related to risk of harm to other people. The lack of explicit analysis at referral meant planning for risk of harm was at times difficult to neatly draw out. This emphasised the importance of a YJA Needs Assessment evaluation.

Implementation and Delivery

High-quality, well-focused, personalised and co-ordinated services are delivered, engaging, and assisting the child.	Yes	No
Does implementation and delivery of services effectively support the child's desistance?	5	1
Does implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of the child?	4	2
Does implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?	5	1

Strengths

- 3.42 Positive relationship building with children and families was consistent throughout implementation and delivery of Diversionary Youth Conference cases in the same manner as Court referrals reviewed. Because staff built such good relationships attention to transition planning from the point of assessment was important. From case records, staff ensured individualised support and interventions. There was good evidence of ESD funding being used to support activities linked to the child's needs.

⁴⁹ Specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound.

- 3.43 Support was adapted to suit the child's individual needs and changing circumstances and this was most evident in the contact record. Where children experienced emotional or mental health crisis staff were responsive in their work to help address and support the child's needs. Family intervention work was excellent, staff demonstrated flexibility in devising ways to work with families that met their needs best.
- 3.44 Implementation of services to support the child's safety and wellbeing was generally good. When done well records reflected the role of the YJA in supporting other agencies work and the implications for the YJA interventions with the child.
- 3.45 Risk of harm to other people was appropriately addressed in the implementation of interventions. Victim impact was addressed in an individualised manner, for example through the One Punch Programme, Driving Awareness sessions and input from YDOs at conferences who had at times reflected more broadly about the impact of the offence on victims, family members and communities. Victim empathy work was tailored to the offence and explored during supervision. Risk of harm had also been managed through family intervention work and appropriately involved parents or carers.

Areas for improvement

- 3.46 Services had not always been available to support desistance. Reasons included the child's willingness to engage, delay in accessing services or restrictions on access related to immigration rules. While there was evidence of ESD funding being used to support desistance, recording whether this had been considered as part of furthering the intervention plan was needed to build consistency. In cases where the child disengaged with services the plan for delivery was not always revisited.
- 3.47 Where factors related to the child's safety and wellbeing were managed less well the record had not adequately reflected concerns reported to other agencies and what the outcome had been; nor had this resulted in adjustments to assessment and planning. In cases where the child experienced crisis or disclosed safeguarding matters at the end of the intervention period the exit plan needed revisited. Although move-on was generally well delivered, transition arrangements where safeguarding concerns existed needed closer attention.
- 3.48 Improved recording was required when external referrals about other children's safety had been made. It was not always possible to tell from the record that a safeguarding referral included concerns about other children, for example siblings, or what the outcome had been. Records to evidence how any such concerns had been addressed or escalated were needed.

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 3

Within six months of report publication, the Youth Justice Agency should evaluate its new Needs Assessment to include an examination of how well it supports analysis of desistance needs and the safety of the child and others.

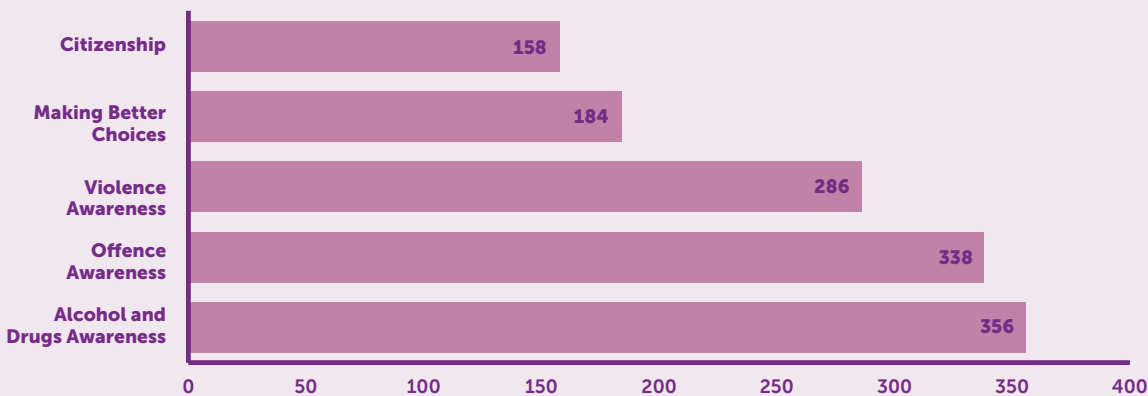
OUT-OF-COURT POLICY AND PROVISION

There is a high-quality, evidence-based out-of-Court disposal service in place that promotes diversion and supports sustainable desistance.

Community Resolution Notices

3.49 In March 2018 the YJA began piloting a drugs and alcohol awareness session for eligible CRN cases referred by the PSNI. The YJA described this as allowing ‘*victims a quick resolution to the harm caused to them while giving those who commit relative minor offences support to avoid further offending and the opportunity to repair the harm caused by their behaviour, without attracting a criminal record.*’ At the time of the inspection YJA CRN programmes were delivered across Northern Ireland and a wider range provided. The 1,322 CRN programmes delivered in 2022-23 were reported as follows:⁵⁰

Figure 6: Youth Justice Services - CRN Programmes 2022-23



3.50 CRN programmes generally involved a short one-hour awareness session. Time engaging with parents and carers and potentially other statutory services meant staff invested resource before and after delivery particularly where there was unmet need. Some YJA Teams reported that they were nearing capacity for CRN referrals intervention work but there was no evidence that this was gripped strategically by the YJA. The PSNI was broadening the range of offences suitable for CRNs. It considered potential benefits of expansion by enabling community resolution for more offences and reduced referrals to the PPS.

50 YJS Workload stats, page 26 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6502ace55b0738000d029e6d/Youth_Justice_Agency_workload_stats_2022_23.pdf

While the PSNI had liaised with the YJA about this, a formal plan to assess how this might impact on workload and the possible range of needs or complexity involved was not apparent. This was an example of where better strategic partnership between the YJA and the PSNI would have been beneficial.

- 3.51 The PSNI provided a referral form which included a section to record the child's needs but a YJA Needs Assessment screening tool was not used. This made it difficult to measure desistance needs, levels of safety and risk of harm and Inspectors were not assured of any data to monitor this. It was important that the YJA provided appropriate guidance to staff on CRN delivery and included an escalation process if referrals were considered out of scope.
- 3.52 A mechanism to appraise equity in CRNs issued by the PSNI was important. The CJI Follow-Up Review on police use of discretion reported on a PPS-PSNI joint quality assurance mechanism for police use of CRNs. It also noted separately that YDOs had been involved in approving CRNs and PSNI recognition that governance of discretionary disposals for children was an area for further improvement.⁵¹
- 3.53 Provided they were alerted, YDOs continued to gatekeep in respect of all PSNI contact with children. The PSNI lead within the Criminal Justice Branch also provided important oversight through guidance and quality assurance and advice to Police Officers within Districts on the use of CRNs involving children. However, it had not been feasible for YDOs to review all police disposals for children and strategic analysis of quality and trends was still needed. Use of out-of-Court disposals including community resolution had also been expanding in England. HMI Probation had highlighted different practices there including joint decision-making models, joint review mechanisms and scrutiny panels involving police, Youth Offending Team staff and partner agencies.⁵²
- 3.54 Given the issues raised in this report and the planned PSNI expansion of CRNs to a wider range of offences, a regular evaluation of the approach to CRNs for children would be important. This should assess if the model operated as intended by reducing formal prosecutions while meeting the needs of children, families and victims.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATION 5

Within six months of report publication, the Youth Justice Agency, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland should agree an action plan to evaluate the approach to Community Resolution Notices for children. This should ensure regular quality assurance, monitor equity in use, and assess how the needs of children, families and victims are met.

51 <https://www.cjini.org/getattachment/4f47f2dd-cb92-4c85-b55f-791e01cbb0f1/report.aspx>

52 HM Inspectorate of Probation, *The implementation and delivery of community resolutions: the role of youth offending services, Research and Analysis Bulletin 2023/01, March 2023* available at <https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2023/03/The-implementation-and-delivery-of-community-resolutions-the-role-of-youth-offending-services-1.pdf>.

PSNI/YJA Referral Schemes

- 3.55 The YJA and the PSNI had partnership initiatives through the sexting referral scheme and vaping substances referral scheme. The latter had been established in response to concern about use of illegal vaping substances that had fallen outside the criteria for a CRN. Pending review of the CRN criteria, the YJA agreed to deliver a voluntary vaping substance awareness programme following Advice and Warning by the PSNI. At the time of the inspection, use of this scheme had been minimal but warranted ongoing review.
- 3.56 The sexting referral scheme involved the delivery of a one-off voluntary education session on referral to the YJA following a PSNI decision for 'No Further Action.' It had been operational since November 2019. In 2022-23, the YJA delivered 221 Sexting Awareness programmes to children and their parents or carers. Staff reported complex cases could involve more resource than a time-bound programme.
- 3.57 As with CRNs, mechanisms for quality assurance and monitoring were needed, and effective escalation for cases considered out of scope. The YJA flowchart within its guidance for staff included referral to Social Services for child protection but not escalation back to the PSNI where the YJA considered sexual exploitation and grooming was involved. The YJA had identified this as an area for development and was liaising with the PSNI to develop an appropriate response. Joint scrutiny of a sample of referrals would be beneficial for quality assurance and learning.

Children's Diversion Forums

- 3.58 Children's Diversion Forums (CDF) were first piloted in Belfast and the Southern Area Team in 2019 and rolled out across Northern Ireland in February 2021. The CDF was a multi-agency panel led by the YJA involving representatives from the PSNI YDOs, the HSC Trust Gateway Teams, and the EA, usually the Education Welfare Service and Youth Services. There was more than one CDF within each HSC Trust area. CDFs had not included VCS representation.
- 3.59 Although the YJA had developed its vision for Earlier Stage Interventions work in 2017 and its Corporate and Business Plans had focused on this, CDF Guidance had been subject to change and illustrated the YJA's approach to the iterative development of ESD. Example reasons for referral included:
- domestic incidents – assaults/thefts/criminal damage in the family home;
 - assaults/thefts/criminal damage in the school setting;
 - drug/alcohol misuse;
 - missing from home (where there is also low-level offending and/or anti-social behaviour); and
 - anti-social behaviour in the community.

- 3.60 Guidance stated that, *'Referrals discussed at forum meetings can be referred to any of the forum partner organisations and/or to any other relevant external support services/universal services.'* If assessed as beneficial following CDF discussion, support was offered to the child on a voluntary basis.
- 3.61 Parents and carers were positive about ESD support. One parent felt that the YJA staff had been *'absolutely fabulous'* at helping the child and family access interventions within the Youth Justice Services Directorate and support from other services, *'Youth Justice say these are the areas we are going to look at, we are going to pick the worst of it and that's what we are going to deal with. You can go there and breathe.'*
- 3.62 Statutory partners reported positive examples of multi-agency working through local CDFs. The YJA was considered responsive and beneficial because qualified staff could work with children in a timely manner. It had been piloting ways to improve referral routes from Children's Services within the Southern HSC Trust. However, not all partners understood its role and remit in the same way. Consistency across areas was needed; partners talked about similar types of referrals being agreed in some areas and turned away in others, or changes to the types of cases accepted. The rationale for changes was not known.
- 3.63 Stakeholder organisations expressed concern about net widening (bringing more children into the criminal justice system) and queried the appropriateness of a criminal justice service for these children. The YJA shared these concerns and were cognisant that while the CDFs linked with its role to prevent offending children's best interests were a primary consideration. It considered that scrutiny at the CDF meeting was the mechanism to safeguard against net-widening. YJA staff recognised that limiting the time for an ESD intervention was important. They worked hard to provide what children and families needed within the three-month period.
- 3.64 Robust scrutiny of Guidance and referrals was required to ensure cases referred were within its scope. Missing children and anti-social behaviour were included within the Guidance whereas the Strategic Framework for Youth Justice stated that, *'all children with whom YJA works directly with have been involved in offending behaviour...'*⁵³ In one Diversionary Youth Conference referral reviewed by Inspectors the basis for an earlier YJA ESD intervention was not apparent even on review of the CDF minutes. The YJA had audited its approach to CDF in early 2023. Inspectors considered that an outline of the basis for YJA involvement due to offending behaviour was required in each case, as well as assurance about intervention quality, safety factors and risk of harm to others.

53 DoJ / YJA Strategic Framework for Youth Justice 2022-2027, March 2022 available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/strategic%20framework%20for%20youth%20justice%20-%202022%20-%202027.PDF>.

- 3.65 Two CDF referrals were reviewed by Inspectors. The children were aged between 12 and 16 years of age. There was clear evidence of offending in both cases. Good evidence of needs outlined by partner agencies and assessed by the YJA was evident in one case. A full YJA Needs Assessment was used, which identified relevant desistance needs. In both cases, appropriate interventions were identified. However, waiting lists meant that the child in one case disengaged before services became available. This was despite excellent flexibility and encouragement from the Practitioner.
- 3.66 Not all factors associated with offending had been comprehensively explored in one of the cases. There was no account of the impact on the victim who was also a child. Risk of harm was not documented in either case. Both involved actual or potential high-harm behaviour. Each illustrated the need for YJA to assure itself that by accepting a case as ESD all relevant safety factors could be addressed. The risk of net widening through ESD required explicit and more robust mitigation with monitoring. A mechanism to ensure the safety of the child and others was supported through assessment, planning and delivery was needed too.

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 4

Within six months of report publication, the Youth Justice Agency should review the approach to Earlier Stage Diversion referrals to ensure all are within scope, and that analysis and recording of offending needs and the safety of the child and others is effective in supporting sustainable desistance.

The way ahead for ESD

- 3.67 The YJA had been working with the PSNI and the PPS to establish a further diversionary disposal for children. This was intended as a diversion without a criminal record. In this respect, it would meet the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child definition of diversion and was a positive proposition. Those involved in its development had in mind particularly young children because the numbers of 10 to 13-year-olds referred to the YJA had increased (see Outcomes Chapter).
- 3.68 Inspectors would have welcomed a stronger evidence base to demonstrate how the current out-of-Court provision was operating overall and if potentially what was available could already cover the scenarios anticipated for the new diversion. Strategic monitoring was needed to establish gaps and reach, for example if all eligible children were being offered ESD, or if barriers to engaging with the PSNI at an earlier stage existed. Inspectors reviewed one Diversionary Youth Conference referral where there was no reasonable explanation why ESD was not offered. It contrasted sharply with the high-harm behaviours involved in the two ESD cases reviewed. This was the type of routine scrutiny on a larger scale that Inspectors expected to see.

- 3.69 Evaluation of out-of-Court disposals to establish clarity in the referral landscape, the range of options, that all eligible children were being considered, and work not out of scope would be beneficial. The YJA had commissioned an independent evaluation of CDFs and this was very welcomed. Opportunities for co-operation across Departments pursuant to the Children's Services Cooperation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015, multi-agency involvement, and partnership with VCS services required examination.
- 3.70 There was evidence that the YJA delivered quality ESD interventions. Although these referrals had increased it remained a smaller proportion of its overall workload. It was incumbent on the YJA to continually review its role within ESD. The YJA had covered ESD/CDF costs through its existing staff resource and workforce constraints meant this was increasingly pressured. Inspectors did not see evidence that YJA resource for ESD was of a type or nature that could be repurposed to fund VCS delivery. **However, a fully costed strategic plan for delivery of ESD in children's best interests with opportunities for cross-Departmental support and VCS partnership would be an important area for improvement.**

RESETTLEMENT

There is a high quality, evidence-based resettlement service for children leaving custody.

- 3.71 Resettlement was supported by policies, procedures and information sharing agreements with the PBNI. However, it was important these were kept under review. The YJA-PBNI Guidance for JJCOs was revised in June 2018 and needed an up-to-date revision against the YJA's new *Children First* Model of Practice. The YJA had good links with the PBNI at a strategic level and there was evidence of positive working relationships between YJA staff and Probation Officers too.
- 3.72 Inspectors reviewed one resettlement case. Assessment worked well when multi-agency links were made. Planning for resettlement was positive in so far as living arrangements had been well considered and planned for. Support services had been identified including through CAMHS and although the child had not engaged it was clear this service remained on offer. The co-located CAMHS service and link through from CAMHS in custody was beneficial.
- 3.73 Although initial planning meetings were on record, as were relevant risk assessment documents from the JJC, it was important that records of the supervision agreement and monthly updates to the PBNI were maintained. In a Court-ordered case reviewed the monthly update was on the contact record but the quality of recording needed enhanced.

3.74 The YJA had not liaised with the PBNI in respect of its new Needs Assessment tool. There was an opportunity to seek advice from the PBNI as a critical friend given its experience assessing risk of harm. Specifically, in relation to resettlement, the PBNI retained statutory responsibility and therefore needed to be consulted on the YJA approach. For example, it was not clear how the needs-based approach mapped across to the PBNI's assessments at pre-sentence report stage or in cases where supervision was transferred from the YJA to the PBNI.

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATION 5

Within three months of report publication, the Youth Justice Agency in partnership with the Probation Board for Northern Ireland should update its guidance on Juvenile Justice Centre Order supervision and develop a mechanism for joint quality assurance of resettlement cases.

CHAPTER 4: OUTCOMES

THE REQUIREMENT FOR DATA COLLECTION, EVALUATION AND RESEARCH

4.1 Data collection, evaluation and research was required in respect of child justice systems. The CRC urged systemic collection of disaggregated data including on:⁵⁴

- the number and nature of offences committed by children;
- the use and the average duration of pretrial detention;
- the number of children dealt with by resorting to measures other than judicial proceedings (diversion);
- the number of convicted children;
- the nature of the sanctions imposed on them; and
- the number of children deprived of their liberty.

4.2 This list was not exhaustive and more in-depth evaluations were also recommended. The effectiveness of intervention measures, scrutiny of matters such as discrimination, reintegration and patterns of offending were important areas for further enquiry, preferably by independent academic institutions. The importance of children being '*...involved in this evaluation and research, in particular those who are or who have previously had contact with the system, and that the evaluation and research are undertaken in line with existing international guidelines on the involvement of children in research*' was also stressed.

DATA ABOUT THE CHILD JUSTICE SYSTEM

Are outcomes measured and evaluated against evidence-based objectives and targets?

Prosecution, conviction and offence data

4.3 Official data included prosecution and conviction data, the types of offences for which children were convicted and diversionary outcomes. This showed that across the various age groups, children accounted for the lowest proportion of cases in which a prosecution was brought and the lowest proportion of convictions at all Courts during 2022.⁵⁵

54 General Comment Ni. 24 (2019) on children's rights in the child justice system, para. 113 to 115 available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-comment-no-24-2019-childrens-rights-child>.

55 Graham, I. and Super, E., *Court Prosecutions, Convictions and Out of Court Disposals for Northern Ireland 2022*, June 2023 available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/prosecutions%20convictions%20and%20diversionary%20disposals%202022%20-%20published.pdf>.

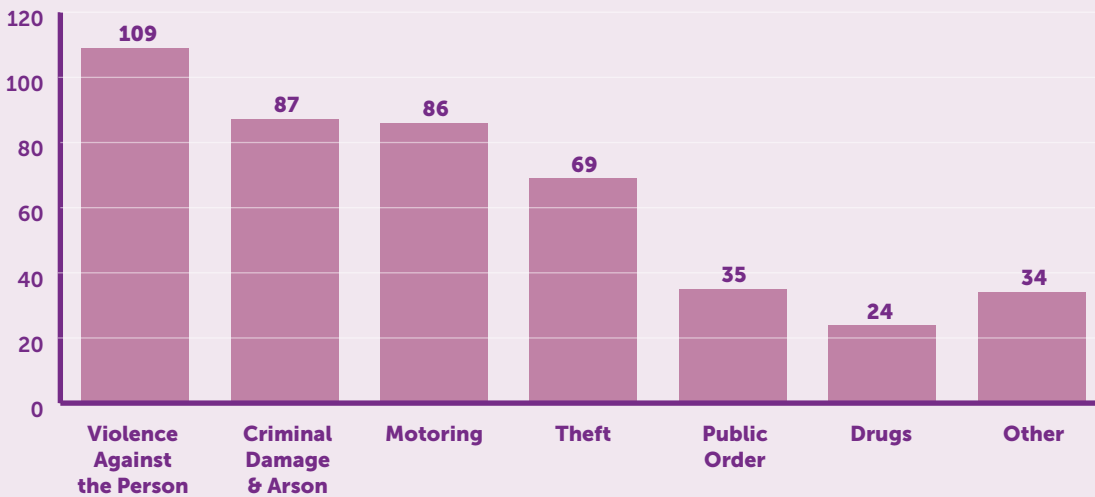
DURING 2022, CHILDREN ACCOUNTED FOR:

1.9%
 of prosecutions (572)
 in all Courts

1.8%
 of convictions (444)
 in all Courts

4.4 Children were convicted of Violence Against the Person, criminal damage and arson, and motoring offences mostly.

Figure 7: 2022 Convictions by Offence Category 10-17 year olds



4.5 More than a quarter (27.5%) of diversionary disposals were issued to those aged 10 to 17 years during 2022. There were 703 PPS ordered Youth Conference Plans which was a decrease of 3.2% from 2021.

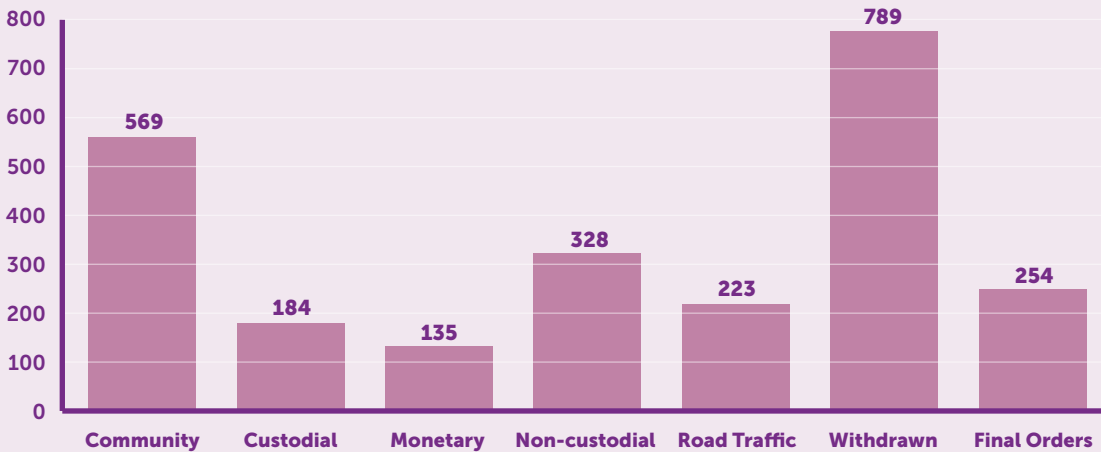
Youth Court: case volumes, disposals, and outcomes

4.6 The volume of children whose cases were received and disposed of in the Youth Court decreased by 30% and 34% respectively between 2019 and 2020 before increasing again by 15% and 19% between 2021 and 2022.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Darragh, C., Martin, R. & McLarnon, P. *Judicial Statistics 2022, June 2023* available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/Judicial%20Statistics%202022.pdf>.

4.7 Although equivalent data was not available for 2021 and 2022, outcomes data showed that roughly half of child defendants pleaded guilty to all charges in 2019 and 2020 and⁵⁷ just over 30% had charges withdrawn.⁵⁸ There were 2,482 final orders granted in the Youth Court in 2020. This was a 27% decrease from 3,404 granted in 2019, although it was noted that the COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted 2020 Court activity.

Figure 8: Types of disposals from Youth Courts 2020 (Orders)



4.8 Where an Order was imposed, community orders made up the greatest proportion of disposals (see Figure 8).

Timeliness: case processing time data

4.9 Recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact timeliness. The median time taken in days for both charge and summons cases to be dealt with were lengthier in the Youth Courts than in the adult Magistrates' Courts (Figure 9).⁵⁹

Figure 9: Median time taken for cases to be dealt with April 2022 to March 2023 (in days)

Youth Court		Adult Magistrates' Court	
142 days (charge case)	278 days (summons)	103 days (charge case)	254 days (summons)

57 51% or 424 out of 828 children in 2020 compared to 49% in 2019 (NISRA Judicial Statistics 2020 available at https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/Judicial%20Statistics%202020_0.pdf).

58 NISRA Judicial Statistics 2020 available at https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/Judicial%20Statistics%202020_0.pdf.

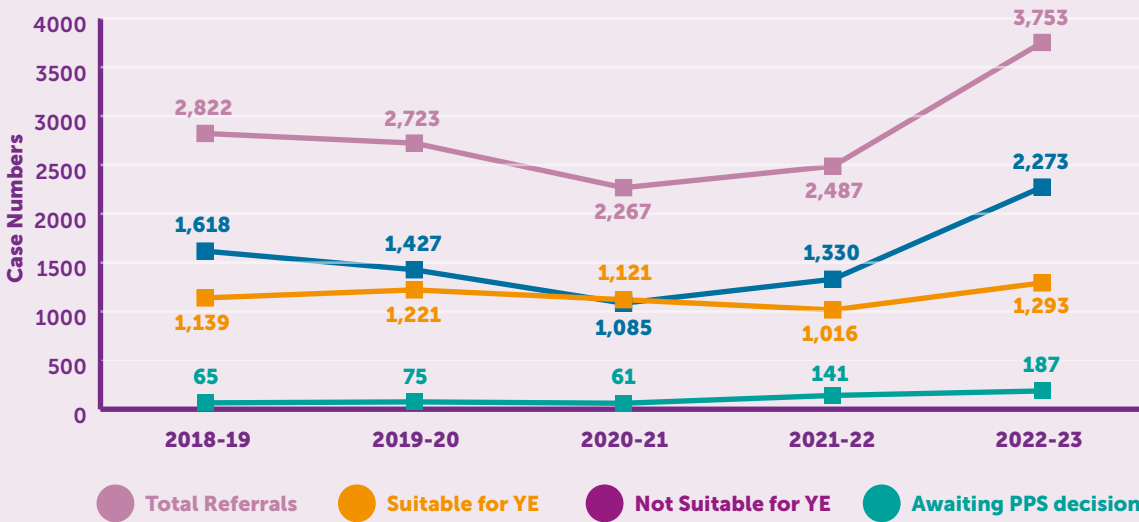
59 Graham, I. Case Processing Time for Criminal Cases Dealt with at Courts in Northern Ireland April 2022 to March 2023, NISRA/DoJ, August 2023, available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/case%20processing%20times%20for%20criminals%20dealt%20with%20in%20court%202022-23.pdf>.

4.10 In 2022-23, the average time taken for a charge case to be dealt with at Youth Courts decreased by 2.1% from 2021-22 (from 145 days). A more marked 25.7% decrease was recorded for the average time taken for a summons case at Youth Courts (374 days taken in 2021-22).

Youth Engagement Statistics

4.11 As with statistics relating to the criminal justice system generally, the data series noted that, ‘...the Youth Engagement process was impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and that is reflected in the numbers reported [...]’. There was an upward trend in children’s cases entering the formal criminal justice system from 2018-19 to 2022-23. Cases increased by half between 2021-22 and 2022-23 (Figure 10).⁶⁰ Acknowledging the COVID-19 pandemic impacts, the reason for this and implications for youth justice overall warranted further examination.

Figure 10: Number of Youth Engagement (YE) Referrals and Cases by Suitability 2018-19 to 2022-23

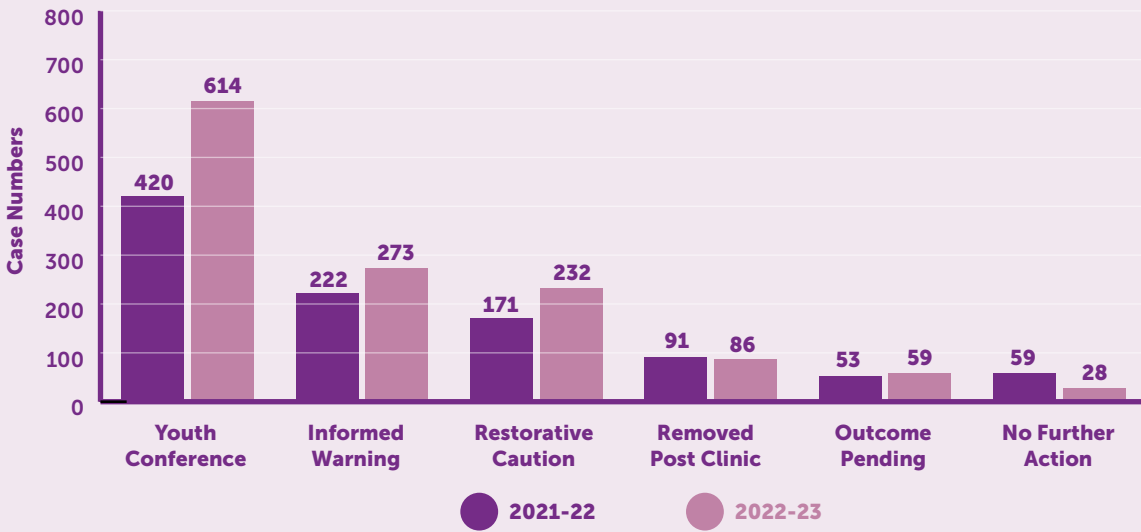


4.12 Around one third of cases in 2022-23 were deemed suitable for Youth Engagement with slightly more resulting in Youth Conference, Informed Warning or Restorative Caution compared to 2021-22 (see Figure 11).⁶¹

60 Youth Engagement Statistics for Northern Ireland 2022/23 tables, from Table 1a, available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/publications/youth-engagement-statistics-northern-ireland-2022-23>.

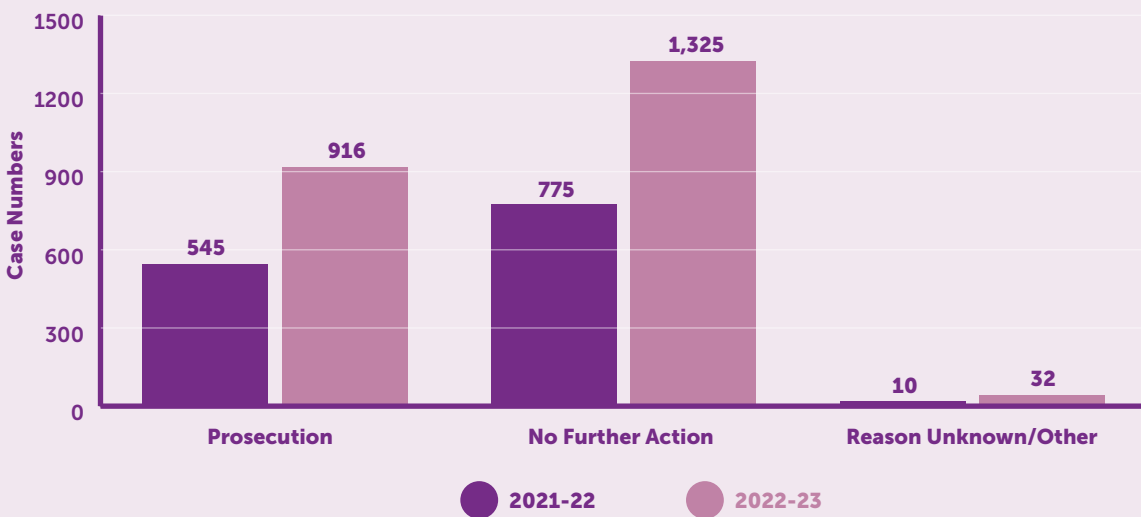
61 Graham, I. Youth Engagement Statistics for Northern Ireland April 2022 to March 2023, NISRA/DoJ November 2023 available at https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/Youth%20Engagement%202022-23%20-%20accessibility_0.pdf.

Figure 11: Outcomes of Cases Suitable for Youth Engagement 2021-22 and 2022-23



4.13 The number of cases assessed not suitable for youth engagement had risen by 70.9% from 2021-2022 to 2022-23. Cases returned for prosecution increased by over two-thirds and cases requiring No Further Action were up by just over 70% in the same period (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Outcomes of Cases Not suitable for Youth Engagement 2021-22 and 2022-23



4.14 The median time taken for half of Youth Engagement cases, measured from when the child was informed to the date of Clinic, increased significantly from 46 days in 2018-19 to 67 days in 2022-23. The number of days taken for 80% of all cases to reach a Clinic in the same period increased from 89 to 155 days. This was too long and frustrated children, families and statutory partners. As one interviewee said, with paperwork it seemed like some cases were 'going round and round in circles.'

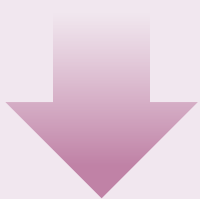
4.15 The YJA, the PSNI and the PPS had been working to streamline Diversionary Youth Conference referrals. It was hoped that by enabling direct referral from the PPS to the YJA for children who received a second or subsequent Diversionary Conference referral, the timeliness of these cases would be improved. At the same time, more capacity would be created to hold Youth Engagement Clinics for children entering the system for the first time. Administrative processes around the issuing of information packs and letters were also being improved.

'First time entrant' data

4.16 The Strategic Framework for Youth Justice reported a substantial reduction in children entering the criminal justice system for the first time. While this could not be attributed solely to the work of the YJA, it asserted this was '*... reflective of the increased focus on early intervention work taken forward by the statutory and voluntary sectors, alongside changes in attitude*' toward children in conflict with the law.

Over a 10-year period, the numbers of children entering the system for the first time had reduced (Figure 13):

Figure 13: First Time Entrants: Children



In 2011-12, young people aged 10-17 accounted for 11.7% of all first offences (1,555 out of 13,246).⁶²

In 2021-22, young people aged 10-17 accounted for 9.5% of all first offences (654 out of 6,886 first offences).⁶³

4.17 Youth Offending Teams in England and Wales had also focused on targets for reducing First Time Entrants. While this had reduced, it was cautioned that '*... without comparison group data to test what would have happened otherwise, it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions.*'⁶⁴ The benefits of early intervention required assessment against the potential for any justice-involved intervention to cause 'net-widening,' and ongoing scrutiny of this area of work was important as outlined in Chapter 3.⁶⁵

62 Graham, I. and Damkat, I., *First Time Entrants to the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland 2011/12 (revised)*, NISRA / DoJ June 2014 <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/doj/fte-201112%20-%20revised.pdf>

63 Graham, I and Super, E., *First Time Entrants to the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland 2021-22*, NISRA / DoJ July 2023, available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/first%20time%20entrants%20to%20criminal%20justice%20system%20northern%20ireland%202122%20-%20published.pdf>.

64 HM Inspectorate of Probation, *The implementation and delivery of community resolutions: the role of youth offending services*, Research & Analysis Bulletin 2023/01 available at <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2023/03/The-implementation-and-delivery-of-community-resolutions-the-role-of-youth-offending-services-1.pdf>.

65 HM Inspectorate of Probation, *The implementation and delivery of community resolutions: the role of youth offending services*, Research & Analysis Bulletin 2023/01 available at <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2023/03/The-implementation-and-delivery-of-community-resolutions-the-role-of-youth-offending-services-1.pdf>.

4.18 The YJA had begun reporting 'insights' into aspects of its ESD work, 'Evidence suggests that this work has been extremely effective – from an initial analysis of referrals from the PSNI via community resolution notices, fewer than 10% of those children who completed a programme with [Youth Justice Services] went on to offend within a year.' While Inspectors were clear that the broader landscape around use of CRNs with children needed more clearly monitored, disaggregated, and understood, this analysis by the YJA was a welcomed step.

4.19 The YJA had also used management information to monitor referral routes into and out of the CDF. Data from 2022-23 showed that the greatest proportion of referrals had arisen from and been made to the Youth Justice Services (Table 2).

Table 2: Youth Justice Services Referral Information for CDFs 2022-23 (Internal YJA management information)

Individual children referred to CDF*	Outcomes of cases discussed at CDF*
Youth Justice Services – 103	Youth Justice Services ESD – 99
PSNI – 97	Youth Services - 11
Social Services – 22	No Further Action - 68
EA – 14	Family Support - 2
	Other - 3
	VCS - 2

*Individual children referred does not match outcomes which counted referrals.

Inspectors were encouraged that the YJA was examining this, although more was required to monitor patterns in referrals reasons and outcomes.

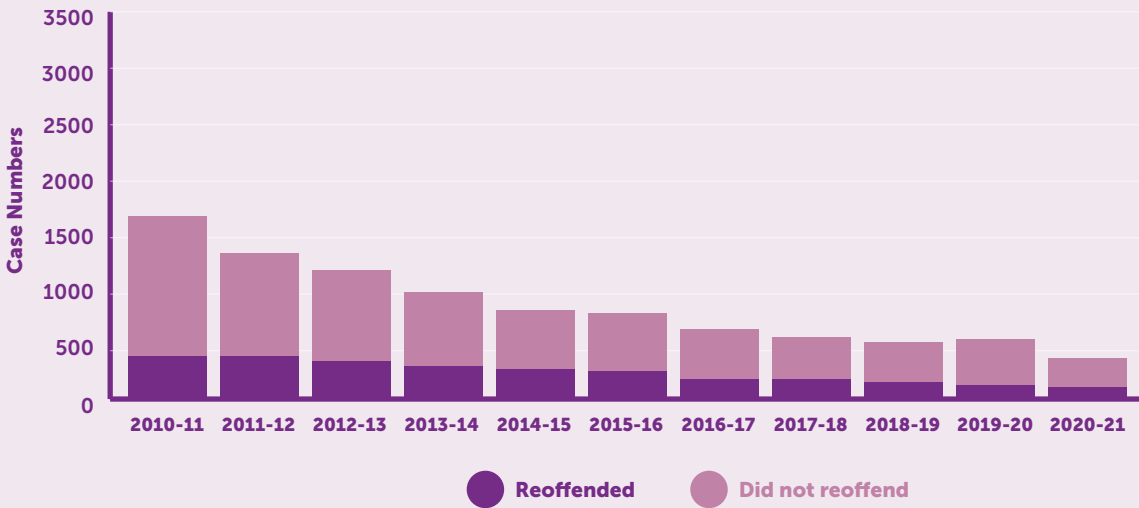
Children's reoffending rates

4.20 Reoffending rates were impacted by COVID-19 pandemic lockdown restrictions and COVID recovery. As such, a caveat accompanied the latest data series, 'Ongoing periods of restrictions will have affected offending behaviour. This, coupled with limited operation of criminal courts during this time, will continue to impact upon numbers recorded in the current bulletin and future releases. The effects of the pandemic on proven reoffending should be taken into consideration when interpreting findings from this publication and publications over the coming years as COVID recovery continues.'⁶⁶

66 Browne, S. and Ward, P. Adult and Youth Reoffending in Northern Ireland (2020/21 Cohort), NISRA / DoJ, October 2023, available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/Adult%20and%20Youth%20Reoffending%20in%20Northern%20Ireland%20%28202021%20Cohort%29.pdf>.

4.21 The number of children within the annual cohort and the number reoffending within one year had generally continued to decrease year on year. The most recent annual cohort of 708 children and the number reoffending (177) was the lowest since the beginning of the data series in 2010-11 (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Youth Reoffending Cohorts 2010-11 to 2020-21



4.22 The proven reoffending rate for children in the 2020-21 cohort was 25% for all disposals, (released from custody, non-custodial disposal at Court or diversionary disposal). This was a slight increase from 2019-20 reoffending rate of 24.8%. Overall, the rate had fluctuated between 23.8% and 32.2%. Over two-thirds (483) of the children in the 2020-21 cohort had no prior offences. The reoffending rate for children with no previous offences was more than 50% lower than for children with 11 or more previous offences (15.9% compared to 68.9% respectively). The 177 children in the observation year committed 794 reoffences ranging from one to 33 per child.

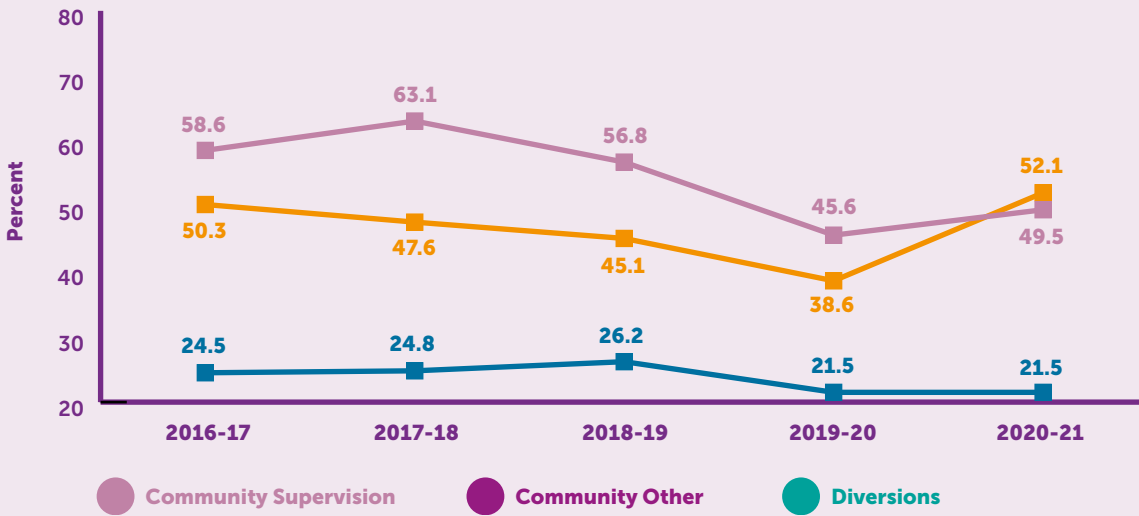
Children’s reoffending rate by disposal type

4.23 The 2020-21 reoffending rate by disposal type showed that seven in 10 children released from custody reoffended within one year. The rate for community supervision, other community orders and diversion was 49.5%, 52.1% and 21.5% respectively.

4.24 Figures over the past five years for non-custodial disposals showed an overall decrease in children reoffending for community supervision. Reoffending following diversion ranged from 24.5% to 21.5%, and from 50.3% to 52.1% for other community orders, that is, those that do not require supervision for example, a fine, suspended sentence, or bound over (Figure 15).⁶⁷

67 Data extracted from adult and youth reoffending tables for each of the five year cohorts 2016-17 to 2020-21 available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/topics/statistics-and-research/reoffending-statistics>. Reoffending rates following release from custody could not be compared across years due to the denominator in each year being too low (i.e. less than 50)

Figure 15: Child % reoffending rates by disposal group, five year trends



Does measurement of outcomes integrate diversity issues to ensure fairness and equality?

4.25 The YJA disaggregated referrals by age range and gender, as well as the age and gender of individuals referred.⁶⁸ Diversity information was collected using a Section 75 Equality monitoring form. However, response rates overall and in relation to some particular groups had been low and missing data within the Youth Justice Services Directorate IT system was also an issue. Sexual orientation was not requested. For these reasons, the YJA had been unable to report on the range of equality characteristics for children supported by its community services. High levels of incomplete and missing Section 75 data had been previously highlighted by academic research, this was more apparent for Youth Justice Services than YJA Custodial Services.⁶⁹ The YJA had been refreshing its Section 75 monitoring form at the time of the inspection.

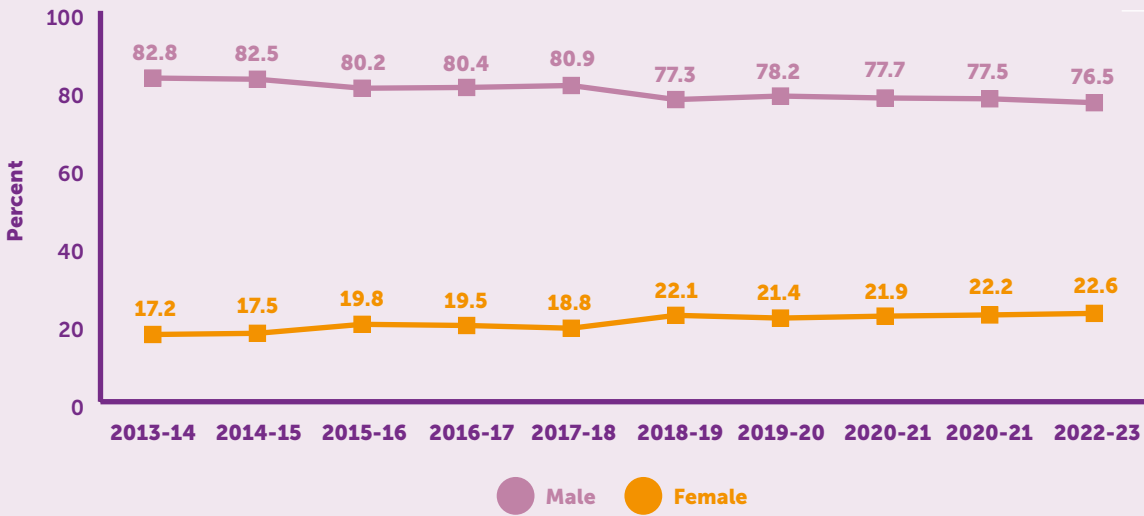
4.26 As with the gendered offending trends, there were a greater proportion of males than females referred to YJA community-based services and this has been a consistent pattern over 10 years.⁷⁰ However, females represented 22.6% of children referred in 2022-23, the highest proportion of individual female children in the 10-year period from 2013-14 (Figure 16).

68 Brown, T. Northern Ireland Youth Justice Agency Annual Workload Statistics 2022/23, 14 September 2023, NISRA/DoJ, available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/YJS%20workload%20stats%202022-23.pdf>.

69 McAlister, S., McNamee, C., Corr, M-L., & Butler, M, Over-representation in the Youth Justice System in Northern Ireland: Full report, 7 March 2022, QUB funded by DoJ, available at https://pureadmin.qub.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/377036690/Over_rep_in_YJS_Main_Report_Final_March_2022.pdf.

70 76.5% male compared to 22.6% female of individual children referred in 2022/23; and 75.3% compared to 23.1% of referrals (Brown, T, Northern Ireland Youth Justice Agency Workload Statistics 2022/23, 14 September 2023, NISRA / DoJ, available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6502ace55b073800d029e6d/Youth_Justice_Agency_workload_stats_2022_23.pdf)

Figure 16: Children referred to Youth Justice Services by gender 2013-14 to 2022-23



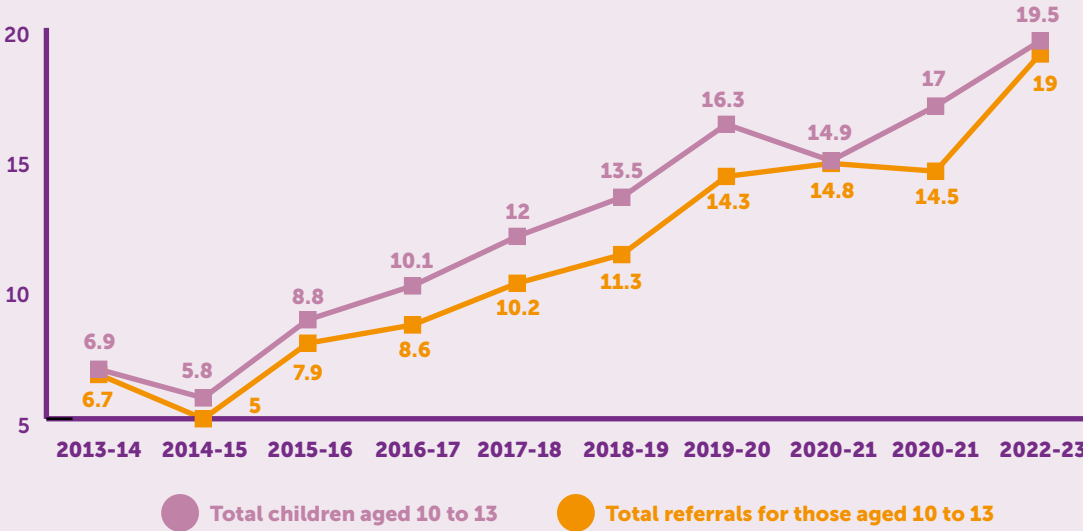
4.27 A CJI inspection examining the response to females in conflict with the law noted that girls under 18 years required special attention to ensure primary consideration of their best interests and gender-based vulnerability.⁷¹ The YJA had been engaging with the DoJ on its strategy for women and girls in the criminal justice system.⁷² This included exploring the needs of young women under 18 years of age and improving transition pathways from youth justice services to adult justice services. A ‘transitions protocol’ was being developed with the PBNI. As a YJA representative explained, ‘we would have girls finishing up with us post 18 but there may be other matters coming through Courts and moving into probation.’ As this had been developed in a gender-responsive way, the YJA was also exploring a similar transition protocol for boys.

4.28 Statutory partners and stakeholders had noticed a trend of younger children entering the criminal justice system. YJA data supported this with almost one fifth (19.5%) of children referred in 2022-23 aged 10 to 13 years. This was the highest in 10 years when 6.9% of children referred were this age (Figure 17).

71 CJI, *How the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland treats females in conflict with the law*, November 2021 available at <https://www.cjini.org/TheInspections/Inspection-Reports/2021/October-December/Females-in-Conflict-with-the-Law>.

72 DoJ *Supporting Change: A Strategy for Women and Girls in or at Risk of Contact with the Justice System*, a multi-agency justice-wide strategy for Northern Ireland 2022 to 2029, available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/strategy.pdf>.

Figure 17: YJA workload: 10 to 13 year olds, 10 year trends - children referred & Youth Justice Services referrals



4.29 A few reasons for the rise were suggested but there had been no strategic analysis. It was important this trend was interrogated particularly given the low age of criminal responsibility and the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child's call to address younger children's desistance needs outside of a criminal justice system.

4.30 Children referred aged 17 and over had declined during the last 10 years but remained the highest proportion of children referred (Figure 18 and 19).

Figure 18: Proportion of Children referred to Youth Justice Services aged 17 and over 2013-14 to 2022-23

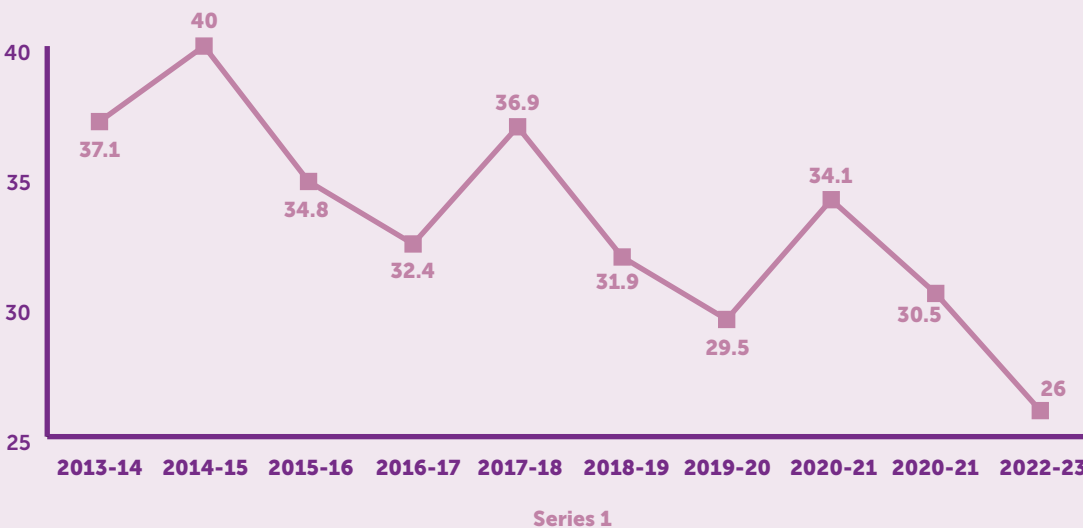
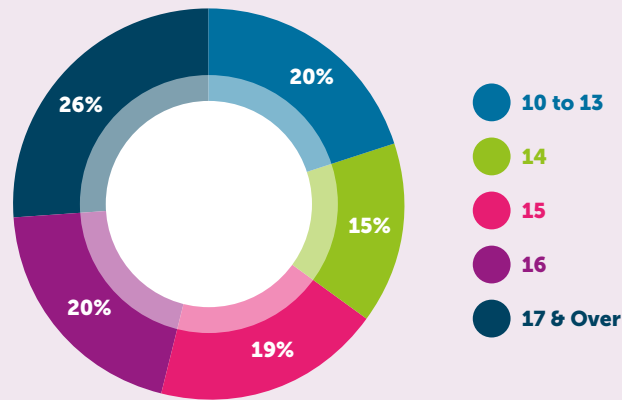


Figure 19: % Children referred to Youth Justice Services by age 2022-23



- 4.31 Analysis was required to understand the needs of those engaging with the YJA aged 18 and over. The YJA had been leading on this area in planning transitional arrangements for children with the PBNI and Hydebank Wood Secure College and Ash House Women's Prison. Transition formed a substantial focus within recommendations arising from the Independent Review of Children's Social Care Services with potential for YJA to link in.
- 4.32 A positive example of a YJA Practitioner and a Probation Officer working together to sequence interventions for a child who had turned 18 years of age was evident in a Court-ordered referral reviewed. There was good collaboration and exchange of information, shared understanding of the child's needs and how to respond in terms of frequency of contact and where to meet. One YJA Area Team discussed its first experience of supporting a child over 17 years through the Public Protection Arrangements Northern Ireland and the importance of learning from this. The YJA Safeguarding Policy included adult safeguarding for children who had turned 18. The potential for safeguarding concerns in relation to any adult the YJA was in contact with, for example family members or victims was also important to reference.
- 4.33 Although not published data, YJA staff talked about monitoring the diversity needs of individual children through supervision. As well as age range and gender, there was much reflected about increased complexities related to mental health, neurodiversity, language and cultural needs. There was reference to a 'cliff edge' when children transitioned from CAMHS to adult mental health services and a co-located mental health worker had been beneficial in this respect. Some staff talked about tailoring work to support those who were LGBTQ+ and transitioning gender and meeting the needs of Traveller children and other Ethnic Minority groups. Although cases reviewed showed recording of this needed enhanced, the level of staff's awareness and consideration of equality issues within their everyday work was positive.

4.34 QUB research showed that analysis of different groups represented within the youth justice system was challenged by variations in data collection across criminal justice agencies and missing information.⁷³ It used a combination of Section 75 data, qualitative interviews, and administrative data from the YJA to investigate factors influencing YJA referrals.

4.35 While administrative data suggested a higher proportion of those living in predominantly Catholic than predominantly Protestant areas were referred to the YJA community and custodial services in 2018-19, the research found '*structural inequalities and their associated risks might help explain this as the data revealed that those living in highly concentrated Catholic areas were assessed by YJA workers as having more additional needs that contributed to their offending behaviour than those that lived in highly concentrated Protestant areas.*'⁷⁴ Religion was not a statistically significant influence on subsequent or repeat contact with the Youth Justice Services Directorate within a one-year period. Living arrangements particularly lived experience of care, and additional needs including substance misuse or undiagnosed and 'hidden' need, were highlighted as factors that could negatively influence children's interactions with the justice system.

4.36 Following this research, the YJA enhanced its recording to capture neurodevelopment needs and children in care which had not previously been gathered by community services. This was positive, and showed a commitment to examine what children's different needs meant for YJA service planning and potentially could inform youth justice and children's services more broadly.⁷⁵

Are analysis, evidence and learning used effectively to drive improvement?

4.37 The YJA adopted an Outcome Based Accountability approach to strategic business planning and reporting from 2020-21. It produced annual performance impact reports. The report was structured around the YJA's strategic outcomes which aligned with the Strategic Framework for Youth Justice. While development was at early stages, the latest performance report showed different types of engagement and assessments completed, as well as results from surveys.⁷⁶

73 McAlister, S., McNamee, C., Corr, ML., Butler, M, *Over-representation in the youth justice system in Northern Ireland: full report, March 2022 DoJ / QUB* available at https://pureadmin.qub.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/377036690/Over_rep_in_YJS_Main_Report_Final_March_2022.pdf.

74 As above, page 5.

75 For contextual data in relation to open referrals at the of the self-assessment request for the inspection, see Appendix 4.

76 *YJS, Performance Impact Report 2022-2023*, available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/YJS-performance-impact-report-2022-23.pdf>.

Children

- 100% Young People engaged with CAMHS partnership reported an improvement in their mental health.
- 16.9% of referrals were for ESD contributing to fewer young people reaching the formal justice system.
- Out of 250 children and young people who had ESD referrals in 2021-22, only 18.8% received a statutory referral to Youth Justice Services within one year of completing the programme.

Victims

- 513 cases involved victims – 617 individual victims were identified and supported.
- 82% of victims engaged in the youth conference process [100% surveyed felt well informed about the conference process].

Bail support

- 118 bail assessments were completed in 2022-23.
- 30 of the 118 young people required a Bail Support package.
- 100% of Bail Support packages involved a minimum of two weekly appointments with the YJA as well as other conditions that are individualised.

Partnership

- 130 young people have been screened for mental health difficulties.
- 52 consultations have taken place.
- 15 young people have been referred into CAMHS for direct work with the Senior Mental Health Practitioner.

4.38 The YJA Board received a quarterly and annual Report Card. This showed progress on the journey to improve outcome reporting. For example, children assessed as needing and who had received an intervention for substance misuse, and the percentage of children requiring Education, Training and Employment support who had received it was included.

4.39 There were good relationships between the current senior management team and academics. It was welcome that the YJA were in the process of commissioning an independent evaluation of its early intervention work specifically that related to the operation of the Children's Diversion Forum.

4.40 The YJA was proactive in seeking feedback on its youth interventions from families, carers and children in the period just after an Order ended. Victims were also surveyed. This showed high satisfaction rates among service users. Participation work with children who had experience of the youth justice system was developing rich qualitative data, which was being used to improve outcomes and understanding of services, for example Youth Conferencing.

4.41 Across YJA Area Teams data required ongoing scrutiny to ensure performance management information was driving improved service delivery and outcomes. At times work was interpreted and therefore recorded differently, for example what constituted family support work or victim engagement. More could be done to analyse what variances in data meant for the Youth Justice Services Directorate, the support it provided to children and advocating with stakeholders on their behalf. Differences in referral sources, with some Teams recording more Court-ordered compared to diversionary conferences or higher levels of ESD had not been analysed.

4.42 CJI's inspection of Woodlands JJC included a recommendation to develop an effective mechanism to capture, monitor and analyse data, which helped assess the outcomes for children in custody and inform the commissioning of services.⁷⁷ The YJA had plans to develop on this with a mechanism to measure the distance travelled by children engaged with Youth Justice Services. This was promising. Inspectors acknowledged the YJA new Needs Assessment required time to establish baseline data and broader analysis of outcomes.

Is performance benchmarked against appropriate organisations?

4.43 YJA senior management and staff engaged regularly in events to develop joint learning opportunities with other organisations. It had good links with youth justice services in the Republic of Ireland and England, and often attended and contributed to academic events including seminars relating to children's rights in the context of youth justice. It had also facilitated visits to Northern Ireland from European Union Member States' youth justice delegations.

4.44 Evidence of benchmarking was an area for development. The new YJA Needs Assessment tool had been developed exclusively by the YJA and there was therefore no direct comparator with other similar services. Commonalities in monitoring youth intervention still existed related to desistance needs and the safety of the child and others. There was opportunity for the YJA to seek out shared learning and inform its own benchmarks for assessing the quality of its services.

Measuring parts of systems had not improved children's outcomes.

4.45 Evidence about how youth interventions had improved outcomes for children continued to be an area for development. The importance of the NIAO recommendation that the YJA continue to develop its monitoring with greater focus on the impact it had on children and families remained.

⁷⁷ CJI, ETI, RQIA, *An unannounced inspection of Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre 22-28 January 2022, September 2022* available at <https://www.cjini.org/TheInspections/Inspection-Reports/2022/July-Sept/Woodlands-JJC-2022>.

4.46 A broad range of official statistics, performance management information and research related to youth justice existed. **An analysis of the relationship between different data sets and implications for the child justice system was not evident, and a drive to enhance Section 75 data monitoring and analysis was an area for improvement.** Parts of systems were measured but not joined up to understand what influenced children's outcomes. As one interviewee reflected, even statutory partners measure different things.

4.47 Scrutiny of matters such as discrimination, reintegration, and patterns of offending was not occurring across child justice or beyond it to understand connections with other systems. There was a solid evidence base to show that while the numbers of children entering the youth justice system for the first time had reduced, durable solutions were needed to improve outcomes for children most at risk of repeated justice involvement, and enhance support where high levels of adversity and trauma had been experienced.

4.48 The Strategic Framework for Youth Justice was positive, but further development was required to meet the criteria for a comprehensive strategy that the NIAO had outlined:⁷⁸

- provide clarity to stakeholders on the evidence base that supports the proposed reforms;
- define the benefits that will be achieved from successful change; and
- establish a framework for monitoring success.

A targeted strategic focus was needed. An evidence-base, as well as United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child recommendations, for much needed change in relation to children who repeatedly reoffended, justice-involved children with lived experience of care, and 10 to 13-year-olds existed. This signalled potential for targeted solutions focused on these groups of children with greater ambition and defined benefits that included enhanced support and reduced representation within justice.

78 NIAO, *Managing children who offend: follow-up review, 1 December 2020* available at https://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/files/niauditoffice/media-files/244345%20Managing%20children%20who%20offend-%20follow%20up%20review%20Report_%28Cmbnd%20Final%29.pdf

APPENDIX 1: METHODOLOGY

Scoping meetings

Inspectors undertook scoping meetings and research to help inform the approach to the inspection. This included meetings with a YJA *Expert by Experience* and children who had experienced YJS. The YJA Participation Officer facilitated this engagement. A group of parents and carers also welcomed Inspectors to a Parents and Carers Group meeting.

Meetings also took place with stakeholder organisations and academics, including Include Youth, the former Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People, Professor Stephen Case, Loughborough University in respect of the '*Child First*' model for youth justice, Dr Siobhan McAlister and Dr Mary-Lousie Corr, Queen's University Belfast. Inspectors also engaged with colleagues in HMI Probation about its youth justice services inspections, and with the YJA to help with understanding how CJI could adapt and apply the HMI Probation youth inspection standards to the work of YJA Youth Justice Services.

Desktop research and documentary review

Applicable human rights standards and particularly the UNCRC General Comment on child rights in the criminal justice system were reviewed for the inspection. Previous CJI inspection reports and HMI Probation reports of its inspection of youth offending services, as well as its academic insights reports were examined. Youth inspection reports were considered.

Research literature and guidance were reviewed in relation to youth justice broadly and to the YJS in particular. This included published performance and workload data reports, as well as academic research. It was used to inform the development of terms of reference for the inspection and fieldwork planning. Inspected organisations also provided documentary evidence as part of the inspection fieldwork.

Fieldwork

YJS was asked to provide a self-assessment with supporting data and documentation using the inspection standards included at Appendix 2, which were adapted from HMI Probation's Inspection Standards for inspection of youth justice services. This was analysed by CJI in advance of the inspection fieldwork.

One-to-one interviews and focus groups with the YJA and partner criminal justice agencies were completed. The majority took place with the YJA Youth Justice Services and to a lesser extent with the PSNI, the PPS and the PBNI. Inspectors also met with representatives of the DoJ and the Judiciary. Statutory partners representing the HSC Trusts and Education Authority and stakeholder organisations were also consulted. We were grateful for the time provided by everyone to take part in the inspection.

YJA

- Chief Executive;
- Two Non-Executive Directors;
- Acting Director;
- Assistant Directors of the five Area Teams;
- Director of Corporate Services and Financial Services Manager;
- Statistician – YJA Statistics and Research; and
- Participation Officer.
- Belfast Area Team
 - Youth Conference Co-ordinators and Practitioners – focus group; and
 - Area Managers and Business Managers – two focus groups.
- Eastern Area Team
 - Youth Conference Co-ordinators and Practitioners – two focus groups;
 - Area Manager role; and
 - Business Manager.
 - Administrative Assistant x 1
- Northern Area Team;
 - Youth Conference Co-ordinators and Practitioners – focus group;
 - Business Manager; and
 - Area Manager.
- Southern Area Team
 - Youth Conference Co-Ordinator's and Practitioners – focus group;
 - Business Manager; and
 - Area Manager.
- Western Area Team
 - Youth Conference Co-ordinators and Practitioners – focus group;
 - Business Manager; and
 - Administrative Team focus group.

Inspectors met with children, parents and carers and victims as part of the inspection fieldwork when visiting each of the Area offices. Inspectors were extremely grateful for the time dedicated to meeting with us to help with the inspection. Inspectors were struck by the openness with which everyone shared their journey to help inform services for others. Inspectors appreciated the assistance of YJA Participation Officer and YJS staff who facilitated this.

In total, 10 parents and carers, nine children and two *Expert and Experience* participated in an individual interview during the inspection fieldwork. Two victims also took part in an interview, one with a supporter. A few carers also spoke to us about their experience as victims.

Inspectors also met with a reparation provider and a Education, Training and Employment placement provider.

Court observation

- A sitting of the Belfast Youth Court was observed.

PSNI

- Assistant Chief Constable – Children's Champion;
- PSNI Corporate Services Lead and Temporary Superintendent – Children and Young Person's Strategy;
- PSNI Criminal Justice Branch – Chief Inspector, Inspector and Sergeant with responsibility for Youth Justice Policy; and
- Youth Diversion Officers – two focus groups.

PPS

- Youth Justice Policy lead; and
- Youth Prosecutors (Public Prosecutors and Senior Public Prosecutors all regions) focus group.

PBNI

- Assistant Director.

Stakeholder organisations and Individuals

- Education Authority focus group;
- HSC Trust Directors of Children's Services x 3 (one focus group);
- Child and Family Social Work Lead for CDF, Southern HSC Trust;
- Voluntary organisations (The CLC and Include Youth) focus group;
- Pathways Project, Extern;
- Dr Colm Walsh, Queen's University, Belfast;
- Dr Conor Murray and Dr Brendan Coyle, Ulster University; and
- Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People.

YJA staff survey

Youth Justice Services Directorate staff were invited to complete a short survey during August until mid-September 2023. The survey asked about governance and leadership, staff and partnership and services. Participation in the survey helped inform CJI's approach to the fieldwork, its overall assessment of community-based interventions, and identify improvements. There were 36 respondents to the survey out of 121 staff. Detailed responses have not been published due to the small numbers involved. Survey responses were used to inform the fieldwork and for the purposes of triangulation with other data gathered as part of the inspection.

File review

A sample of cases were selected for file review. Six Court ordered cases were selected from all Youth Conference Order referrals to YJA in September 2022 and one from January 2023. Six Diversionary Youth Conference referrals from all referrals to YJA during a one-week period in January 2023, and two ESD cases. A question set to assess cases was adapted from HMI Probation methodology and focused on assessment, planning, delivery, and review. Each stage of every case was examined for effectiveness in relation to desistance needs, the safety and wellbeing of the child, and the safety (or risk of harm) to others. Sixteen staff were interviewed for their perspectives on supervising the cases. Each interview focused on management oversight, services to support desistance, safety of the child and management of risk of harm. Findings were not representative of all cases referred to YJA as representative sampling was not used.

APPENDIX 2: INSPECTION STANDARDS

CJI Inspection of Youth Interventions 2023: Standards with associated question areas/indicators (adapted from HMI Probation standards for youth offending services May 2021).⁷⁹

CATEGORY: STRATEGY AND GOVERNANCE

1.1 Governance and leadership support and promote the delivery of high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children.

- 1.1.1 *Is there an effective vision and strategy for the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children?*
- 1.1.2 *Do the partnership arrangements actively support effective service delivery?*
- 1.1.3 *Does the leadership support effective service delivery?*

1.2 Staff are empowered to deliver a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children.

- 1.2.1 *Do staffing and workload levels support the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children?*
- 1.2.2 *Do the skills of staff support the delivery of a high-quality, personalised and responsive service for all children?*
- 1.2.3 *Does the oversight of work support high-quality delivery and professional development?*
- 1.2.4 *Are arrangements for learning and development comprehensive and responsive?*
- 1.2.5 *Do managers pay sufficient attention to staff engagement?*

1.3 A comprehensive range of high-quality services is in place, enabling personalised and responsive provision for all children.

- 1.3.1 *Is there a sufficiently comprehensive and up-to-date analysis of profile of children, used by the YJA to deliver well-targeted services?*
- 1.3.2 *Do partnerships provide the volume, range and quality of services and interventions required to meet the needs of all children?*
- 1.3.3 *Are arrangements with statutory partners, providers and other agencies established, maintained and used effectively to deliver high-quality services?*

⁷⁹ HM Inspectorate of Probation, *Inspection Standards for youth offending services, May 2021 (effective from July 2021)*, available at <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2023/11/Standards-for-inspection-youth-offending-services-English.pdf>. Note that HMI Probation had been consulting on changes to its inspection standards for youth offending services with consultation having closed in January 2024. Consultation document available at <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2024/01/Consultation-on-youth-inspection-extended-deadline-1.pdf>.

1.4 Timely and relevant information is available and appropriate facilities are in place to support a high-quality, personalised and responsive approach for all children.

- 1.4.1 *Do the policies and guidance in place enable staff to deliver a high-quality service, meeting the needs of all children?*
- 1.4.2 *Does the delivery environment meet the needs of all children and enable staff to deliver a high-quality service?*
- 1.4.3 *Do the ICT systems enable staff to deliver a high-quality service, meeting the needs of all children?*

1.5 Resources are planned, managed, and improved to deliver against targets. [added from CJI inspection framework]

- 1.5.1 *Are finances and resources used effectively and efficiently in support of delivery objectives?*

CATEGORY: DELIVERY

2. Court Disposals

2.1 Assessment is well-informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents or carers.

- 2.1.1 *Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?*
- 2.1.2 *Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?*
- 2.1.3 *Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?*

2.2 Planning is well-informed, holistic and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents or carers.

- 2.2.1 *Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?*
- 2.2.2 *Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?*
- 2.2.3 *Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?*

2.3 High-quality, well-focused, personalised and co-ordinated services are delivered, engaging and assisting the child.

- 2.3.1 *Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the child's desistance?*
- 2.3.2 *Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of the child?*
- 2.3.3 *Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?*

2.4 Reviewing of progress is well-informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents or carers.

- 2.4.1 *Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?*
- 2.4.2 *Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?*
- 2.4.3 *Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?*

3. Out-of-Court disposals – PPS Diversionary Youth Conference

3.1 Assessment is well-informed, analytical and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents or carers.

- 3.1.1 *Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?*
- 3.1.2 *Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?*
- 3.1.3 *Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?*

3.2 Planning is well-informed, holistic and personalised, actively involving the child and their parents or carers.

- 3.2.1 *Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?*
- 3.2.2 *Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?*
- 3.2.3 *Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?*

3.3 High-quality, well-focused, personalised and co-ordinated services are delivered, engaging and assisting the child.

- 3.3.1 *Does service delivery support the child's desistance?*
- 3.3.2 *Does service delivery support the safety of the child?*
- 3.3.3 *Does service delivery effectively support the safety of other people?*

3.4 There is a high-quality, evidence-based out-of-Court disposal service in place that promotes diversion and supports sustainable desistance.

- 3.4.1 *Is there a policy in place for out-of-Court disposal provision that promotes appropriate diversion and supports sustainable desistance?*
- 3.4.2 *Does out-of-Court disposal provision promote diversion and support sustainable desistance?*
- 3.4.3 *Are the out-of-Court disposal policy and provision regularly assessed and updated to ensure effectiveness and maintain alignment with the evidence base?*

4. Early-Stage Diversion (ESD) [added by CJI to encompass YJA ESD]

4.1 There is a high-quality, evidence-based service in place that promotes diversion.

- 4.1.1 *Is there a policy in place that promotes a high-quality, constructive and personalised service for all children?*
- 4.1.2 *Does provision promote a high-quality, constructive and personalised service for all children?*
- 4.1.3 *Are ESD policy and provision regularly assessed and updated to ensure effectiveness and maintain alignment with the evidence base?*

5. Resettlement

5.1 There is a high quality, evidence-based resettlement service for children leaving custody.

- 5.1.1 *Is there a resettlement policy in place that promotes a high-quality, constructive and personalised resettlement service for all children?*
- 5.1.2 *Does resettlement provision promote a high-quality, constructive and personalised resettlement service for all children?*
- 5.1.3 *Are resettlement policy and provision regularly assessed and updated to ensure effectiveness and maintain alignment with the evidence base?*

CATEGORY: OUTCOMES [ADDED TO ENCOMPASS CJI FOCUS 'OUTCOMES']

- 1.1 **Are outcomes measured and evaluated against evidence-based objectives and targets?**
- 1.2 **Does measurement of outcomes integrate diversity issues to ensure fairness and equality [including Section 75 groups of children]?**
- 1.3 **Are analysis, evidence and learning used effectively to drive improvement?**
- 1.4 **Is performance is benchmarked against appropriate organisations?**

APPENDIX 3: FILE REVIEW QUESTION SET

COURT-ORDERED YOUTH CONFERENCE PLAN REFERRALS

ASSESSMENT

A1 Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?

- Reoffending/needs score at assessment.
- What do you think completed?
- Is there sufficient analysis of offending behaviour, including relationship between the child's needs and their offending behaviour?
- Does assessment sufficiently analyse diversity issues?
- Does assessment consider personal circumstances, including the wider familial and social context of the child?
- Does assessment utilise information held by other agencies?
- Does assessment focus on the child's strengths and protective factors?
- Does assessment analyse the key structural barriers facing the child?
- Is sufficient attention given to understanding the child's levels of maturity, ability and motivation to change, and their likelihood of engaging with the Court disposal?
- Does assessment give sufficient attention to the needs and wishes of the victim/s, and opportunities for restorative justice?
- Is the child and their parents or carers meaningfully involved in their assessment, and are their views taken into account?
- Which of the following factors were related to desistance in this case? [substance misuse; physical health; learning and Education; Training and Employment; living arrangements; speech, language, and communication; lifestyle; mental health; resilience; family/carer relationship; support networks; being connected; traumatic past events; self-identity; none of the above]

A2 Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?

- Has the child been subject to a Child Protection Plan or Article 66 Enquiries at any time during the sentence being inspected?
- Does assessment clearly identify and analyse any risks to the safety and wellbeing of the child?
- Does assessment draw sufficiently on available sources of information, including other assessments, and involve other agencies where appropriate?
- Does assessment analyse controls and interventions to promote the safety and wellbeing of the child?
- Is there a clear, written record of the assessment of the child's safety and wellbeing?

A3 Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?

- Does assessment clearly identify and analyse any risk of harm to others posed by the child, including identifying who is at risk and the nature of that risk?
- Does assessment draw sufficiently on available sources of information, including past behaviour and convictions, and involve other agencies where appropriate?
- Does assessment analyse controls and interventions to manage and minimise the risk of harm presented by the child?
- Is there a risk of serious harm classification of the child, according to the case manager?
- What is the classification of risk of serious harm, in the view of the Inspector?
- Is the case manager's classification of risk of serious harm reasonable?
- Was the case Public Protection Arrangements Northern Ireland eligible at any time during the sentence being inspected?
- What was the highest Public Protection Arrangements Northern Ireland level at which this case was managed during the sentence being inspected?
- Is there a clear, written record of the assessment to keep other people safe?

PLANNING

P1 Does Planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?

- Does planning set out the services most likely to support desistance, paying sufficient attention to the available timescales and the need for sequencing?
- Does planning sufficiently address diversity issues?
- Does planning take sufficient account of the child's personal circumstances including the wider familial and social context of the child?
- Does planning take sufficient account of the child's strengths and protective factors, and seek to reinforce or develop these as necessary?
- Does planning take sufficient account of the child's levels of maturity, ability and motivation to change, and seek to develop these as necessary?
- Does planning give sufficient attention to the needs and wishes of the victim/s?
- Are the child and their parents or carers meaningfully involved in planning, and are their views taken into account?
- Were sufficient services planned for, to address the factors identified as related to desistance in this case?
- Is planning proportionate to the court outcome, with interventions capable of being delivered within appropriate timescales?

P2 Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?

- Does planning promote the safety and wellbeing of the child, sufficiently addressing risks?
- Does planning involve other agencies where appropriate, and is there sufficient alignment with other plans (for example child protection or care plans) concerning the child?
- Does planning set out the necessary controls and interventions to promote the safety and wellbeing of the child?
- Does planning set out necessary and effective contingency arrangements to manage those risks that have been identified?

P3 Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping people safe?

- Does planning promote the safety of other people, sufficiently addressing risk of harm factors?
- Does planning involve other agencies where appropriate?
- Does planning address any specific concerns and risks related to actual and potential victims?
- Does planning set out the necessary controls and interventions to promote the safety of other people?
- Does planning set out necessary and effective contingency arrangements to manage those risks that have been identified?

IMPLEMENTATION AND DELIVERY

D1 Does implementation and delivery of services effectively support the child's desistance?

- Are the delivered services those most likely to support desistance, with sufficient attention given to sequencing and the available timescales?
- Does service delivery account for the diversity issues of the child?
- Does service delivery reflect the wider familial and social context of the child, involving the parents, carers or significant others?
- Does service delivery build upon the child's strengths and enhance protective factors?
- Is sufficient focus given to developing and maintaining an effective working relationship with the child and their parents/carers?
- Is sufficient attention given to encouraging and enabling the child's compliance/engagement?
- Were sufficient services delivered, to address the factors identified as related to desistance in this case?
- Are enforcement actions taken when appropriate?
- Is the delivery of services proportionate to the disposal, and completed within the required timescales?

D2 Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of the child?

- Does service delivery promote the safety and wellbeing of the child?
- Is the involvement of other organisations in keeping the child safe sufficiently well co-ordinated?

D3 Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of other people?

- Are the delivered services sufficient to manage and minimise the risk of harm?
- Is sufficient attention given to the protection of actual and potential victims?
- Is the involvement of other agencies in managing the risk of harm sufficiently well co-ordinated?
- Is there evidence of Strand 1 funding being used in this case?
- Is there evidence that the Strand 1 funding supported the delivery of the plan and the child's desistance?

REVIEWING

R1 Does reviewing focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?

- Does reviewing identify and respond to changes in factors linked to desistance?
- Does reviewing focus sufficiently on building upon the child's strengths and enhancing protective factors?
- Does reviewing include analysis of, and respond to, diversity factors?
- Does reviewing consider the personal circumstances including the wider familial and social context of the child?
- Does reviewing consider motivation and engagement levels and any relevant barriers?
- Is the child meaningfully involved in reviewing their progress and engagement, and are their views taken into account?
- Are the parents or carers meaningfully involved in reviewing their progress and engagement, and are their views taken into account?
- Does reviewing lead to the necessary adjustments in the ongoing plan of work to support desistance?
- Was a written review of desistance completed?

R2 Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?

- Does reviewing identify and respond to changes in factors related to safety and wellbeing?
- Is reviewing informed by the necessary input from other agencies involved in promoting the safety and wellbeing of the child?
- Was a written review of safety and wellbeing completed?

R3 Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping other people safe?

- Does reviewing identify and respond to changes in factors related to risk of harm?
- Is reviewing informed by the necessary input from other agencies involved in managing the risk of harm?
- Does reviewing lead to the necessary adjustments in the ongoing plan of work to manage and minimise the risk of harm?
- Was a written review of risk of harm completed?

PPS YOUTH CONFERENCE PLAN REFERRALS

ASSESSMENT

A1 Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to support the child's desistance?

- Reoffending/needs assessment score.
- What do you think completed?
- Is there sufficient analysis of offending behaviour, including relationship between the child's needs and their offending behaviour?
- Does assessment sufficiently analyse diversity issues?

- Does assessment consider personal circumstances, including the wider familial and social context of the child?
- Does assessment utilise information held by other agencies?
- Does assessment focus on the child's strengths and protective factors?
- Does assessment analyse the key structural barriers facing the child?
- Is sufficient attention given to understanding the child's levels of maturity, ability and motivation to change?
- Does assessment give sufficient attention to the needs and wishes of the victims, and opportunities for restorative justice?
- Are the child and their parents or carers meaningfully involved in their assessment, and are their views taken into account?
- Which of the following factors were related to desistance in this case? [substance misuse; physical health; learning and Education, Training and Employment; living arrangements; speech, language, and communication; lifestyle; mental health; resilience; family/carer relationship; support networks; being connected; traumatic past events; self-identity; none of the above].

A2 Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?

- Has the child been subject to a Child Protection Plan or Article 66 Enquiries at any time during the sentence being inspected?
- Does assessment clearly identify and analyse any risks to the safety and wellbeing of the child?
- Does assessment draw sufficiently on available sources of information, including other assessments, and involve other agencies where appropriate?
- Is there a clear, written record of the assessment of the child's safety and wellbeing?

A3 Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep other people safe?

- Does assessment clearly identify and analyse any risk of harm to others posed by the child, including identifying who is at risk and the nature of that risk?
- Does assessment draw sufficiently on available sources of information, including any other assessments that have been completed, and other evidence of behaviour by the child?
- Is there a risk of serious harm classification of the child, according to the case manager?
- What is the classification of risk of serious harm in the view of the Inspector?
- Is the case manager's classification of risk of serious harm reasonable?
- Is there a clear, written record of the assessment to keep other people safe?

PLANNING

P1 Does planning focus sufficiently on supporting the child's desistance?

- Does planning set out the services most likely to support desistance, paying sufficient attention to the available timescales and the need for sequencing?
- Does planning sufficiently address diversity issues?
- Does planning take sufficient account of the child's personal circumstances including the wider familial and social context of the child?
- Does planning take sufficient account of the child's strengths and protective factors, and seek to reinforce or develop these as necessary?
- Does planning take sufficient account of the child's levels of maturity, ability and motivation to change, and seek to develop these as necessary?
- Does planning take sufficient account of opportunities for community integration, including access to mainstream services following completion of out-of-Court disposal work?
- Does planning give sufficient attention to the needs and wishes of the victims?
- Is the child meaningfully involved in planning, and are their views taken into account?
- Are their parents or carers meaningfully involved in planning, and are their views taken into account?
- Were sufficient services planned for, to address the factors identified as related to desistance in this case?
- Is planning proportionate to the disposal type, with interventions capable of being completed within appropriate timescales?

P2 Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?

- Does planning promote the safety and wellbeing of the child, sufficiently addressing risks?
- Does planning involve other agencies where appropriate, and is there sufficient alignment with other plans (for example child protection or care plans) concerning the child?
- Does planning include necessary contingency arrangements for those risks that have been identified?

P3 Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping people safe?

- Does planning promote the safety of other people, sufficiently addressing risk of harm factors?
- Does planning involve other agencies where appropriate?
- Does planning address any specific concerns and risks related to actual and potential victims?
- Does planning set out necessary contingency arrangements to manage those risks that have been identified?

IMPLEMENTATION AND DELIVERY

D1 Does implementation and delivery of services support the child's desistance?

- Are the delivered services those most likely to support desistance, with sufficient attention given to sequencing and the available timescales?
- Does service delivery account for the diversity issues of the child?
- Does service delivery reflect the wider familial and social context of the child, involving the parents, carers or significant others?
- Is sufficient focus given to developing and maintaining an effective working relationship with the child and their parents or carers?
- Is sufficient attention given to encouraging and enabling the child's compliance with the work?
- Does service delivery promote opportunities for community integration, including access to mainstream services?
- Is the delivery of services proportionate to the type of out-of-Court disposal, and completed within the required timescales?
- Were sufficient services delivered, to address the factors identified as related to desistance in this case?
- Are enforcement actions taken when appropriate?

D2 Does the implementation and delivery of services effectively support the safety of the child?

- Does service delivery promote the safety and wellbeing of the child?
- Is the involvement of other agencies in keeping the child safe sufficiently well-utilised and co-ordinated?

D3 Does service delivery effectively support the safety of other people?

- Are the delivered services sufficient to manage and minimise the risk of harm?
- Is sufficient attention given to the protection of actual and potential victims?
- Is there evidence of Strand 1 funding being used in this case?
- Is there evidence of that the Strand 1 funding supported the delivery of the plan and support the child's desistance

APPENDIX 4: YOUTH JUSTICE AGENCY CONTEXTUAL DATA

YJA NOTE: Data was lifted (21/6/23) from a live database prior to full QA process and subject to change; only referrals with a status of open are included.

Open referrals by age

Age*	Referrals	Individuals
10-14 years	295	146
15+ years	522	297
Total	817	436*

* Age is calculated at the time of referral.

* On occasion a child will be older than 17 due to their offence being committed prior to their 18th birthday.

* If a child has more than one referral and are a different age at each referral, they will be counted twice within the individuals column.

* If a child has more than 1 referral that have a different <x> at the time of referral, they will be counted once per different <x> within the individuals column. The summation of the individuals <x> categories will differ to the total as a child could be counted in more than one categories but would only be counted once in the total'

Open referrals by ethnicity

Ethnicity*	Referrals	Individuals
White	561	275
Ethnic Minority **	6	4
I do not wish to answer	-	-
Irish Traveller	26	8
Mixed ethnic group	12	7
Unknown	-	-
Not Entered on Database	203	138
Total	817	436

* This information is self-reported by the child and can therefore not be validated.

** Data collapsed by CJI due to small numbers in some categories (categories provided: Black African, Black Other, Chinese) - removed due to small numbers

Open referrals by sex

Sex	Referrals	Individuals
Female	198	103
Male	597	319
Other	12	4
Not Entered on Database	10	10
Total	817	436

Open referrals by Local Government District 2014

LGD2014	Referrals	Individuals
Antrim and Newtownabbey	29	21
Ards and North Down	100	29
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	87	57
Belfast	146	101
Causeway Coast and Glens	55	32
Derry City and Strabane	120	41
Fermanagh and Omagh	43	28
Lisburn and Castlereagh	56	29
Mid and East Antrim	64	39
Mid Ulster	46	26
Newry, Mourne and Down	67	30
Not Available	4	4
Total	817	436*

* If a child has more than 1 referral that have a different <x> at the time of referral, they will be counted once per different <x> within the individuals column. The summation of the individuals <x> categories will differ to the total as a child could be counted in more than one categories but would only be counted once in the total

Open referrals by referral type

Referral Grouped	Referral Type	Referrals
Court Ordered	Court Ordered	245
	Total	245
Diversionsary	Diversionsary	165
	Youth Engagement Diversionsary	271
	Total	436

Referral Grouped	Referral Type	Referrals
Other	Attendance Centre Order	12
	Bail Support - Court	-
	Community Responsibility Order	-
	Juvenile Justice Centre Order	18
	PBNI	-
	Total	35
ESD	CDF Intervention	44
	CRN Intervention	16
	Sexting Intervention	5
	Youth Engagement Intervention	7
	Total	72
Voluntary	Bail Support - Vol	14
	Plan/Order Pending	11
	Post-Plan/Order	4
	Total	29
Total		817

- Removed due to small numbers

Open referrals by Area Team

Area	Referrals	Individuals
Belfast	169	116
Eastern	141	55
Northern	133	82
Southern	166	91
Western	208	99
Total	817	436*

* If a child has more than 1 referral that have a different <x> at the time of referral, they will be counted once per different <x> within the individuals column. The summation of the individuals <x> categories will differ to the total as a child could be counted in more than one categories but would only be counted once in the total

Open referrals by prior involvement

Involvement	Referrals
Prior involvement with YJA	582
No Prior involvement with YJA	235
Total	817

*Prior involvement does not compare against YECs, CDF meeting or CDF, Sexting or Vaping Schemes.

Open referrals by care status

Care status	Referrals	Individuals
At home	4	4
Not in care	460	320
Subject to care order	184	64
Voluntary accommodated	43	21
Not Known	62	22
Not Entered on Database	64	59
Total	817	436*

* If a child has more than 1 referral that have a different <x> at the time of referral, they will be counted once per different <x> within the individuals column. The summation of the individuals <x> categories will differ to the total as a child could be counted in more than one categories but would only be counted once in the total

Open admissions by child protection status at time of admission

Child Protection On Admission	Admissions
No	190
Yes	30
Not Entered on Database	146
Total	366

Open statutory referrals by offence group

Offence Group 2020	Referrals
Burglary	13
Criminal Damage & Arson	128
Drugs - Controlled	22
Fraud – National Fraud Intelligence Bureau	38
Fraud - Other	-
Misc - general	7
Misc sexual	5
Motoring	-
Possession of Weapons	21
Public Order	53
Robbery	-
Sexual	11
Theft	105
VAP	305
Total	714

* Only statutory referrals with a status of open are included in this analysis.

- Removed due to small numbers

APPENDIX 5: TERMS OF REFERENCE

AN INSPECTION OF THE YOUTH JUSTICE AGENCY: YOUTH INTERVENTIONS

Introduction

Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJI) proposes to undertake an inspection of the Youth Justice Agency's (YJA's) community-based interventions with children in Northern Ireland.

The inspection will focus on the YJA Youth Justice Services (YJS), which delivers community-based interventions and services. Where it is necessary to assess the delivery of youth interventions, the interface between the YJS and its criminal justice partners will be considered, namely, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland (PPS), the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) and the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI). The inspection will consider the role of the Department of Justice (DoJ) in the development of relevant policy or legislation where appropriate.

The relevant human rights framework, in particular, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No. 24 on children's rights in the child justice system¹ will inform the inspection. The latter sets out guidance for States in implementing a child justice system that promotes and protects children's rights including key strategies to reduce the harmful effects of contact with the criminal justice system. Community-based interventions that divert children away from the formal system, as well as those provided in the context of judicial proceedings are covered.

Context

This will be CJI's first inspection of the range of community-based interventions delivered by the YJA. Previous inspections relevant to this area have included Early Youth Interventions² and the Effectiveness of Youth Conferencing.³ In addition, CJI has monitored progress on implementing recommendations arising from a 2011 review of youth justice in Northern Ireland.⁴

The 2011 Youth Justice Review ('the Review') recommendations remain relevant to the delivery of non-custodial interventions. Research commissioned jointly by the CLC, Include Youth, NIACRO and VOYPIC reported that by 2021, the Review recommendations had been only partially implemented with some not taken forward at all.

Among the issues highlighted were gaps in data to show how outcomes for children as a result of interventions had been meaningfully assessed.⁵

A series of recommendations relating to the development of strategy for youth justice policy, services and interventions, performance indicators, assessment of cost effectiveness, and the recording of interventions by the YJA had also been made by the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO).⁶ In 2020, the NIAO reported that the DoJ and YJA had made progress towards implementing its recommendations. However, areas for improvement remained and the YJA was urged to '*...continue to develop its performance reporting regime with greater focus on the impact of its work with children and families, in line with the principles of OBA*' (Outcomes Based Accountability).⁷

The YJA is responsible for custodial and non-custodial services for children and young people in Northern Ireland. Custodial services are provided at Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre.

The YJA supervises a range of non-custodial disposals including diversionary and Court-ordered Youth Conferences, and Community Orders such as attendance centre orders, community responsibility orders and reparation orders.⁸ Early Stage Diversion (ESD) is also part of YJA work. ESD is described as '*support to children on the cusp of or involved in the early stages of offending to help divert them from the formal criminal justice system.*'⁹

Available data shows how YJA's community-based work has changed over time.¹⁰ Five-year trends show a slight overall increase in the proportion of 'diversionary referrals,' (41.9% in 2017-18 to 45.3% in 2021-22), while the proportion of Court-ordered referrals has decreased overall (from 34% in 2017-18 to 25.5% in 2021-22). The proportion of ESD referrals had more than doubled in the same period from 8.6% to 21%.

An important development also relevant to any consideration of YJA's work is its new Model of Practice. It's overarching '*Children First*' approach aims to better reflect a focus on achieving outcomes for children, families, and victims, and is applicable to the YJA in its delivery of community-based interventions.¹¹

Aims of the Inspection

The broad aims of the Inspection are to:

- review the effectiveness of strategy, governance and leadership in supporting the delivery of quality community-based interventions;
- outline the range and type of community-based interventions delivered by the YJA YJS and examine their use and resource utilisation over time;
- assess the quality of youth interventions delivered by the YJA; and
- examine the ways in which YJA measures and reports on the quality, and the impact, of YJA interventions on children, families and victims, including any reoffending related measures and feedback sought from service users and community groups involved in delivering services.

An inspection framework tailored to the assessment of YJA community-based interventions will be developed as part of the inspection and provide the criteria against which the quality of YJA interventions will be assessed. The framework will be shared with YJA and published as part of the inspection.

Methodology

The inspection will be based on the CJI Inspection Framework for each inspection that it conducts. The three main elements of the inspection framework are:

- Strategy and governance;
- Delivery; and
- Outcomes.

Constants in each of the three framework elements and throughout each inspection are equality and fairness, together with standards and best practice. The CJI inspection methodology can be found at www.cjini.org.

Given the importance and prevalence of reviews already undertaken at a strategic level in the area of youth justice, CJI will adopt a targeted approach to the examination of strategy and governance for this inspection. This means that areas of strategy and governance will be examined according to key lines of enquiry that emerge from Inspectors' assessment of the quality of the delivery of YJA interventions.

Design and Planning

Preliminary research

Data and initial information has been reviewed in order to inform the scope of the inspection. CJI has also undertaken early scoping discussions with academic, statutory and voluntary sector organisations, as well as with the YJA. A number of children either currently or previously involved with YJA, and the YJA parents and carers group members also met with Inspectors to inform the planning of the inspection.

To assist in the development of an inspection framework, CJI has liaised with His Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation (HMI Probation) to learn more about its approach when inspecting Youth Offending Teams in England and Wales.

Benchmarking, research and data collection

Collection of benchmarking information and data, where available, from other jurisdictions and sectors in Northern Ireland and a review of inspection and research reports will be undertaken.

Contact with agency (ies)

Terms of reference will be prepared and shared with the YJA prior to the commencement of the inspection. A copy will also be provided to the DoJ, the PSNI, the PPS, the NICTS and the PBNI. Liaison officers from the organisation should be nominated.

Policies and procedures, management information, accounting information, minutes of meetings and related documentation from the YJA will be requested and reviewed. Where relevant, CJI may also request documentation from the other criminal justice organisations named in the terms of reference and the DoJ.

Delivery

Stakeholder consultation

CJI will undertake consultation with stakeholder organisations advocating for and supporting children in the context of youth justice including those engaging with the YJA.

Self-assessment

The YJA will be asked to undertake a self-assessment for the inspection, which will be reviewed by CJI prior to the commencement of fieldwork.

Development of fieldwork plan

CJI will liaise closely with the YJA and where applicable other criminal justice organisations in the development and scheduling of fieldwork.

The fieldwork plan will include:

- meetings with staff and managers in the YJA YJS;
- meetings with community organisations involved in delivering services on behalf of the YJA;
- the completion of case reviews to assess the impact of YJA interventions work on children, families and victims;
- observation of Youth Conferences will be considered;
- meeting with children, families and victims about their experience of YJA interventions where appropriate and where they are supported through the YJA or a voluntary organisation; and
- meetings with key staff in other criminal justice organisations and the DoJ where necessary to assess the quality of YJA interventions.

Initial feedback to agency

On conclusion of the fieldwork the evidence will be collated, triangulated and analysed and emerging recommendations will be developed. CJI will then present the findings to appropriate organisations.

Drafting of report

Following completion of the fieldwork and analysis of data a draft report will be shared with the inspected bodies for factual accuracy check. The Chief Inspector will invite the inspected bodies to complete an action plan within six weeks to address the recommendations and if the plan has been agreed and is available it will be published as part of the final inspection report. The inspection report will be shared, under embargo, in advance of the publication date with the inspected bodies.

Publication and Closure

A report will be sent to the Minister of Justice, or in their absence the DoJ Permanent Secretary, for permission to publish. When permission is received the report will be finalised for publication. A press release will be drafted and shared with the inspected agencies prior to publication and release. A publication date will be agreed and the report will be issued.

Indicative Timetable

- Scoping/Research: January to April 2023.
- Stakeholder consultation: May/June 2023.
- Development of inspection framework: May/June 2023.
- Agency fieldwork: June to September 2023*.
- Draft Report to agencies: November 2023.
- Factual accuracy feedback received: December 2023.

The above timetable may be impacted by factors outside CJJ's control. The inspected organisations will be kept advised of any significant changes to the indicative timetable.

****fieldwork with YJA was extended to mid-November 2023***

ENDNOTES

- 1 *Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 24 (2019) on children's rights in the child justice system*, 18 September 2019 available at <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G19/275/57/PDF/G1927557.pdf?OpenElement>.
- 2 CJI, *Early Youth Interventions: An inspection of the contribution the criminal justice agencies in Northern Ireland make to preventing children and young people from entering the criminal justice system*, July 2012 available at <https://www.cjini.org/TheInspections/Inspection-Reports/2012/July---September/Early-Youth-Interventions>.
- 3 CJI, *The Effectiveness of Youth Conferencing*, March 2015 available at <https://www.cjini.org/TheInspections/Inspection-Reports/2015/January---March/The-effectiveness-of-youth-conferencing>. See also CJI, *The Effectiveness of Youth Conferencing: A Follow-Up Review*, April 2019 available at <https://www.cjini.org/TheInspections/Action-Plan-Reviews-Inspection-Follow-Up-Review/2019/April-June/Youth-Conferencing-1>.
- 4 CJI, *Monitoring of Progress on Implementation of the Youth Justice Review Recommendations*, December 2013 and December 2015, available at <https://www.cjini.org/TheInspections/Inspection-Reports/2013/October---December/Monitoring-of-Progress-on-Implementation-of-the-You>; and <https://www.cjini.org/TheInspections/Inspection-Reports/2015/October---December/Youth-Justice-Review-test>.
- 5 Carr, N & McAlister, S, *Tracing the Review: Developments in Youth Justice in Northern Ireland 2011-2021*, May 2021 available at https://pureadmin.qub.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/263877347/TRACING_THE_REVIEW_PDF.pdf.
- 6 NIAO, *Managing Children Who Offend*, July 2017 available at https://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/files/niauditoffice/media-files/174770%20NIAO%20Managing%20children%20who%20offend_Fnl%20LowRs_5.pdf.
- 7 NIAO, *Managing Children Who Offend, follow up review*, December 2020, Recommendation 2 available at https://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/files/niauditoffice/media-files/244345%20Managing%20children%20who%20offend-%20follow%20up%20review%20Report_%28Cmbnd%20Final%29.pdf.
- 8 See the 'definitions' in NISRA, *Northern Ireland Youth Justice Agency Annual Workload Statistics 2021/22*, T. Brown, September 2022 available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/youth%20justice%20agency%20workload%20stats%20bulletin%202021-22.pdf>.
- 9 ESD is defined as 'support to children on the cusp of or involved in the early stages of offending to help divert them from the formal criminal justice system' (see YJS Workload statistics as above, page 7).
- 10 As above.
- 11 YJS, *Positive and Progressive Youth Justice: Children First, Youth Justice Agency Model of Practice*, available at <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/justice/YJS-model-of-practice-final.pdf>.

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