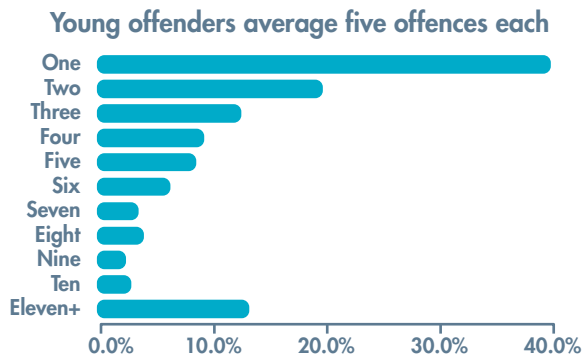


Youth offending and reoffending



£324,000
average annual
cost of custody
for each child

£17.4M
cost of
operations in the
Youth Justice
Agency in
2015-16

72% of youth crime incidents
were committed by
repeat offenders

28% of young offenders
reoffended within
one year

79% of young offenders
were male

45% of young offenders
had committed
offences previously

89% of young offenders
(31 out of 35)
released from custody
reoffend

1% of young
offenders accounted for

13% of all incidents
of crime and disorder

930
First-time
offences by
young people in
2014-2015

Executive Summary

1. The number of first time offences committed by young people (aged between 10 and 17) has been reducing in recent years with 930 offences in 2014-15, a reduction of 23 per cent on 2013-14 (1,205 offences)¹. This represents around 0.5 per cent of our youth population. During 2013-14, 1,905 young people were given a community or diversionary disposal² or released from custody. However, more than one in four young offenders (28 per cent) will go on to reoffend within one year. Repeat offenders account for a disproportionately high percentage of all incidents, representing 72 per cent of all youth crime and disorder.
2. A small number of young people are linked to a high number of incidents of crime and disorder. Three quarters of young people who become involved with the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) are boys. The majority of young people involved, both boys and girls, are aged between 14 and 16 years of age. Most young people recorded as being involved in crime and disorder were linked to only one incident. However, a third of young people were recorded more than once, while two thirds of these repeat offenders will go on to be recorded in more than one year. The most prolific one per cent of young offenders account for around 13 per cent of all incidents³.
3. Long term analysis of reoffending has been constrained by a lack of reliable data. The Department of Justice (the Department) has collected and published reliable statistics on youth reoffending since 2014. However, the lack of reliable consistent statistical data has been a significant strategic and practical weakness.
4. The reoffending rate for Northern Ireland is lower than in England and Wales, at 28 per cent compared to 38 per cent. However, Northern Ireland has proportionately more first time entrants into the justice system.
5. Diverting young people away from criminal behaviour requires a joint and co-ordinated approach by all justice agencies. This has become increasingly important in the current environment of austerity given the need to achieve the best outcome from limited resources. A cross-departmental Strategic Framework on Reducing Offending published in May 2013 aims to provide a strategic and co-ordinated approach to reducing offending behaviour in Northern Ireland. However, it does not differentiate between approaches required for managing youth reoffending and reoffending amongst adults. There is a need for a specific strategy to guide the Executive in terms of youth justice policy and interventions and to help co-ordinate the delivery of youth justice services.
6. The Department has commenced work on a scoping study into children in, or on the fringes of, the criminal justice system. The first stage of the study concluded in March 2016, with a series of

1 First Time Entrants to the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland Research and Statistical Bulletin 20/2015 and 18/2016

2 The disposal of the offender is the type of sentence the offender received for their offence

3 Children and Young People's contact with police – Five-year trend analysis - PSNI Policing with the Community Branch (March 2015)

high-level proposals presented to the Assembly. Further work is required to turn the proposals into detailed recommendations for Ministerial consideration. The scoping study proposals provide a framework to underpin improved outcomes, but will require significant political and cross-department support to be successful. In practice this will require public bodies to work collaboratively and to maintain their engagement with partners in single outcome agreements. They must work effectively not only with traditional partners in the criminal justice system, but also with key departments and agencies in health, education and housing.

7. Custodial services represent the largest element of the Youth Justice Agency's (YJA) costs, £6.9 million in 2015-16, when around 160 young people were detained. Historically, young people on remand have made up the majority of the custodial population and accounted for half of all those processed through the Juvenile Justice Centre (JJC) in 2014-15. The average cost per occupant each year in the JJC is £324,000. The Department has not compared the cost of youth custody in Northern Ireland to costs in England and Wales.
8. Rates of reoffending have increased since 2010-11. The most recent statistics for 2013-14 reveal that while the overall reoffending rate is 28 per cent, the reoffending rate for those released from custody is 89 per cent (31 out of 35). Over 50 per cent of young offenders dealt with through community orders reoffended.

9. YJA's activities focus on building a relationship between the young offender and the YJA practitioner based around the assessed needs of the young person and the agreed content of youth conference plans in support of changing behaviour. However, to date, there remains a lack of clear evidence on the impact of these measures. There is no strong evidence base as to what works to reduce offending in Northern Ireland. Youth conferencing in particular may not address the needs of prolific offenders.
10. Assessing the cost effectiveness of interventions is the foundation for delivering value for money. The Department and the YJA lack the capacity to identify and apportion costs to the full range of interventions used to address offending behaviour. Consequently, they cannot adequately assess their cost-effectiveness and cannot currently demonstrate that the interventions to reduce reoffending by young people represent value for money.

Recommendations

R1: The Department should establish a specific strategy to address youth offending and reoffending to co-ordinate the delivery of youth justice services, policy and interventions.

R2: The Youth Justice Agency and other government agencies should establish a series of performance indicators to underpin the Programme for Government targets to reduce reoffending, focusing on improved outcomes

Executive Summary

R3: The Department and the Youth Justice Agency should expand cost recording and analysis across the youth justice system, to enable them to assess the cost effectiveness and the return on investment on interventions aimed at reducing youth offending.

R4: The Department and the Youth Justice Agency should examine the factors that contribute to the custody costs in Northern Ireland and benchmark costs against custodial arrangements in other UK regions. Cost of custody data should be published.

R5: Activity to reduce offending among young people should be focused towards those interventions with proven impact and supported by evidence about the cost-effectiveness of interventions.

R6: Complete records are necessary to any assessment of the effectiveness of interventions to address offending behaviour. The Youth Justice Agency should ensure that all interventions are recorded adequately and consistently to facilitate comparison of their effectiveness.

R7: The Department and the Youth Justice Agency should evaluate the effectiveness of youth conferencing in the cases of prolific offenders.
