



HM Inspectorate of Probation

THEMATIC INSPECTION REPORT

An Inspection of Junior
Attendance Centres



Home Office

The Home Office logo, consisting of a black curved line above the text 'Home Office'.

2007

Foreword

We were pleased to be asked to undertake this thematic inspection to identify the extent to which Junior Attendance Centres had become integrated with mainstream youth justice. We trust that our findings will prove to be helpful to the national consultation on the future of these Centres.

We found many enthusiastic and dedicated staff working in Centres and YOTs, showing great commitment to the children and young people with whom they were working. Considerable activity had taken place to plan and begin integration, but on the whole, this had stalled for reasons outlined within this report.

However, our findings and recommendations should now enable Government to retain and further integrate Attendance Centres into the Youth Justice system, and thereby make their contribution more efficient and effective.

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HM Chief Inspector of Probation

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Acknowledgements

I am indebted to the Officers in Charge, instructors and attendees of the following centres, which were the subject of fieldwork visits:

Bilston
Croydon
Gloucester
Great Yarmouth
Gwynnedd
Kirklees and Wakefield
Newcastle & Gateshead
Nottingham
Sheffield
Wessex

Thanks are also due to all those YOT managers, their staff and others who contributed in whatever way to this inspection and in particular to:

Liz Calderbank, Steve Glass and Natalie Dewsnap (HMI Probation)
Ian Dawkins, Mike Salt, Mike Smith and Mike Page (Attendance Centre Inspectors)
Mick Coleman (Bolton YOT manager)
Keith Roberts and Tamara Bruck (YJCU)

RAY WEGRZYN HM Inspector of Probation

January 2007

Glossary of abbreviations

Initials	Term
AC	Attendance centre
ACI	Assistant Chief Inspector
Asset	Assessment tool developed by the Youth Justice Board
HMI Probation	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation
ISSP	Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme
OIC	Officer in charge
PSR	Pre-sentence report
TUPE	Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations
YJB	Youth Justice Board
YJCU	Youth Justice and Children Unit
YOT	Youth Offending Team

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Attendance Centres were established by statute in 1948. Their original purpose was to “*deprive a young offender of a half day holiday, to prevent their going to a football match or a cinema*”. They are now a network of locations provided by the Home Office under section 62 of the Powers of the Criminal Courts Act 2000 in order to administer Attendance Centre orders or other community orders imposed by the criminal courts.
- 1.2 Legislation was drafted in 2005 to devolve delivery responsibility for junior centres to local authorities (specifically YOTs). The Bill did not proceed and both junior and senior centres continue to be administered by the Youth Justice and Children Unit in the Home Office.
- 1.3 As a result of the proposed changes, however, the working relationship between various Attendance Centres and YOTs had developed at different rates, thereby creating an inconsistent service. The Youth Justice and Children Unit wanted to understand the extent of the change that had occurred and what factors had helped or hindered progress at a local level. They therefore asked HMI Probation to undertake this thematic inspection, the agreed purpose of which was to identify the extent to which Attendance Centres had become integrated into the wider youth justice system.

2. METHODOLOGY

- 2.1 HMI Probation uses the PRINCE 2 project management methodology to plan and control its work. A lead inspector was allocated, who also took on the role of project manager. An Assistant Chief Inspector was identified as project owner and a steering group of stakeholders established. This comprised the Assistant Chief Inspector as chair, members of the Youth Justice and Children Unit, two officers in charge representatives, a YOT manager, the lead inspector and a member of HMI Probation support staff. The purpose of this group was to bring a range of views to bear on the project and to consider the findings and subsequent report.
- 2.2 It was decided to conduct an initial survey by questionnaire of all Attendance Centres and YOTs and to use the information gathered to inform the overall project. Ninety questionnaires were sent to officers in charge and 155 to YOTs; 48 and 65 returns were received. Once the information from these had been considered by the steering group, it was used to identify the areas for inspection visits. The factors used for selection were geographical spread, size of Attendance Centre, apparent level of integration with the local YOT and location. From this distillation, ten areas were selected.
- 2.3 Questionnaires were developed and it was determined that the lead and supporting inspectors would work with two of the existing Attendance Centre inspectors, who were also officers in charge, visiting centres in pairs, as this work could only take place on Saturdays. This approach also ensured that centres were being judged by people with pre-existing knowledge and experience. During the inspections, the centre's officer in charge, instructors and young people were interviewed. Enquiries were undertaken of YOT managers, and others by the Inspectors.
- 2.4 It was decided that there would be a short report to each centre visited, giving feedback on performance and an over-arching report on the project as a whole.

3. KEY FINDINGS

Strengths:

All centres visited and the majority of respondents to the questionnaires (including YOT managers) had:

- made some progress in integration during recent years
- developed a range of relevant programmes
- reached agreements with local YOTs to accommodate children and young people on other order types.

The majority of officers in charge:

- demonstrated great commitment to their work and to the children and young people attending their centre, as did their instructors
- worked more than the hours for which they were paid in order to ensure the smooth running of the Attendance Centre
- ran their centre in accordance with the national standard
- found the Attendance Centre inspection regime and recent developments in the Youth Justice and Children Unit helpful.

Areas for Improvement:

- There was inconsistency of access, programme content and style of delivery, criteria for accepting other order types, level of engagement with YOTs.
- The employment status of instructors was unclear.
- YOT managers were concerned about taking on responsibility for the centres and their staff whilst employment issues and funding details were not clarified.

Recommendations

The Youth Justice and Children Unit should:

- i. agree with the Youth Justice Board and issue guidance covering the basis on which young people under YOT supervision could be managed at Attendance Centres
- ii. work with the Youth Justice Board to commission the development of a core set of programmes suitable to be delivered by Attendance Centres and which complement those delivered by YOTs
- iii. in partnership with the Youth Justice Board, develop a core training package for officers in charge and instructors covering basic child protection procedures, programme delivery, diversity and health and safety

- iv. in consultation with the Youth Justice Board, develop and implement a consistent national recruitment process
- v. issue clarification of the rules about payment to officers in charge when engaged in the enforcement of orders
- vi. determine a clear basis for funding any transfer of authority from the Home Office to the local authorities which could be published quickly in the event of the legislation going forward
- vii. clarify the employment status of instructors and the implications of any employment transfer.

Officers in charge should:

- i. engage with courts and YOT managers to ensure robust systems of notification about new Attendance Centre orders
- ii. seek regular invitations to relevant YOT meetings and training events for themselves and their instructors
- iii. maintain regular contact with the case manager of any attendee being supervised by the YOT so that they are fully aware of any developments or matters of concern.
- iv. report back to Youth Justice and Children Unit on the implementation of any inspection recommendations within three months of receiving the report.

YOT Managers should:

- i. ensure that their staff are aware of the work of the Attendance Centre and the potential benefits it offers for young people
- ii. seek the involvement of officers in charge in relevant meetings and training events
- iii. ensure that when a young person under the supervision of the YOT is sent to the Attendance Centre, any information about *Risk of Harm* to others or vulnerability is fully shared with the officer in charge.

4. INTRODUCTION

4.1 The purpose of the inspection was determined by the steering group as being:

To examine the extent to which attendance centres have become integrated into the wider youth justice system and to identify the factors which have helped or hindered that process.

4.2 This purpose was set on the basis of a decision in early 2000 to pass responsibility for ACs from the then Juvenile Offender Unit (JOU) of the Home Office to local authorities. The intention was clearly in line with general developments within youth justice – to bring together all the elements of youth justice under a single team within each local authority, thereby ensuring speedier, more consistent and effective administration of justice to children and young people.

4.3 There were several broad areas of responsibility that needed to be moved across in order for the full accountability to be transferred. Following discussions between what became the YJCU (formerly JOU), the Association of Local Authorities and the YJB, responsibility for acting as the ACs' managing agent, including recruiting OICs, would then be transferred from Chief Constable to YOT manager. This move simply required agreement by both parties.

4.4 A further area of development was the opening up of the ACs to children and young people on other types of orders. This offered YOT managers a free facility, providing contact with young people on a Saturday. This element of the development has been perhaps the most useful for YOTs, although the level of take-up and range of usage has varied and overall was less than had been expected. This issue will be considered in detail later on.

4.5 The transfer of the budget from the central YJCU to each local authority was more complicated. It was clearly an attractive proposition which would provide some additional funding to YOTs. It was identified that the move required primary legislation which, for a variety of reasons has not occurred. It had been anticipated that, once finalised, formal responsibility for the AC, its staff and functions would become the responsibility of the local authority. However, even when legislative matters were dealt with, the fact that ACs were not co-terminous with YOTs would make it difficult to find an easy formula for disseminating the budget.

4.6 When the intention to make this change was announced, most OICs began to engage with YOT managers and to make plans to implement it. Whilst most of the practice developments which occurred during that time have remained in place, once it became clear that the required legislative changes were not going to occur for some time, many YOTs shelved their plans, recognising that without budgetary responsibility and the freedom to act, there would be relatively little benefit for them in moving forwards. This view was strengthened as YOT managers grew to realise that there were several complex issues which they would need to address, including TUPE for instructors, sharing the budget split to take account of the geographical differences between ACs and YOTs and the fact that their ability to develop the concept of a Youth Justice Centre – a place where a range of activities, including an

AC could be provided – would not be achievable within the amount of money they were likely to receive for the AC. Indeed, there was a view that taking responsibility for an AC could cost the local authority money in the medium and long-term. It has been difficult to know the extent to which these matters affected YOT managers' interest in taking on formal responsibility for ACs.

- 4.7 Accordingly one purpose of this inspection was to discover the factors which have helped or hindered the intended development. It has been possible to identify some common factors and we identify these during the course of this report.

5. CRITERIA

5.1 In order to support the purpose of the inspection, the steering group agreed a set of criteria which establish the measures against which developments would be judged. These were as follows:

1. Attendance Centre Criteria

- 1.1 *The OIC has a view as to the place of the AC in the overall scheme of youth justice.*
- 1.2 *The OIC has established (or attempted to establish) links with the local YOT and courts.*
- 1.3 *The OIC has provided the opportunity for other orders to take part in the centre's programme.*
- 1.4 *The OIC has sought joint training with YOT staff to help ensure both consistency and a high quality of programme delivery.*
- 1.5 *The OIC keeps records which differentiate those on AC orders and those on orders managed directly by the YOT.*
- 1.6 *Breaches are instigated in a timely manner, irrespective of the order type.*
- 1.7 *Children and young people with diverse needs are accommodated.*
- 1.8 *The centre is run in line with national standard requirements and Home Office procedures.*

2. YOT Criteria

- 2.1 *The YOT manager has a view as to the place of the AC in the overall scheme of youth justice.*
- 2.2 *The YOT manager has established (or attempted to establish) links with the OIC.*
- 2.3 *The YOT manager encourages YOT staff to make use of the attendance centre for other orders.*
- 2.4 *The YOT manager encourages staff to make appropriate recommendations to court for AC orders.*
- 2.5 *The YOT manager is confident that children and young people with diverse needs will be accommodated.*
- 2.6 *The YOT manager encourages centre staff to take part in appropriate joint training events.*

3. Court Criteria

- 3.1. *The Youth Court bench and clerk have a sound knowledge of what the centre can offer and the appropriate criteria for making an AC order.*
- 3.2. *The court makes attendance centre orders against appropriate recommendations in proportion to other orders.*
- 3.3. *The court deals with breaches in a timely manner.*

4. Home Office Criteria

- 4.1. *The YJCU and the YJB have active liaison over the role of, and responsibility for, ACs.*
- 4.2. *There is a clear funding formula which takes account of expected developments.*
- 4.3. *There are clear monitoring and inspection arrangements in place.*

6. ATTENDANCE CENTRES

- 6.1 Most OICs and instructors had been in post for a considerable period of time and were very experienced in running their centres. Whilst there was not a shared view of how centres might look in the future, there was an overwhelmingly positive attitude expressed about the principle of development. Equally, most OICs articulated a realistic understanding of both the benefits and the limitations of a centre that opened for two hours per fortnight.
- 6.2 There were links with the YOT in each area visited and, according to the larger number of questionnaire returns, very few centres had none at all. The nature of these links varied considerably. In one area, the YOT had taken responsibility for the centre as a formal pilot and so had complete control over how it operated and was staffed, although did not hold the budget. In this area, the YOT had developed a Youth Justice Centre, with the manager also operating as OIC for the AC on Saturdays. There was a separate group of instructors for the AC. Even without this level of integration, there were still very close working relationships in other areas, where, for example, the OIC would consult with the YOT as to which programmes were run and/or where good use was made of the centre for YOT orders. Other links involved the YOT conducting breaches on behalf of the OIC, providing information where available, active involvement in recruitment and so on. However, even within these broad categories, there was considerable variance in the detail of the relationship.
- 6.3 Many centres served more than one YOT area. This created added complexity when two or more YOTs operated in different ways with the same OIC. The same applied with relationships with youth courts. Links were varied and many centres covered more than one Petty Sessional Division. In such circumstances, OICs would have to liaise with several YOT managers about local breach arrangements and notification systems.
- 6.4 Although many YOTs had experience of sharing resources, the lack of co-terminosity had implications for further integration.
- 6.5 Most, if not all ACs now have a mix of children and young people subject to AC orders and other order types in attendance. However, there was little consistency as to the criteria used to identify appropriate cases. Some YOTs adopted a risk-based approach, excluding only those cases assessed as high Risk of Harm to others or particularly vulnerable, irrespective of order type. Others allowed specific order types to be referred, most commonly referral orders. ISSPs were also frequently referred to ACs as these orders required a high level of contact.
- 6.6 It was surprising that, on the whole, relatively few children and young people on YOT supervised orders were sent to the AC. This was a free option for YOTs and the number that could be accommodated was limited only by the staffing ratios at the AC. When visited for the inspection, some ACs were operating with more staff than young people present and this was reported as not being an isolated occurrence. The reason considered most likely by OICs for the low numbers was that some YOT staff

believed that centres were run in an overly harsh, disciplined way that was not conducive to current practice with children and young people. These comments were often supplemented with the remark that no staff from the YOT had visited the centre. Some ACs had YOT staff working as instructors who appropriately saw an ambassadorial role for themselves. There was not a sufficient sample to identify whether there was any significant attitudinal difference in these areas.

- 6.7 YOT staff did not express the same view on this matter. Rather, there was an admission of low awareness of the programme content, along with the view that relatively few young people required an intervention on a Saturday.
- 6.8 There was little evidence of joint training in either the areas visited or from the questionnaire returns. Several OICs had expressed interest in joint training to the YOT manager, but, either because of logistical difficulties or problems in identifying areas of sufficient joint interest, no events had been arranged. A consequence of this was that instructors were delivering similar interventions to the YOT workers without having had the benefit of the same training. Whilst some instructors had experience in working with children and young people or because they also worked in a YOT, this was clearly an area which contributed to inconsistent service provision. Some OICs also believed that instructors could not be paid for attending a training event, although this was incorrect. Training is an issue which receives further consideration in this report.
- 6.9 Brief records were kept in all centres visited and were a responsibility held by the OIC. On the whole, records were of attendance and whether or not an absence was acceptable or unacceptable. There was little evidence of any recording of an attendee's behaviour or general progress. In some respects, this was not surprising, as the centres had no consistent way of measuring progress. However, it meant that any issues of progress or behavioural difficulties were lost to the youth justice system should the young person reoffend and become engaged with the YOT at a future date.
- 6.10 One area completed an Asset on all children and young people at the start and end of the AC order. This was clearly a positive practice, although the use made of the information obtained was limited.
- 6.11 On the whole, most YOTs had internal systems and breach arrangements with the local courts which ensured timely return to court when required. AC order breaches were also conducted by YOTs with provision of information by the OIC. Whilst these arrangements worked well in straight-forward cases, contested breaches were a contentious issue which usually required the OIC to attend court, thereby cutting into their working week. Many OICs raised concern about levels of payment for this activity, not so much about the actual amount as the fact that there was confusion around and an inconsistent understanding of, the rules.
- 6.12 An additional issue, stemming from the transfer of breach work to the YOT, was the loss of regular contact with the youth courts. Whilst no one suggested this as the reason for falling numbers of AC orders, it was difficult to imagine that it had not played some part in reducing sentencers' awareness of the AC. The OIC in one area in particular, where the AC covered at least four courts and he retained responsibility for conducting breaches of AC orders, was clear in asserting that his regular

appearance at court was a clear reminder to sentencers that the AC order remained a relevant option.

- 6.13 There was a good level of awareness of children and young people's needs, in particular those of singleton girls or vulnerable young people in groups. Examples included: instructors being asked to support specific individuals during the session; provision of alternative programmes, allowing girls to wear tee-shirts over swimming costumes; and a young man, who had received a bad head injury, to wear his hat during the session. All centres visited had at least one female member of staff on duty at all times.
- 6.14 All centres visited operated broadly in line with national standards and Home Office procedures. Punctuality was very good, with work starting promptly and young people not being allowed to leave until the appointed time. Staff commitment was most impressive with all instructors and OICs interviewed demonstrating dedication and enthusiasm.
- 6.15 There was little training available generally for OICs or instructors. This was of particular concern as far as issues around safeguarding and child protection awareness issues. More is written about this later.
- 6.16 Many of the instructors interviewed had experience, in working with young people outside of their role within the AC. However, few had had the opportunity to receive specific training in delivering the programmes in use at the centre. Whilst it was not felt that this invalidated the programmes delivered, best practice indicated that group leaders should have training and be monitored in their delivery of any specific programme.
- 6.17 The content of the groupwork delivered appeared to be, on the whole, relevant to offending. However, the majority of programmes had been developed within each centre and were not validated or accredited and so their value in reducing offending could not be assessed. More positively, many of the programmes had documentation to support them which aided consistency of content when different instructors led sessions. *The National Standard June 2004 paragraph 4* set very high and perhaps rather unrealistic aspirations for the outcomes of an AC:
- To prevent reoffending;
 - To punish the offender by imposing a regular restriction on liberty in the form of loss of leisure time;
 - To provide the offender with occupation and instruction designed to assist him or her to acquire or develop personal responsibility, self-discipline, new practical skills and interests; and,
 - To enable the offender to develop social skills and to make better use of leisure time through group activities organised in a disciplined environment to benefit the young person and his/her wider community.
- 6.18 It seemed unlikely that this aim could be met by involvement in group work for one hour, once a fortnight for a maximum of six months.
- 6.19 It was encouraging to note that in the majority of cases, staff leading group work sessions were very careful to ensure that all attendees were actively included. Clearly, this was easier to achieve in smaller centres, but nonetheless, required staff

to be attentive and active in their leadership. There were some good examples of positive re-enforcement and of inappropriate language or behaviour being properly and effectively challenged.

6.20 The general approach and atmosphere set by the OIC and instructors contributed much to the general behaviour of attendees, particularly at the beginning of the session. In all the centres visited, the staff had clear expectations about the behaviour of the young people, which they enforced from the outset. Different ACs had some variations in the overall regime. Most secured the attendees' personal property, such as mobile phones, but wherever that happened, belongings were stored appropriately. One centre was more relaxed and it was evident, during the groupwork session, that staff had to work hard to keep on top of the distraction that retaining property, such as an mp3 player, allowed some attendees. Whilst the instructors managed very well, the session was more fragmented than might be desirable. In none of the centres visited was the atmosphere oppressive or unduly harsh. Once again, the approach differed in the larger centres from the smaller ones. Because of numbers, a more 'crowd management' style was needed in larger centres, but, whilst lacking some of the individualised contact possible in smaller units, was wholly acceptable and fit for purpose.

6.21 Breach action was recorded and was seen on the whole to be timely and appropriate.

6.22 Some attendees interviewed gave positive comments and scores about their experience such as:

"Yes, doing the things they cover here has made me think." 8/10

"Makes me think there was a better way to handle things – if I'd done it different I wouldn't be sat here" 7/10

The majority were less positive, although this was not unexpected. It was common for the AC to be experienced as a punishment:

"Sessions could be better presented. You're supposed to sit through a video and say nothing" 6/10

"I could be doing better things on a Saturday' 1/10 'but I don't expect anyone likes it"

"Stop treating us like kids and give us more to do" 1/10 (When pressed, could not suggest anything better)

7. YOTs

- 7.1 The reality is that for most YOT managers, the AC constituted a very small fraction of their overall responsibility and did not feature high on their agenda except when the matter was raised for some reason. Nonetheless, those interviewed during the inspection were knowledgeable and had thought about the future.
- 7.2 On the whole, the generally held view was that the prospect of taking on responsibility for ACs was not a welcome one. This linked to two particular issues – having to deal with the employment issues on behalf of the local authority and the need to find funding to develop or even to maintain the centre. This area is further explored in the issues section.
- 7.3 There were links between YOTs and OICs in each area visited, although these differed in both scale and scope. In one area, after the initial announcement about integration, the YOT manager had become very active and produced development plans. Once the legislation fell however, contact ceased almost entirely. By contrast, in another area, there was a senior manager with responsibility for both centres within the county and an operational link person in each team who managed the day to day working arrangements between the YOT and the OIC. However, even in this area, use of the centre for children and young people on YOT orders was very limited. In only two of the areas visited was substantial use made of the centre for other orders. In both of these, the OIC had made specific provision in consultation with the YOT (e.g. final warning scheme, reparation scheme) and in both cases, there was an active relationship between the YOT manager and the OIC.
- 7.4 YOT managers were aware that the centres offered them a free facility but, even though there were pockets of good usage, take-up was very limited overall.
- 7.5 The number of AC orders were reported to have fallen since the introduction of YOTs and the wide range of new orders available to the courts. It was not unusual for a child or young person to be made subject to an AC order without a PSR, although there would sometimes be a specific sentence or stand-down report. However, there appeared to be no criteria to identify appropriate cases and unless a PSR was prepared, no Asset or risk assessment was completed. Often, the OIC would not have any information about a young person who started their AC order on any given day and sometimes would not even know that they were due to attend. This situation seems out of step with the rest of the youth justice system and was a cause of some concern.
- 7.6 YOT managers were broadly happy that this area of work was one in which they could have confidence. When asked why, the answer usually was based on knowing that the OIC and/or instructors had relevant full-time jobs which would involve them in addressing diversity issues and may have undertaken some training.
- 7.7 There were few examples of this happening. In part, this was linked to the fact that most OICs and instructors were not available during the normal working week when YOT training events would take place. However, it was also clearly the case that this

level of involvement was linked to the overall working relationship between the YOT and the OIC.

8. YOUTH COURTS

- 8.1 There were few examples of sentencers recently visiting centres, although in one area, the OIC had made an agreement that part of the training for all new magistrates would include a visit to the AC. In another court, the OIC, who still conducted breaches and was a well known figure to all court staff, took every opportunity to market the centre.
- 8.2 On the whole, YOTs from the sample had taken over the court function for ACs. As a result, the OICs no longer attended meetings such as Court Users Group or bench meetings and relied on the YOT to represent them at these important forums. The level of active representation again depended to a large extent on the nature of the overall relationship between the OIC and the YOT. However, the reduction in the numbers of AC orders suggested that few sentencers had a good knowledge of what the centre could offer.
- 8.3 It appeared that most AC orders were not made on the basis of a PSR. There were a number of issues related to this. As discussed, many YOT staff had little knowledge of what happened at the AC, and were thus unlikely to promote that sentence in court. The AC order had limited impact compared to other interventions available to the YOT and so, it would not be surprising that report writers or court staff proposed other, more substantial sentences to courts. The finding that few magistrates have visited ACs or had input from the OIC during any training events, would reinforce any reluctance on the part of sentencers to seek such a proposal.
- 8.4 Most YOTs had systems in place to deal with breaches in an organised way. On the whole, OICs provided information on breach of AC orders and the YOT returned the matter to the court appropriately. However, there was some variability in the information returned to OICs after the court hearing.

9. HOME OFFICE

- 9.1 YJCU and YJB staff had met and negotiated about the principle of responsibility for ACs. In practice, it was the local authorities who would take on responsibility for staff and financial management, via the local YOT manager. The anticipated role of the YJB would be to provide oversight and guidance rather than direct control or responsibility. The YJCU had established an executive group to identify ways forward in dealing with the issues raised in this report.
- 9.2 Although negotiations had been ongoing between the YJCU and YJB, there had not been agreement on a definitive funding formula to identify how the £2 million annual budget would be deployed to local authorities should handover occur. The three most obvious methods were:
- i. straightforward division of the total by the number of YOTs. This would result in each YOT receiving approximately £13,000 p.a. There would then need to be a series of local negotiations where an AC covered several YOTs in order to agree budget contributions. This seemed overly complex;
 - ii. a formula developed which took account of numbers attending each centre over the past year or more. This would then be paid to the identified lead YOT for each centre. Again, there could be some contentious issues resulting from this, not least which YOT would administer the budget split and how the costs of administration would be met;
 - iii. the budget goes to the YJB and YOTs bid for it based on a pre-determined set of criteria. This could result in some centres closing down, but where they continued, there would be some evidence of clear commitment.
- 9.3 OICs reported that inspection arrangements have become tighter and clearer in recent years. However, there is no mechanism for routine follow-up of AC Inspectors' recommendations.
- 9.4 If current inspection arrangements remain, they would benefit from a clear set of inspection criteria and a requirement that OICs demonstrate to the YJCU that they have implemented any recommendations or a satisfactory explanation as to why this had not been done within a given time limit.

10. ISSUES THAT AROSE CONSISTENTLY DURING INSPECTION VISITS

- 10.1 The AC order remains today the same as it has been for many years. OICs report a marked decline in its use since the introduction of the new youth justice sentences (referral order, action plan order, etc.) The order requires attendance at a centre, most of which operate for two hours once per fortnight and within which the programme is defined as one hour of physical activity and one hour of groupwork. However well the AC Instructors might deliver that groupwork and whatever the topic might be, an AC order can only be of limited impact in terms of addressing offending behaviour. The other orders provide for much more involvement – often two contacts per week, one of which, in some areas, may occur at the AC. Such use of the AC, happening as part of a bigger picture, rather than on its own, was more likely to be of measurable benefit to the young person.
- 10.2 Throughout this inspection a series of issues were mentioned or raised during most if not all visits. Whilst these did not fit neatly under the criteria, it would be wrong not to give them due consideration as they were clearly important topics for those involved in the integration of centres into the wider youth justice system.
- 10.3 The following section considers each issue. It is not presented in any priority order nor is it exhaustive, but aims simply to highlight the key points.

Additional Issue: Staffing ratio

- 10.4 Guidance had been issued by YJCU, advising on numbers of staff against numbers of attendees. Some centres worked to these ratios, others operated, as revealed both by our fieldwork and the AC's own registers, with ratios of 1:1 or greater. This had implications for any sort of unit costing and for comparison of centres against a number of criteria. There was some criticism of the guidance, particularly for its potential impact on instructors, who risked being stood down at short notice if attendance was low. Some OICs also questioned how they were to know in advance how many would attend.
- 10.5 The view was strongly expressed by both OICs and instructors that there should always be two instructors present in order to ensure that should one instructor be involved in dealing with an individual, then work does not stop nor would attendees be left alone. This was in addition to the OIC who may be involved in other activities.

Strengths:

- Central guidance had been issued which would provide a useful framework for improved financial management.
- The YJCU had a helpfully flexible interpretation of the guidance and were willing and able to accede to specific requests wherever possible.

Area for Improvement:

- Some OICs did not follow the staffing ratio set and considered that the guidance was difficult to implement.

Additional Issue: Payment arrangements

- 10.6 OICs were currently paid for the length of the session plus about three hours per week to cover administrative duties and enforcement action following a child or young person's failure to attend. There were a number of factors which impacted upon the time taken to complete these other responsibilities and considerable difference in the amount of additional time spent engaged in work relevant to the centre. Some OICs stated that they spent 20 hours in some weeks engaged in relevant activities. Geography was one factor which played a part here: conducting home visits and following-up failures to attend, could take significant time. Equally, preparing for, and attending, meetings with the YOT could be time consuming. Some OICs were more aware than others as to what they could claim extra payment for, such as work to do with enforcement or breach.

Additional Issue: Employment status

- 10.7 Instructors were, on the whole, recruited by OICs on the basis of personal knowledge or recommendation and had no contract of employment. There was a considerable lack of clarity about employment rights and the implications of any transfer to the local authority. Instructors' employment status was the subject of a tribunal, ongoing at the time of the inspection, which it was hoped would provide a clear baseline for the future.
- 10.8 There was no formal training provision for OICs or instructors when they were recruited. There was the facility for an OIC to run a training event either after a session or by mutual agreement for which instructors could be paid. However, the content of such an event was up to the OIC. This was of particular concern in terms of critical areas of work such as child protection and diversity where consistency of knowledge and approach was essential. It also applied to issues around delivery of interventions. The recently established regional meeting arrangements provided some opportunity to address some of this concern.

Strengths:

- Instructors were well paid.
- The system provided a very flexible workforce
- The YJCU had in recent times taken a more supportive position with regard to additional claims for enforcement work.

Areas for Improvement:

- No proper recruitment procedure for instructors was followed in most areas.
- Instructors had no contract of employment and were unclear as to who employed them.

- There was a need for better consistency across OICs as to time spent on activities outside the actual running of the centre.

Additional Issue: Attendance Centre Orders

- 10.9 Based on reducing numbers, the AC order alone appeared to be seen as having less value by the courts, although it is true to say that in some areas, the bench valued the principle of discipline which underpinned the AC order.
- 10.10 In the majority of AC orders, there was no system of assessment or review. This was because many orders were made without a PSR, which would have triggered the YOT to complete an Asset, and the AC orders were held by the OIC who does not have access to Asset. However, in one area visited, the YOT undertook to complete a start and end Asset on all AC orders on the basis that the child or young person was involved in the youth justice system, and might come to the YOT's attention again. Although limited use was made of the Asset during the AC order, its potential value for the future was being recognised. This good practice would become routine once YOTs were formally responsible for ACs.

Strength:

- The AC order provided a specific, low frequency intervention.

Areas for Improvement:

- There was no consistent assessment or recording procedure.
- Progress and development was not routinely monitored.

11. ADDITIONAL ISSUE: OTHER ORDER TYPES AND PROGRAMME CONTENT

- 11.1 Inspection visits and questionnaire returns demonstrated that there was considerable variation in terms of the numbers of attendees on each register and those attending on any given date. One centre visited had nearly 50 attendees whilst another had only three. They did not feel like the same operation, but rather like two very different regimes. The number of attendees also raised the issue of different orders being managed at ACs. Overall, there seems to have been a decline in AC orders. Many centres had arrangements (albeit different ones) in place with the local YOT(s) to receive attendees on other orders who needed Saturday contact for whatever reason. However, there were distinct differences in the criteria set.
- 11.2 One model was risk based. Any order type that was not assessed by Asset as high or very high and required a Saturday contact could be referred. This model included a named operational link person within the YOT who could quality assure all referrals and act as the single point of contact for both the OIC and YOT staff. Another model was based on order type alone. Referral orders and those on ISSP could be referred directly by the supervising officer, irrespective of risk level.
- 11.3 Each of these models – risk or order type (and there may be others) - had been devised by the OIC, usually in consultation with the YOT manager. There was no central guidance and so again, no consistency in terms of the criteria used.
- 11.4 Some centres had different start times for two age groups; 10-14 and 15-18 being the general line drawn. Others, particularly smaller centres, mixed the age groups, but it was usually clear that staff were aware of the need to watch for more vulnerable younger people. However, there was also the issue of programme content to consider. Some ten year olds could not accommodate sessions which would make sense to a 17 year old and vice versa.
- 11.5 One large centre ran a final warning session as one part of its operation. The intervention had been agreed with the YOT. The session lasted for one hour and started and finished between the start and finish times of the centre, thus keeping those on final warnings completely separate from other attendees. This centre also ran a reparation scheme, thus providing even more functionality for the YOT.

Strengths:

- The majority of centres already had arrangements in place to accommodate children and young people on other order types.
- Some centres had very good systems in place to deal with different age ranges.
- Most centres provided a wide range of programmes, many of which were developed in consultation with the local YOT.
- Good efforts were made to engage attendees and to deliver relevant material.
- The current funding arrangements provided YOT managers with a free service

Areas for Improvement:

- Many staff had no training in programme delivery
- There was no central direction and no consistency in the interventions delivered in centres.
- The range of topics varied widely, and there was no quality assurance system for delivery, resulting in variable provision across the country.

Summary:

- 11.6 All centres had a range of topics available to be delivered. In some centres these were based on the instructor's knowledge and ability. In others, there had been negotiations with the YOT as to what was most appropriate.
- 11.7 Some instructors had had training in groupwork delivery through their full-time posts. Others had experience as teachers or trainers. Many had neither other experiences nor training to call upon.
- 11.8 The content of programmes was inconsistent between ACs. Each centre had developed its own content. In a few, material had been received from the YOT. In others, people brought material from other sources, but on the whole, the content was put together by the centre's staff and OIC.
- 11.9 Some young people could attend the AC over a six month period and took part in 12 interventions. There was no mechanism for identifying whether or not there had been any change in thinking or behaviour as a result of the work undertaken. All OICs kept records, but these tended only to cover attendance and any poor behaviour. In any event, without a national system, consistently applied, it would not be helpful to try to undertake such a process.
- 11.10 The national standard states that a young person could travel for up to 90 minutes to get to an AC. The view was expressed that it was a lot to expect a young person to travel for three hours for a two or three hour event. However, accepting that the position was as stated, there was not sufficient provision for every young person to get to their nearest centre within 90 minutes. This was certainly the case in parts of Wales and in other rural areas.
- 11.11 Overall, such inconsistent provision of service was a cause for concern within the criminal justice system.

Conclusion:

- 11.12 As with any development, there were a series of enablers and constraints involved in this topic.
- 11.13 The success of integration will be helped by the recommendations in this report being carried out, as they will considerably reduce the constraints.

11.14 The key enablers to this development are the people involved. OICs and YOT managers are committed and capable but they need to be clear on the benefits for their teams and the young people in their area before their full commitment could be expected. Once this is achieved however, and there is more clarity around the constraints, the people involved are more than able to make a success of integrating ACs within the wider youth justice system.

Appendix A

Completed questionnaires were received from the following YOTs and Attendance Centres:

YOTs	Attendance Centres
Barking & Dagenham	Accrington Mixed
Bedfordshire	Barnsley Junior Mixed
Bexley	Barrow-in-Furness
Blackburn with Darwen	Basingstoke
Bolton	Bilston
Bradford & District	Brighton Junior Mixed
Brighton & Hove	Bristol Junior & Senior Mixed
Bristol	Carlisle Junior Mixed
Buckinghamshire	Colchester
Calderdale	Derby Mixed
Cardiff	East Kent Junior AC
Colchester (Essex)	Essex
Conwy/Denbighshire	Flintshire
Coventry	Gloucestershire YJC
Croydon	Great Yarmouth
Cumbria	Guildford Mixed Junior
Derby City	Gwynedd Mixed
Derbyshire	Hertford Mixed
Doncaster	Hull YJC
East Sussex	Kirklees & Wakefield YJC
Flintshire	Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland YJC
Greenwich	London South Junior
Gwynedd I Mon Caernarfon	Luton
Hackney	Merseyside Junior Mixed
Havering	Newcastle & Gateshead Junior mixed AC
Kensington & Chelsea	North Derbyshire JMAC
Kirklees	Norwich Junior Mixed
Leeds	Nottingham A
Leicester	Oldham
Luton	Portsmouth & District Junior
Medway	Preston Mixed
North-East Lincolnshire	Romford
Neath Port Talbot	Rotherham Mixed
Newport	Sheffield Mixed
Norfolk	Slough
North Tyneside	St Albans Junior Mixed
North Yorkshire	Stockport
Oldham	West Cumbria Junior Mixed
Pembrokeshire	West London
Plymouth	West Mids Mixed
Reading & Wokingham	Wigan Mixed
Rhondda Cynon Taff	Wrexham
Rotherham	York Junior mixed
Salford	
Sandwell	
Sefton	

Sheffield Slough South Gloucestershire South Tees South Tyneside Stockport Stockton on Tees Suffolk Surrey Swindon Tameside Trafford Warwickshire Wigan Wiltshire Windsor & Maidenhead Wolverhampton Worcestershire & Herefordshire	
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