



PRODUCING THE GOODS?

**REPORT OF THE 2012 FIVE NATIONS BIENNIAL
CONFERENCE ON CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND CRIME**



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME AND CONTEXT

INFORMED DELEGATE REPORTS ALAINA TOLHURST AND JANET PHILLIPSON

**REFLECTIONS ON THE FIVE NATIONS CONFERENCES FROM SUE THOMAS,
STEERING GROUP MEMBER**

SUMMARY – HERE AND NOW

FEEDBACK FROM EVALUATIONS

APPENDICES

1. Plenary slides – John Drew
2. Plenary slides – Dr. Tim Bateman
3. Plenary slides - Fiona Dyer
4. Plenary slides - Karin Philips
5. Plenary Slides- Sean Redmond
6. Plenary slides - Hugh Campbell
7. Workshop information
8. Conference programme
9. Delegate list
10. Speaker biographies
11. Steering group members

Introduction and acknowledgements

I was delighted that England was able to host the 2012 Five Nations Conference and that I was invited to open the event and set the context for contributions. This biennial conference, first held in 1998 provides a unique opportunity for policy makers, managers and practitioners, academics and others concerned in the development of policy and practice in youth justice. It is perhaps the only forum that allows us to share issues across the UK nations and the Republic of Ireland, to examine practice and policy in all five nations and to learn from good practice examples.

Whilst policy and the legislative framework may differ, the underlying principles of prevention and achieving positive outcomes for children and young people are shared across the nations. This was demonstrated to conference delegates by the quality and passion of presenters in both the plenary sessions and workshops.

The conference is only able to be held thanks to the continuing support of governments in all the administrations and, conscious of the current climate it is to be commended that this event was considered important enough to attract continued funding from them. While this meant that the venue for conference was perhaps less comfortable than in previous years, the quality of content remained high even within a limited budget.

I would like to thank the steering group for their hard work in ensuring the smooth running of the conference; all of the plenary speakers and workshop leaders and the staff at the University of Liverpool including Professor Barry Goldson who welcomed delegates, I am grateful to Alaina Tolhurst and Janet Phillipson from the Youth Justice Board who volunteered for the task of providing a delegates eye view for inclusion in this report; and to Sue Thomas for her perspective as a steering group member Finally, I would like to extend a special thanks to the young people from the Positive Punch project who reminded us of the reason why we must continue to strive to make our systems work for them and others like them.



John Drew

Chief Executive Youth Justice Board for England and Wales

Background and history of the Five Nations Conference

At the end of the 1990's a number of practitioners, policy makers and academics in the youth justice field across the UK were concerned that while global research and practice was frequently referenced, there was no forum for organisations and individuals across the home nations to share practice and policy, compare effectiveness and outcomes or learn from other nation's experiences.

A small group took forward the idea of holding a participatory conference in each of the nations, with specifically invited delegates to provide a sharing and learning opportunity.

The first conference was held in 1998 and following this a formal steering group was established with representatives from each of the nations. The group sought and got support (including funding) from each of the administrations in England and Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The conference has been held bi-annually since 1998.

Inaugural Conference - Scotland 1998

The first conference took place at the University of Stirling on 15th to 17th June 1998¹. It was initiated by Barry Anderson, when Chief Executive Officer of Communities that Care. The purpose was to discuss common themes about youth crime across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, the Republic of Ireland and Wales and to provide a platform for sharing knowledge and experience to:

- Examine what works in each of the respective systems;
- The common interests and how they are tackled; and,
- The lessons that could be learned to develop new ideas.

At this stage it was not called the Five Nations Conference, in part because distinctions were not made between England and Wales. The event concluded with agreement between participants that similar conferences should be organised in the future to bring together a range of invited participants from each of the jurisdictions.

Republic of Ireland 2000

The second conference took place in Athlone, Ireland on 5th to 7th March 2002². The content focused on changes that were occurring in the youth justice systems in Great Britain and Ireland, with a focus on the development of integrated services and partnership working. Themes addressed included engaging young people, families and communities and diversion.

¹ Scottish Executive Central Research Unit (2000) Children, Young People and Crime in Britain and Ireland: From Exclusion to Inclusion – 1998 Edinburgh: The Scottish Executive
² Children, Young People and Crime in Britain and Ireland Second Biennial Conference: 'Strategies for Implementation' Conference Report

England 2002

The third conference, 'Weighing the Evidence'³ was held in Liverpool on 19th to 21st June 2002. The conference had by now been established to provide an opportunity for 'academics, policy and practice communities to meet together to exchange ideas and experiences and to learn from each other'. It took place following the introduction of the Crime and Disorder Act in 1998 which brought significant reform to the youth justice system in England and Wales. In Northern Ireland the Criminal Justice Review had been published (in 2000), as had 'A Criminal Waste' a report on youth crime in Scotland. In the Republic of Ireland the Children Act 2001 had reformed the Children Act 1908 and other enactments related to juvenile offenders.

Wales 2004

Perceptions and Realities⁴, was the fourth biennial conference which was held in Cardiff in June 2004. The conference continued to be recognised as an event that provided one of the few opportunities for those with an interest in youth justice to meet with like-minded colleagues from the five nations. The event provided an opportunity to discuss the reforms that had occurred across the jurisdictions and to examine some of the key aspects of contemporary youth justice policy. In particular this included exploring the relationship and synergy between public perception, policy response and practice development.

Northern Ireland 2006

The 2006 conference, 'Getting the Balance Right'⁵ was held on the 16th to 18th May, in Belfast. This widened the scope of previous conferences in that a number of workshops were delivered by colleagues from Denmark, Norway and the Netherlands. There was continuing consensus that the conference provided a useful means of gathering and disseminating information amongst the youth justice community.

Scotland 2008

'Finding Common Ground'⁶, was hosted by the Scottish Executive on 28th and 29th February 2008 at Dalmahoy near Edinburgh. This event offered a wide range of workshops on a wide variety of topics that allowed each of the jurisdictions to share information not just about policy but how it translated into practice. This event was followed up by a networking survey which demonstrated that a high proportion of conference attendees made contact with colleagues after the event to pursue topics of interest that had been presented in Scotland.

³ *Weighing the Evidence: Comparative Approaches to Children, Young People and Crime* edited by Barry Goldson

⁴ (June 2004) *Perceptions and Realities Selected Proceedings from the Fourth Biennial Conference on Children, Young People and Crime in the United Kingdom and Ireland* edited by Anne Crowley

⁵ *Getting the Balance Right Selected Proceedings from the Fifth Biennial Conference on Children, Young People and Crime in the United Kingdom and Ireland* edited by Howard Jenkinson

⁶ *Finding Common Ground Young People and Crime Conference 2008*

Republic of Ireland 2010

This conference took place in Dublin on 9th and 10th June 2010. The theme was prevention and early intervention⁷ as it was felt to be an area of common interest to all of the jurisdictions and would therefore provide an opportunity to hear about the different initiatives and approaches that were being taken. This was reflected in a broad range of workshops that included multi systemic therapy, custody triage, the youth restorative disposal and an overview of Garda youth diversion projects.

2012 CONFERENCE PROGRAMME AND CONTEXT

In the years since the first Five Nations Conference, the pace of change in the legislative and policy framework across all administrations has impacted on the approach to children and young people who commit crime. This has affected youth crime prevention, sentencing practice, community interventions and children who are detained. Previous conferences have looked at different aspects of this change and the steering group agreed that the 2012 conference should focus on a reflection and examination of the effectiveness of interventions – both policy and practice.

Plenary speakers and workshop leaders were asked to examine contemporary youth justice across the five nations sharing policy, practice, evidence and outcomes to stimulate debate and address the title question: ‘Producing the goods?’

Day One

Delegates were welcomed by Professor Barry Goldson on behalf of Liverpool University. The opening plenary session saw John Drew, Chief Executive of the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (YJB) outline not only the English perspective but also the challenges he felt were common to all jurisdictions: to build a youth justice system that is effective, child focused, safe and decent, that links to systems for young adult offenders and has public confidence. John talked about the current state of youth justice in England and Wales, the progress that had been made, for example, in the reduction of first time entrants to the youth justice system and to custody.

⁷ Prevention and Early Intervention’ 5 Nations Biennial Conference on Children, Young People and Crime 2010 Conference Report



John continued to provide a link throughout the conference, drawing together the common themes from all presenters and outlining his view of the ten key features of an effective youth justice system:

- Early intervention and prevention
- Co-commissioned but not necessarily delivered by statutory youth justice services
- A patient, diversionary for early offences, with...
- policing policies that support this approach
- A common assessment system which addresses the young person's capacity to desist as well as the risk they pose
- Services designed and delivered to build desistance
- Interventions that draw on all agencies and professions
- A developing evidence base that is modest in itself ...
- but clear about patterns of offending by children
- Seamless passages for children leaving custody

Dr. Tim Bateman, Reader in Youth Justice at the University of Bedford, followed John's presentation with a thoughtful critique of the system in England and Wales. Acknowledging the progress in some areas, he also posed some questions as to how evidence of effectiveness is collected and used. He suggested that some youth justice policy in England may have been driven more by political rhetoric and expediency than

by robust evidence and in particular questioned the validity of an approach to youth justice that is based on payments by results (PBR) rather than the principles of rights and proportionality.

Fiona Dyer, professional advisor to the Scottish Government outlined an innovative approach recently implemented in Scotland that has produced better outcomes for children and young people who offend. The 'Whole System' approach is designed to provide the right services, at the right time and to the right children and families; services designed to meet their needs rather than solely focusing on offending behaviour. The approach is based on properly linking interventions throughout the system: early intervention, diversion from prosecution, alternatives to secure placements and custody and reintegration and transitions. It has been adopted in recognition that what should be at the forefront of service delivery is addressing children's needs and they should not be fitted into a system in a way that might not work for them. The approach has currently been adopted by 28 of the 32 local authorities in Scotland.

Karin Philips, Head of Community Safety for the Welsh Government presented the Welsh perspective. Whilst she acknowledged that youth justice is not a devolved matter, Karin demonstrated the commitment of the Welsh Government to a partnership approach, to improve youth justice services in Wales and to consider the need for legislation to strengthen the support given to young people at risk of offending or involved in the youth justice system. Karin referred to a number of evidence gathering exercises that had been conducted to prepare for a forthcoming Green Paper⁸ and the engagement of children in young people in the process.

Using his experience in overseeing the implementation of the change management approach to Garda Youth Diversion projects Sean Redmond from the Irish Youth Justice Service provided a very interesting summary of the technical challenges to successful implementation of new initiatives. He made a powerful case for taking a formal programme and project management approach (using the logic model) to overcoming these challenges, and provided some food for thought about how to ensure programmes are introduced with fidelity, and in a manner which is likely to be sustainable.

The final plenary speaker of the first day also gave a thought provoking presentation. Hugh Campbell from the University of Ulster gave a very personal reflection of recent unrest in Belfast and the impact of this on young people. He explored the concept of justice from objective, subjective and contextual viewpoints and demonstrated some of the complexities in defining 'justice' and the implications of this for an effective response. He emphasised the need for all adults to take responsibility for children and the need for a wide involvement in responding, particularly to occasions of civil unrest.

⁸ <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dsjlg/consultation/120918youthjusticeenv1.pdf>

The day came to an end with a presentation from the Positive Punch project. This project is based on the MACUK (www.musicandchange.com) model of working with young people. It facilitates user led approaches to enable young people to develop their own programmes and solutions and focuses on emotional and mental health support. The two young people spoke eloquently about their own experiences and showed a short DVD outlining some of the issues faced by disadvantaged young people.



Day two

Following the morning workshop sessions, Tam Baillie, the Children's Commissioner for Scotland gave his perspective. Tam reminded delegates that, in the UK most children are OK for most of the time and will grow up to be happy and healthy adults. But he went on to stress that this made it more important to focus our efforts on those who lack the nurture and opportunities to achieve this. He stressed there are three overarching issues for children and young people:

- We are in the middle of a serious set of financial cut backs and the impact of this on services for children and young people cannot be ignored. Past experiences tell us that in such times children and young people are disproportionately affected.
- Levels of child poverty are of concern – 3.8 million children and young people live in poverty in the UK. This has one of the most corrosive impacts on well- being

and is a major contributor to poor outcomes and in particular the level of the adult and juvenile prison population.

- There is a strong link between what happens in a child's early years and their later development and in particular a well-established connection between attainment social, emotional and cognitive well-being and functioning. We need to improve our knowledge of how this affects young people.

Tam suggested the youth justice system all too frequently picks up the pieces of the damage done to children in their early years. He reminded us that most children and young people grow up to be well adjusted adults and if we make sure that children and young people are safe, treated fairly, respected and included this will significantly contribute to their well-being.



Informed delegates reports

This commentary presents perceptions of the conference through the eyes of two informed delegates. They were asked to keep a running record throughout the conference of the sessions they went to. This section provides an edited report of their views.

Delegate One:

As a first-time attendee to the Five Nations Conference this was a great opportunity for me to find out more about the work going on in other jurisdictions. As many of the speakers highlighted, we are all currently stretched in this time of austerity, so we rarely have the spare capacity to spend time looking outside our direct work for ideas and examples of good practice, despite the fact that we are all grappling with similar issues. We appreciate there is much to be learned from our neighbouring jurisdictions, from both their successes and failures.

One of the most refreshing and informative workshops was on 'youth conferencing in Northern Ireland: a time to reflect'. Michael Heaney and Mary Brannigan from the Northern Ireland Youth Justice Agency gave a refreshingly honest account of their youth conferencing scheme. They acknowledged that previous data which suggested high levels of victim participation and satisfaction had been misleading, in large part because many of those who had appeared as victims were not the direct victims of the crimes being conferenced. The more accurate data they now have is nonetheless impressive, with a third of cases having direct victims and another third having victim representation. Equally if not more instructive was their recognition of where the youth conferencing had not lived up to expectations, its limitations in more complex cases and the general danger in the implementation of new schemes that processes and data will be fudged to provide certain hoped-for narratives. Whilst it is important that victims' wishes are considered, there is a risk that individual victims can perceive the harm caused by an act very differently, and so similar acts can result in diverse reparations. There is also a danger that the deed committed can overshadow the needs of the young person, which must also be taken into account when considering an appropriate reparation if one of the aims is to prevent reoffending. This requires professional judgments to assess what is appropriate for an individual.

The Northern Ireland Youth Justice Agency is still committed to the scheme, and with good reason for the levels of victim satisfaction it can bring and for the impacts on reoffending in some cases, but they are now progressing it with additional constraints to ensure that both young peoples' needs and fairness in sanctioning are not forgotten at the expense of victims' wishes. They have also recognised the limits of the model in dealing with complex or persistent offenders, so now alternative models are used where necessary. They also cautioned about how resource-intensive and thus expensive the system was, so it may not be easily exported to jurisdictions with larger numbers of offenders, but it is well worth considering how some of the principles can at least be applied. It is also worth us all considering whether we have programmes or beliefs which need to be re-assessed honestly in light of robust evidence.

Related to this wider point about assessing programmes in light of a strong evidence base, both John Drew and Michael Little from the Social Research Unit at Dartington highlighted the need to ensure that, especially in these straitened times, we focus our limited resources on interventions which are supported by evidence to have a positive impact on the reduction of offending or other relevant objectives, in a cost-effective manner.

Michael detailed 14 evidence-based ideas which could improve outcomes. These included cognitive behavioural therapy, contingency management and motivational interviewing. These approaches can be embedded in services by teaching staff to use the techniques in their daily work, and by reviewing the results of individual staff members working on different programmes, and ensuring that lessons are learned about which staff members are being effective and why. This might also mean taking the necessary actions to ensure that those who are counter-productive are not allowed to continue being so. Michael also stressed the need to stop delivering interventions which have been proven to do more harm than good, such as the 'Scared Straight' programme, which is still being run despite its ineffectiveness in reducing offending.

One difficulty I have since encountered when trying to look at ways to measure the effectiveness of our providers is the need to have sufficiently large sample groups to demonstrate statistical significance. Given in all our jurisdictions we have relatively low numbers of young people in any particular programme, it would be useful to think about ways we might be able to overcome the issue of statistical significance, to ensure that we measure effectiveness in ways which will lead to valid conclusions and decisions about whether to continue with particular programmes.

Tim Bateman questioned the short term targets of PBR, such as no reconvictions within 12 months, at the expense of longer term developmental targets including attainments in education, training and employment. This is a useful reminder that any programmes we choose to fund need to be carefully thought through to ensure that they produce the desired results and do not have negative unintended consequences. However considering this in the light of Michael Little's workshop on evidence-based practice, what we need is more proof to demonstrate whether we can identify a solid link between the attainment of developmental targets and the realisation of either short or long term reductions in offending. Reducing offending or reoffending will always remain an inherently desirable and a politically useful objective. This is of particular relevance to the current debates around PBR, although Tim Bateman reminded us that any PBR schemes should contain minimum requirements about the protection of rights in addition to wider freedoms about how to achieve the desired results.

The smaller workshops on specific topics allowed participants the opportunity to choose subjects of interest and to debate them in small groups. The plenary sessions were more formal with less opportunity for debate. It would perhaps be useful to consider in future years, the balance between smaller groups and plenary sessions to maximise the opportunities for delegates to be involved in wider discussions.

Delegate two:

The conference focused on delivering effective practice in a time of austerity, a particularly relevant and useful area to explore in the current financial climate.

The plenary sessions offered a good range of speakers and styles of presentations from the different nations – which also kept the day interesting. The opening speech from

John Drew set the context well for the conference followed by an admirable closing presentation from Tam Baillie. As a result of the contributions of both of these speakers, the conference opened and closed with the importance of children and their well-being, and the challenges we all face in improving outcomes (as opposed to outputs) for the young people we work with - John summed it up nicely with his quote that young people '*are not hard to reach, they are just easy to write off*'.



Michael Little's workshop (Innovation in the context of austerity) was insightful and interesting, looking at the key ways in which to ensure effective practice is delivered, even when resources are limited. It usefully allowed delegates to think about what they are doing and how they could be doing it better, ensuring that the limited resources organisations have are used wisely and productively. He also gave some good links for people to follow up when they return to work, which will allow people to actually take the advice forward and use it. (www.dartington.org.uk).

Reflections on the five nations conference – Sue Thomas Steering Group Member

The Five Nations Conference has been part of my youth justice landscape right from its early days. I was privileged to be one of the invited speakers at the first event held 14 years ago in Scotland and have been a steering group committee member for the last

three conferences. What I offer here is a retrospective, by a quick re-visit to 1998, a whistle stop journey through the jurisdictions highlighting some but by no means all of the key developments to date (drawn from a review of previous conference reports) and a final observation about effective practice and its place in our current world.

Revisiting 1998

Back in 1998 we discussed four main themes – early intervention, restorative justice, diversity and programmes for young people who offend. The early intervention theme covered information about the Scottish Children’s Hearings system and the role of the Garda in the Republic of Ireland in crime prevention, in particular plans for the inclusion of the Juvenile Liaison Diversion Programme in the Children Act 2001. Victim Support (Scotland) discussed the merits of restorative justice and the Republic of Ireland talked about a proposal to include a Family Conference Scheme as part of its Juvenile Liaison Diversion activity.

One of the diversity contributions, a presentation from England, talked about it in court, in particular how youth benches are comprised (race and gender) and how defendants are dealt with (by race and gender). The other contribution, my own from Wales focused on matters of rurality, Welsh language and the impact of local government re-organisation (in 1996 from eight counties to 22 local authorities in Wales) and what this might mean for the soon to be formed youth offending teams.

The final theme addressed work with serious and persistent offenders, including lessons learned from the Freagarrach Project in Scotland and the newly forming ideas about the fast tracking of persistent young offenders through the court system in England and Wales. Emerging changes in youth justice practice in Northern Ireland were also discussed, in particular the widening of the remit of the juvenile justice system to focus on prevention and diversion, and restorative justice becoming a locus for victims and communities.

The changing landscape

Looking back over the time span of the Five Nations Conferences in 1998 we were on the cusp of a number of changes that were to affect the way in which we operated across all jurisdictions. It now feels that change is part of the culture of youth justice and the environment in which we operate is far from static. A lot has happened in the intervening years; governments have come and gone leaving a variety of legacies. New legislation has been introduced to instigate wholesale systemic change (as in England and Wales) or to embed particular practices in statute as in the case of diversionary activity in the Republic of Ireland or to introduce new ways of working such as youth conferencing in Northern Ireland. What has been apparent in examining all of these developments is the debate about whether responses to children and young people in trouble with the law should be welfare or justice based (or in reality a mixture of the two) and it is evident this debate continues to be apparent in our current thinking.

A further development in this period has been in relation to children’s rights. At the time of the first Five Nations Conference, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the

Child (UNCRC) had scrutinised the UK's record of compliance with the UNCRC once, in 1995. By 2012, two further reporting rounds (in 2002 and 2008) had taken place and juvenile justice has come under particular criticism, not least of all because of concerns about the low age of criminal responsibility across the UK and the high use of custody. All nations now have a children's commissioner or an ombudsman for children and there is greater visibility of the UNCRC in policy making. For example the Convention underpins all Welsh Government policies relating to children and young people and the additional restorative practices that have developed in Northern Ireland have been based on the UNCRC.

Varying degrees of devolution have occurred in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales which have altered the political and decision-making landscape. Governments have commissioned a variety of reviews of youth justice systems to inform its development and it could be argued in all instances that some changes have been welcomed and others less so as a result. The Audit Commission examined the youth justice system in England and Wales in 1996 and made a series of recommendations which were highly influential. It also revisited the system in 2004 to examine how the new arrangements were operating. In 2009 the Welsh Government commissioned a review of the risks and benefits associated with devolving youth justice to Wales. Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland have also undertaken reviews of youth justice, which are referred to below.

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 brought about comprehensive change to the youth justice system in England and Wales, which led to the formation of the YJB and the setting up of multi-agency youth offending teams to deal with offending behaviour. Criticism of the system that New Labour created was one that was too concerned with 'managerialism' and process and was largely punitive in nature. A change of government in 2010 (a Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition) has seen a reversal in some of these trends, but also an introduction of some new approaches and thinking around the operation of the youth justice system, notably the concept of PBR and transferring the costs of remands to local authorities, as an incentive to provide community alternatives and to reduce central costs. There was for a period of time a question about the future of the YJB, which has now been resolved and it is perhaps important to observe that all of the jurisdictions have a distinct government department that is responsible for ensuring the needs of children and young people who offend are specifically considered and are separated from adults.

With regard to Wales when I went to Stirling in 1998 I was part of a delegation of four; myself representing a practitioner forum in Wales, a principal youth justice officer from one of the local authorities and two representatives from the Welsh Office. Since then, the National Assembly for Wales was formed in 1999 and has taken responsibility for the governance of Wales, although criminal and youth justice matters have not been devolved. The Welsh Government has been increasingly seeking to improve the lot of young people on the cusp of, or involved in the youth justice system in Wales through the support that devolved services can provide, whether health, housing, education or social services. In 2004 the *All Wales Youth Offending Strategy* was published which

set out the joint vision and strategy of the Welsh Government and YJB (because of the bi-lateral arrangements) for (non-devolved) youth justice in Wales, reflecting the principles and priorities of both. The Welsh Government will be consulting on proposals to improve services in Wales to better meet the needs of children and young people who are at risk of entering, or are already in the youth justice system. It is noteworthy that for the last two Five Nations Conferences Wales has sent a full delegation to these events reflecting the growing importance of youth justice in Wales.

Northern Ireland has seen many changes too, not least of all in its political climate but also in respect of youth justice. The Criminal Justice Review was set up in June 1998 under the Good Friday Agreement and set in motion a wide-ranging review of justice services (excluding policing and emergency legislation). The Criminal Justice Review Group report 2000 made significant proposals for restorative approaches to be used as a response to youth crime, in particular the use of mediation and youth conferencing. The 2000 report made the recommendation that Northern Ireland should incorporate rights based approaches at the heart of its youth justice system and increase its focus on diversion. A series of recommendations were enacted in the Justice (NI) Act 2002 and youth conferencing has now become synonymous with youth justice in Northern Ireland. A further review was published in 2011, which commented on the importance of youth conferencing and recommended that early intervention and prevention should be strengthened and set out a number of actions for consideration.

Scotland has had a long tradition of taking a welfare based approach to youth justice and of seeking to divert young people from the criminal justice system through the Children's Hearing System. In common with other jurisdictions a series of reports on the youth and criminal justice systems have been commissioned. The Scottish Executive's report 'It's a Criminal Waste' in 2000 in many respects paved the way for an approach that has been based on evidence led policy and practice and an interest in developing effective responses to persistent offenders. In 2002 a ten point action plan for youth justice was produced which amongst other things led to the creation of the youth court in Scotland, which had hitherto relied solely on the Children's Hearing System. More latterly the Scottish Government has adopted the 'Whole System' approach to youth justice (which was successfully piloted in Aberdeen) and has encouraged local areas to implement this way of working when dealing with young people who offend. The focus of the Whole System approach is on the use of community based systems that have diversion, early intervention and alternatives to custody at its heart. It is also noteworthy that following the last reporting round from the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2008 that Scotland raised the age of criminal responsibility from eight years to twelve on 28 March 2011.

In 1998 it was acknowledged that policy making in the Republic of Ireland was under-developed and that what had emerged was an uncoordinated response to youth crime. The Garda Juvenile Office was set up in 1991 to deal with youth crime and the Garda Juvenile Diversion Programme grew out of this. The Children Act 2001 put the Juvenile Diversion Programme on a statutory footing and reinforced its aim to divert young people from crime by introducing a system of formal and informal (restorative) cautions.

The Republic of Ireland has continued to build on this diversionary approach. In 2005 the Irish Government agreed a programme to introduce youth justice reforms including the establishment of an Irish Youth Justice Service. This was followed by a youth justice strategy underpinned by the principles of the Children Act 2001 and focuses on young people who had already had some contact with the criminal justice system. It's aim was to provide a partnership approach among agencies working in the youth justice sector and set out key actions and commitments for each of these stakeholders. The net effect of this combined effort has been the development of a more coordinated strategic approach, making better use of existing resources, creating positive working relationships amongst stakeholders and delivering better outcomes for young people in trouble with the law and for the community in general. The Republic can now say that more is known about the nature of the youth crime problem. This has enabled services to be more data driven and evidence-informed. This has corresponded with a falling detected youth crime rate. These positive changes have occurred at the same time as Ireland's relatively low-level youth detention which has experienced further downward trends. This also correlates with a more effective use of money and offers the prospect of better outcomes for young people and communities.

Summary - The here and now

The one thing that has not changed over the last 14 years is our concern about children and young people and their involvement in crime. Many of the characteristics of the changes that we have seen over the years have been driven by the need to identify what is effective in preventing offending and re-offending and to incorporate those approaches into ways of working. It is noticeable that all jurisdictions have adopted restorative approaches within their youth justice systems. When I looked back to 1998 I really did not expect to see too much about effective practice, as to the best of my recollection it did not seem to be very high on the youth justice list of priorities at that time. However I was wrong and pleased to see that many of the presentations had the same theme of getting practice right and drawing on what is known to be effective. One presentation in particular talked about the importance of giving proper attention to understanding and responding to offending amongst girls and young women, something that we still recognise is important but is far from developed. Another presenter discussed socially inclusive practice with young people who have histories of persistent offending. The central messages being that it is important that such work is embedded in supportive local networks with access to mainstream services; that young people's offending should not be seen in abstract from other areas of their lives; and the quality of practice matters. These are themes that are hopefully at the forefront of what we do now and what we were looking at in Liverpool in the context of 2012.

Future plans

The five administrations and the steering group have debated the issue of holding conferences at a time of austerity and in the context of the need to ensure that any expenditure produces value for money. The consensus is that this conference does indeed provide a valuable and effective forum for policy makers and others to learn from different approaches and to move towards a shared understanding of the common

issues. Therefore the steering group, with Wales taking a lead, will plan a conference in 2014, using a suitable but cost efficient venue.

Feedback from evaluation

The feedback on the content of the conference was highly positive overall. All of the delegates found the conference informative and interesting.

94% of delegates found the conference relevant. Feedback indicated it was 'highly topical', 'very relevant', 'interesting and stimulating' with useful discussions. The plenary sessions were delivered by engaging people and were varied yet complementary. Delegates considered there was an excellent range of workshops, with content combining policy, practice and research. They welcomed being updated on new initiatives and hearing about what is being implemented in other jurisdictions, with the opportunity to make comparisons and to collectively problem solve. A small number of delegates indicated that they would have liked to have had the opportunity to attend all workshops provided by other nations.

The Positive Punch session was excellent and delegates considered it to be important to hear about a young person led, collaboratively funded programme.

88% of delegates indicated that the conference was well planned and presented. In terms of the venue, delegates liked the university campus and its surroundings and it was generally considered to be a good location. However, there were mixed comments about the standard of accommodation, although it was recognised that it reflected the current need for austerity. The feedback on the catering was generally favourable and the helpfulness and friendliness of the university staff was also commented on.