

EVALUATION OF THE ENHANCED COMBINATION ORDER PILOT

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CONTENTS

Executive Summary

1.1 Overall	1
1.2 Context	1
1.3 Approach	2
1.4 Outcomes	2
1.5 General Themes	5
1.6 Going Forward	6

Context

2.1 Enhanced Combination Orders (ECO)	7
2.2 This Report	7

Approach

3.1 Data Collection	8
3.2 Orders Imposed	9
3.3 Participants	11
3.4 Limitations	12
3.5 ECO Delivery	13

Outcomes

4.1 Offending Focussed Work	16
4.2 Accredited Programmes	17
4.3 Parenting/Family Support	18
4.4 Psychological Intervention	19
4.5 Community Service	20
4.6 Victim Focussed and Restorative Work	22

Overall

5.1 Working Well	23
5.2 Challenges	24
5.3 Suggestions	27
5.4 Overall	28

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Executive Summary

1.1 Overall

The qualitative and quantitative evidence highlighted in this evaluation shows that the initiative has been successful in achieving its aims. The ECO pilot has been shown to be an effective programme for participants who valued the support it provided. The commitment of the staff involved was evident across all the evaluation activities and the high regard in which they were held by participants was demonstrated during the client focus groups.

The initiative has been embraced by the Judiciary and the number of custodial sentences of 12 months or less, awarded by courts involved in the ECO pilot, decreased by 10.5% between 2015 and 2016. While there was also a reduction in the overall number of short term sentences across all the NI courts, at 2.4% this was lower than that across the pilot areas suggesting that ECO was impacting on prison numbers although further work is required to see if this trend continues. This reduction in custodial sentences with the resultant decrease in tax payer costs was identified as a major benefit of the pilot. The indicative costs of ECOs has been estimated at £9k per annum, which on top of the clearly beneficial social impact, the reduced re-offending rate and focus on victim issues, indicates a sentence which provides excellent value for money and better outcomes in comparison to short prison sentences. In addition there are positive and encouraging indications regarding impact on reoffending. The offending rate for a cohort of 52 ECO participants in the six months prior to being sentenced to an ECO was 57.7%. In the six months post sentencing, the re-offending rate at 17.3% was significantly lower (see page 16).

1.2 Context

At May 2015, statistics showed that 88% of prison sentences were for 12 months or less. Research has shown that short prison sentences are less effective in addressing offending behaviours than community-based disposals because there is little that can be done in practical terms to rehabilitate offenders during a short prison stay; the re-offending rate for those sentenced to a short prison term was also shown to be greater than 50%. The Lord Chief Justice therefore requested that the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) develop a demanding community sentence as an alternative to the high number of short prison sentences of less than 12 months.

Following consultation with DOJ, PSNI and PPS, it was agreed that PBNI would pilot an intensive community sentence as an option for Judges in the Ards and Armagh & South Down court divisions. Termed the Enhanced Combination Order (ECO), it was based on existing legislation and offered Judges an existing community option in a more intensive format.

ECOs focussed on rehabilitation, victim issues, restorative practice and desistance. They also included a focus on mental health, parenting/family issues and an assessment by PBNI Psychologists. The requirements on offenders subject to such orders were to:

- complete unpaid work within local communities at an accelerated pace,
- participate in victim focussed work, and if possible, a restorative intervention,

Executive Summary

- undergo assessment and, if appropriate, mental health interventions with PBNI psychology staff,
- participate in parenting/family support work if applicable,
- complete an accredited programme, if appropriate, such as 'Thinking Skills',
- undertake intensive offending focussed work with their Probation Officer (PO).

This report summarises the findings from an evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the initiative and gather evidence to establish the extent to which these requirements are being met.

1.3 Approach

The ECO initiative, operational since 1st October 2015, is scheduled to run until September 2017. This report uses administrative data and qualitative information gathered through surveys, interviews and focus groups with participants, Probation staff, Judges and stakeholders to identify progress made during the first 18 months. By 10th March 2017, 136 offenders had been subject to an ECO; of these 13 had completed the order, 12 had been revoked and 111 were actively engaged; 22 breaches were recorded during the period including the 12 participants who were revoked.

1.4 Outcomes

Offending focussed work

It was evident from the written comments recorded in the data sheet that POs were working extensively on the requirement to undertake intensive offending focussed work with participants, exploring the impact of participants behaviour on victims, their family and the community. In general participants also thought that the order had helped them address their problems and the way they thought about their future offending behaviour. Participants often demonstrated a high level of respect for their PO/Probation Services Officer (PSO) and were keen 'not to let them down'.

Due to the timing of this evaluation it is only possible to provide a comparison between the re-offending rates six months before the ECO was made and six months after the ECO was made. While results should be viewed with caution due to the small numbers and the limited time frames involved, the re-offending rate in the six months post sentencing was significantly lower than in the six months prior to being sentenced to an ECO. While 37 participants re-offended while on the pilot, qualitative evidence suggests that the intense support helped reduce re-offending among some.

Executive Summary

Accredited Programmes

The completion of an accredited programme, if appropriate, was a requirement of the ECO pilot and over one third of participants had additional requirements attached to their order, mainly Drug/Alcohol Counselling, Thinking Skills and Treatment Programmes. By March 2017, approximately one third of participants had taken part in at least one programme, some of which had been recommended during the Psychology assessments. The Thinking Skills and Human Faces courses were identified as particularly effective and some participants who initially felt such interventions weren't necessary for them had found their course really beneficial.

Support with employment was also available through Community and Voluntary Sector initiatives such as ACCESS (support to increase employability), Work Routes and People First, and in Newry an external adviser provided guidance on education and potential job related opportunities. The data showed that at least five participants had obtained employment during their time on the order.

Parenting/Family Support

Just over half of participants were reported to need support with parenting/family issues. The requirement therefore to participate in parenting/family work was appropriate for them and by March 2017 around one quarter of all participants had undertaken work/received support in this area. Participants were reported to have engaged well and along with Probation staff viewed this element of the order very favourably. Examples were provided across the research of the impact this aspect had on family life including gaining access to and custody of children.

The support provided by Barnardo's was highly valued with the primary aim to increase parental understanding of the impact offending had on children's welfare and life chances. It was evident that this aim was being achieved through conversations with focus group participants.

In addition to the work related to parenting, support was also provided to those experiencing marital difficulties and family members of participants with addiction and mental health issues.

Psychological Assessment

Undergoing an assessment and, if appropriate, mental health interventions with PBNi psychology staff was a further ECO requirement. At the time of the evaluation just under half of participants had gone or were going through the psychological assessment process; referrals had been made in around a further fifth of cases. Staff and participants were generally very positive of this element, particularly as issues with alcohol/substance misuse, previous life traumas and mental health were challenges for many participants. The one to one work undertaken by the Psychologists as well as their recommended interventions/programmes were viewed very favourably and over two fifths of participants were recorded as having undertaken mental health or addiction related work.

Executive Summary

Community Service

The completion of unpaid work within local communities at an accelerated pace was one of the main requirements of ECOs. By March 2017, 59 participants had completed and a further 65 were working on this element of their order, mainly at a rate of one day per week. Placements included sorting donated items in charity shops, working with sports clubs and undertaking manual squad work such as gardening. Communities within Ards and Armagh/South Down benefitted from 11,585 community service hours, the total sentenced by the courts during the first 18 months of the pilot. Based on the minimum wage this was equivalent to almost £87,000 worth of work.

Securing appropriate placements, particularly those of a restorative nature, was challenging due both to a lack of availability and client mental health/lifestyle issues. Consequently over half of recorded placements involved manual squad work. The restorative element of the order therefore tended to be addressed through separate victim awareness type work and only five placements were recorded as being relevant to the offence. Victims had some influence over the type of work undertaken in six orders and participants had influence in 30.

Participants generally liked the fact that community service kept them busy, an aspect that some felt helped prevent re-offending. They also valued the structure and support from other participants, something that they said they would miss once this element of the order had finished.

Victim Focus

Participation in victim focussed work, and if possible, a restorative intervention was a further requirement of the order. The focus tended to be mainly on restorative work through partnerships with organisations including Community Restorative Justice Ireland and Northern Ireland Alternatives. At the time of the evaluation, restorative work had been completed/was ongoing or due to start for approximately three fifths of participants. A further fifth were either not ready to undertake this aspect or the emphasis was on other elements such as parenting and addictions.

It was recognised at the outset, that while a core principle of the pilot, involvement with victims would be a challenge as restorative engagement with victims was possible only when victims registered/requested contact with the PBNI Victim Information Unit. By 10th March 2017, only four victims had chosen to do this making the victim focussed aspect of the order difficult. An additional feature, developed over the course of the pilot to increase victim input was that engagement would be undertaken by Victim Support following a referral from PBNI. At 14, the number of referrals was modest but PBNI management reported that they intend to build on this feature going forward to increase both referrals and restorative engagement.

Executive Summary

1.5 General themes



Addresses client need

ECOs addressed the underlying contributing reasons for offending behaviour, including mental health/psychological difficulties. Participants were given time to build relationships and staff felt that ECOs provided a more social work based approach. Support with employment was also available and client confidence was reported to have increased.



Flexible

The flexible nature of the programme worked well and examples were given of participants with significant addiction issues who had been allowed to concentrate on other lifestyle issues before starting their community service. Flexibility was seen as essential to enable the pilot to work successfully and staff who 'wanted to tick boxes' were not the right type of people to work with ECO participants.



Collaborative

The multiagency, multidisciplinary collaborative approach worked really well. Concerns were raised however regarding the inconsistent availability of programmes, due to funding constraints, particularly between March and October 2016. The general consensus was that these key support services were vital to ensuring ECOs were different to generic orders.



PSO complements the PO role

The support provided by the PSO was described as essential to the success of the programme. The strong relationship they had with POs, Psychologists and participants 'made the programme work' and was highly effective in assisting the service user to move forward. Participants spoke exceptionally highly of PSOs and were very appreciative of the efforts they had gone to on their behalf.



Demanding for participants and staff

Meeting the range of complex needs of participants was difficult and effective management required considerable PO/PSO time. A lot was expected from participants with often chaotic lifestyles and the pace of work in the initial stages of the pilot was 'full on'. This had been difficult for participants to maintain and feedback was taken on board to make the pace of work more realistic.



Enforcement

Some staff felt that ECO management was inconsistent and a policy to provide clarity was identified as being potentially beneficial. It was reported that while some staff were flexible others took a more rigid approach.

Executive Summary

1.6 Going Forward

Overall, the evidence indicates that the ECO initiative is working very effectively and is a robust community sentence as an alternative to a 12 month prison sentence. A number of recommendations, however, are detailed below for consideration going forward with any extension of the initiative to be properly resourced:

- Management should provide clarity on the referral processes for victim engagement and client psychological assessments as well as practice relating to enforcement, keeping in mind however that flexibility has been identified as one of the strengths of the ECO initiative.
- PBNI should identify and establish links with organisations potentially willing to accommodate community service placements, particularly those of a restorative nature.
- Explore whether it would be feasible to have one ECO specific CSO, PO, PSO and Psychologist as the contact point for all queries.
- Ensure that Judges are clear as to the type of participants for whom ECOs would not be an appropriate sentencing option.
- PBNI should continue to look and learn from other relevant international evidence of good practice in robust community sentences as alternatives to custody.



2 Context

2.1 Enhanced Combination Orders (ECO)

At May 2015, statistics showed that 88% of prison sentences were for 12 months or less. Research has shown that short prison sentences are less effective in addressing offending behaviours than community-based disposals because there is little that can be done in practical terms to rehabilitate offenders during a short prison stay; the re-offending rate for those sentenced to a short prison term was also shown to be greater than 50%. The Lord Chief Justice therefore requested that the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) develop a demanding community sentence as an alternative to the high number of short prison sentences of less than 12 months.

Following consultation and agreement with the then Justice Minister, the Chief Constable, and the Director of the Public Prosecution Service (PPS), it was agreed that PBNI would pilot an intensive community sentence for 18 months as an option for Judges in the Ards and Armagh & South Down court divisions. Termed the Enhanced Combination Order (ECO), it was based on existing legislation and offered Judges in the two pilot areas an existing community option in a more intensive format.

ECOs focussed on rehabilitation, restorative practice and desistance, and involved interventions, where victim issues were addressed. All participants were also offered an assessment by PBNI Psychologists in respect of any mental health issues and parenting/family support work was included where applicable.

The requirements on offenders subject to such orders were to:

- complete unpaid work within local communities at an accelerated pace,
- participate in victim focussed work, and if possible, a restorative intervention,
- undergo assessment and, if appropriate, mental health interventions with PBNI psychology staff; where such issues were identified, a treatment plan or referral to an appropriate health provider formed part of the intervention,
- participate in parenting/family support work (if appropriate),
- complete an accredited programme, if appropriate, such as 'Thinking Skills',
- undertake intensive offending focussed work with their Probation Officer (PO).

The initiative has been in place in the two pilot court areas since 1st October 2015, and is scheduled to run until September 2017.

2.2 This Report

This report provides an overview of an independent evaluation undertaken by the Human Resource Consultancy Services (HRCS) branch of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). Its aim was to assess the effectiveness of ECOs by looking at the extent to which the requirements listed above were met during the period October 2015 and 10th March 2017.

3 | Approach

About this chapter

This chapter provides an overview of the data collection techniques used, the orders and participants involved in the pilot, the data limitations and the initiative delivery approach.

3.1 Data Collection

A range of qualitative and quantitative data was gathered using the following techniques:

Interviews and Focus Groups

- Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with the Judiciary (2) and Victim Support (1);
- Focus groups were conducted with participants (10) and Probation/Community Service staff (12);
- Written input was provided by the Lord Chief Justice.

Participation in interviews and focus groups was voluntary. Those with participants were conducted in private (i.e. Probation staff were not present). Recruitment of all participants was arranged by PBNI.

Administrative Data Sources

The evaluation used administrative data held by PBNI along with that supplied to the Department of Justice's Analytical Services Group from the Causeway Data Sharing Mechanism.

Questionnaires

- Participants (n=13)

Participants completed an exit questionnaire at the end of their order. It gathered data relating to ECO expectations and experiences. By 10th March 2017, the 13 offenders who had completed the ECO programme had also completed the questionnaire.

- Staff (n=24)

The questionnaire aimed to gather views on the challenges and key achievements of the ECO initiative faced by POs, Probation Services Officers (PSOs), Psychologists and CSOs.

- Stakeholders (n=6)

Gathered information on the support provided by the stakeholder organisations as well as suggestions for future collaborative working.

- Judges (n=4)

The purpose of the questionnaire was to gather Judiciary input on communication, what worked well and suggestions for improvement.



3 Approach

3.2 Orders Imposed

From 1st October 2015 to 10th March 2017, 136 offenders were made subject to an ECO. By 10th March 2017, 13 had completed the order, 12 had been revoked and 111 were actively engaged; there were 22 recorded breaches including the 12 participants whose order was revoked.

Due to the geographical spread of where ECO participants lived, a significant number of POs (33) had experience of managing ECO cases. However, while the majority had responsibility for one or two ECO participants, two staff were solely identified for holding a full caseload of ECOs in Ards. While a similar approach was initially taken in Armagh and South Down, staff illness meant that this was not possible and ECO participants were split across POs in the area. It was reported that this was a better approach given the demanding nature of this client group.

Location

Of the 136 participants, 80 were sentenced in the Ards court division and 56 in Armagh and South Down (Table 1). The vast majority of orders were imposed through the Magistrates and Crown Courts (Table 2). While 28 judges were involved in the pre sentence report request stage and 22 at sentencing, six judges were responsible for imposing over 60% of all ECOs.

Table 1 – Number of Orders by Court Location

	Court	Count	%
Armagh & South Down	Armagh	16	11.8
	Banbridge	10	7.4
	Craigavon	1	0.7
	Newry	29	21.3
Ards	Belfast	1	0.7
	Downpatrick	59	43.4
	Newtownards	20	14.7
Total		136	100.0

Table 2 – Number of Orders by Court Type

Court	Count	%
Appeal Court	5	3.7
County Court	2	1.5
Crown Court	52	38.2
High Court	1	0.7
Magistrates Court	74	54.4
Youth Court	2	1.5
Total	136	100.0

3 Approach

Order Requirements

The average length of an ECO was 20 months. The mean number of community service hours sentenced was 85 with a total of 11,585 hours sentenced by the courts during the first 18 months of the pilot. This was equivalent to almost £87,000¹ worth of work provided to communities in the Ards and Armagh/South Down areas.

Over one third (50) of participants had additional requirements attached to the order, mainly Drug/Alcohol Counselling, Thinking Skills and Treatment Programmes or a combination of these.

Table 3 – Length of Order

Length of Order (Months)	Count	%
6	2	1.5
12	41	30.1
18	41	30.1
24	40	29.4
36	11	8.1
80	1	0.7
Total	136	100.0



Table 4 – Community Service Hours Sentenced

Community Service Hours Sentenced	Count	%
40	2	1.5
50	8	5.9
60	15	11.0
70	5	3.7
75	5	3.7
80	25	18.4
90	12	8.8
100	64	47.1
Total	136	100.0

¹Based on national minimum wage of £7.50 per hour.

3 Approach

3.3 Participants

Table 5 shows that most of the participants were male. The age of those taking part ranged from 17 to 59 with a median of 28 years. Only five out of the 136 participants were women.

Table 6 shows that the most common offence committed by participants of all ages was 'Violence against the person'. Excluding those defined as 'Other' this was followed by 'Theft' for those aged under 30 and joint highest with crimes defined as 'Drugs' for those aged 30+.

Table 5 – ECO Participant Profile

		Count	%
Age when ECO imposed (n=136)	17 to 29	73	53.7
	30+	63	46.3
Gender (n=136)	Male	131	96.3
	Female	5	3.7
Reducing Offending in Partnership (ROP) (n=106)	Yes	22	20.9
	No	84	79.1
ACE Risk of re-offending at start of ECO (n=125)	High	50	40.0
	Medium	69	55.2
	Low	6	4.8

Table 6 – Offence¹ Type by Age Group (n=136)

Offence Type	% 17-29	% 30+	% Total
Violence against the person	42.5	30.2	36.8
Drugs	16.4	28.6	22.1
Motoring	20.5	22.2	21.3
Theft	26.0	12.7	19.9
Criminal Damage	19.2	9.5	14.7
Public Order	16.4	14.3	15.4
Burglary	16.4	3.2	10.3
Possession of Weapons	5.5	11.1	8.1
Sexual	2.7	3.2	2.9
Fraud	4.1	0.0	2.2
Robbery	2.7	0.0	1.5
Other	28.8	33.3	30.9

¹Individuals may have committed more than one offence type and consequently will be counted in more than one offence category.

3 Approach

3.4 Data limitations

The following limitations should be kept in mind when reading this report:

- While 136 participants were subject to an ECO from 1st October 2015 only 13 had completed the order by 10th March 2017 and were eligible to complete the exit questionnaire; responses were obtained for all 13.
- Input from CVS partners (6) and the Judiciary (6) involved small numbers.
- Data collected by PBNI in relation to offence type, additional requirements, achievements and the psychology assessment was largely free text. Recoding of this information was undertaken by HRCS statisticians but it is important to note there is an element of subjectivity when assigning categories.
- Re-offending data is included for participants made subject to an ECO between 1st December 2015 and 30th April 2016. Those made subject after this date cannot, as yet, be included in the analysis due to the time frame restrictions around which re-offending is calculated. While every care has been taken in collating the data, they are subject to the limitations inherent in any large-scale recording system and to variation in recording practice over time. Validation exercises conducted have included comparing convictions data from Causeway with records from other agencies, including the Northern Ireland Prison Service, PBNI and the Youth Justice Agency with amendments made where appropriate.

At present available data to enable matched sampling, for both releases from custody and community sentences, does not cover the time frame over which the ECO pilot has been running. The small number of offenders in the ECO cohort also means that it is unlikely that following the matching process we would have two groups of adequate size from which to draw comparison. As an alternative the offending behaviours of those in the ECO cohort can be tracked pre and post being sentenced to ECO. It should also be noted that, at present, only a six month observation window is available post sentencing. This is a relatively short period of time during which the offender will be under PBNI supervision. While this information will give some guidance as to the impact of ECO on those individuals, it will not assist in the discussion of ECO as an alternative to other sentencing options. In addition, as it will be only over a six month period any perceived impact is short term only. Further analysis at a later date would need to be completed to examine the longer term impact.

3 Approach

3.5 ECO Delivery

Collaborative nature of the orders

ECOs used a multiagency, multidisciplinary collaborative approach which was reported to work well and the contributions of organisations such as Barnardo's and CRJI were highlighted for the benefits they brought to the programme. Concerns were raised however regarding the inconsistent availability of programmes, due to funding constraints, particularly between March and October 2016. The general consensus was that these key support services were vital to ensuring ECOs were different to generic orders.

"It has enhanced the already strong ties with service providers in the voluntary and charitable sector."

"Identifying a new way of working with some of the most vulnerable in society and working with other agencies to manage these participants."

"The support services such as Barnardo's and CRJ are essential. This is what makes an ECO an ECO. Without these support services it's just a combination order."

The four cornered approach between POs, PSOs, CSOs and the Psychology team worked well, allowing greater flexibility, recognising that some participants responded well to one person but less so with another and so offering greater choice.

Staff commitment

The commitment of the staff involved was evident across all the evaluation activities and the high regard in which they were held by participants was demonstrated during the focus groups.

"Staff are willing to push themselves and go the extra mile to offer support for the participants, sometimes to the detriment of staff wellbeing."

The PSO role

The support provided by the PSO was described as essential. The strong relationship they had with POs, Psychologists and participants 'made the programme work' and was highly effective in assisting the service user to move forward.

"Having a PSO to co-work the case. The supervision element per se can be held by the PO and other aspects of work such as victim awareness can be completed by the PSO which seems to be more efficient."

"(Named PSO) makes the programme work because she knows the participants as individuals. She has been able to invest in the relationship. This takes time and flexibility. Some participants had never had this type of support before."

Their impact was also highlighted by participants.

"If it hadn't been for (named PSO) I wouldn't have got through it though. She made the difference. Talking to (named PSO) wasn't like talking to my PO. I was always on edge when I was talking to the PO."

While not widely reported it was suggested that on occasion the roles and responsibilities of the PSO and PO had become blurred and some clarity may be useful.

The breach process

Interestingly the breach process was identified as an aspect of the pilot that worked well as it provided a means of re-enforcing the programme. Once breached participants had up to six weeks before going back to court. During this time they realised how close they were to going to prison, re-engaged and got back on board with the order. Often by the time they appeared before the Judge most were fully committed. One service user described it as 'a wake up call'.

3 Approach

Embraced by the courts

The general consensus was that the ECO initiative had been valued and embraced by the Judiciary. While Judiciary input into the evaluation was limited there was unanimous agreement that ECOs were a constructive alternative to short-term custodial sentences.

“Any reduction in short-term prison sentences can be regarded as a success. In my view the best results have been with nuisance type offenders and a focus on their particular needs does reduce re-offending. This needs to be adequately resourced.”

In addition the number of custodial sentences of 12 months or less, awarded by courts involved in the ECO pilot, decreased by 10.5% between 2015 and 2016 (Table 7).

While there was also a reduction in the overall number of short term sentences across all the NI courts, at 2.4% this was lower than that across the pilot areas suggesting that ECO was impacting on prison numbers. Further work however is required to see if this trend continues.

Client challenges

Chapter 4 provides an overview of the outcomes of the pilot. When reading this section the reader should bear in mind the challenges faced by the client group. The main problems - addictions, mental health, family issues and unemployment - were highlighted in the data (Chart 1) and across the surveys and focus groups. Their often chaotic lifestyles and complex needs were reported to be a challenge for staff.

The high level of mental health issues and substance/alcohol misuse was difficult to manage and support due to the high level of need and the lack

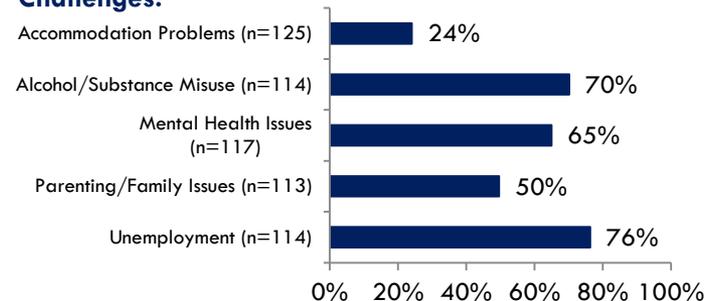
Table 7 – Number of Custodial Sentences of 12 months or less

	2015	2016
Downpatrick	102	102
Newtownards	178	120
Armagh	30	53
Banbridge	19	16
Newry	110	102
Total	439	393

of both ability and motivation for accessing help. The low moods associated with these challenges at times resulted in issues with compliance. Support with employment was also available through initiatives such as ACCESS, Work Routes and People First, and in Newry an external adviser provided guidance on education and potential job related opportunities and the data showed that at least five participants had obtained employment during their time on the order.

Probation staff used a range of strategies to stabilise participants and manage need. As well as identifying priorities and targets through social work assessments, POs also felt positive reinforcement and establishing links with family members and services in the local area were helpful. A multi disciplinary approach which availed of the support services on offer was also seen as important and the successful partnership working between the POs and PSOs was seen as crucial to the success of the programme.

Chart 1 – Proportion of Participants Facing the Following Challenges:



Reasons for participation

Participants said they had agreed to take part in an ECO for a variety of reasons although enabling them to stay out of trouble and avoiding prison tended to be the most frequently stated. Help with staying sober and finding work as well as increasing self-esteem and offering a better life were also reported.

4 | Outcomes

About this chapter

The general consensus among all evaluation participants was that ECO is a highly worthwhile and effective programme which they would like to see continue. Participants themselves were enthusiastic and the vast majority said they were satisfied with the support they received, the activities they did and that they would recommend ECO to someone else as an alternative to custody. They generally felt that their problems were addressed and that goals were realistic.

“You knew if you messed up you were going back inside and that kept you right. The weekly meetings kept me on track. They were a good support.”

“Its better than gaol, you’re kept busy and you don’t have time to re-offend.”

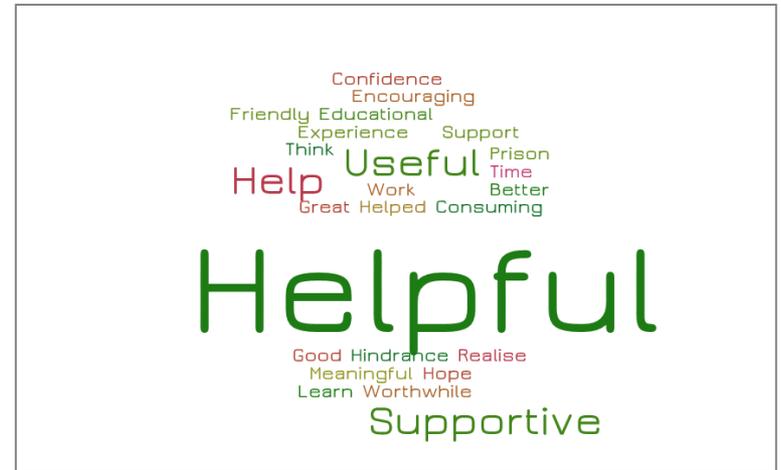
Participants were asked to give three words to describe ECO, and the sentiment expressed about their experience was positive. The word cloud opposite gives greater prominence to words that appeared more frequently; 80% of the words had a positive sentiment, 6% were neutral while 14% were negative.

While challenges were reported, Probation staff felt that the initiative had generally worked well.

“While it will continue to be challenging, we have got participants working with us who previously had been breached on Community Service Orders.”

“For some, it’s really great for them when they finished an order for the first time. One client was happy to have completed his ECO for a breach of a Combination Order.”

This chapter provides an overview of the outcomes for each of the ECO requirements.



“I just wanted to keep out of trouble. It kept me occupied and on track. The positive feedback from all the people here helped with that.”



“Yes I would recommend it to others. It’s better than 12 months.”



4 | Outcomes

4.1 Offending Focussed Work

To undertake intensive offending focussed work with POs was a requirement of the order. It was evident from the written comments recorded in the data sheet that POs were working on this extensively and exploring the impact of participants behaviour on victims, their family and the community.

Staff views

While 37 participants were recorded as having re-offended while on the pilot, Probation staff said that they felt the intense support had definitely helped reduce re-offending among some participants.

"It helps prevent re-offending. I had one client that re-offended but it was for a minor offense. There has been no re-offense from my other participants. This is down to the intense hand holding of the process."

"They would have re-offended anyway. We would be surprised if they didn't. Some others have really surprised us and haven't."

Service user views

Participants also generally thought that the order had helped them address their problems and the way they thought about their future offending behaviour.

"If I was not on this order I would still be getting into trouble."

In addition participants demonstrated a high level of respect for their PO/PSO and were keen 'not to let them down'.

"One client said he thought about getting into bother but he kept thinking about us and how we would be let down if he did."

Re-offending rates

Re-offending rates were calculated for the 52 participants made subject to an ECO up to 30th April 2016. Those made subject after this date cannot, as yet, be included in the analysis due to the time frame restrictions around which re-offending is calculated.

The offending rate of this cohort in the six months¹ prior to being sentenced to an ECO was 57.7% (30 of the 52 offenders). In the six months post sentencing, the re-offending rate at 17.3%² (9 offenders) was significantly lower. In total 31 further offences were committed by these 9 individuals, an average of 3.4 offences per re-offender and an average of 0.6 across the 52 participants.

Due to the small numbers and the limited time frames involved, this result however should be viewed with caution and repeated when more information becomes available.



¹Three of the offenders in the ECO cohort were in custody for the full six months prior to receiving an ECO. For these individuals the previous six months was used for comparison.

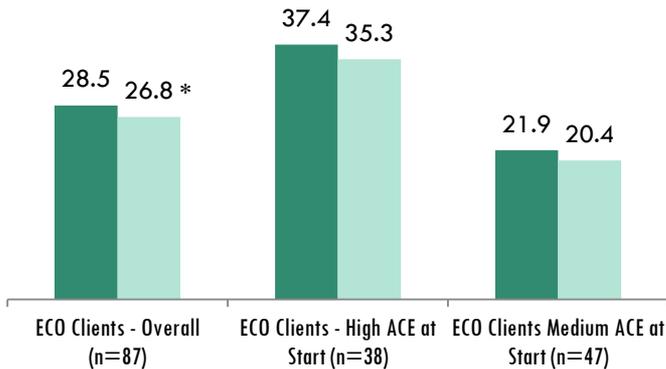
²Non-parametric statistical test was used – Wilcoxon.

4 Outcomes

Likelihood of re-offending Assessments (ACE Scores)

While not a specific requirement of the pilot, at an overall level there was a statistically significant decrease between the most recent ACE score and the score at the start of the order (n=87, p<0.05). Differences were most notable in high ACE participants who saw their score decrease by an average of 2.1 points (or 6%) although the difference like that for medium ACE participants was not significant. The number of participants with a low ACE score was low and it was not possible to run significance testing on this group.

Chart 2 – Difference Between Most Recent ACE Score and that at Sentencing



*Statistically significant decrease (p<0.05).

4.2 Accredited Programmes

The completion of an accredited programme, if appropriate, was a requirement of the ECO pilot. At 10th March 2017 approximately one third of participants had taken part in a range of programmes relating mainly to thinking skills, anger management, decision making and communication. Some of these were recommended as part of the psychology assessments.

The Thinking Skills and Human Faces courses were seen as particularly effective and participants identified benefits of taking part.

“The Thinking Skills program has changed me. It’s about how to see the warning signs and act correctly before things get out of control. I got a lot out of it.”

“Makes me think before I act”.

“I did the Human Faces. It opened my eyes and taught me a lot. It opened my eyes to stereotypes.”

There were times that participants had initially thought they hadn’t needed an intervention but had found it useful.

“They said I needed to do anger management. I didn’t think I needed it. But it did my head good. I have changed my life now.”

4 Outcomes

4.3 Parenting/Family Support

Participation in parenting/family support work (if appropriate) was one of the requirements of ECOs and by 10th March 2017 just under half of participants were reported to have problems in this area; around one quarter were recorded as having undertaken work/received support.

Parenting support

The support provided in relation to parenting was viewed very positively by staff and participants. Examples were provided across the research of the impact on family life including gaining access and custody of children. The impact of family on the prevention of re-offending was also highlighted.

“My one year old son has ensured no further offending”.

The support provided by Barnardo’s was highly valued with the primary aim of the work to increase parental understanding of the impact offending had on children’s welfare and life chances. Those referred were reported to have engaged well and indicated that they had benefited from the service.

“Access to Barnardo’s - positive and strength based approach looking at their main motivators in their lives - their children.”

This was also evident in some of the participants who took part in the focus groups.

It was suggested that if further funding was secured greater linkages could be made between families and other community supports.

Other family support

Further examples of the work that participants undertook, in addition to that on parenting, were provided over the course of the evaluation. This included working with and supporting family members of participants with addiction and mental health issues as well as helping those experiencing marital difficulties.



4 Outcomes

4.4 Psychological Intervention

Referrals

At the outset of the pilot all participants were offered an assessment with PBNi psychology staff and, then where appropriate, mental health interventions. It was reported during the evaluation that guidance had changed, although not all staff were aware of this, and that the usual Psychology consultation and referral process now applied, with participants seen based on need. By 10th March 2017 just under half of participants were recorded as having gone through or were going through the assessment process; referrals had been made in approximately a further fifth of cases¹.

Intervention

Staff and participants were generally very positive of the Psychology element of the requirement.

“A big positive of ECO is the Psychology team involvement from the beginning.”

“Made me understand myself, made me realise what’s important. As a result of this ECO I think I’m a different and better person. Psychology has been great for me, as a result I am prepared to engage in other services”.

“The referral to the Psychologist has helped me a lot and it’s still on going.”

Issues with alcohol/substance misuse and mental health were identified both in the data and across the qualitative activities as being significant problems for participants (see page 14). Some participants also presented with life traumas that had not been previously addressed. The one to one work undertaken by the Psychologists as well as their recommended interventions/programmes (see page 17) were very beneficial. Over two fifths of participants were recorded as having been involved on mental health or addiction interventions/programmes. Where relevant almost all of the small number of participants who had completed the order said it had helped with their alcohol/drug use.

Barriers to progress

Access to mental health services were identified as barriers to client progress and it was reported that there were particular difficulties with participants who didn’t have a mental health diagnosis. GP referrals to the Community Addictions Team were reported to take a long time.

“An addictions audit is carried out at the start of the order. If a client is a Tier three they are referred via their GP to the Community Addictions Team. This is a slow process that can take up to six weeks and the person could be breached before they get help.”

Missing appointments for health and addiction support was also reported to cause difficulties as participants would be discharged.

“I’ve struggled with participants who struggle with mental health which is linked to their drug abuse. They will be discharged if they don’t attend their appointments.”

¹This number could be higher as the coding of categories was dependent on the level of detail recorded.

4 Outcomes

4.5 Community Service

The completion of unpaid work within local communities at an accelerated pace was one of the main requirements of ECOs. By 10th March 2017, community service had been completed for 59 orders and was ongoing for a further 65. The order had been revoked in a further 12 cases.

Client and victim influence

The data collected showed that 30 participants had some influence on the type of community service they undertook; victims had influence in six orders. Data on input by both groups was missing however for approximately one third of cases and so these figures were potentially higher.

Table 8 – Community Service Work Rate (n=75)

Work Rate	%
1 day per fortnight	2.7
1 day per week	69.3
2 days per week	21.3
More than 2 days per week	6.7

Pace of work

The majority of participants undertook community service one day per week (69%) (Table 8). The pace of work was described as being ‘full on’ initially and difficult for participants to maintain. Feedback however was taken on board as the pilot progressed to ensure a more manageable pace.

“At the beginning everything was thrown at them and it was full on. That was tapered off but initially some participants weren’t capable. Some can only manage two to three hours not two days of community service – that feedback was taken on board.”

While some participants also highlighted the fast pace others liked the fact that it had allowed the community service element to be completed quickly.

“(Named person) said I had to do a minimum of two days a week, nine to five but the Judge explained I had twelve months to do one hundred hours. I suppose I did get it over with quickly.”

Placements

Difficulties obtaining appropriate placements were reported and only five were recorded as being relevant to the offence type. Some staff felt that a lack of resources were hindering the establishment of links with organisations potentially willing to accommodate participants. A dedicated person to develop this area and expand the placements on offer was suggested as being beneficial.

As well as a perceived reluctance by some organisations to take particular participants, mental health and lifestyle issues were also identified as barriers to placement. Difficulties caused by travel restrictions resulting from PO risk assessments, participants under threat and those in employment were also highlighted and it was reported that flexibility was essential to ensure the ECO didn’t turn into a standard combination order.

“A few work, so there is the added difficulty of scheduling services for them. If they don’t get to access the services it turns into a normal combination order. Obviously the positive benefits of being in employment have to come first.”

“The community are benefitting from the unpaid element of the order.”



4 Outcomes

Securing restorative placements, particularly when there was no identifiable victim, was also challenging and the restorative element of the order tended to be addressed through separate restorative/victim awareness work rather than community service.

Over half of recorded placements involved manual squad work (Table 9). Squad space was also limited at times due to the cap on the number of participants who could be supervised at one time in some areas and at times participants had to be turned away.

“Even if a client makes his own way there (named person) can only supervise six, so they can still be turned away.”

Difficulties with transport were also highlighted in some of the more rural locations. While a vehicle was provided by a CSO in one area, space was limited and again if more than four participants turned up for work some had to be stood down. It was also reported that on occasion while two days community service per week was required only one day could be offered.

Compliance

When it happened, non-compliance with the community service aspect of the order was sometimes due to limited understanding of the implications. Ensuring participants fully understood the potential impact - possible return to court and a prison sentence - if community service wasn't adhered to was seen as important.

Table 9 – Type of Community Service (n=92)

Type of community service	%
Squad	54.3
Charity	31.5
Sports club	5.4
Other	8.7

Client views

Participants generally liked the fact that the community service aspect of the order gave them something to do and some felt that it was a good way of staying out of trouble. A few said that they would miss having the structure and support of other participants once it finished with one so concerned about filling their time that they had asked their PO to investigate volunteering opportunities post community service.

“At least with this they are physically making you do stuff. It was good. The community service was for Action Cancer, picking up furniture, I just got on with it.”

“I've been getting on with my community service, litter picking and down at the football club.”

One self employed participant said that the community service element of the order had the most impact on stopping him from further offending because of the loss of income on community service days.

“I think it's too early to monitor whether in terms of community service there is a marked difference from combination orders. Perhaps the two days standards will increase enforcement of the order. However, in relation to the ethos behind the order, it has increased more partnership working between the Community Service Officer and the Probation Officers.”



4 | Outcomes

4.6 Victim Focused Restorative Work

Restorative work

Participation in victim focussed work, and if possible, a restorative intervention was a further requirement of the order. Data was available for 128 of the orders and showed that by 10th March 2017 restorative work had been completed/was ongoing or due to start for approximately three fifths of cases. Under a tenth of participants were either not ready to commence restorative work yet or the emphasis was on other aspects such as parenting and addictions. The remaining cases had either breached or had no restorative work recorded.

Restorative work was undertaken through partnerships with organisations such as Community Restorative Justice Ireland (CRJI) and Northern Ireland Alternatives (NIA). While supporting participants, CRJI applied restorative practice, values and processes and assisted participants to make good in the community. They also engaged other services to help with specialist work such as addictions.

NIA helped participants develop a restorative plan and provided victim awareness. A key focus of their work was to help to integrate participants in positive ways into community life through volunteering and training.

“The restorative side is there but no direct input from the victim. We all really believe in the ethos behind the restorative side.”

Victim engagement

Restorative engagement with victims was possible only when victims registered/requested contact with the PBNI Victim Information Unit. By 10th March 2017, only four victims had chosen to do this making the victim focussed aspect of the order difficult.

“I only have one client who is a registered victim. I can’t do anything if there’s no registered victim.”

An additional feature, developed over the course of the pilot to increase victim input was put in place in conjunction with Victim Support. Initial victim engagement would be obtained through PO referrals to Victim Support in cases where an ECO was being recommended as a sentence. Victims were then contacted, the content of the order was explained and their views as a potential sentence in the case were sought. Those in favour were then asked for input regarding the type of community service the offender should complete and if they would be interested in working restoratively with them. While the number of initial referrals was modest (14 cases), all but one of the victims contacted, supported an ECO as a sentencing option and said they would be willing to work restoratively with their offender. While the restorative work had yet to take place for those already referred, PBNI management reported intending to build on this feature going forward to ensure increased victim engagement.

“There is a lot of potential and I know from meeting the PBNI team in Newry that they are keen too.”

Although engagement was limited an example was given where meeting the victim had significantly impacted on the service user showing the potential benefits when progressed. Staff also encouraged participants to reflect on the impact of their offence on victims such as writing apology letters although these could only be sent if the victim was registered.

5

Overall

About this chapter

This chapter provides an overview of the aspects of the pilot that worked well, challenges faced and suggestions going forward.

5.1 Working Well

Reduction in custodial sentences

The reduction in custodial sentences with the resultant decrease in tax payer costs was identified by participants across the evaluation as a major benefit of the pilot.

“Have reduced the number of individuals going to prison for short prison sentences where they would have had no work completed in custody. On an ECO they have had an intensive tailor made case plan which actively challenges their offending and incorporates service user needs, victim issues and gives structure to their time through community service.”

“There are now over one hundred people who would have received short custodial sentences who are being successfully managed in the community with appropriate resources which are intended to develop social capital and assist with forging a new identity. Reduced cost to the public purse.”

Addresses client need

ECOs addressed the underlying contributing reasons for offending behaviour, including mental health/psychological difficulties. They responded both pragmatically and through therapeutic professional interventions providing intensive support, motivation and mentoring, signposting participants to appropriate organisations.

Participants were given time to build relationships and staff felt that ECOs provided a more social work based approach.

“Allowing us the opportunity to explore the underlying reasons for offending behaviour and lifestyle to help begin addressing this as opposed to a band aid fix.”

While not measured specifically, staff felt that anecdotally, the pilot increased client confidence through both the opportunities offered and the successful completion of the order.

“For the ones who get work – they never would have believed they could stick at it.”

Flexible approach

The flexible nature of the programme worked well and examples were given of participants with significant addiction issues who had been allowed time off from community service to concentrate on relationships and motivational work. When the drug use was resolved they had been able to recommence. Similarly others had been able to undertake home based community service.

“Being able to be flexible with support with regards community service. For example a man with significant issues and unable to find a local placement was permitted to do home based work.”

The general consensus was that flexibility was essential to enable the pilot to work successfully and staff who ‘wanted to tick boxes’ were not the right type of people to work with ECO participants.

5

Overall

Access to resources

Both staff and participants recognised the benefits of having access to additional resources through ECO. As stated previously staff felt that these extra elements were very important to ensure that ECOs were different from a standard combination order and concerns were raised regarding the continued availability of funding.

“The start of a more collaborative, multi-disciplinary way of working with participants who generally have not traditionally gleaned the benefit of resources either in custody (short sentences) or with PBNI (lower risk).”

“I consider the ECO to be our ‘best practice’, and it is something which we strive to do with all orders we supervise when we have the resources.”



5.2 Challenges

Demanding for participants

A lot was expected at the outset of the order from people with complex needs and chaotic lifestyles. Supporting participants therefore to cope with the demands at an early stage was important. Prioritising the work so they weren't overwhelmed, resisting the temptation to rush additional requirements in the first few months and improving communication between those involved were strategies used.

Asking participants to invest in multiple relationships was also challenging, as they were having to 'tell their story again and again'.

Conflicts between multiple projects running at the same time were also highlighted, particularly for participants in contact with other agencies such as social services.

“At the beginning everything was thrown at them and it was full on. That was tapered off but initially some participants weren't capable. Some can only manage two or three hours not two days of community service. That feedback was taken on board.”



“If we know they are chaotic and don't engage, is this the most appropriate sentence and how can we increase motivation to engage.”



5 Overall

Targeting the correct participants

Staff said that ECOs didn't work for everybody and so careful consideration regarding client suitability was important. Examples were given of cases where Judges had taken a different approach to the pre sentence report recommendation and participants without the necessary motivation were given ECOs which were later revoked. Participants with mobility issues and for whom the community service aspect was problematic had also been included even though achievement of the order would be difficult. Providing Judges with information relating to when ECOs were appropriate was suggested. That said, the Judges who participated in the evaluation felt they had been provided with enough detail to inform their decision although more information on the progress of the ECOs given in their court was suggested by some.

Probation staff said that there was a perception that if they said a client wasn't ready for an ECO they would get a custodial sentence and it was important to remember that a combination order was a good alternative.

In terms of participants who were most likely to benefit, some staff felt traditionally difficult people as there was both the time and additional staff to build relationships. One person found that those involved in petty crime tended to do better than those who had committed more serious offences or who were heavily dependent on drugs or alcohol. Another said it worked better for people known to them for a while as they realise they are getting a 'state of the art' programme compared to their previous experience. One of the Judges felt that it was most suitable for drug related crimes involving dishonesty and low level robberies but was usually unsuitable for sexually related offences.

Demanding for staff

Meeting the range of complex needs of participants was difficult, and effective management required considerable PO/PSO time particularly at the start of an order. Staff supervising an ECO as part of a generic caseload found it a challenge to keep on top of the different orders participants were on and the services available to them.

Motivating participants to engage and attend the large number of appointments was also challenging particularly when funding constraints had led to the unavailability of partner agencies. Strategies used to promote motivation included building relationships between participants and the organisations involved and focussing on client interests to finding enjoyable and engaging activities.

Enforcement

Some staff felt that there was a level of inconsistency regarding the enforcement of ECO cases. It was clear that 'robust enforcement' was a critical element of ECOs. Guidance to provide additional clarity was identified as being potentially beneficial. It was reported that while some staff were flexible others were more rigid giving participants 'mixed messages' if the order was transferred between staff.

"As the ECO has so many elements to it for attendance there is a less strict discipline applied by Probation Officers that can cause difficulties with Community Service Officers and combination order offenders. Whilst as a Community Service Officer I can understand the reasoning for the less strict discipline, it can still be difficult to manage with others participants, but to date there has been no serious issues."

"It's a lot of investment of energy – giving them hope and encouraging them – there was one client we didn't think would survive – we were able to give him a break from community service to deal with his drug issue and he was able to go back."



"We need a consistent, stable and structured approach to help manage these cases, often they are very chaotic and unstable and if we are not clear on the process this instability can be further heightened."



5 Overall

Resourcing uncertainties

As stated previously concerns were raised regarding the inconsistent nature of programme availability caused by funding uncertainties. Support was reported to be particularly limited between March and October 2016 and without this, staff questioned how ECOs would be different to generic Probation orders.

“It feels like all or nothing – no consistent resource pool throughout the year.”

Staff felt that funding uncertainty meant that participants were being signed up to multiple initiatives/interventions in case funding was withdrawn. The general consensus was that orders needed to be better paced.

“Firing a lot of resources at people all at one time is not a good idea either. We need to know that we will have the Probation Services Officer and the support services in place for one year so we can plan and not just sign a person up as quickly as possible because the funding is available at that moment.”

“There is a risk that when the order arrives you throw everything at them. But we have two years to pace the order.”

A lack of community resources for drug and alcohol services, counselling and mental health support was also raised as a challenge and while there was recognition that funding was available through ECO for particular programmes sometimes participants needed more.

“The Barnardo’s parenting programme and Alternatives/CRJI received more funding which is great but in no way enough when substance/alcohol and mental health are the primary difficulties for participants along with underlying trauma.”

Geographical location

The fact that the services in the Armagh and South Down pilot area were in Newry was a challenge both for staff based in other locations and participants dependent on often unreliable public transport.



5

Overall

5.3 Suggestions

Evaluation participants were asked for ideas regarding how ECO could be improved. An overview of suggestions made has been provided below. Some of the suggestions outlined may represent individual views only, so need to be considered in perspective.

More targeted help

“The most success can be achieved by identifying the offender who will benefit from the ECO in terms of additional resources and help.”

Extend the pilot across the province

“Rolling out through the entire jurisdiction.”

Provide a settling in period before introducing additional programmes

“Many ECO participants display chaotic and dysfunctional behaviours, over and above pre-existing mental health conditions, which can at times impact on their ability to engage with all of their order requirements; from this it may be more pertinent to allow a settling in period with their Probation Order and Community Service requirement before expecting them to participate in additional programmes thus allowing for a more beneficial and productive outcome.”

Longer term resourcing

A longer term funding strategy was seen as crucial and potential funding streams including the Society of Friends were suggested.

“Long term planning and resources could make this service invaluable. This would ensure that we solidify the relationships across community and statutory organisations which would assist in embedding this way of working. Collaborative approaches in our view is the direction of travel.”

Single points of contact

It was suggested that having one CSO, one PO, one PSO and one Psychologist as the liaising point would make communication easier for staff and participants.

CRJI run clinics

“It is my own personal view that CRJI should deliver a portion of this work within PBNI offices for example through clinics. The benefits to all concerned are immense.”

Provide Judges with information on the progress of ECOs that had been imposed in their court.

While Judges were offered the opportunity to receive general reports on the performance of people in ECO, the provision of information on the progress of ECOs imposed in their courts was also suggested.

5 | Overall

5.4 Other Comments

The majority of additional comments emphasised the regard in which the pilot is held

“I believe the ECO pilot has been a very innovative and pragmatic approach to reducing offending behaviours in those previously subject to custodial sentences of twelve months or less. The concept fits neatly into the outcomes of the Programme for Government and should be supported to continue after the pilot finishes.”

“My experience of ECO overall has been a very positive one for participants. One has completed well and although one has breached it was for a very minor offence and they are now back on track.”

“There’s a perception that ECO is what POs already do – intensive, supportive – It’s what everybody should be getting anyway.”

