



# EVALUATION OF THE ENHANCED COMBINATION ORDER OCTOBER 2015 TO DECEMBER 2021



Department of  
**Justice**

An Roinn Díf agus Cirt  
Máinnstríe O tha Laa



**NISRA**











Northern Ireland  
Statistics and Research Agency  
Gníomhaireacht Thuaisceart Éireann  
um Staitisticí agus Taighde

**June 2022**

# Acronyms

ACE	Assessment, Case management and Evaluation
CRJI	Community Restorative Justice Ireland
HRCS	Human Resource Consultancy Services
NIACRO	Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
ORS	Offending Related Score
PBNI	Probation Board for Northern Ireland
PO	Probation Officer
PS	Problem Score
PSO	Probation Service Officer
ROP	Reducing Offending in Partnership

# CONTENTS

	Executive Summary	1
	Context	4
	Approach	6
	Orders and Service Users	7
	How Much and How Well?	11
	Impact	22
	Overall	28
	Appendix 1	34
	Appendix 2	35
	Appendix 3	36

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## Acknowledgements

We would like to record our thanks to all of the participants who gave us their views in a frank and genuine manner. This report is based on what they told us.

The Lord Chief Justice requested that the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI), develop a community sentence as an alternative to the high number of prison sentences lasting less than 12 months. Known as the Enhanced Combination Order (ECO), ECOs commenced in the Ards, and Armagh and South Down court divisions in October 2015 and were extended to the North West in October 2018. Focussing on restorative practice, desistance and victims, service users also complete community service. Where appropriate access to a PBNI psychologist, parenting/family support work and accredited programmes are also part of the order. This report provides an overview of the findings of an evaluation undertaken for the years that the order has been operational.

## Key Findings

The key findings from the research are summarised below -

### 1) Delivery

- By 31<sup>st</sup> December 2021, 682 individuals had received an ECO; 83 went on to receive a subsequent one on at least one other occasion (855 separate ECOs). Over 30% were sentenced in the Ards court division, over 31% in Armagh and South Down and 29% in the North West. The average length of an order was 20 months.
- By 31<sup>st</sup> December 2021, of the 740 ECO referrals made to PBNI, 368 service users had successfully completed their order, 253 were still actively engaged and 119 had either breached, had their order revoked or a warrant issued.
- Service users were mainly male (89%) and had a median age of 29 years; the majority were medium or high risk of reoffending.

## 2) Impact

- The completion of unpaid work within local communities was one of the main requirements of ECOs with 70,400 hours sentenced by the courts between October 2015 and December 2021. Service users completed an average of 82 hours and the majority (77%) said they found this element of the order useful.
- The psychology element was one of the most highly valued aspects of ECOs for both PBNI staff and service users, many of whom had mental health and addiction issues. The fact that no waiting lists meant a faster intervention was viewed as one of the main benefits. The majority of service users said they found the psychological intervention useful (86%) and that ECOs helped them address addiction issues (92%).
- Support with parenting/family relationships was available from Barnardos for those who required it. There were 314 referrals since October 2015 with improved scores for the majority of service users in the four outcomes of focus. Findings from the exit survey showed 79% of service users said ECO had helped with family relationships.
- Over 80% of service users rated the discussion and work on victim issues as useful. Specific benefits identified by stakeholders included raised awareness of the impact of behaviour on victims, their own families and the wider community. Challenges relating to Victim Support referrals were reported to be largely due to the number of cases with no identifiable victim along with caution not to re-traumatise. A strong desire for a more restorative conference style approach was highlighted by a number of stakeholders.
- The one year proven reoffending rate has shown a year on year decrease since 2015/16. The vast majority of service users agreed that ECOs had helped them address their offending behaviour (95%), PBNI staff's support had helped them avoid/reduce re-offending (92%) and they were unlikely to commit a further similar offence (99%).

# 1

## Executive Summary

- There was a statistically significant decrease between ACE scores at the start and end of the order, overall and when broken down into high, medium and low risk categories with average reductions of 6.3, 3.4 and 2.5 points respectively.
- Between 2015 and 2017 the number of custodial sentences of 12 months or less, awarded by courts involved in the Armagh/South Down/Ards pilot, decreased by 20.7%. Between 2018 and 2020, when the North West came on board, there was a 20.3% decrease. While there were reductions in the overall number of short term sentences across all the NI courts, at 3.4% between 2015 and 2017 and 14.6% between 2018 and 2020 these were lower than across the pilot areas.
- The impact of provision of support with employment, particularly that from NIACRO, was also highlighted during the qualitative phase of the research, as was improvements in service user confidence.

### 3) Overall

- The evidence highlighted in this review shows that ECOs provide a well rounded holistic service for complex and chaotic service users. The associated wrap around services are now well embedded and excellent working relationships have developed between stakeholders with continued commitment between partner organisations evident. Challenges, relating mainly to the pandemic, homelessness, securing restorative placements/victim input and unavailable on a province wide basis were identified with suggestions for improvements focussing on restorative conference style work, incorporating a housing element, mainstreaming and roll out.
- Input from service users themselves has also been positive with the vast majority satisfied with the support they received (98%) and a range of benefits identified. The wider value that ECOs have brought to service users, including the provision of psychological support and help with avoiding re-offending should not be under-estimated.

## 2 | Context

### 2.1 Enhanced Combination Orders

Research shows that more than 50% of offenders sentenced to a short prison term will re-offend and that as there is little that can be done in practical terms to rehabilitate them during a short prison stay, short-term prison sentences are less effective in addressing offending behaviours than community-based disposals. The Lord Chief Justice therefore requested that the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI), develop a community sentence as an alternative to the high number of prison sentences lasting less than 12 months. Based on existing legislation and known as the Enhanced Combination Order (ECO), they offered Judges a community option in a more intensive format.

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 ECOs in the Ards, and Armagh and South Down court divisions

for 18 months, from October 2015; this was extended to court divisions in the North West in October 2018 and has been operational across both areas since then.

ECOs fall within the Department of Justice's (DoJ) Problem-Solving Justice (PSJ) initiative which aims to tackle the root causes of offending, and reduce harmful behaviour. Further information about PSJ initiatives is available on the [NI Direct website](#).

ECOs focus on restorative practice, desistance and victims, with service users also required to complete unpaid work within their local communities. Those with mental health issues are assessed by PBNI psychologists, with a treatment plan or referral to an appropriate health provider then forming part of the intervention. Where appropriate parenting/family support work and accredited programmes are also part of the order.

## 2 Context

ECOs use a multiagency, multidisciplinary, collaborative approach, with PBNI leading on the order, and support provided by a range of organisations including Barnardos, Community Restorative Justice Ireland (CRJI), Northern Ireland Alternatives and Victim Support. Within PBNI, ECOs involve Probation Officers (POs), Probation Service Officers (PSOs), Community Service Officers (CSOs) and PBNI Psychologists providing greater flexibility and choice.

### 2.2 The Review

Several [evaluations](#) of the ECO initiative have been undertaken over the last number of years. They have shown, that while demanding for both staff and service users, the orders have been successful in achieving their aims. This current review was undertaken during February and March 2022 by Analytical Services Group (ASG), statisticians on loan to DoJ from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). It examines how much has been done between October 2015 and December 2021, how well it has been done and the impact that it has had on service users. This report provides an overview of the findings.





# 3 | Approach

## About this Chapter

This chapter provides an overview of the data collection techniques used.

### 3.1 Data Collection

The evaluation used the following quantitative and qualitative sources –

- Administrative data held by Barnardos, PBNI and DoJ's Causeway Data System.
- Semi-structured interviews with representatives from PBNI (1 Director, 3 Assistant Directors, 4 area managers, 1 PO), Alternatives (2), Barnardos (2), CRJI (2) and Victim Support (1).

- Questionnaires -
  - ✓ Exit questionnaires completed by participants at the end of their order to gather data relating to ECO expectations and experiences. By March 2022, 104 completed questionnaires were available from participants involved with ECO between April 2017 and January 2022.
  - ✓ All POs, PSOs, CSOs and psychologists working with ECO service users were invited to complete a questionnaire to gather their views on how the order was working and its impact on service users; 13 individuals responded.
  - ✓ Judges working in the pilot areas were invited to complete a questionnaire to gather their views on the order; 2 individuals responded.



### 3.2 Data Limitations

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

- While 740 participants were subject to an ECO from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2015, 368 had completed the order by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2021 and were eligible to complete the exit questionnaire; responses were obtained for 103 (response rate, 28%).

# 4 Orders and Service Users

## About this Chapter

This chapter provides an overview of the number of ECOs imposed between 1<sup>st</sup> October 2015 and 31<sup>st</sup> December 2021, along with a profile of participating service users.

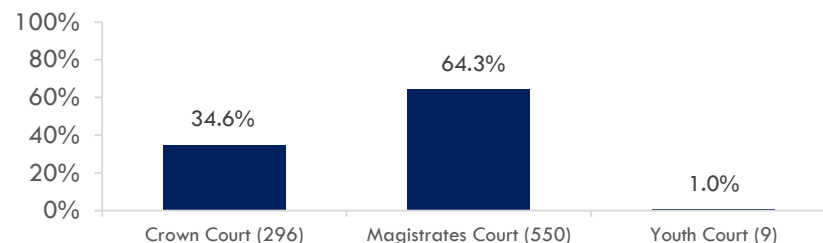
## 4.1 Orders Imposed

By 31<sup>st</sup> December 2021, 682 individuals had received an ECO; 83 of these individuals received a subsequent ECO on at least one other occasion (855 separate ECOs).

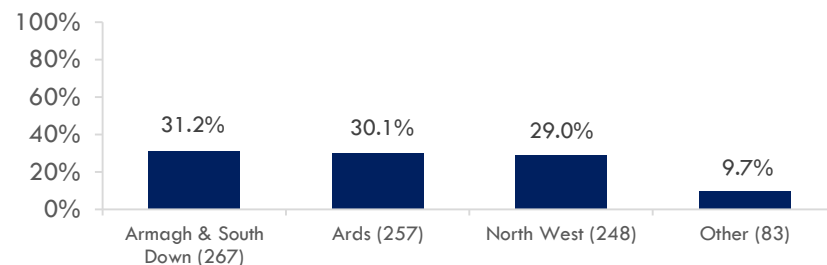
Approximately two thirds were imposed through the Magistrates and a third through the Crown Courts (Figure 1). Over 31% of ECOs were sentenced in the Armagh and South Down court division, over 30% in Ards and 29% in the North West (Figure 2). Just under 10% of ECOs were recorded within other non pilot courts. A breakdown by individual court office is available in Appendix 1.

The majority of orders lasted for 12, 18 or 24 months (Figure 3). The average length of an order was 20 months.

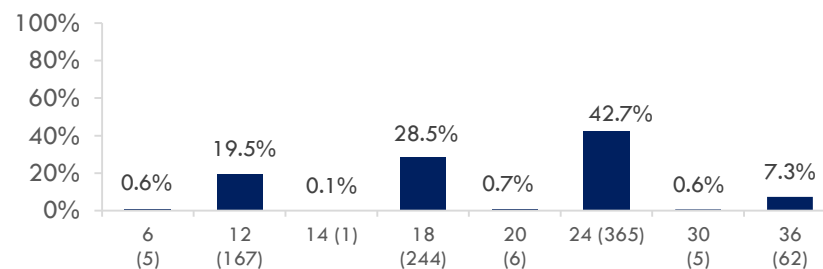
**Figure 1 – Number of orders by court type (n=855)**  
(Source: Causeway System)



**Figure 2 – Number of orders by court location (n=855)**  
(Source: Causeway System)



**Figure 3 – Proportion of service users by length of ECO in months (n=855)** (Source: Causeway System)



# 4 Orders and Service Users

## 4.2 User Profile

Participants were largely male and ranged in age from 17 to 70 with a median of 29 years; the majority were medium or high risk (Table 1).

Drug related crimes and crimes defined as ‘violence against the person’ were the most common offence types committed (Table 2).

**Table 1 – ECO participant profile**

(Source: Age and gender, Causeway System; ACE, PBNI)

		Count	%
Age when ECO imposed (n=682)	17 to 29	347	50.9
	30+	335	49.1
Gender (n=682)	Male	606	88.9
	Female	76	11.1
ACE Risk of re-offending at start of ECO (n=666)	High	232	34.8
	Medium	360	54.1
	Low	74	11.1

**Table 2 – Offence type by age group** (Individuals may have committed more than one offence type and consequently will be counted in more than one offence category) (Source: Causeway System)

Offence Type	%	%	%
	17-29	30+	Total
Violence against the person	23.9	23.8	23.9
Drugs	24.2	22.1	23.2
Motoring	12.8	17.4	15.0
Theft	8.5	9.1	8.8
Criminal Damage	4.9	4.4	4.7
Public Order	9.8	7.1	8.5
Burglary	5.1	2.0	3.6
Possession of Weapons	3.4	2.5	2.9
Sexual	2.2	2.0	2.1
Fraud	0.9	1.2	1.1
Robbery	0.7	0.2	0.5
Miscellaneous crimes against society	3.6	8.3	5.8

# 4 Orders and Service Users

## 4.3 PBNI Service User Numbers

By 31<sup>st</sup> December 2021, of the 740 ECO referrals made to PBNI, 368 had successfully completed their order, 253 were still under supervision and 119 had either breached their order, had their order revoked (47) or had a warrant issued.

## 4.4 Problems Faced by Service Users

The challenges faced by service users, many of whom led chaotic lifestyles, were highlighted across the research activities. Many were reported to have complex mental health and/or addiction issues; others were homeless and had no family support. Others had been in contact with Criminal Justice organisations in the past and had unsuccessful outcomes, consequently motivation and belief that 'change' for the better was possible, was low.

ACE risk and needs profile scores were available for 273 service users. The scores reflect the problems and needs they faced for various factors within the social, personal and offending domains. Factors within all three domains are given an Offending Related Score (ORS); factors within the social and personal domains are also given a Problem Score (PS). The ORS reflects the extent to which the factor is relevant to the person's recent and/or potential offending while the PS reflects the extent of the problem for the client, regardless of any link with their offending. The ORS and PS prevalence rates are the proportion of those assessed as having a small, medium or large problem with each factor.

Table 3 on the following page lists the factors where more than half of service users were assessed as having a problem. It shows that 94% had difficulties with reasoning/thinking and almost 90% with responsibility/control and impulsive/risk taking. These three factors were relevant to recent and/or potential offending for almost all ECO service users.

Approximately three quarters of service users were assessed as having problems with employment, education, training, family/personal relationships, alcohol and emotional well being. Just over 60% had

# 4 | Orders and Service Users

problems with drugs and stress management. Appendix 2 provides prevalence rates for additional social, personal and offending related factors.

**Table 3 – Factors where more than half of service users were deemed to have a small, medium or large problem**

Domain	ACE Factor	Prevalence Rate (%)			
		ORS	PS		
Social	Employment, Education & Training	59	76		
	Community	53	57		
	Family & Personal Relationships	53	74		
Personal	Substance Misuse & Addictions	Alcohol	68	71	
		Drugs	55	61	
	Health	Emotional Well Being	68	76	
	Personal Skills	Reasoning/Thinking	98	94	
	Individual Characteristics		Impulsive/Risk Taking	97	89
			Responsibility/Control	93	88
			Stress Management	56	62
			Aggression/Temper	53	53
Offending	Lifestyle & Associates	Does the offender's lifestyle put him/her at risk of reoffending?	84	n/a	
		Do friends/ associates put him/her at risk of reoffending?	68		
	Attitudes	Does the offender deny responsibility for his/her offending?	50	n/a	
		Does the offender disregard harm to his/her victim(s)	56		

# 5 | How Much and How Well?

## About this Chapter

The requirements on offenders subject to ECOs were to:

1. Undergo assessment and, if appropriate, mental health interventions with PBNi psychology staff;
2. Complete unpaid work within local communities;
3. Participate in parenting/family support work if appropriate;
4. Participate in victim focussed work, and if possible, a restorative intervention; and
5. Complete an accredited programme, if appropriate.

Views relating to how each element was working were gathered through exit questionnaires with service users (103 available), surveys with the Judiciary/PBNi staff, and face to face interviews with stakeholders. This chapter provides an overview of the findings.



# 5 | How Much and How Well?

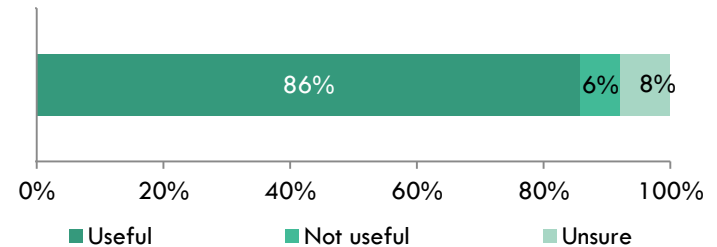
## 5.1 Psychological Intervention

When ECOs first commenced all participants were offered an assessment with a PBNI psychologist and then, where appropriate, mental health interventions. This changed at the end of the first eighteen months and from then on the usual psychology consultation and referral process has applied, with participants seen based on need.

Providing a personalised programme of work, the psychological intervention looks at service users behaviours, triggers and backgrounds, giving them support to explore that. Where appropriate it can also involve linking in with family members, who are able to provide further insight into service user needs. While not all service users are ready to engage with the psychologist initially, this can be revisited at a later stage and it was reported, that most service users were willing to engage once relationships had been established and trust had been built.

The psychology element is one of the most highly valued aspects of the order for both PBNI staff and service users. Described by one PBNI interviewee as ‘phenomenal’ and ‘critical to the success’ of the order, almost all PBNI staff who responded to the survey agreed that it was operating well and beneficial to service users (Tables 2 and 3, Appendix 3). From a service user perspective, the exit questionnaire showed that the vast majority found the referral useful (Figure 4).

**Figure 4 – How useful did you find the referral to the PBNI psychologist? (Source: Service User Exit Questionnaire, n=63)**



## 5 | How Much and How Well?

A number of benefits of the psychological element of the order were identified during the research and included -

- No waiting lists so service users get help straight away, something that makes a huge difference for those with mental health issues, addictions and learning difficulties;
- Provides a quicker intervention for service users who don't meet the threshold for other mental health or addiction services, who don't have a diagnosed mental health issue or who don't meet the criteria of a diagnosed learning difficulty;
- Gives POs greater insight on how best to work with service users, enabling them to build a bespoke plan; and
- Psychologists able to advocate to GPs on service users behalf, with GPs more likely to listen to another medical professional.

*"Psychology is key to this order. I feel the rest are just sticking plasters. Need to get to bottom of issue. Not skim the surface." PBNI*



*"If you were waiting in the community for a referral it would be maybe six months to two years now with covid. With probation we have no waiting lists." PBNI*





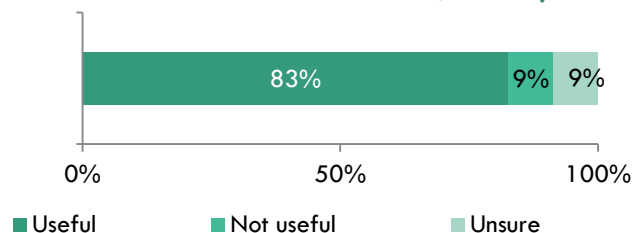
# 5 | How Much and How Well?

## 5.2 Community Service

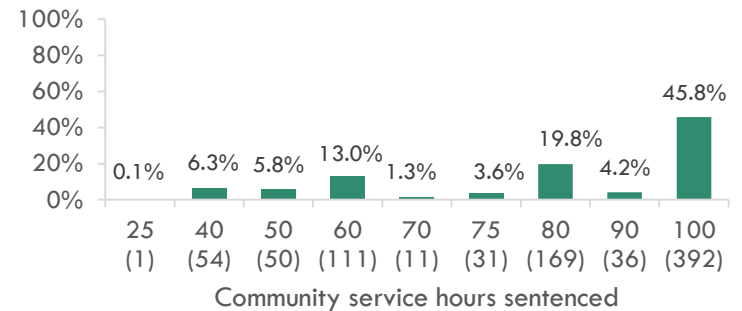
The completion of unpaid work within local communities was one of the main requirements of ECOs. By 31<sup>st</sup> December 2021, the mean number of community service hours sentenced was 82 with a total of 70,400 hours sentenced by the courts from October 2015. Based on the 2022 national living wage of £9.50 per hour this was equivalent to almost £670,000 worth of work provided to communities in the Ards, Armagh/South Down and North West areas.

All 13 respondents to the PBNl staff survey agreed that the community service element of the order was operating well and almost all agreed community service benefitted service users (Tables 2 and 3, Appendix 3). This was reiterated further during the interviews when PBNl representatives highlighted the commitment of the CSOs and PSOs and provided examples of the positive impact that community service had on both the local area and service users themselves. For some service users it provided structure,

**Figure 6 – How useful did you find the community service?**  
(Source: Service User Exit Questionnaire, n=103)



**Figure 5 – Proportion of service users by community service hours sentenced (n=855) (Source: Causeway System)**



a purpose and increased their confidence, with a small number getting so much from their placement that they had opted to continue once their allocated hours were completed. For others it was their first job and provided a work like atmosphere, helping them understand the potential benefits of working. Input from service users showed that over 80% found the community service useful (Figure 6).

# 5 How Much and How Well?

A number of challenges relating to the community service element of the order were identified during the research and included -

- The chaotic nature of many service users' lives and the complexities of addictions and mental health issues made full engagement difficult for some;
- A small number of individuals were reported not to be physically capable of completing community service hours;

*"The community service element is massive, they are involved with community projects and really adding value. Covid has shut down a lot of the voluntary sector, but having people coming in and maintaining grounds, or dealing with graffiti, that's a great benefit to the community." PBNI*



*"Majority of ECO clients lead chaotic lifestyles. Trying to get them to the community service element and attend consistently with appointments can be difficult when also managing other factors such as addiction." PBNI*



- While PBNI aimed to make placements restorative, and specific examples of this were provided across the research, securing such placements was reported to be challenging, particularly when there was no identifiable victim or in areas where there were fewer restorative placement options; and
- While the onset of the pandemic meant that community service stalled for a short time, the focus had to move towards outdoor work placements. Interviewees noted that staff had worked hard to ensure community service continued with investment in social distancing alarm devices, worn by service users, to help ensure social distancing was maintained. During the pandemic, community service was reported as being a 'lifeline' for some service users struggling with mental health issues.

# 5 | How Much and How Well?

## 5.3 Parenting/Family Support

Participation in parenting/family work, where appropriate was a requirement of ECOs with POs able to refer service users to Barnardos for support. Initially offered on a four session basis there was capacity to extend if additional work was required. An initial assessment was undertaken at the first session to determine individual needs with identified areas addressed during subsequent sessions. Delivery was in person in PBNI accommodation until the onset of the pandemic in March 2020; since then sessions have been delivered remotely, due mainly to restrictions on visitors to PBNI premises.

The current target for service delivery is 100 parents and 400 individual or group sessions available annually. As expected, numbers were impacted due to the closure of the courts at the start of the pandemic and during this time additional sessions were offered to those already engaged. From October 2015 until January 2022, approximately 314 individuals, have engaged with Barnardos - 73 recorded in

the ECO evaluation report covering October 2015 to November 2018 and 241 recorded by Barnardos during October 2018 and January 2022. Since October 2018, 1,402 individual sessions have been completed; the number of non-completers was reported to be low.

Feedback across all stakeholder groups regarding support and the resultant benefits to service users was extremely positive, as were views on working relationships between Barnardos and PBNI.

Specific benefits identified included –

- Raising awareness of the impact of behaviour on children, helping the person move away from offending lifestyle;
- Improved knowledge of own needs as a parent and the needs

*“It shows them what impact their offending or the potential impact of their future offending would have on their children, and that helps that person move away from that lifestyle.”*

PBNI



*“It’s about them seeing the impact of their own behaviour, and understanding the impact of their behaviour on their children. Helping them understand how their choices affect their children.”*

Stakeholder



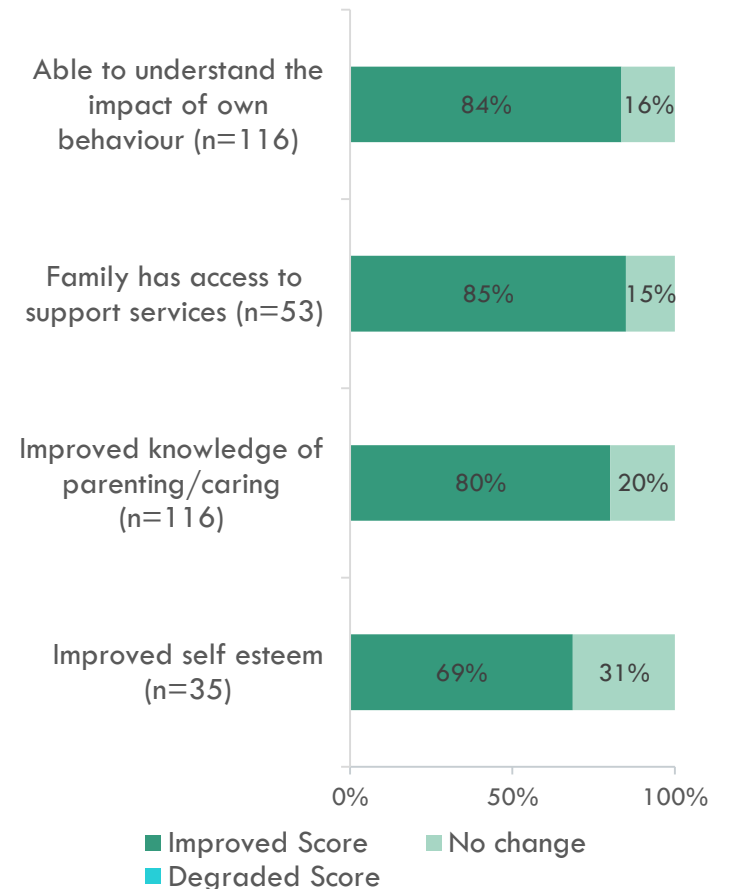
# 5 | How Much and How Well?

of the child;

- Available for all parents (including expectant parents and those without access) and not just those experiencing parenting problems;
- Compliments the health and social care system and ‘carries weight’ for service users involved with social workers;
- Provides service users with a perspective, outside PBNl and the criminal justice system;
- Ability to respond to individual need, including accommodating sessions around working hours for those in employment; and
- Sign posting to other support services.

Service users were asked to rate their level of need, when they started and finished working with Barnardos. Figure 7 shows that by the time they had completed the programme the majority had improved their scores in all four outcomes and no scores were degraded.

**Figure 7 – Outcome Progress Scores for Service users working with Barnardos (Source: Barnardos)**



# 5 | How Much and How Well?

## 5.4 Victim Element

The victim element of the order involved –

- Victim focussed, awareness work, undertaken with service users, by PBNI, CRJI and Alternatives; and
- Where an ECO was being considered and there was an identifiable, registered victim, PBNI would make a referral to Victim Support asking them to contact the victim so their views could be considered.

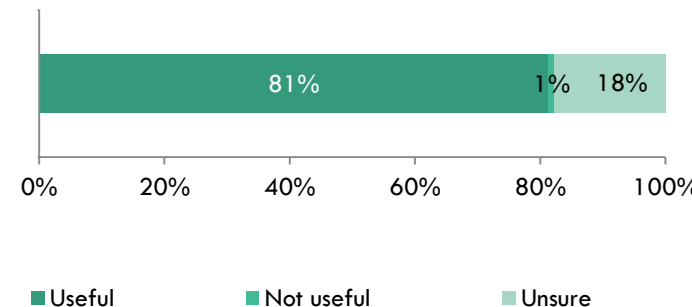
Over 80% of service users rated the discussion and work on victim issues as useful or very useful (Figure 8). Almost all respondents to the staff survey agreed this element was operating well and benefitting service users (Tables 2 and 3, Appendix 3). Specific benefits identified across the stakeholder groups included –

- Raised awareness of the impact of behaviour on victims and the wider community;
- Where the offence was ‘victimless’, shows service users the impact of their behaviour on their own families; and
- CRJI and Alternatives provide a bridge back to the community where the person has committed the offence.

*“Interventions such as victim awareness highlights reflection and allows the service user to become more aware of their actions and the consequences. Helps to see how their offending affects their family/friends but also the victim as well.” PBNI*



**Figure 8 – How useful did you find the discussion and work on victim issues? - (Source: Service User Exit Questionnaire, n=96)**



## 5 | How Much and How Well?

Aside from the benefits relating to raised awareness of impact on others, engagement with Alternatives and CRJI provided service users with the following –

- Availability of therapeutic support with no waiting lists;
- Gym provision;
- Employment support;
- Support available outside scheduled appointments, including on a ‘first responder’ basis to crises outside of office hours;
- Provision of support to family members such as help with benefit applications;
- More likely to ‘open up’ as community based;
- Support available after ECO has ended and for as long as required; and
- Practical support during pandemic, including food parcels and help with gas/electric.

Challenges relating to this element of the order, identified during the research included –

- Where possible victims wishes were taken into account for the community service element of the order but with placements limited, particularly during the pandemic, this was often challenging.
- Referrals to Victim Support averaged one to two a month with a total of 22 during the previous year. PBNI reported this was largely due to the number of cases with no identifiable victim along with caution not to re-traumatise the victims involved in some cases. While supportive of the overall aims of ECOs, Victim Support felt that it was important that progress with the victim element of the order wasn’t overstated publicly.

*“I would like the victim to be able to say if they would like to support a specific charity to make it more meaningful for the victim but I suppose within Probation we are looking at ways we can improve the restorative justice aspect.” PBNI*



## 5 How Much and How Well?

- Some examples were provided of incorrect referrals to Victim Support, thought in part to be related to high PBNi staff turnover.
- Establishing contact between victim and service user required both parties to be ready and getting the timing right could be difficult. For example some service users needed to deal with their own issues before being able to understand the impact of their actions on others. Contact therefore tended to be largely via letter. Several interviewees across the stakeholder organisations reported a strong desire for a more restorative conference style approach.

*“If we are doing restorative justice in a case that we could all agree that if the offender and the victim agrees that we could work to get them together. There is sometimes a bit of a culture of going for letters over in person meetings.”*  
Stakeholder



*“We help clients through a process, dealing with victims, the community and the family. It’s a holistic approach. Offenders are not in touch with their emotions, restorative intervention helps them take control of their emotions again. It humanises them again and they are seen as humans by others in their life.”*  
Stakeholder



### 5.5 Accredited Programmes

The completion of an accredited programme, if appropriate, was a requirement of the ECO pilot. In the 2019 evaluation over one third (108) of participants had

additional requirements attached to their order, mainly Drug/Alcohol Counselling, Thinking Skills and Treatment Programmes or a combination of these. While updated information was unavailable for the current evaluation these courses were touched on during the interviews. Almost all respondents to the staff survey agreed this element was operating well and benefitting service users (Tables 2 and 3, Appendix 3).



# 5 | How Much and How Well?

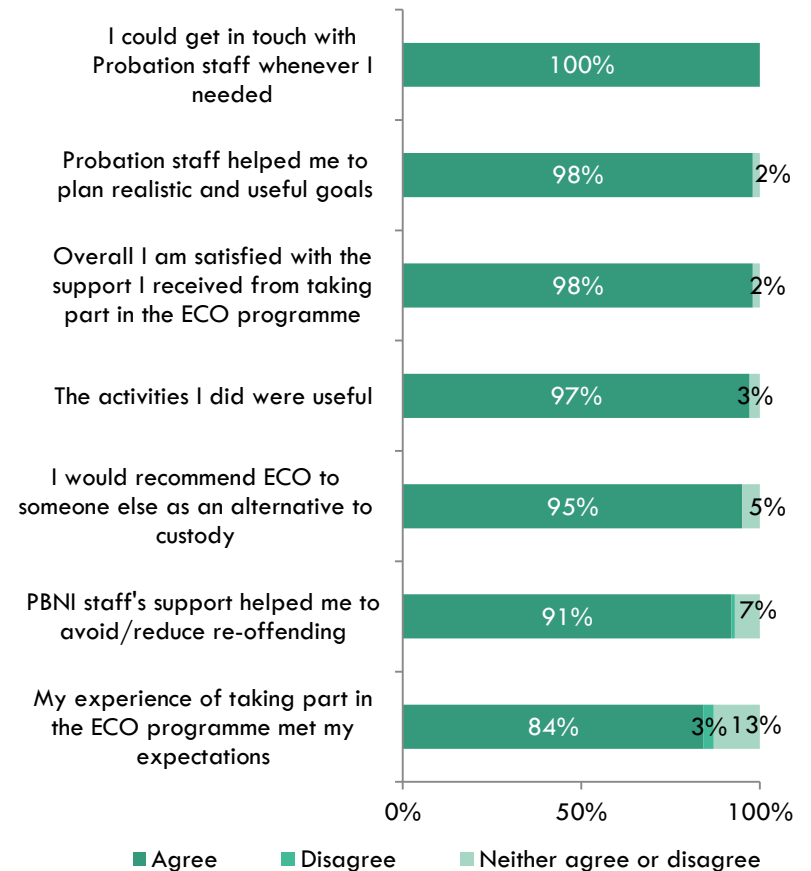
## 5.6 Service User Views Overall

The exit questionnaire showed that the main things that service users hoped to achieve by taking part in ECO were to avoid prison (49%) or to stay out of trouble (23%). Additional factors included support with mental health and addiction issues, getting their lives back on track, general support and help finding work.

At an overall level, figure 9 shows that all service users agreed they could get in touch with PBNI staff when needed. The vast majority agreed that -

- PBNI staff helped them to plan realistic and useful goals (98%);
- They were satisfied with the support they received (98%);
- The activities they did were useful (97%);
- They would recommend ECO to someone else (95%);
- PBNI support had helped them to avoid/reduce re-offending (91%); and
- Overall their experience of taking part met their expectations (84%).

**Figure 9 – Service users' experience of being on the ECO programme (Source: Service User Exit Questionnaire, n=102)**





# 6 | Impact

## About this Chapter

The previous chapter looked at ECO delivery, identifying how much had been done, how well it had been done along with benefits and challenges. This chapter looks at the impact of that work on both service users and wider society.

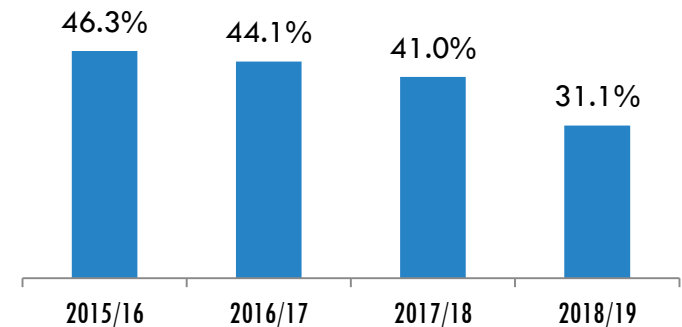
### 6.1 Addressing Re-offending Behaviour

Interviewees felt that given the chaotic lifestyles of many of the service users and the history of their re-offending, harm reduction and distanced travelled, rather than re-offending, might be a more appropriate measure. That said, figure 10 shows that the one year proven reoffending rate has decreased year on year, with subsequent ECO cohorts since 2015/16. In addition and as already highlighted in figure 9 in section 5, the majority of service users who completed the exit questionnaire agreed that PBNI staff's support helped them avoid/reduce re-offending (91%). The majority also said that -

- The help received addressing problems in their lifestyle and the way they thought about future offending was useful (94%, Figure 11);

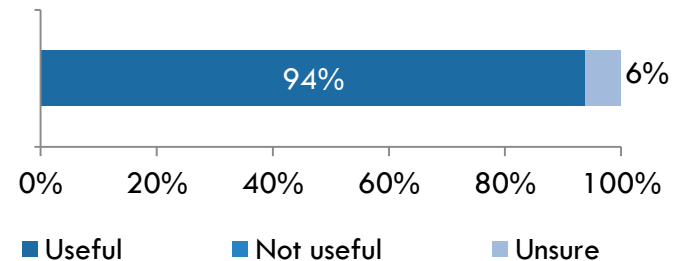
**Figure 10 – One year proven reoffending rate for ECO cohorts 2015/16 to 2018/19**

*(Data Source: Causeway Data Sharing Mechanism)*



**Figure 11 – How useful did you find the help addressing problems in your lifestyle and the way you think about future offending?**

*(Source: Service User Exit Questionnaire, n=99)*



# 6 Impact

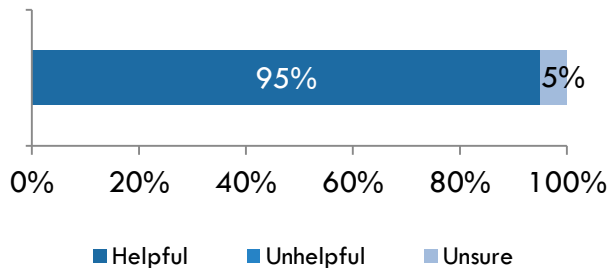
- The programme had helped them address their offending behaviour (95%, Figure 12); and
- They were unlikely to commit a further similar offence (99%, Figure 13).

When asked to explain how the programme had helped them, the most commonly cited responses related to –

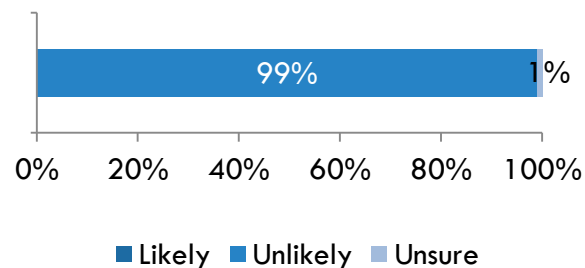
- the focus on behaviours that led to their offending;
- the support provided by staff;
- the psychological intervention;
- help with addictions; and
- awareness of the impact on others (family and victims).

A small number said that it provided structure, helped with employment and improved confidence/self worth.

**Figure 12 – Overall, how helpful do you think this programme has been in helping you to address your offending behaviour?**  
(Source: Exit Questionnaire, n=102)



**Figure 13 – At this point, how likely is it that you would commit a further similar offence?**  
(Source: Exit Questionnaire, n=101)



*“Because it helped me with everything going on and relationships and how I think. I am less anxious and feel more confident and have found it helpful speaking to others.”*

Service User



*“Looked at my criminal record and seen it was all drink related, talked about how I feel about police, family experiences, and past reflective work.”*

Service User



# 6 Impact

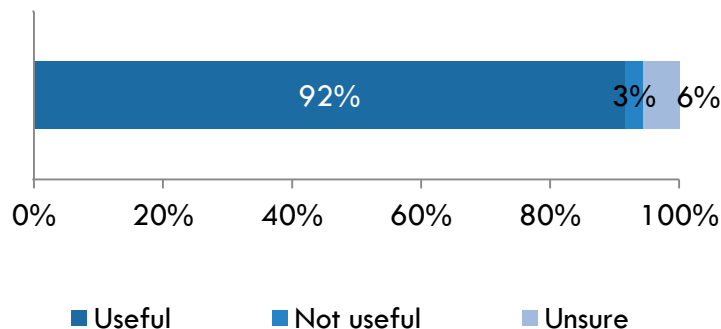
## 6.2 Support with Addiction and Mental Health

Issues with alcohol/substance misuse and mental health were identified in both the data (section 4.4) and interviews as being significant problems for service users. The vast majority (92%) found the help they received with drinking/drug use useful (Figure 14) –

*“It helped me get off drink and drugs and away from the people I was with.” Service User*

**Figure 14 – How useful did you find the help with your drinking/drug use?**

(Source: Service User Exit Questionnaire, n=71)

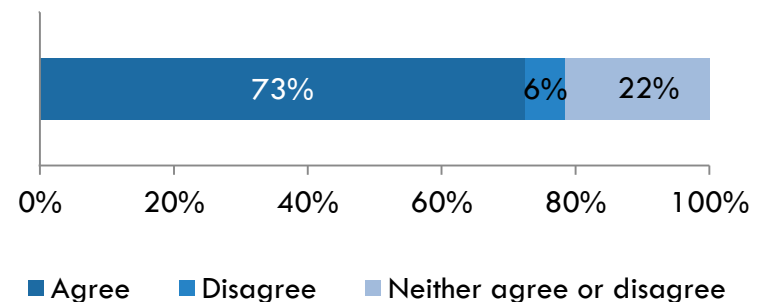


## 6.3 Support with Confidence

Just under three quarters of service users agreed that taking part in ECO had increased their confidence (Figure 15). Specific examples highlighted during the stakeholder interviews included individuals who had gone on to get promoted at work, and how a service user, who hadn't entered a shop in four years because of shame resulting from their offence, had been able to do so again following ECO support.

**Figure 15 – Service users' agreement that taking part in ECO has increased my confidence**

(Source: Service User Exit Questionnaire, n=102)



# 6 Impact

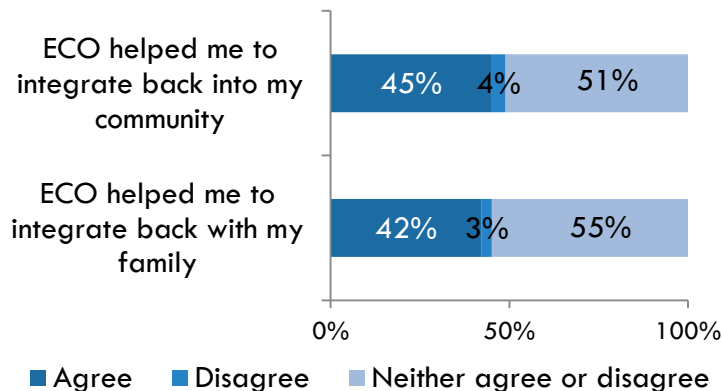
## 6.4 Support with Family and Community Integration

Over 40% of service users agreed ECO had helped them integrate back with their community and their family (Figure 16); 79% found the help with family/relationships useful (Figure 17). The benefit to families of service users not going to prison was also highlighted during the interviews and in the surveys. This enabled them to remain in employment and provide for and maintain close relationships with family members.

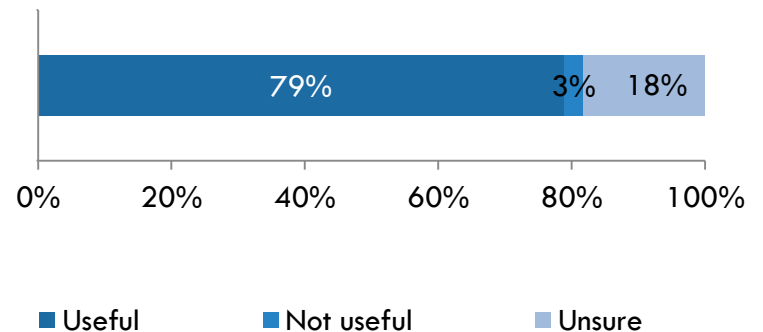
The parenting/family support work undertaken by Barnardos and its benefits have been highlighted already in section 5.3.



**Figure 16 – Service users’ experience of being on the ECO programme (Source: Service User Exit Questionnaire, n=102)**



**Figure 17 – How useful did you find the help with family/relationships? (Source: Service User Exit Questionnaire, n=66)**



# 6 Impact

## 6.5 Support with Employment

As already highlighted in Section 5.2 the community service element of the order helped those who had never worked before to understand the potential benefits of employment.

Several interviewees also highlighted the benefit of the support provided to service users by NIACRO, particularly for those who were 'work ready'. As well as having access to a mentor, their Working Well Scheme helped service users to prepare CVs and get into work.

Additional examples highlighted across the research included help with obtaining CSCS cards to enable service users to be building site ready, something they couldn't normally afford to

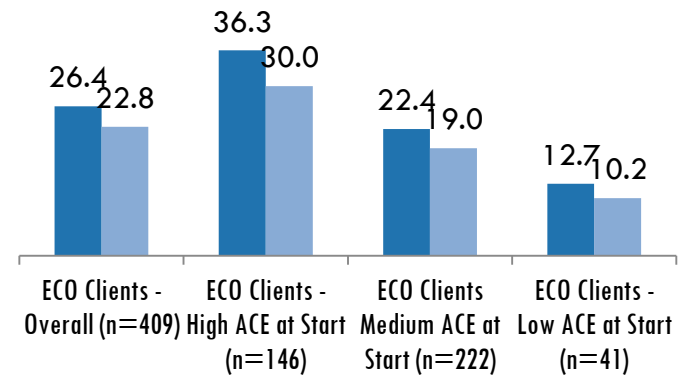


do themselves. Further examples included service users who had gone on to university, secured employment (eliminating the need for benefits) or had been promoted in their jobs.

## 6.6 Reducing Risk

There was a statistically significant decrease between ACE scores recorded closest to the start and end of their order at an overall level (n=407, p<0.05) and when broken down into high, medium and low with average reductions of 6.3, 3.4 and 2.5 points respectively.

**Figure 18 – Difference between ACE Score recorded closest to start and end of order. Note that a statistically significant decrease (p<0.05) was evident overall and for each of the three individual categories**



# 6 Impact

## 6.7 Reducing Short Term Prison Sentences

The number of custodial sentences of 12 months or less, awarded by courts involved in the Armagh/South Down/Ards pilot between 2015 and 2017, decreased by 20.7%. Similarly there was a decrease of 20.3% between 2018 and 2020 (Table 4) when the North West became part of the pilot. While there was also a reduction in the overall number of short term sentences across all the NI courts, at 3.4% between 2015 and 2017 and 14.6% between 2018 and 2020 this was lower than that across the pilot areas.

**Table 4 – Number of Custodial Sentences of 12 months or less**

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Downpatrick	102	102	81	57	62	35
Newtownards	178	120	130	138	163	93
Armagh	30	53	35	31	64	26
Banbridge	19	16	14	20	19	17
Newry	110	102	88	56	73	72
Limavady	N/A	N/A	N/A	24	30	15
Londonderry	N/A	N/A	N/A	305	228	245
<b>Total</b>	<b>439</b>	<b>393</b>	<b>348</b>	<b>631</b>	<b>639</b>	<b>503</b>

## 6.8 Work Provided to Communities

As already discussed in section 5.2, 70,400 community service hours were sentenced by the courts from October 2015, equivalent to almost £670,000 worth of work provided to communities in the Ards, Armagh/South Down and North West areas.

*“The community service element is massive, they are involved with community projects and really adding value.”*

PBNI



# 7 | Overall

## About this Chapter

This chapter provides an overview of aspects of the initiative that have worked well, the challenges that have been faced and suggestions for improvement from evaluation participants. Many of these aspects have been documented in previous sections; those that have not are covered in more detail.

### 8.1 Aspects Working Well

Previously highlighted in the report -


- Psychological support with no waiting lists (Sections 5.1 & 6.1)
- Support with parenting/family relationships (Sections 5.3 & 6.4)
- Support with alcohol/drug use (Section 6.2)
- Support with addressing offending behaviour (Section 5.4 & 6.1)
- Reduction in reoffending rate (Section 6.1)
- Restorative work provided by CRJI, NI Alternatives and PBNi (Section 5.4, 5.5 & 6.1)
- Increased client confidence (Section 6.3)
- Significant reduction in ACE scores (Section 6.4)
- Reduction in number of short custodial sentences (Section 6.7)
- Provision of 70,400 hours worth of work to communities (Section 5.2)

#### Additional factors -

- **Well rounded holistic service**

Stakeholders felt that ECOs worked well because the resources were available to provide complex and chaotic service users with a well rounded holistic service. Described as the *'platinum product of probation'* by one interviewee, it was recognised that service users received a *'Rolls Royce service compared to those on generic orders'* because they were most in need of it. Stakeholders felt that it was likely for many that ECOs provided them with more support than they had ever had.

*"We try to address every aspect of a user's life, like how we link into family and the pathways we have into the different services. If we are contributing to people not going to prison, that has to be making a difference."*  
PBNi



# 7 Overall

- **Good collaborative approach between all partner organisations**

Working relationships across all the stakeholder organisations were reported to be very good with responsibility shared. There was a perception that partnerships with the community/voluntary sector were stronger with ECOs than standard orders because it was *'hardwired into the order itself'*. Links to the additional services elicited positive results.

- **Ability to spend time building relationships with service users**

The ability to spend time building relationships with service users was seen as a strength of the order, letting staff get to know and really invest in them. While it was recognised that standards were applied as with any order, there was greater flexibility and even a year down the line contact for some might still be weekly. In addition case numbers for POs supervising ECOs were reported to be lower, allowing a higher level of individual support.

- **The PSO role**

The support provided by the PSO was seen by PBNi interviewees as critical. Along with restorative work they also delivered coping skills programmes, provided interventions and worked with service users on addiction and relationship issues. PSOs also provided practical support including daily check ins, text reminders of what service users needed to do that day, ensuring attendance at medical appointments and help with budgeting, including ensuring service users bought food.





# 7

## Overall

*“ECOs don’t work for everybody, and some people may need to return to court, but we are very clear about that.”*  
PBNI



- **Enforcement**

Interviewees reported that service users were held accountable and if they did not keep up with the ECO there was a swifter return to court. Having this written into the order meant that service users knew they had to engage and if not there were court sanctions as a consequence, something that was seen as helpful. On the

flipside however, interviewees recognised that a balance needed to be struck and that it was important not to be too rigid as there would always be personal circumstances that could impact on ability to engage.

- **Services well embedded**

Given that ECOs have been operational since 2015, the associated wrap around services were reported to be well embedded at this stage.

- **Targeting the right people**

Interviewees felt that the right people were generally being targeted.

- **Continues to be embraced by the Judiciary**

- **Keeping people out of prison**

- **Highly committed staff across all partner organisations**

## 7.2 Challenges

Previously mentioned in the report -

- Complex and chaotic service users (Section 4.4)
- Securing restorative community service placements challenging at times (Sections 5.2 and 5.4)
- Appetite towards more restorative conference style approach (Section 5.4)
- Challenges related to securing victim input (Section 5.4)



# 7 Overall

## Additional factors -

- **ECOs not available on a province wide basis**

Stakeholders felt that ECOs needed to be made available province wide as individuals who could potentially benefit were missing out as they did not reside in a pilot area.

- **Enforcement**

While enforcement was reported to work well, some interviewees highlighted that the chaotic lifestyle of many service users had the potential to cause a dilemma for POs, balancing enforcement and allowing time for service users to meaningfully engage.

- **Homelessness**

A number of interviewees highlighted that homelessness impacted some service users and given that research showed it to be a major factor in criminality, felt that accommodation needed to be addressed in some way as part of the ECO. Difficulties with securing essential services without an address were highlighted as was the fact that many service users were single and therefore not viewed as a priority in the housing arena.


- **Numbers referred getting smaller**

While interviewees felt that ECOs had been embraced by the Judiciary and were generally targeting the right people, numbers sentenced to an ECO had reduced in recent times. Discussions with sentencers were reported to be ongoing to understand why.

*“It’s not fair that someone who is sentenced in Ards can get an ECO, but someone who is sentenced in Belfast won’t.”*  
Stakeholder



*“You can set all these services up but if people aren’t willing to meaningfully engage, there’s no more you can do but they know if they end up in court again after an ECO has already been tried, they are looking at bigger sentences.”*  
PBNI



# 7 Overall

- **Staffing**

A number of staffing related challenges were highlighted during the research, including staff turnover/PO recruitment difficulties, potential for the 'ECO specialism' to cause division between teams, the perception that ECO resources are prioritised and complications when service users move to non-pilot areas.

- **Managing expectations**

Interviewees highlighted that while many service users benefitted significantly from ECO support, expectations on impact on longer term and serial offenders needed to be managed with recognition that for some a positive result might be a reduction in number of reoffences. There was also recognition that there would always be some individuals who would not be willing to meaningfully engage.

- **The pandemic**

The pandemic resulted in changes to how ECOs were able to operate and the impact on the community service element of the order has already been discussed in Section 5.2.

The format of contact with service users was also impacted, changing from face to face to telephone and resulting in difficulties gauging how well service users were looking after themselves. Engaging, particularly with those who staff hadn't previously met, was also difficult and while PBNI encouraged a video call for the initial meeting, not all clients were comfortable with this. The less formal nature of a call also meant that some service users did not view it as an appointment, asking staff to call back; for others, children or partners were at home and the lack of privacy hampered discussion. Concerns were also raised about the impact on mental health for those service users whose only contact that week might have been the call with PBNI.

That said some positives were also identified as a result of the pandemic, including better and more honest engagement by phone than in person for some service users and contact by WebEx/Zoom/WhatsApp being more appealing to younger service users.

# 7 Overall

## 7.3 Stakeholder Suggestions for Changes to ECO

Service users, stakeholders and PBNI staff were asked in the questionnaires and during the interviews what they would change about the ECO programme. A number of suggestions were made and are listed below. Note however that suggestions may represent the views of a small number of individuals so should be considered in perspective -

### Roll Out

- Mainstream and make ECOs province wide

### Thresholds

- Raise the threshold to sentences up to two years
- Cap orders at two years as doing 'meaningful' work over three years is difficult
- If eligible for a short term sentence should be automatically eligible for an ECO

### Delivery

- More restorative conference work
- More restorative counselling and addiction services
- More generic and trauma based counselling
- Make ECOs a part of the generic PBNI team rather than a specialist team
- Designated ECO supervising officer at each location (1)
- Review enforcement (1)

### Partner Related

- Incorporate a housing element into the order e.g. include a service level agreement with partner agencies such as NI Housing Executive and Housing Associations
- Co-location with partner organisations to help manage complex needs of service users
- Inclusion of DoH as a partner
- Simplify Barnardos referral process

## 8

## Appendix 1

**Table 1 - Number of orders by Armagh & South Down court location** (Source: Causeway System)

<b>Armagh &amp; South Down Courts</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Armagh	88	10.3
Banbridge	45	5.3
Newry	134	15.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>31.2</b>

**Table 2 - Number of orders by Ards court location** (Source: Causeway System)

<b>Ards Courts</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Downpatrick	146	17.1
Newtownards	111	13.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>257</b>	<b>30.1</b>

**Table 3 - Number of orders by North West court location** (Source: Causeway System)

<b>North West Courts</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Limavady	28	3.3
Londonderry	220	25.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>248</b>	<b>29.0</b>

**Table 4 - Number of orders by non pilot court location** (Source: Causeway System)

<b>Other Courts</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Antrim	3	0.4
Coleraine	16	1.9
Craigavon	2	0.2
Dungannon	9	1.1
Laganside	37	4.3
Magherafelt	1	0.1
Strabane	15	1.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>9.7</b>

## 8

## Appendix 2

**Table 1 – ACE Risk and Need Profile Scores - Factors where less than half of service users were deemed to have a small, medium or large problem**

Domain	ACE Factor	Prevalence Rate (%)		
		ORS	PS	
Social	Accommodation	33	44	
	Finance	44	51	
Personal	Health	Mental	35	45
	Personal Skills	Interpersonal/Social Skills	17	26
	Individual Characteristics	Boredom/Need for Excitement	40	47
		Self-Esteem/Self Image	27	47
		Sexuality/Sexual Behaviour	6	5
		Discriminatory Attitudes	12	12
Offending	Motivation/Attitude to Supervision	Does the offender appear unmotivated to avoid re-offending?	43	n/a
		Does the offender appear unmotivated to deal with relevant problems?	49	
		Does the offender appear to not accept being under supervision?	23	
	Attitudes	Does the offender disregard effects of his/ her offending on people to whom they are close?	32	n/a
		Does the offender have anti-social and/ or pro-criminal attitudes?	45	
		Does the offender have beliefs which enable him/ her to deny the facts about their offending?	48	
		Does the offender view the benefits from crime as outweighing the costs?	22	

## 8

## Appendix 3

Table 1 - To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements (Source: PBNI Staff Survey, n=13)

Aspect	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Neither %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
I am satisfied with ECO and how it is operating	38.5	61.5	0	0	0
I have access to all resources needed to make an ECO successful	38.5	38.5	15.4	7.7	0
The right people are being given ECOs	15.4	38.5	30.8	15.4	0
ECOs work well when defendants are willing to engage	84.6	15.4	0	0	0
I have sufficient contact with ECO clients	69.2	30.8	0	0	0
ECOs focus on all necessary contributors of offending	53.8	46.2	0	0	0

## 8

## Appendix 3

**Table 2 - The following aspects of ECO are operating well (Source: PBNI Staff Survey, n=13)**

Aspect	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Neither %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
The referral to the PBNI Psychologist	53.8	38.5	7.7	0	0
Work on victim issues	61.5	30.8	7.7	0	0
The community service element	61.5	38.5	0	0	0
The parenting/ family related work	30.8	53.8	15.4	0	0
Programmes that service users take part in e.g. Thinking skills, Anger Management	23.1	61.5	15.4	0	0



## 8

## Appendix 3

**Table 3 - The following aspects of ECO benefit clients (Source: PBNI Staff Survey, n=13)**

Aspect	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Neither %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
The referral to the PBNI Psychologist	76.9	13.4	7.7	0	0
Work on victim issues	61.5	30.8	7.7	0	0
The community service element	46.2	46.2	0	7.7	0
The parenting/ family related work	38.5	53.8	7.7	0	0
Intensive offending focussed work	53.8	38.5	7.7	0	0
Programmes that service users take part in e.g. Thinking skills, Anger Management	46.2	46.2	7.7	0	0

## 8 | Appendix 3

**Table 4 - What do you see as the main benefits to service users of taking part in ECOs (Source: PBNI Staff Survey, n=13)**

Benefit	Count	%
Help with preventing reoffending	12	92.3
Help with drink/drugs	11	84.6
Self-esteem/confidence	11	84.6
Employment	10	76.9
Training/education	9	69.2
Community integration	7	53.8
Parenting/family relationships	6	46.2
Accommodation	5	38.5