

Restorative Justice in Northern Ireland

Legislative basis

The Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 established a statutory service to facilitate restorative conferences for all young people who admit a criminal offence and the people they harm as long as the parties consent. The only exclusions are offences for which there is a life sentence. These conferences can be used both as a diversion from court and as a court order.

Conferences can result in apology, reparation, compensation, supervision, offending programmes, restrictions such as curfews, drug and alcohol treatment and custody.

The police can offer restorative cautions to first and second time offenders.

Protocols for community restorative justice

Low risk offences, anti-social behaviour and neighbourhood disputes can be referred to local restorative justice programmes facilitated by community organisations.

High risk offending

The Priority Youth Offending Project has been designed to provide an intensive daily contact through a circle of support and accountability based upon restorative principles.

Custody

Young people on release from the secure custodial centre will participate in a restorative family group conference.

The Northern Ireland Prison Service is training staff to conduct conferences between prisoners and their victims and to address internal discipline incidents.

The Balanced Model



Quality assurance

1. Recruit high quality staff;
2. Design a robust practice model supported by a manual;
3. High quality training;
4. Strong leadership and performance management;
5. Commitment to evaluating performance and results.

Outcomes for statutory scheme

Northern Ireland population 1.7m.
13,000 conferences completed since 2003.
80,000 people have participated.

Victim participation 50 to 70%
Victim satisfaction 90%
100% of victims would prefer a conference to court.

94% of conference plans are completed successfully.

Reoffending rates:

- Restorative justice: Diversionary and court ordered youth conference orders 35.4%
- Community based supervision 53.5%
- Custody 68.3%

Three times as many young people are committed to custody in England and Wales compared to N. Ireland.

University of Ulster

- Certificate in restorative practices (12 days training: two 5000 word assignments) - Basic qualification to practice
- Diploma in restorative practices
- Masters in restorative practices

Police, youth justice workers, teachers, prison officers, social workers, and community workers have participated.