



Custody Visiting in Northern Ireland 2010/2011

Northern Ireland Independent
Custody Visiting Scheme

NORTHERN IRELAND INDEPENDENT CUSTODY VISITING SCHEME ANNUAL REPORT 2010/2011

Foreword



This document details the work carried out in 2010/2011 by the Northern Ireland Independent Custody Visiting Scheme. Custody Visitors are volunteers from the community who make unannounced visits (in pairs) to police stations to check on the rights, health and wellbeing and conditions of detention of people being held in custody.

On behalf of the Northern Ireland Policing Board (the Board) I would like to publicly thank the volunteer members of the Scheme. The Board is very proud of its Custody Visiting Scheme and in November 2010 we became the first such Scheme to achieve the Investing in Volunteers award. The Scheme would not function were it not for the involvement, commitment and dedication of our volunteers who provide an important contribution to the work of the Board by maintaining independent oversight on police custody arrangements.

**Brian Rea – Chairman
Northern Ireland Policing Board**

Background

Custody Visiting in the UK came about as a result of Lord Scarman's inquiry into the Brixton disorders in 1981. The Northern Ireland Independent Custody Visiting Scheme was established in 1991 and was made statutory under Section 73 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000.

Role of Independent Custody Visitors

Custody Visitors are volunteers from across the community. They are independent of the police or the criminal justice system and visit designated police custody suites, unannounced, to report on how detained people are being dealt with by the police and the conditions in which they are held.

The Board supports and administers the Custody Visiting Scheme and each quarter the Human Rights & Professional Standards Committee receives a report on the work of the Custody Visiting Scheme. The report highlights any issues raised and the remedial actions taken to address these. The report covers three distinct areas:

- The Rights of the Detainee;
- The Health & Wellbeing of the Detainee; and
- The Facilities & Conditions of Detention.

Composition of the Custody Visiting Scheme

As at 31 March 2011 there were 53 Custody Visitors. The gender, age and community background is shown in the charts below.

Figure 1: Gender of Custody Visitors

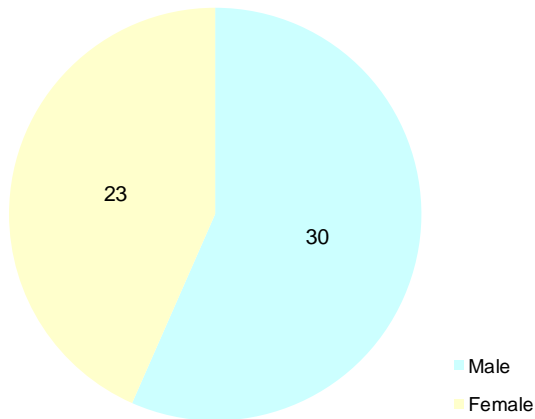


Figure 2: Age of Custody Visitors

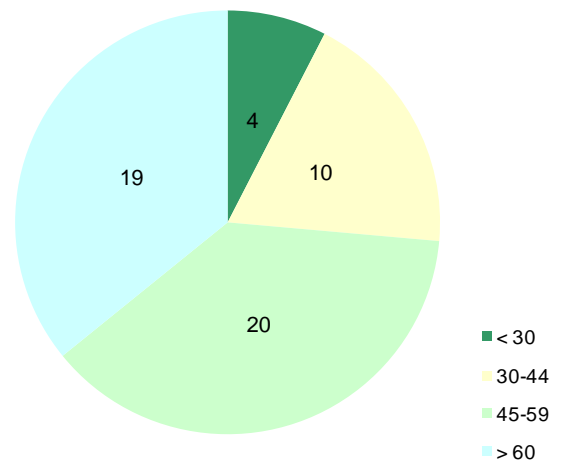
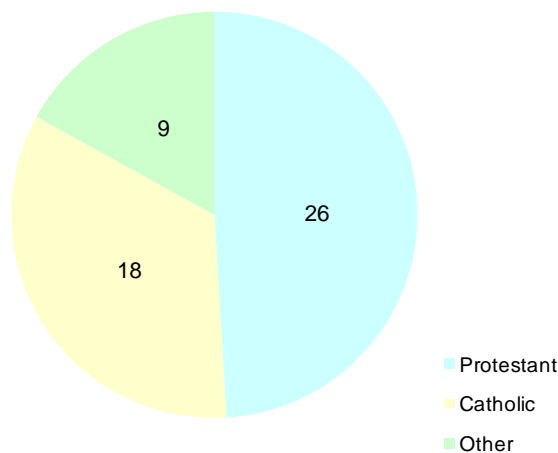


Figure 3: Community Background of Custody Visitors



Custody Visiting Teams

There are currently four Custody Visiting teams covering Northern Ireland. These are:

- Belfast/Antrim - responsible for 9 custody suites including the Antrim Serious Crime Suite (SCS);
- North West - responsible for 5 custody suites;
- Tyrone/Fermanagh (Tyfer) - responsible for 4 custody suites; and
- Down/Armagh - responsible for 3 custody suites.

The work of the Custody Visiting Teams during 2010/2011

Each year the Board sets a guideline number of custody visits to be completed by each team. During 2010/2011 the guideline number of visits was set at 1,107 and the actual number of visits made was 1,122. Of the 1,122 visits made 1,074 were

deemed to be Valid Visits. The other 48 visits could not be completed due to factors such as the Custody Suite being too busy (24), closed (10) or the unavailability of a second Custody Visitor (8).

Visits took place across all seven days of the week and at all times of the night and day. A breakdown of day and times of visits in 2010/2011 is illustrated in the following tables:

Figure 4: Day of Visits

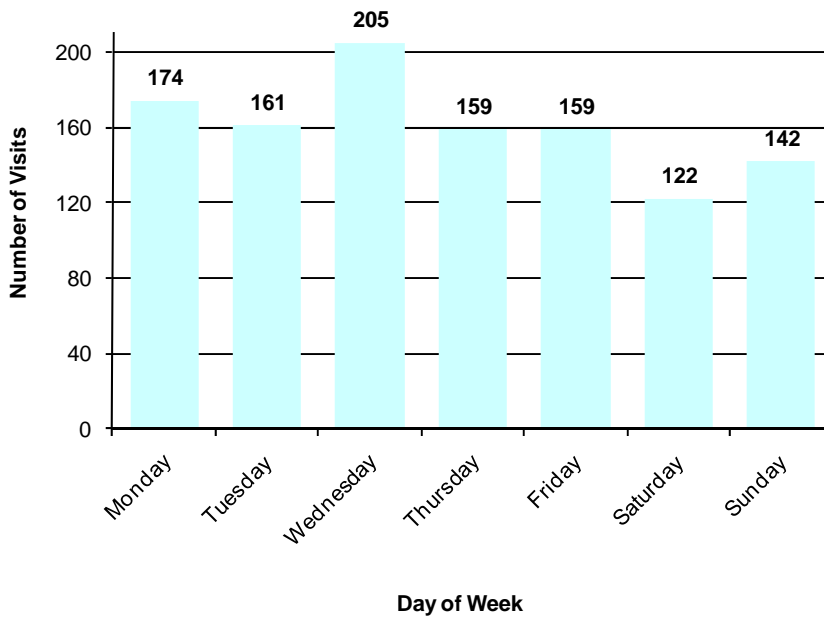
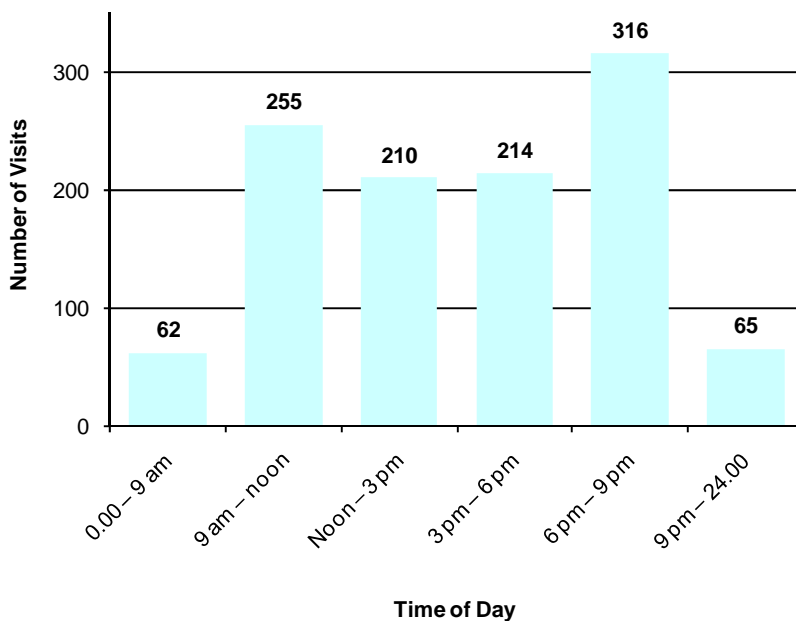
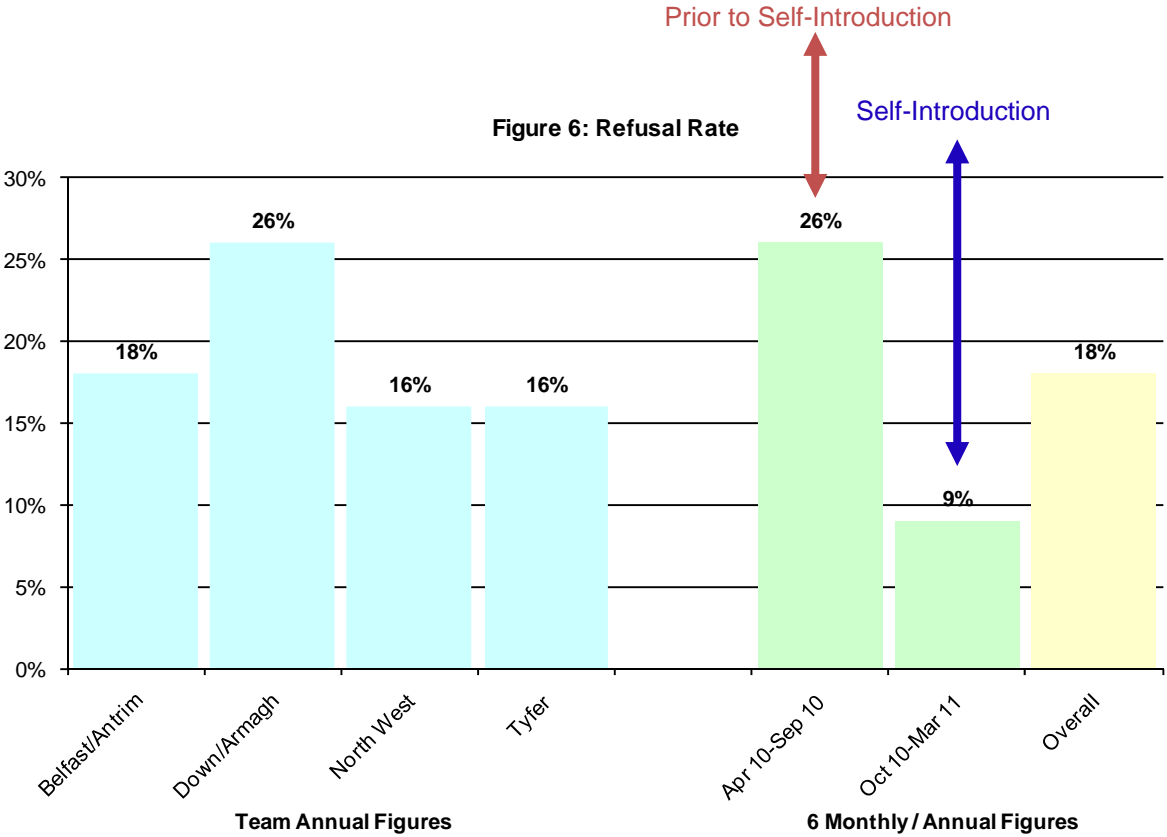


Figure 5: Times of Visits



Custody visitors require the consent of a detainee to talk to them or to see their custody record. There were 1,963 detainees held in custody at the time of the visits in 2010/2011, of which visitors spoke to 918. A total of 358 detainees refused to be seen, and 687 detainees were not seen for other reasons such as being asleep or being with their solicitor. The overall refusal rate was 18%¹. A breakdown of refusal rates (by team) is illustrated below:



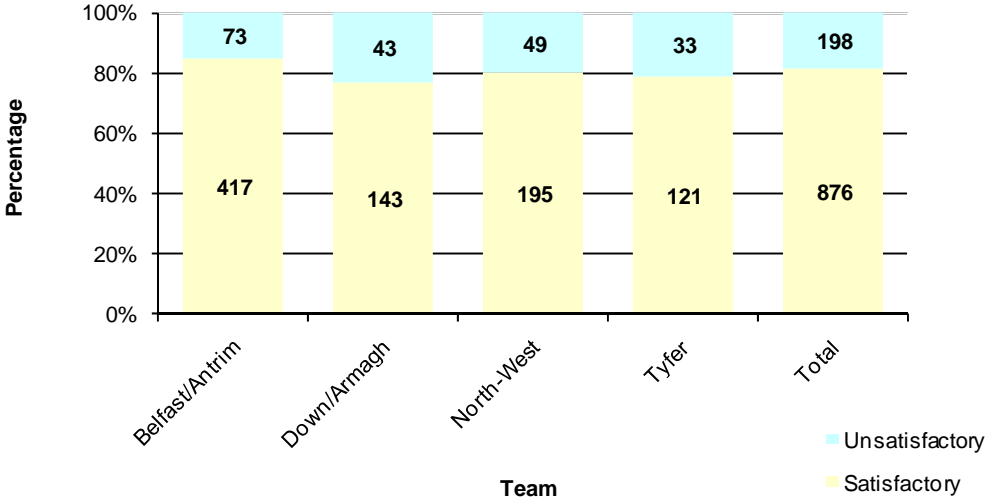
Self introduction by Custody Visitors was introduced on 1st October 2010, whereby the Custody Visitors personally establish whether a detainee wishes to speak to them, rather than being introduced by the Custody Officer.

As can be seen from the bar graph above this has resulted in a reduction in refusal rate, from 26% in the first six months (April to September 2010), to 9% in the last six months (October 2010 to March 2011).

¹ The refusal rate is calculated as the number of detainees who refused to be seen as a percentage of the number that were held in custody at the time of the visit.

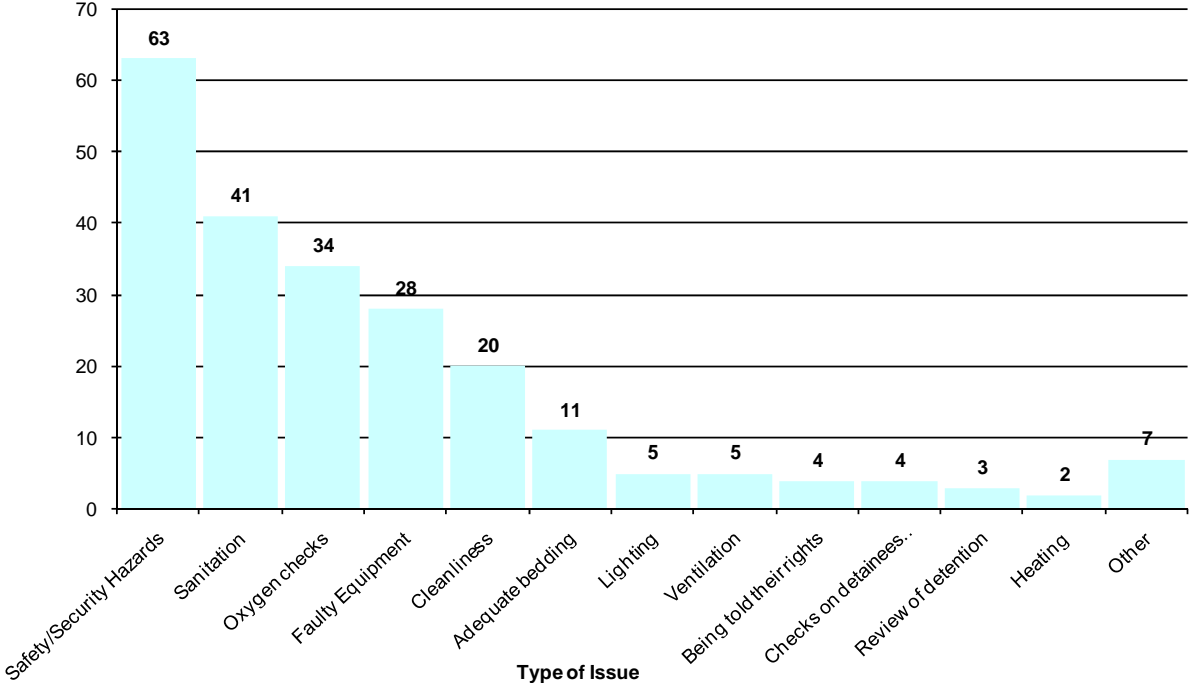
Of the 1,074 valid visits, 876 (82%) were found to be entirely satisfactory by the Custody Visitors. In the remaining 198 (18%) visits issues were identified deeming these visits unsatisfactory. A breakdown of visits completed by each team is illustrated below:

Figure 7: Number of Valid Visits Made to each Team by Satisfaction



A total of 227² issues were identified by the Custody Visitors in 2010/2011. A breakdown of the issues identified is illustrated below. Noticeably, oxygen checks was only introduced as a specific category in April 2010, yet was the third biggest issue (34) contributing to unsatisfactory visits.

Figure 8: Issues in Unsatisfactory Visits³



² The total number of issues identified is more than the total number of unsatisfactory visits because of multiple reasons for some visits.

³ The other category includes: informing somebody, legal advice, adequate food and drink, access to wc/washing, medical attention, exercise and alarm.

All issues identified are brought to the attention of PSNI and the Board so that they can be addressed as soon as possible. The Board has an agreed procedure to follow up on issues of concern which can involve escalation to Assistant Chief Constable level if issues are not resolved within the agreed timeframe.

A full statistical breakdown of Custody Visits carried out to each Suite in 2010/2011 can be accessed on the Board's website at:

<http://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/index/publications/custody-visitors.htm>

OPCAT National Preventative Mechanism (NPM)

Throughout 2010/2011, the Scheme continued to fulfil its obligations and commitment to the UK's Operational Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT). The Scheme is designated as one of the four Northern Ireland bodies that form the National Preventative Mechanism (NPM), carrying out a system of regular visits to places of detention in order to prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The work of the UK NPM is coordinated by HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP). Further information can be found at:

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/inspectors/hmi-prisons/2536.htm>.



Investing in Volunteers

Investing in Volunteers is the UK quality standard for all organisations which involve volunteers in their work. The Standard enables organisations to comprehensively review their volunteer management, and also publicly demonstrates their



commitment to volunteering. The Board received the Investing in Volunteers award for the Scheme in November 2010, making it the first such Scheme in the UK to achieve this accreditation.

To meet the standard required the Scheme was rigorously assessed on 9 indicators, involving 46 practices, and included interviews and focus groups with Board Members, staff and volunteers.

Custody Visitor Survey

A survey was conducted during March 2011 to obtain the views of Custody Visitors on a range of policy, support and practical issues in order to help the Board improve the support given to volunteers.

A total of 36 Custody Visitors returned questionnaires (a 67% response rate); with 86% of respondents being very/fairly satisfied with the way the Board runs the Custody Visiting scheme. There is work to be done in relation to only 17% of respondents correctly identifying the Board's Lead Member for Custody Visiting and just over half of respondents (56%) being aware of the Scheme's designation under the OPCAT NPM.

The full survey report can be found at:

http://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/2011_custody_visitors_survey_report-2.pdf.

Training

The Board is responsible for delivering training and development activities in order to ensure the efficient and effective running of the Scheme. For example:

- In April 2010 Equality and Disability Awareness training was completed for all Custody Visitors;
- In November 2010 refresher training was provided covering vulnerable detainees, the Risk Assessment process, updates on policy and practical examples of Health & Safety and Personal Security; and
- In February 2011 all four teams received training on oxygen requirements in the Custody Suite.

Other Activities

The Custody Visitors Annual Conference was held on 27 March 2011. This provided the forum for Custody Visitors to discuss relevant issues and was an occasion to celebrate the work of custody visiting and express the Board's thanks to the volunteers involved in this role.



Speakers at this year's conference included:

- Dr Ian Carson – Chair of the Regulation & Quality Improvement Authority (NPM Member organisation);
- Baroness May Blood of Blackwatern town; and
- Ian Smith - Chief Executive of the Independent Custody Visiting Association (ICVA)

Presentations were made to nine volunteers who completed their 6-year tenure on the Scheme.

ICVA works alongside Custody Visiting Schemes offering best practice advice nationally in order to acknowledge the commitment of volunteers and provide excellent and consistent service in custody suites across the UK. The Scheme is represented on the ICVA Executive Committee. In November 2010 four Custody Visitors attended the ICVA Conference in Leeds. This provided volunteers with an opportunity of meeting colleagues from England, Wales and Scotland. Further information on ICVA can be found at <http://www.icva.org.uk/>.



In November 2010 the Board launched a recruitment campaign for new Custody Visitors. Over 130 applications were received and following interviews in January and February 2011, the Board hopes to appoint 22 new volunteers in May 2011.

More information

If you would like more information about Custody Visiting, or are interested in joining the Scheme, please contact:

Custody Visiting Scheme Administrator
Northern Ireland Policing Board
31 Clarendon Road
Clarendon Dock
Belfast BT1 3BG

Tel: 028 90408562

Fax: 028 90408564

Email: custodyvisiting@nipolicingboard.org.uk

Website: <http://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/index/publications/custody-visitors.htm>

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/policingboard>



NORTHERN IRELAND POLICING BOARD

Waterside Tower
31 Clarendon Road
Clarendon Dock
Belfast BT1 3BG

Tel: 028 9040 8500
Fax: 028 9040 8544
Textphone: 028 9052 7668

Email: information@nipolicingboard.org.uk
Website: www.nipolicingboard.org.uk

DOCUMENT TITLE

Custody Visiting in Northern Ireland 2010/2011

PUBLISHED JUNE 2011

This document may also be made available upon request in alternative formats or languages. Requests for alternative formats should be made to the Northern Ireland Policing Board.

ONLINE FORMAT

This document is available in PDF format from our website.

DISCLAIMER

While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this document, neither the Northern Ireland Policing Board nor its consultants will be held liable for any inaccuracies that may be contained within.



Join us on Facebook
www.facebook.com/policingboard

