

What does the Ministry of Justice RJ research tell us?

- a) The University of Sheffield was commissioned by the Government to evaluate Restorative Justice, with the results published in four reports between 2004 and 2008. Professor Joanna Shapland and her team evaluated the work of three Restorative Justice projects. Two of these projects (Connect and Remedi) had very positive results, but the small sample size did not allow for statistically significant findings.
- b) The third project, the Justice Research Consortium (JRC), led by Professor Lawrence Sherman and Dr Heather Strang, provided face-to-face RJ Conferencing, in 374 cases in London, Northumbria and Thames Valley, primarily with adult offenders¹. As all three sites used the same model of restorative justice conferencing, the 374 cases together create a large enough sample for statistically significant evidence. The JRC cases, using a rigorous randomised controlled trial research design with a wide range of different types of offence, demonstrated a 27% drop in the frequency of re-offending following RJ Conferencing.
- c) The full results of the Sheffield University evaluation are contained in four reports published by the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice². We look at the findings contained in each of the reports here:

First report: Key findings about setting up restorative services

- Restorative Justice should be set up with a clear statutory footing, to give Criminal Justice Agencies the impetus to refer cases.
- Projects faced less difficulty setting up when they were based within Criminal Justice Agencies and had access to established, HR, finance, IT and other central services.

¹ The cases did not include domestic violence or sexual offences.

² Published in four separate stages, the Sheffield University/Home Office/Ministry of Justice research results are contained in the following four reports:

Shapland, J et al (2004) Implementing restorative justice schemes (Crime Reduction Programme) A report on the first year Home Office Online Report is at:

www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs04/rdsolr3204.pdf

Shapland, J et al (2006) Restorative justice in practice – findings from the second phase of the evaluation of three schemes is at: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs06/r274.pdf and the full report at http://ccr.group.shef.ac.uk/papers/pdfs/Restorative_Justice_Report.pdf

Shapland, J et al (2007) Restorative Justice: the views of victims. The third report from the evaluation of three schemes. Ministry of Justice Research Series 3/07. London: Ministry of Justice is at:

www.justice.gov.uk/papers/pdfs/Restorative_Justice_Report.pdf

Shapland, J et al (2008) Restorative Justice: Does Restorative Justice affect reconviction. The fourth report from the evaluation of three schemes. Ministry of Justice Research Series 10/08. London: Ministry of Justice is at: www.justice.gov.uk/publications/restorative-justice.htm

- Government must do more to raise awareness of what the research shows RJ can achieve, so as to build the confidence of sentencers and CJ Agencies in RJ.

Second report: Key findings about victim participation

- Victim participation rates were extremely high, with up to 77% of victims choosing to take part in cases involving adult offenders, and up to 89% of victims participating in cases involving young offenders. Offender participation rates were similarly high. All the projects devoted significant time and resources to good preparation with both victims and offenders.
- RJ can be facilitated well by people from any criminal justice professional background or by volunteer mediators, as long as they are trained and supervised well.
- Although victims tend to choose indirect mediation when offered the choice, participation did not fall when only a face-to-face conferencing option was offered.

Third Report: Key findings about the impact on victims

- 85% of JRC victims were very/quite satisfied with their experience of the RJ conference (80% of offenders in JRC conferences also expressed themselves very/quite satisfied)³
- 98% of JRC Conferences ended with the participants reaching an outcome agreement, which was normally focused on what the offender would do next to repair the harm, address their problems and re-orientate their life away from crime
- Overall, only 6 offenders (of 152 interviewed) and 6 victims (of 216 interviewed) were dissatisfied with their experience of face-to-face conferencing - dissatisfaction in these cases revolved around disputes about the facts or details of the offence or difficulties in communication.
- Although victims tended to opt for indirect RJ when this was offered (finding in Second Report) face-to-face processes tended to lead to higher levels of victim satisfaction than indirect processes where people did not meet⁴.

Fourth Report: Key findings about the impact of RJ on re-offending

- a) The Justice Research Consortium delivered RJ Conferencing in 374 cases, over three sites, each involving randomised controlled trials (RCTs). As each of the sites was using exactly the same rigorous form of restorative justice conferencing they can be taken together as one sample group of 374 cases to provide statistically significant evidence of the

³ In separate research with this same sample, Dr Caroline Angel has demonstrated a statistically significant impact on the post-traumatic stress symptoms of victims following restorative justice (Angel, C. (2005) *Victims Meet Their Offenders: Testing the Impact of Restorative Justice Conferences on Victims' Post-Traumatic Stress Symptoms*, PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania)

⁴ Indirect restorative justice involved the facilitator passing information between the victim and offender.

impact of RJ on re-offending. Professor Shapland found that RJ does not stop offenders offending altogether (the previous, traditional measure), but they do offend less. Each of the sites on their own demonstrated a positive impact on the frequency of re-offending, and taking all the Restorative Justice Conferencing trials together there *is a statistically significant fall in the frequency of reconviction*. **The research demonstrated that 27% fewer crimes were committed by offenders who had experienced RJ Conferencing, compared with those offenders who did not.**

- b) Professor Shapland found no evidence of RJ leading to an increase in offending, and no differences in reconviction between types of offender or offence - so no evidence to support targeting restorative justice towards one group of offenders over another. However, adult offenders' views about the RJ Conference they had participated in did relate to the level of re-offending after RJ. In particular, they were less likely to offend depending on their perception of:
- the extent to which the conference had made them realise the harm done
 - how much they wanted to meet the victim at the start
 - the extent to which they were actively involved in the conference
 - how useful they felt the conference was⁵

Fourth report: Does RJ provide value for money?

- a) Professor Shapland found clear evidence that Restorative Justice Conferencing provides value for money. The Home Office standard measure for the cost of crimes was used (this combines the cost to victims plus the costs to the Criminal Justice System of particular crimes)⁶. The overall cost of re-offending is therefore a combination of frequency of re-offending and severity (more serious crimes cost more to both victims and the CJS).
- b) The cost savings provided by RJ reducing the frequency of re-offending can then be compared with the cost of delivering Restorative Justice. In this research, the JRC RJ Conferencing groups all showed a significantly lower *cost of convictions* versus the control groups at all their three sites, London, Northumbria and Thames Valley.
- c) The table below shows the cost for each of the three JRC sites. The cost-savings found in London were much higher because of the kinds of crimes the London site dealt with - serious burglary and robbery. Here reductions in reconvictions through RJ Conferencing saved the Criminal Justice

⁵ These findings show that rather than trying to select offenders by offence type, one key to the success of RJ is the skill of the facilitator in preparing the offender well for the restorative justice conference and enabling their full participation in it.

⁶ There is no standard way of measuring in financial terms the impact of crime on victims beyond their material loss, so any savings for the NHS (through better mental health and reductions in post-traumatic stress symptoms) and for employers (from ability to return to work) have not been quantified and costed within this research.

System 14 times the cost of delivering RJ; in Thames Valley the cost-savings ratio was 2 to 1 (RJ saved the CJS twice as much as it cost to deliver). Summed together the cost savings of all the JRC cases at the three sites demonstrated cost-savings on average of 8 to 1 – **through reductions in the frequency of offending RJ saved the CJS 8 times what it cost to deliver**⁷.

JRC Site	Cost of RJ Cases over the running period	Money saved through reductions in offending	Ratio of costs to savings
<u>JRC London</u>	598,848	8,261,028	1:14
<u>JRC Northumbria</u>	275,411	320,125	1:1.2
<u>JRC Thames Valley</u>	222,463	461,455	1:2
<u>Overall</u>			<u>1:8</u>

- d) These findings from the Sheffield team’s research for the Ministry of Justice, examining the effectiveness of RJ in England and Wales, corroborate international research findings on restorative justice conferencing. Randomised controlled trials in both Australia and the US mirror the research in this country by delivering very high victim satisfaction and reductions in the frequency of re-offending. These international findings have been summarised in a recent Smith Institute report ⁸.
- e) These findings must also be seen against the background of wider Government research revealing the low levels of public confidence and satisfaction with Criminal Justice agencies generally. In particular the British Crime Survey (BCS) shows a widespread public perception that the criminal justice system fails to meet the needs of victims: only 36 per cent of the public believe that the criminal justice system meets the needs of victims of crime⁹.
- f) This Government research has demonstrated that restorative justice provides 85% victim satisfaction, substantially reduces the frequency of re-offending, and provides value for money by saving the taxpayer £8 for every £1 spent on RJ. The case for legislation and investment in restorative justice is clear.

**Restorative Justice Consortium
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⁷ Table provided by Professor Joanna Shapland

⁸ Smith Institute (2007) *Restorative justice: the evidence*, by Lawrence Sherman and Heather Strang, The Smith Institute: London.

⁹ Public perceptions, in 2007-2008 British Crime Survey, online: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs08/hosb0708chap5.pdf>, page 119.