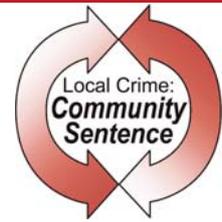


WHAT THE PUBLIC REALLY THINKS ABOUT COMMUNITY SENTENCES



What is LCCS?

'Local Crime:Community Sentence' is a joint project of the Magistrates' Association and the Probation Boards' Association¹. Its aim is to raise public awareness about the importance of community sentences and through increased understanding, to improve public confidence in such sentences.

The project consists of interactive presentations given to local community groups by a sentencer and a member of probation staff working in partnership together. The presentations use mocked-up newspapers to give basic information about a case and early on the audience is asked to decide whether the person (the offender) should be sent to prison or not. All the cases are carefully crafted such that they are just serious enough to attract a prison sentence.

An anonymous questionnaire completed by the audience as the event proceeds captures details about them and also how they voted. Having voted the audience is then taken through the background to both the offence and the offender and told what the options for dealing with them might be. Having been given more information, the audience is then again asked to vote and, if they have changed their mind (from Prison to a community sentence, or vice-versa), to say why.

Following on from a very successful pilot in three probation areas in 2002-03 (Hampshire, Northumbria and Lancashire)² the project was launched nationally. Since the summer of 2003, 16 areas have joined the project and the second year of national roll-out has just been completed. Since the start of national roll-out over 4,000 members of the public have taken part with over 3,000 completing questionnaires.

¹The MA is the membership organisation for Magistrates' of England and Wales; The PBA is the national employers' organisation representing the interests of the 42 probation boards of England and Wales who are responsible for delivery of probation locally.

²See the LCCS website for details of the results of the pilot and the first year of national roll-out (www.lccs.org.uk)

³The full report is published at www.kcl.ac.uk/ccjs and www.lccs.org.uk

'Though a democratic system of justice relies on public trust and confidence, it is well-known that the public is poorly informed about the workings of the criminal justice system. There is an emerging recognition that the best way forward in developing an accountable criminal justice policy is through democratic engagement (Green 2006) rather than using ill-designed opinion polls that fail to capture underlying perceptions. LCCS has been a leading example of the drive toward engagement with the public, combining information provision and consultation. Its self-monitoring strategy is both unusual and exemplary. The current evidence on impact is encouraging and suggests that the project is making a positive difference to the views of those it engages.'

Roger Grimshaw, Research Director,
Centre for Crime and Justice Studies,
Kings College.

The Evaluation of the 'Local Crime: Community Sentence' Project: Key Findings³

- **Who was presented to:** In the year up to the end of June 2006 the project has contacted 2219 attendees at 87 events.
- **Audience diversity:** There is evidence from the survey that the LCCS project is contacting audiences with a range of concern about, and interest in, crime.
- **Impact of more information on the public:** It is succeeding in changing the minds of almost half the people who initially favour imprisonment.
- **Impact on public confidence:** It appears to be increasing confidence in community sentences.
- **Impact on fear of crime:** For some it has an effect in decreasing fear of becoming a crime victim, but for a minority who are initially very fearful it is tending to increase rather than reduce concern.
- **The public want to know:** Many of the audiences show an appetite for more information about sentencing and justice.
- **Rating the presentations:** Almost 9 out of ten rated the presentations as 'quite good' or 'very good'.

Independent Evaluation of the second year of LCCS: July 2005- June 2006 - The national picture

by Roger Grimshaw, Centre for Crime & Justice Studies, Kings College, London

For and on behalf of the LCCS National Steering Group.

Coverage of the report:

This report considers evidence about the impact of LCCS case study presentations based on questionnaires completed by 2219 attendees at 87 events in the following probation areas.

Questionnaires, by region		
Region	N	%
Cheshire	147	7
Dyfed/Powys	399	18
Kent	120	5
Lancashire	173	8
London	238	11
North Wales	86	4
South Wales	415	19
Staffordshire	228	10
Suffolk	205	9
Warwickshire	208	9
Total	2219	100

Audience composition

The audiences included a significant proportion who claimed no connection with the criminal justice system - 71 per cent. 29 per cent claimed a connection and these links were varied - some occupational, some indirect.

The most obvious connections were through occupational links, with the legal profession, police, probation or services, but there were also magistrates, victims, and volunteers - and even a link through offending.

- Lawyers: 'Barrister', 'Bar Council'
- Police: 'Serving police constable'
- Prisons: 'Prison area manager', 'Prison Service 33 years'
- Services: 'Housing for homeless (ex-prison or probation) women'
- Volunteers: 'Victim Support volunteer', 'Neighbourhood Watch', 'Women's aid volunteer'
- Victims: 'Criminal damage to business premises when working'
- Magistrates: 'J.P.'
- Offender: 'Ex Conman'

Interestingly, some of the connections were through family: 'Aunt is a lawyer'; 'Granddaughter in CID'; 'Grandfather lecturer (in) Law'; 'Family been in prison'.

Interest in law and order, and attitudes towards crime:

While just over half the audience (52 per cent) were very interested in law and order issues, a large proportion (45 per cent) were slightly or fairly interested, but 3 per cent were not interested at all.

Over a quarter (29 per cent) was very concerned about being a victim of crime; two thirds (62 per cent) were slightly or fairly concerned.

Concerns were more frequently strong in the oldest group and least frequently strong in the youngest group.

Great concerns were more frequently found among women and least concern was most frequently noted among men.

Awareness of sentences:

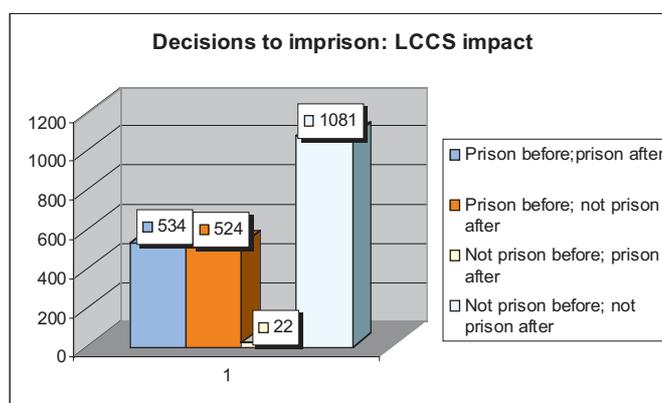
Only five per cent claimed to be very knowledgeable about sentences. Two thirds of the audiences - 66 per cent- claimed that they were slightly knowledgeable or had no knowledge of sentences in criminal cases. This large group clearly formed part of the target audience for LCCS.

Impact of the LCCS Case studies:

The attendees provided information about their views before and after the background report had been presented.

Graphical presentation of results:

Almost half - 49.5 per cent - (524, out of 1058) of those who initially chose the prison option changed their minds after the report presentation.



Half of all the attendees chose not to send the offender to prison at any stage.

In contrast just 22 of the 1103 initially against the prison option switched later to imprisonment

Significant messages:

The most significantly impacting core messages were about:

- The option of requiring unpaid work
- The advantages of community sentences in terms of supervision and sanctions

Also significant was the appreciation of:

- The offender's needs
- The offender's attitudes to services and employment
- The offender's attitude to the offence
- The advantages of community sentences in terms of service availability, specifically drug services
- The offender's state of mind at the time of the offence
- The offender's history

Of some significance were:

- The disadvantages of imprisonment
- The opportunity for the offender to alter ways/rebuild life
- The offender's willingness to change

Characteristics of the group whose views moved against imprisonment

Summary:

The findings suggest that the facts delivered in the case study reports had a broad and strong impact, particularly on younger people, women, broadcast media consumers, and people concerned about becoming a victim. As this year's sample is larger than last year's, it is likely to be a better indication of the general impact of the presentations.

Evidence:

People under the age of twenty were a higher proportion of the group that moved against imprisonment than were older people. Women were more likely than men to be in the group that changed its mind.

Ages of attendees whose views moved against prison, compared with whole sample				
	Moved against prison		Whole sample	
	N	%	N	%
16-20	112	22	349	16
21-25	40	8	187	9
26-30	19	4	127	6
31-40	40	8	164	8
41-60	102	20	499	23
Over 60	199	39	810	38
All	512	100	2136	100

Bases: 512 and 2136 valid cases

Gender of attendees whose views moved against prison, compared with whole sample				
	Moved against prison		Whole sample	
	N	%	N	%
Female	303	59	1181	55
Male	211	41	962	45
All	514	100	2143	100

Bases: 514 and 2143 valid cases

No statistically significant difference was found between the proportion of minority ethnic groups in the 'changers' group compared with the whole sample.

The 'changers' group's exposure to the press and media differed only in relation to news and current affairs programmes, compared with other audience members. 80 per cent of the changer group had watched or listened to a news or current affairs programme in the past week, compared with 77 per cent of the whole sample. Concern about being a victim of crime was found to be a distinguishing characteristic of the 'changers': 31 per cent of the changer group were 'very concerned' about being a crime victim, compared with 29 per cent of the whole sample.

Information outcomes for audiences at the events:

A further purpose of the events was to promote public education about crime and justice.

A majority of the respondents were aware that failure to complete a community sentence could lead to imprisonment but this proportion (62 per cent) had declined compared with the previous year (73 per cent).

This section gives some of the key findings about the attitudes of the audiences to the information presented at the events.

- A majority felt that the presentations had increased their confidence in community sentences.
- The pattern of responses was similar to the previous year's, with a fifth reporting an increase 'to a large extent' - a slight increase on the previous year.
- However, almost a fifth did not answer the question this year.

Impact on confidence in community sentences		
Increase	N	%
Not at all	228	13
To a limited extent	354	20
To some extent	754	42
To a large extent	356	20
To a very large extent	91	5
Total	1783	100

Base: 1783; 436 missing

The pattern of impact seemed to differ by age categories, with relatively more of the older people in the group that increased greatly in confidence. A larger proportion of the youngest category was represented in the group that increased confidence to some extent. It was the age-group aged from 26 to 30 years which seemed least likely to increase in confidence.

A greater proportion of men were represented in the groups whose confidence had not increased at all or had by contrast increased to a very large extent while a slightly bigger proportion of women increased in confidence to some or a large extent.

When the results for confidence increase were analysed in relation to the case studies, the differences were found to be significant, but not easily translatable into clear judgments about the impact of the different case studies themselves.

The initial pattern of concerns about being a victim was varied, as shown earlier in the report. As in the previous year concerns about becoming a victim of crime had not changed for the great majority and more of the attendees had become less concerned than had become more concerned.

Change in concern about becoming a victim of crime		
Change	N	%
No change	1670	84
Less concerned	175	9
More concerned	146	7
Total	1991	100

When these changes were analysed, it was found that the original level of concern at the outset was significantly linked to the likelihood and direction of change. Those who had been very concerned were more likely than others to change and more of them became more concerned than became less concerned.

A higher proportion of the oldest and youngest groups were among those who changed their opinion in each direction and a higher proportion of the youngest group fell among those who became less concerned.

Quantity of information

Though it was clear that some were satisfied by the amount of information presented, there were consistent patterns of interest in receiving further information on key topics.

- 50 per cent wanted the presentation to have said more about supervision of offenders
- 46 per cent wanted the presentation to have said more about sentencing of offenders
- 44 per cent wanted the presentation to have said more about how the courts treat men compared with how they treat women
- 43 per cent wanted the presentation to have said more about how the courts treat people from different ethnic and religious groups

Presentations and special needs:

Those using a shorter version of the questionnaire seemed generally to be satisfied by the clarity of the presentation: out of 225 responses, 8 found the presentation 'quite' or 'very' puzzling, and 10 found it 'neither clear nor puzzling'; 107 thought it was 'quite clear' and 100 found it 'very clear'.

Quality of presentations:

Out of 2019 respondents, almost 9 out of ten rated the presentations as 'quite good' or 'very good', and 8 per cent gave a neutral opinion, leaving 2 per cent rating them as 'quite poor' or 'very poor'.

Audiences and presenter self-assessments:

Although about half the presenters did not give their views, those that did tended to express satisfaction with their performance and with the event itself. Any negative views affected events attended by few of the audience as a whole. Only 3 per cent of the audience attended events considered by magistrates to have gone 'not very well' and 4 per cent in events considered by probation to have gone 'not very well'; only 3 per cent of the audience attended events at which magistrates considered that they had done 'not very well'. No negative views were given by the probation presenters about their performance.

Conclusion

The project is succeeding in many of its key objectives. The mixture of audiences is encouraging in terms of assessing the relevance of the project. The fact that the project engages police and other professionals should not be overlooked in assessing its impact and targeting.

The LCCS case studies have been designed to present material for decisions on cases that stand at the threshold of custody. Accordingly they represent the guidelines for custodial sentencing. This means that the public is being asked in effect to sign up to the guidelines. The messages that have impact refer to that zone of decision-making. They suggest that imprisonment supporters are satisfied by community sentences that involve unpaid work, addiction treatment and supervision for needy and compliant offenders.

Accordingly the case studies may have a limited relevance to the problem of what to do about the less eligible sectors of the population who do not, for example, display signs of positive attitudes to services, etc. Is unpaid work seen as an appropriate response for the less easily manageable offenders? There needs to be evidence about the public's responses to such cases if there is to be a movement towards reducing the existing prison population and developing wider community supervision and support.



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