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MOTOR PROJECTS IN ENGLAND AND WALES: AN EVALUATION

Darren Sugg

The findings reported here are from an evaluation of 42 schemes designed to deal with motoring offences. Reconviction rates after two years were examined for 1,087 offenders who attended projects between 1989 and 1993.

KEY POINTS

- ▶ Most motor projects used cognitive-behavioural techniques to challenge offenders' attitudes and behaviour and encourage them to focus on the consequences of their actions. This was sometimes combined with car maintenance workshops and/or opportunities to drive fast legally.
- ▶ Of the 1,087 offenders on the projects 89% were male and 95% had previous convictions.
- ▶ Nearly 80% of offenders were reconvicted within two years of being sentenced of 'any' offence – of these, three-quarters were reconvicted for a motoring offence.
- ▶ Overall, actual reconviction rates were higher than predicted with particularly poor results for 'racing' projects. The worst results were for young offenders but for the older group actual reconviction (56%) was lower than the prediction (62%).
- ▶ Offenders who did not complete the projects were reconvicted at much higher rates than their age and criminal histories would suggest.

A survey of motor projects (Martin and Webster, 1994) showed that in England and Wales, by the end of 1992, 32 of the (then) 55 probation areas ran about 60 projects. This study reports on reconvictions after two years for 1,087 offenders who attended 42 of these projects between 1989 and 1993. Two-thirds of the 42 projects were run exclusively by probation services and the remainder in partnership with other agencies. The evaluation examined:

- types of techniques used by the projects
- the age, sex, previous offending and sentencing histories of offenders referred
- offenders' expected rate of reoffending compared with actual reconviction rates.

The projects used a variety of techniques including:

- **challenging offenders' attitudes and behaviour** – by making them think about the consequences of their actions both for themselves and their victims and so to act less impulsively (cognitive behavioural techniques)

- **racing** – to provide offenders with the opportunity to drive fast legally
- **car maintenance workshops** – to increase offenders' knowledge of cars and encourage more responsible driving.

Many projects combined two or more techniques – the different approaches used with offenders are shown in Table 1.

Confidence in the power of cognitive behavioural techniques to change offenders' attitudes and ultimately their reoffending has grown in recent years (see Vennard, Hedderman and Sugg, 1997 for an overview of the literature). It is not clear to what extent these techniques were actually employed in the projects examined in this study but, as can be seen in Table 1, nearly all offenders attended projects which included some elements aimed at challenging offenders' behaviour. For just over half the sample, these were the only approaches used.

	Number of offenders
Challenging offending behaviour only	51%
Challenging offending behaviour combined with workshop and/or racing	45%
Workshop and/or racing only	2%
Missing	2%
Total	N = 1,087

WHO ATTENDED THESE MOTOR PROJECTS?

The staff interviewed in the Martin and Webster survey of probation-run motor projects identified two groups of offenders:

- a large group comprising young ‘twockers’ (so called because many have convictions for ‘taking a vehicle without owner’s consent’)
 - a smaller group of older offenders who have failed to comply with lengthy periods of disqualification built up over a long period.
- This age structure is confirmed in Table 2.

Under 21	61%	Male	89%
Over 21	39%	Female	2%
		No information	9%
Attendance on project:			
As a condition of court order		81%	
Voluntary		12%	
No information		7%	
Total		N = 1,087	

Nearly nine out of ten offenders were male and 81% were on the projects as a result of a court order, 12% attended voluntarily. Despite the relative youth of the sample many offenders had extensive criminal histories as follows:

- more than ten previous convictions (26%)
- six to ten previous convictions (30%)
- one to five previous convictions (39%)
- no previous convictions (5%).

The frequency of past offending probably explains the high proportion of offenders with experience of custody and probation. Nearly six out of ten offenders had previously experienced a custodial sentence and three-quarters had served some form of community sentence.

The most common offences for which offenders were referred to motor projects (see Table 3) were:

- driving whilst disqualified
- taking a vehicle without consent
- driving without insurance.

Just over a quarter of offenders were referred to the projects for one of these offences only. Nearly nine out of ten offenders also had at least one previous conviction for one of these offences. Eleven offenders had previous convictions for the more serious offences of causing death by careless driving or aggravated vehicle taking. No significant differences were found between the

	Current	Previous
Motoring		
Driving whilst disqualified	59%	63%
Taking a vehicle without consent	38%	65%
No insurance	58%	67%
Other motoring	54%	77%
All motoring	100%	86%
Non-motoring		
Theft	–	75%
Burglary	–	60%
Violence against the person	–	30%
Criminal damage	–	41%
Other	–	61%
All non-motoring	–	91%
Total		N = 1,087

criminal histories of offenders on racing and/or workshop projects and those on projects exclusively aimed at challenging offending behaviour, nor were there any such differences with respect to age and current offending.

Opinion is divided on whether offenders who attend motor projects specialise in car crime but Wilkinson (1997) notes that most projects are based on this assumption (for differing views see Light et al., 1993 and Wilkinson). However, this study suggests that the motoring offenders on these programmes were not specialists, as they had had previous convictions for:

- theft (75%)
- burglary (60%)
- offences of violence against the person (30%).

EFFECT ON RECONVICTION RATES

Nearly 80% of offenders were reconvicted for an offence of some sort within two years of being sentenced (see Table 4). Three-quarters of these were reconvicted for a motoring offence. Recidivism figures were marginally lower for the group of offenders who only received ‘challenging offending behaviour’ sessions and for the small number of offenders who only went through

Type of project	Any offence	Any motoring offence
Challenging offending behaviour only (n=551)	77%	60%
Workshop and/or racing only (n=25)	76%	52%
Challenging offending behaviour with workshop and/or racing (n=487)	83%	68%
Missing (n=24)		
All offenders (n = 1,087)	79%	63%

Note: Offenders may have been convicted more than once within the two-year period.

Table 5 Predicted versus actual reconvictions¹

	Predicted rate	Actual reconviction rate	Difference
Challenging offending behaviour only (n=503)	65%	68%	+3
Challenging offending behaviour with workshop and/or racing (n=427)	67%	72%	+5
Workshop and/or racing only (n=23)	61%	70%	+9
Missing ² (n=134)			
All offenders (n = 1,087)	65%	69%	+4

Note: 1. To ensure compatibility with the predicted scores the actual rates exclude convictions for many summary offences, including some minor motoring offences. 2. Actual/predicted scores are not given as no information was available on sex (95), or on standard list offences (16), or on the projects' components (23) for these offenders.

workshop or racing-based projects. The most common reconvictions were:

- driving whilst disqualified (49%)
- driving without insurance (48%)
- taking a vehicle without consent (21%).

The most common non-motoring offences were theft (39%), burglary (25%) and violence against the person (15%).

Given the sample's relative youth and extensive criminal careers, such a high level of reconviction may not be surprising. In Table 5 the actual reconviction figures are compared with the predicted rates, calculated using the Offender Group Reconviction Scale (OGRS), i.e. taking age, previous offending and experience of youth custody into account.

Overall, the actual reconviction rates are higher than the predicted rates (69% compared with 65%). For the small number of offenders who only went through workshop and/or racing projects the difference was quite substantial (+9 points). The largest differences were for the actual and predicted scores for 224 offenders who went through racing projects, whether or not this was in combination with other approaches (75% compared with an expected rate of 63.5%, a difference of 11.5 percentage points).

Since OGRS is known to under-predict reconviction for young offenders, who make up over half the sample, Table 6 shows the differences in actual and predicted rates for the young offenders and those over 21 separately. For the older group the actual reconviction rate was six percentage points lower than predicted. This improvement with age was apparent whatever approaches were used with offenders.

SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF THE COURSE

Previous research in different areas has shown that those who do not complete programmes fare worse

than either those who have completed or those in control groups. Sufficient information was available on whether offenders had successfully completed or failed to complete their projects for 309 offenders in this evaluation. The remaining offenders were either still engaged on the projects or information was not available to calculate predicted scores. Of the 309, the reconviction rates were:

- two percentage points lower than the predicted rate for the 129 offenders who successfully completed projects (actual reconviction rate of 65% compared with 67%)
- ten percentage points higher than the predicted rate for the 180 offenders who had not completed the projects (actual reconviction rate of 82% compared with 72%).

These findings should be interpreted with caution. Some of the difference may be because those who did not complete the project were likely to be younger (for offenders under 21 the completion rate was 32% compared with 52% for older offenders). As discussed earlier, OGRS under-predicts re-offending for young offenders so there could be a corresponding under-prediction for many non-completers. It is also possible that there are other factors, not accounted for in prediction, that are associated with non-completion and are related to subsequent reconviction.

DISCUSSION

There is some evidence to suggest that motor projects may help older offenders to move away from car crime, particularly if the projects are completed. Overall, however, these results are not encouraging – they indicate that the motor projects in operation between 1989 and 1993 had little positive impact on offending behaviour. Although some recent research (such as Wilkinson, 1997) has

Table 6 Reconviction by age

Age group	Predicted reconviction rate	Actual reconviction rate	Difference
Under 21* (n=600)	68%	77%	+9
Over 21 (n=376)	62%	56%	-6

Note: * OGRS under-predicts reconviction for young offenders as the young offenders in the original sample used to construct the predictor had relatively few convictions and therefore less criminal history to draw on. As in Table 5 scores could not be calculated for some offenders (111).

reached more positive conclusions, those studies were based on small samples.

The difference between actual and predicted rates was marginally smaller for offenders who only went through projects which were aimed at challenging offending behaviour but actual offending was still worse than predicted. There may be a number of reasons for this:

- the OGRS prediction model may not take into account important factors that cause motor offenders to have higher than predicted rates (e.g. impulsiveness)
- staff who ran programmes in 1996 aimed at challenging offending behaviour had rarely received proper training in the relevant psychological theories and techniques (see Hedderman and Sugg, 1997). During the earlier 1990s training was even less likely
- Martin and Webster (1994) found that the offending behaviour aspects of motor projects were adapted by probation staff

from other projects. As Hedderman and Sugg noted, such adaptations, if carried out by untrained staff, may seriously reduce programme efficacy

- motor offenders are a high risk group who have in the past failed to respond to most criminal sanctions
- only limited information could be provided by services on the projects undertaken by offenders. For example, although it is known whether an offender attended a project which included racing, car maintenance or any modules aimed at challenging offenders' attitudes, information is not available on:
 - ▶ the precise nature of these approaches for specific projects
 - ▶ the proportion of each project dedicated to each approach
 - ▶ how far they were run in line with 'what works' principles.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

For 1,972 offenders who attended projects surveyed by Martin and Webster, information on the projects undertaken was obtained from probation areas. It was possible to match this information with that of criminal records held by the National Identification Service at Scotland Yard for 1,087 offenders (55% of the original sample). Non-matches occurred because identification details were too vague or too common (e.g. too many Smiths born the same day). There is no evidence that this has created any systematic bias.

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Darren Sugg is a Research Officer in the Offenders and Corrections Unit, Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate.



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