

‘GETTING THE BALANCE RIGHT: CHILDREN AND THE COURT’

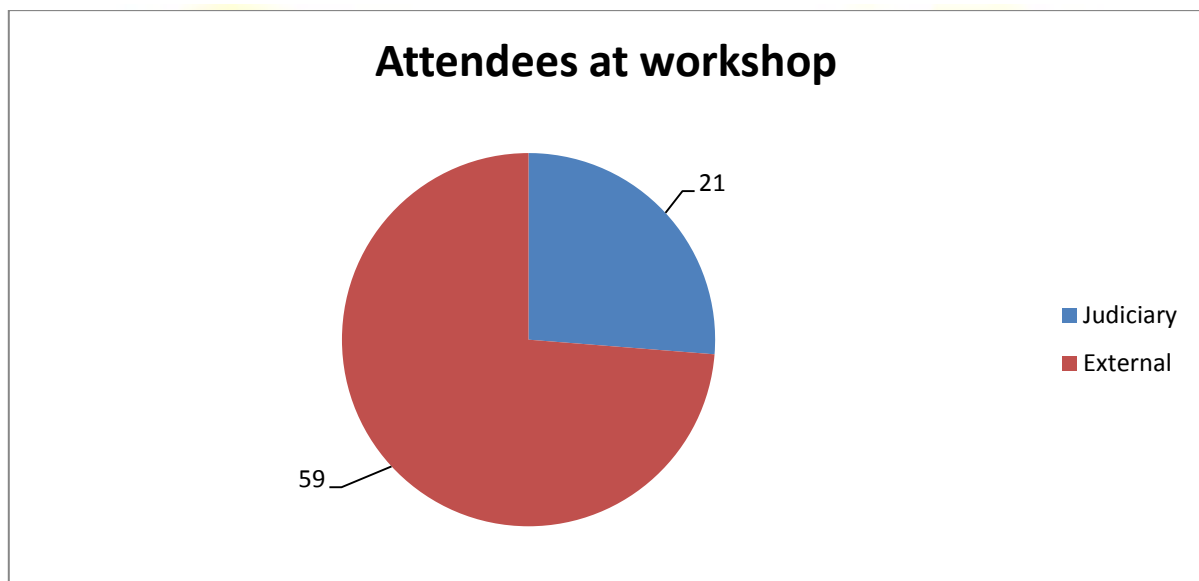
**THURSDAY 22ND JANUARY 2015-
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COURTS OF JUSTICE**

**Report based on feedback
provided by Attendees**

Supported by the Early Intervention Transformation Programme

The '**Getting the balance right: Children and Court**' Presentation took place on the 22nd January 2015 in the Royal Courts of Justice, Belfast. Professor Masson presented to 80 attendees, 21 were from the Judiciary and 59 were external attendees including Social Workers and Civil Servants.

80 people attended the presentation including members of the judiciary, legal representatives, social workers and civil servants



Feedback forms were left on the seats to try and encourage attendees to provide comments. The feedback form followed a format of **5 questions**. The aim of the presentation was stated at the top of the form to allow attendees to answer the questions.

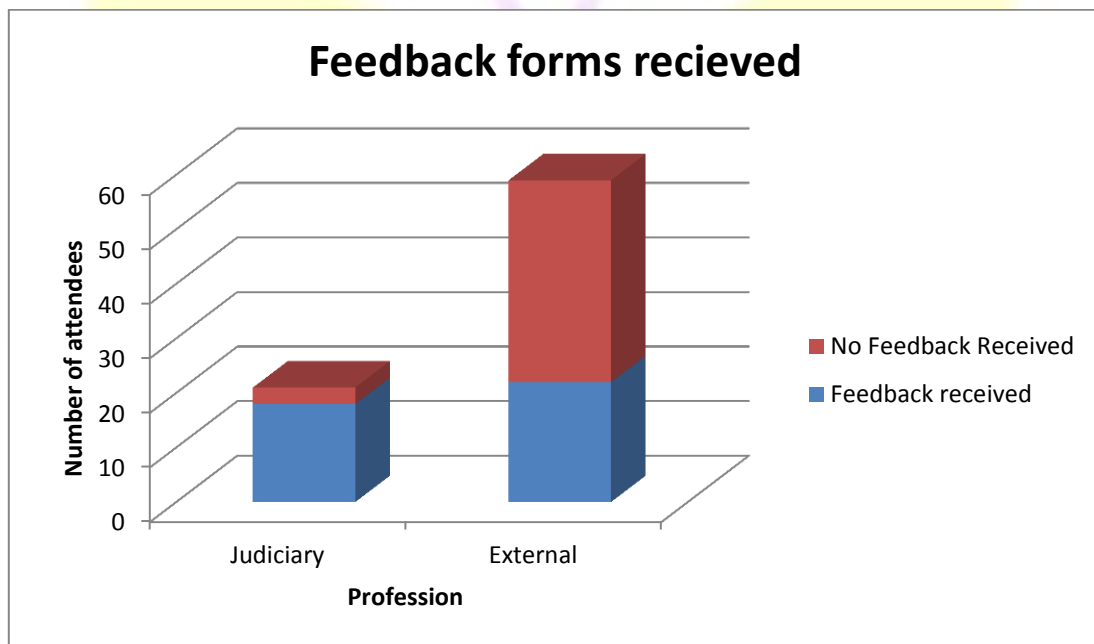
The aim of the presentation was '*to identify how the family justice systems and Trusts in Northern Ireland can achieve good decisions for children in a more timely way, and avoid some of the difficulties that have been experienced in England and Wales over the last 16 months.*'

- ❖ **Question 1** asked attendees which professional group they were from, Legal Representatives, Judiciary or Social Work Profession. All feedback forms except one were within these groups with one person who was attending from the Civil Service (this was counted under external candidate). For the first diagram I have grouped judiciary and legal representatives under 'judiciary' and all others

18 of the 21 Judiciary attendees and 22 out of the 59 external candidates provided feedback

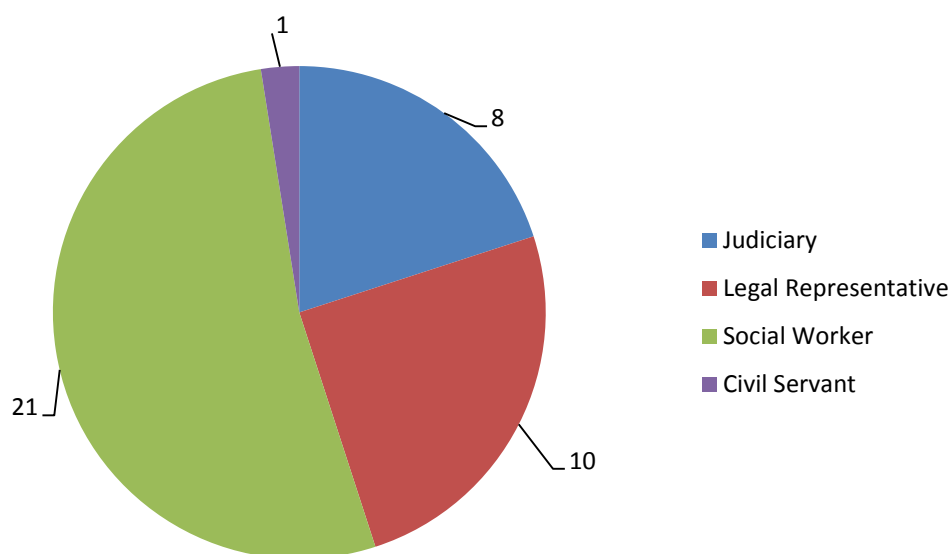
*80% of the attendees
provided feedback*

under external. Feedback was received from 18 of the 21 Judiciary attendees/ legal representatives and 22 out of the 59 external candidates. This means around 80% of the attendees completed feedback forms. The diagram below shows in blue how many of each sector provided feedback and in red how many did not provide feedback.



If the professions are further broken down 8 were from the judiciary, 10 were legal representatives, 1 was a civil servant and there were 21 social workers as seen in the pie chart below.

Breakdown of professions from which feedback was recieved



- ❖ In **Question 2** attendees were asked, 'To what extent did the presentation achieve the objective outlined.' There was a scale of 0-6 provided with 0 meaning not at all and 6 meaning very well.

They answered as follows:

	0 Not at all	1	2	3 Average	4	5 Well	6 Very Well
Social Work					3	8	10
Civil Servant					1		
Judiciary			1	1	1	1	4
Legal Rep			1	4	1	3	1
TOTAL			2	5	6	12	15

50% of the judiciary attending felt that the objectives were met very well while another 25% thought it met objectives well. Only 12.5% felt that the presentation was below average in meeting objectives. Legal representatives felt the presentation met objectives with 50% rating it above average. Only 1 legal representative and 1 judge felt that objectives were not

met to an above average standard. It interesting to note that judges rated the presentation more positively than legal representatives.

The group who found the presentation most relevant to them appears to be social workers. 48% of social workers thought objectives of the presentation were met very well. The other 52% felt that objectives were met to an above average standard.

The final **3 questions** were all answered using a comment box.

❖ **Question 3** asked attendees:

‘What specifically did you learn or be usefully reminded of?’

Comments	<p>“reinforced the principle that the parent’s issues should not delay a solution for the child”</p> <p>“recent case law pertinent to adoptions in Re BS”</p> <p>“Case law developments”</p> <p>“different ways of working”</p> <p>“moving cases on quickly is best for all children and parties interested”</p> <p>“a better understanding of what was needed to achieve 26 weeks in England”</p> <p>“there is a need for joint agreed approach between Judiciary and Trust- in terms of continuity of practice/ evidence”</p> <p>“the need to refocus on a child’s life”</p> <p>“useful discussion- impact Re BS”</p> <p>“Re BS did not change the law! Children should be always at the centre- adoption is not draconian when seen from their perspective”</p> <p>“excellent presenter- knew it would be and was not disappointed”</p>
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Areas for development/consideration	<p>"Would have been helpful to have a response from our Family Judge"</p> <p>"Balancing the various pressures in the system to achieve a more timely outcome- seminar identified issues but not solutions"</p> <p>"...a more collaborative approach would have been a much more effective way of delivering the material. I say this as counsel who represents Trusts and children as well as parents and accepts that the role of legal reps is very important in avoiding delay."</p> <p>"Very negative focus on proceedings. Not much in way of positives and acknowledgement of difficult cases."</p>
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❖ **Question 4** stated

'Are joint events with social services and the legal profession a useful and relevant way to explore issues of mutual interest including up to date research in relation to children and Public Law'

Comments	<p>"Yes"</p> <p>"Yes but some interdisciplinary informal discussion time after the talk would be very useful"</p> <p>"Yes- policy development"</p> <p>"Yes- also useful to hear from social services as their perspective on court process"</p> <p>"yes- greater understanding assists practice within court"</p> <p>"Yes- more events necessary and very valuable"</p> <p>"Yes and more debate and discussion is essential and further events where this can be facilitated is essential"</p> <p>"it is essential to have the contrasting views considered to develop practice"</p> <p>"Yes- BAAF Legal Seminars provide these opportunities on an on-going basis"</p>
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	"absolutely essential- the legal professionals, or at least some of them, need to be exposed to alternative perspectives to enable 'cultural change'"
Areas for development/consideration	"More NI focused would be very useful"

❖ **Question 5** asked attendees

'Are there issues highlighted today that would usefully be the subject of further events'

Comments included:

"Care Management"

"When will NI get a PLO 2013"

"When will COAC BPG be updated? Has become an out of date tool? Has it been abandoned?"

"The difference between English Practice and Northern Ireland"

"Practical advice/ lectures on speeding up public law cases"

"Yes- enjoyed this lecture!"

"Re BS and in particular the consequences of this for social work assessments and NB. Whether we need a new format for social work assessments/ reports"

"Pre- proceedings process- acceptance of pre-proceedings expert and social work assessments"

"Home- on- Time Project"

"References helpful"

"Not meeting timescales and the implications"

"Follow- up on Care Proceedings Pilot in Northern Ireland"

"Expectations of the judiciary in light of Re BS to ensure there is no further delays for vulnerable children"

"Judith Mason research excellent presenter and structure"

“Suggestion that there is justice lottery”

“The impact of the delay needs to be explored in full to allow all parties to put the best interest of the child at the centre of decisions”



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