

## 2.11 Coerced arrest referral as early intervention

**Findings** Two process evaluations have detailed the strengths and limitations of incentive arrest referral schemes. These offer diversion from criminal proceedings to offenders who address their drug use/problem. Bail schemes incorporate coercion by deferring a decision about proceeding while the offender is on police bail, a condition of which is that they accept the help on offer. If they do, no further action is taken; if they do not, proceedings continue.

Both featured schemes are bail schemes available only to offenders arrested for, and who admit, illegal possession of drugs. The Durham study (1) relied mainly on observation of intervention sessions; the Kirklees report (from the relevant police service), on the scheme's records. Both drew on feedback questionnaires completed by offenders at the end of intervention sessions. The first results below relate to Durham, the second Kirklees.

Of all eligible offenders, 12% and 20% refused or were unsuitable, leaving about 500 and over 650 referred to the schemes in a year. Most were aged 25 or less and arrested for cannabis possession (only 3% and 17% for heroin), though many later admitted using other drugs. Over 80% complied with bail requirements. In Durham this involved a group advice/information session. Experience led group sizes to be cut to on average three and to the offer of one-to-one sessions, especially for heroin offenders. The Kirklees scheme required and directly provided a one-to-one therapeutic intervention. Scheme staff referred 1 in 12 and 1 in 5 offenders for further help. For both schemes client feedback indicated satisfaction with the interventions; two-thirds of offenders felt it had helped change their behaviour. Police records for the first year of the Durham scheme show that 5% of referrals re-offended during that period. In Kirklees (where 64% had previous convictions) 31% of clients seen in the first six months were later re-arrested.

**In context** Because they offer diversion from criminal proceedings, incentive schemes can only be applied to less serious offences and only capture drug-related offenders found in possession of drugs. As a result, their clients are younger than in proactive schemes (➤ *Nuggets 2.10*) and their drug use is far less serious. Referral to further help is less common, partly because often this is unnecessary and probably partly because services for the young, the less dependent, and users of non-opiate drugs are less available than for older opiate addicts. Instead such schemes mainly function (if effective) as an early brief intervention. No specific outcome data is available, but research suggests that coerced treatment entry need not affect outcomes ➤ *Pressure pays*, p. 4.

The Durham report mentions two possible side-effects. Decreased post-arrest workload and expectations that something useful would be done with offenders "probably" led police to step up arrests for possession of drugs, and arrestees who know they can qualify for diversion only by admitting guilt may do so even if they would later have been exonerated. **LINKS** *Nuggets 1.9, 2.10. Pressure pays*, p. 4

**Practice implications** Incentive schemes tap a range of drug users from first-time cannabis smokers to heroin addicts. A similarly varied response is required; care must be taken not to expose young experimental users to negative influences from other clients. The inter-agency working demanded by such schemes can act as a foundation for further cooperation to extend services for young non-opiate users, informed by the unmet need uncovered by the schemes. Incentive schemes do not efficiently access criminally active addicts, but may intercept some drug careers before they reach this point. They avoid criminalising young, casual drug users and offer police a way to avoid the cost of proceeding with minor drug cases whilst still taking action to address the offending. Integrating such schemes with proactive schemes would combine early intervention with crime-reduction.

**Main sources** 1 Alred G., et al. *Offering incentive*. Durham and Darlington Drug Action Team, 1998. Copies: apply [Durham](#) and [Darlington](#) DAT, Appleton House, Lancaster Road, Durham DH1 5RE 2 Marsland S. *Evaluation of the Kirklees drug arrest referral scheme*. West Yorkshire Police, 1998. Copies: apply Kirklees Drug Liaison Officer, [West Yorkshire Police](#), Castlegate, Huddersfield HD1 2NJ.

**Secondary sources** ➤ *Nuggets 2.10, Secondary sources 3*.

**Contacts** ➤ *Main sources*.