1. As a student at the University of Sheffield, current member of Sheffield City Council’s Restorative Justice Panel and person trained in RJ practices, I would like to make a submission of evidence to address the effectiveness of delivery of RJ and progress being made by the government in implementing the Restorative Justice Plan of 2014. The submission will make reference of my experience as a member of a RJ panel, and as a person trained in RJ. The submission will focus on the need for RJ to become an integral part of the criminal system, and its potential in other areas. Therefore this submission will recommend the need for Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) to both understand RJ, encourage its usage on a wider basis and share good practice. It will also recommend an increased usage in arenas outside of the criminal justice system, and recommend that the Victims’ Law sufficiently entrenches the right of victims to have access to RJ regardless of geographical location.

*Do Police Crime Commissioners currently have a positive impact on RJ provisions?*

2. A 2014 polling report by Ipsos Mori showed a vast support for the principle of Restorative Justice, “Seventy-five percent of those polled agreed with the statement ‘victims of crime should have the right, if they want to, to meet the offender and tell them the impact of this crime’”. This highlights the willingness of the public to see an increased usage of RJ on a wider basis. This must stem from Police and Crime Commissioners having a more active role in encouraging usage of RJ as a priority in both their manifestos but also in practice.
3. This submission recognises the good work of individual Police and Crime Commissioners in their understanding of and encouragement of RJ. In November, 2014 Merseyside’s Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner set up a fund to deliver RJ services. The Dorset Police and Crime Commissioner has set up smaller Neighbourhood Justice Panels (NJP). It is however important that good practice is shared with other regions and their respective Police and Crime Commissioners. This would strengthen RJ in areas where focuses have been in other areas, and would allow closer relations between Police and Crime Commissioners.

4. As a member of the Sheffield Restorative Justice Panel I have experienced numerous occasions where RJ has been successful in ensuring satisfactory outcomes for the victim, whilst ensuring that the offender is empathetic to the impacts of their actions. This is of critical importance to the correct functioning of RJ; both to satisfy the victims want for safety and security, but also to help drive down re-offending. This may be particularly crucial in areas where youth offending is high, or where non-serious crime is becoming a blight for communities. This shows where RJ can be a positive approach. It is cost-effective, drives down re-offending and is particularly useful in areas of high youth offending or high non-serious crime rates. I would therefore recommend that PCC’s actively pursue a policy of RJ on as wide a basis as possible; using several channels to achieve this.

Is Restorative Justice currently used in as widely and in as many arenas as possible?

5. As someone who was trained in RJ whilst at secondary school, I believe that usage of RJ can be spread further than simply within the criminal justice system. I believe that the Victims’ Law may have provisions for encouragement of usage of RJ in other
applicable areas. I believe in this case that there should be active encouragement, both from the Ministry of Justice and the Department of Education to see an increased usage of RJ in schools, if possible, lead by community policing. For example, my former secondary school; Jack Hunt in Peterborough, where young people are trained in RJ, before applying their training in behavioural cases i.e. disputes between students. I therefore recommend the education of young people in the practices of RJ. Leading to an increased understanding, access and application of RJ at all levels in community policing, local education and the criminal justice system.

6. RJ is, as polls and research shows, an effective conflict solver. However, there is no evidence which suggests this should be limited to the criminal justice system. I would therefore recommend an increased focus of usage of RJ in other areas. In particular, I believe in usage by housing associations, in order to deal with small scale neighbourly disputes. This would be particularly effective alongside PCC sharing of good practice. As already mentioned, the Dorset PCC has begun utilising NJP’s. Where local communities could set up their own groups to effectively deal with small disputes. I would also recommend that those involved in HR undertake RJ training where possible. I appreciate the work that HR departments already do in mediating disputes and commend Alternative Dispute Resolution. However, RJ is different in that in aims to build better relationships and stronger community. It is therefore recommendable that businesses are encouraged to introduced RJ, as a critical aspect of increasing access and understanding.

*Does the Victims' Code do enough to ensure information about and access to Restorative Justice?*
7. The Victims’ Code is admiral in its approach to RJ as a component on the criminal justice system. It seeks to create an ‘entitlement’ to RJ in applicable situations, and makes clear the procedural and timing aspects of RJ in practice. It also lays out policing responsibilities. There are however still geographical limitations to access to RJ. I would therefore recommend that the Victims’ Law entrenches the right of victims to information and access to RJ. It is critical that RJ is nationwide, an integral part of the justice system.

8. Upon reference of The Restorative Justice Council’s list of PCC contact information, it is clear to see that most of Britain’s regions are represented, however this is not the case for all. I would recommend that the government leads a drive toward information, and therefore access regardless of geographical location.

**Concluding Statements**

9. To conclude, this submission believes that the work of previous governments on RJ has been positive, there has been a great deal of forward momentum on the usage of RJ, and this is amicable. There is however still work to be done. In particular around entrenching the right to access and information in the Victims’ Law, in ensuring good practice is shared by PCC’s, in increasing usage of RJ in other arenas. It therefore recommends that Restorative Justice remains an important factor in the criminal justice system.

10. This submission recommends that the committee continues to pursue a policies of RJ in the criminal justice system and elsewhere. The Ministry of Justice thus needs to introduce the Victims’ Law including suitable provisions, work with other
departments to increase understanding and access and encourage PCCs to be increasingly active in pursuing RJ policies.

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