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PRESERVATION

JOINT COMMITTEE ON YOUNG OFFENDERS.
[REPORT ON THE] JOINT COMMITTEE
ON YOUNG OFFENDERS.

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PRESERVATIONTHE JOINT COMMITTEE ON YOUNG OFFENDERSEstablishment of the Committee

In June 1958 the Minister of Education, together with the Ministers of Police, Justice and Child Welfare, announced the setting up of a committee to consider problems relating to young offenders. The committee was an interdepartmental one, originally with representation from the Government Departments of Justice, Police and Education (including the Child Welfare Division, which is a division of the Department of Education). Subsequently the Departments of Maori Affairs and Internal Affairs were added to the representation. The terms of reference of this committee were as follows:

- (a) To review legislation covering the apprehension, prosecution and treatment of young offenders;
- (b) To review procedures in the Children's Court;
- (c) To study the adequacy of the facilities available for the prevention of delinquency and the treatment of young offenders;
- (d) To set up and direct the activities of a Research Unit on young offenders.

Structure of the Joint Committee

The Full Committee is made up of the Permanent Heads of represented Departments and the Superintendent of Child Welfare, together with senior officers appointed by the Permanent Heads. The Full Committee meets whenever sufficient business to justify a meeting has accumulated; this is usually once or twice a year. Its main tasks are to make major decisions affecting the working of the Committee, to consider resolutions arising from the meetings of the Working Sub-Committee (which is described below), and to make representations to Government.

The Working Sub-Committee is made up of the senior departmental officers who are members of the Full Committee, but does not include the Permanent Heads nor the Superintendent of Child Welfare. It usually meets once a month to discuss ideas for dealing with delinquency, to consider reports and to prepare recommendations to the Full Committee.

The Joint Committee Research Unit

A permanent research unit of two qualified officers was established in 1963. The Research Unit exists to prepare background papers and to carry out short-term surveys and research projects which will aid the Committee in the consideration of particular problems, and also to undertake substantial long-term projects. Examples of the former type of work are background papers on social education in New Zealand schools and on the use of television for parent education, and short research studies of vandalism, drinking amongst young people, and shoplifting. Two of the major long-term projects are a study designed to provide information about crime amongst Maoris and a social adjustment study designed to reveal more about early signs of maladjustment which are often precursors of seriously disturbed or delinquent

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behaviour. (These two projects are described more fully in the next section, which also includes mention of other studies by the Unit).

A review of the work of the Joint Committee

Part of the value of the Committee is simply in providing a continuous source of liaison between Government Departments which deal with different aspects of the general problem of disturbed and unlawful behaviour by young people. Thus part of the Committee's work is the consideration of particular matters reflecting on the co-ordination between Departments or administrative procedures within Departments. Such matters are dealt with as they arise.

The other main aspect of the Committee's work is the consideration of substantial topics related to ways of dealing with juvenile offending. Often this involves commissioning the Research Unit to review available evidence or to conduct appropriate research itself. Some of the main topics which have been considered by the Committee are listed below.

Following a trial run of the Juvenile Crime Prevention Section of the Police, in Christchurch in 1958, the Committee's representations to Government resulted in the extension of the Section to other parts of the country, resulting in an increase in preventive work with pre-delinquent and mildly delinquent children. In 1968 the Section changed its name to Youth Aid Section.

Recommendations of the Committee have led to better co-ordination of the work of Maori Welfare Officers, Child Welfare Officers and the Police. For instance, when Maori children are involved, Maori Welfare Officers now attend the meetings where cases referred to the Youth Aid Section (of the N.Z. Police) are discussed with Child Welfare Officers.

The Joint Committee Research Unit has investigated whether there was a "delinquent generations" effect in New Zealand affecting children who passed through their early years of life during the Second World War. Such an effect has been reported by research workers in England and Denmark. Analysis of crime statistics supported the conclusion that this effect also was felt in New Zealand, and a paper based on the research was published in an American criminological journal. (Reference: Slater, S.W., Darwin, J.H., and Ritchie, W.L., "Delinquent Generations in New Zealand", Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, Vol. 3 No. 2, July 1966.)

On the recommendation of the Committee approval was given for the visiting teacher service to be extended to post-primary schools in Wellington and the Hutt Valley.

The Committee has devoted much thought to the procedures of the Children's Courts, and this was of value to those concerned with the drafting of the Child Welfare Bill.

On the recommendation of the Committee a right of appeal against decisions in the Children's Court is now embodied in legislation, as is a right of review of an order for committal of a child to the guardianship of the Superintendent of Child Welfare.

Provision has been made for the translation of a Supervision Order into a Probation Order in appropriate cases.

Parents of children committed to the care of the Superintendent of Child Welfare, or placed under the supervision of a Child Welfare Officer by court order, are now issued with an advice note setting out in plain language the import of the Court's decision and the conditions implied, and informing parents of their legal rights of appeal and review.

The Committee has recommended to the Minister of Justice that a system should be instituted to inform young offenders of the possibility of obtaining legal aid in needful cases and to provide this legal aid more liberally than at present. It is understood that action on this recommendation is standing over until a scheme for legal aid in civil cases has been worked out.

A conference of representatives of the Departments of Justice, Police and Statistics, of the Child Welfare Division and of the Joint Committee itself resulted in a better co-ordination of recorded statistics of crime.

The Research Unit has prepared a review of evidence about the effects on young people of viewing television violence. The matter has been discussed by the Committee, which recommended to the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation that the level of violence should be reduced.

The Research Unit has made several small-scale investigations of aspects of Maori offending, and a major study, based on extensive interviews, comparing a group of Maori offenders with a group of Maori non-offenders.

A recommendation of the Committee that the age of criminal responsibility should be raised to ten years was embodied in legislation in 1961.

Most traffic cases have been removed from jurisdiction of the Children's Court to be dealt with in open court.

The Committee prepared recommendations to the Social Welfare Advisory Board, which accepted them in principle, concerning the early establishment of social services in areas of mushrooming population.

The Committee (in conjunction with the Child Welfare Division) has prepared a documented report on mass-media which might adversely affect young people.

The Committee has discussed shoplifting by young people and an article, prepared by the Research Unit, appeared in the retailers' journal Retailers' Window. The article summarised the findings of a local study by the Research Unit, and explained to retailers the Committee's conclusions on how shop managers should deal with juvenile shoplifters caught in their stores.

The United Kingdom reports of the Ingleby and of the Kilbrandon Committees, concerned mainly with young offenders, have been carefully scrutinised and discussed for possible application of this modern British thinking in New Zealand. Where appropriate, recommendations have been made to the Secretary for Justice and others.

The Research Unit has produced a review of family court systems operating overseas, and the matter has been discussed at length by the Committee, which has reported to the Secretary for Justice.

Following recommendations by the Committee, the Department of Education undertook research on the incidence of truancy, and is examining its procedures for the detection and treatment of truants.

As a result of discussions within the Committee, the Department of Education commissioned the writing of a Secondary Schools Bulletin which will assist young people to understand our legal system, the ethical principles which underlie it, how it works, and how it may affect them as citizens. The bulletin was published in 1968.

The Committee in 1965 studied a report requested from the Department of Education on the work of the Mt Wellington Residential School for maladjusted children and on the demand for places at it, and recommended to the Department that in view of the considerable number of maladjusted children who could not be accommodated because of the shortage of places, and the substantial contribution such treatment could make to the prevention of delinquency, the number of places available in residential schools for maladjusted children be increased. The Department has since obtained premises in Christchurch for a second school for maladjusted children, which will begin operation in 1969.

The Joint Committee has initiated a major research study of the social adjustment of children, designed to obtain evidence about forms of early maladjustment which are likely to develop subsequently into seriously disturbed behaviour. The project is being carried out with the co-operation of the Department of Education (including the Psychological Service and the Child Welfare Division) and Victoria University of Wellington. It is under the overall direction of the Joint Committee Research Unit. The research design is, briefly, to collect data about the adjustment of children at the age of ten years, and to relate this information, at the end of a seven year follow-up period, to data about which children are referred to the Psychological Service or the Child Welfare Division, or who appear in Court. A survey of the adjustment of ten year old children was made in 1967. The follow-up period will extend to 1974, but some preliminary analysis of the data will be performed in the meantime.

