

**Mental Deficiency Act, 1913 : second preliminary report / by Meredith Young, County Medical Officer of Health.**

**Contributors**

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Cheshire County Council.

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MENTAL DEFICIENCY ACT, 1913.

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## Second Preliminary Report

BY

MEREDITH YOUNG, M.D.,

*County Medical Officer of Health.*

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September 1st, 1914.



# Mental Deficiency Act, 1913.

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*To the Chairman and Members of the  
Mental Deficiency Act Committee.*

MR. CHAIRMAN, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

1. I have now, after very considerable trouble, managed to collect a few figures and facts relating to the persons with whom your Committee may have to deal under the above Act. The information herein given has been compiled from returns received from a large number of different sources—some I think entirely reliable, others only moderately so. The plan I pursued was first of all to select from amongst the sources of information mentioned by the Board of Control those which I knew from experience to be likely to yield correct facts. The next step (and the most difficult one) was to plan out forms of inquiry containing heads of information such as I should be likely to obtain from each of the selected sources of inquiry. In all close upon 600 inquiry forms were sent out with a general covering letter stating the object of the inquiry. The replies which came in had to be carefully filed and indexed so as to avoid duplication of cases because the same case of mental defect appeared quite frequently on several different returns.

2. It must clearly be understood that the classification given here is only a preliminary one and in all but a minority of cases is not based on medical or other expert opinion: still it is the only one possible under the circumstances. A generous rather than a severe view of the degree of mental defect has been taken, *i.e.*, many cases classed as idiot or imbecile have, for various reasons, been temporarily placed in the feeble-minded group. As regards the classification of children of school age (7 to 16 years) this is based on the opinion of one or other of the Assistant School Medical Officers and may therefore be taken as fairly correct.

3. So far I have received information of 583 persons who are in some degree mentally defective. Of these 361 are males and 222 females. Under the age of 7 years there are 35 persons: between the ages of 7 and 16 years there are 424 persons and there are 124 over the age of 16 years. The group primarily classified as "feeble-minded" comprises 409 persons, *viz.*, 252 males and 157 females. The next largest group is that of the imbeciles, which contains 76 persons. The accompanying Table shews the grouping of these cases:—

6  
424  
583  
8

TABLE I. Number and Nature of reported cases of Mental Defect, classified according to age and sex.

	Idiots.	Imbeciles	Moral Imbeciles	Feeble Minded.	Feeble Minded and Epileptic.	Feeble Minded and Paralytic.	Imbecile and Epileptic.	Feeble Minded and Deaf and Dumb.	Idiot and Paralytic.	Unclassified.	TOTAL.
MALES.											
Under 7	...	3	..	19	1	...	...	...	...	...	23
7-15	8	32	5	198	20	6	...	...	...	1	270
Over 16	7	13	6	35	4	1	1	...	...	1	68
	15	48	11	252	25	7	1	...	...	2	361
FEMALES.											
Under 7	...	...	...	10	...	1	...	1	...	...	12
7-15	7	18	2	114	12	...	...	...	..	1	154
Over 16	4	10	5	33	1	...	...	1	1	1	56
	11	28	7	157	13	1	...	2	1	2	222
Both Sexes	26	76	18	409	38	8	1	2	1	4	583

4. For the purposes of district classification I have taken the districts of Education Administrative Sub-Committees which are well-known to most of your Committee, and I present a statement shewing the distribution according to different age-periods and sexes in these areas. This will, I think, be of assistance to your Committee in some ways. In the case of children of school age it may be useful in deciding on the establishment of special schools or classes, though this is outside the actual functions of this Committee. It should also be of use when your Committee come to consider the question of the appointment of Inquiry Officers, of persons for the supervision of defectives, of District Sub-Committees and so on.



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5. The following statement shews the cases of mental defect which, so far as I am able to ascertain from the returns and from a number of special letters received, will most probably call for immediate action by way of supervision, guardianship or detention in an Institution. The Guardians' returns had not all come in when this table was compiled, which accounts for the small numbers appearing in Columns 5 and 7. The table will, however, give your Committee a rough idea of the amount of work which will have to be undertaken almost at once. *The greatest care will have to be taken not to exhaust your available funds by sending cases to Institutions which could just as well be kept at home under supervision or placed under guardianship.* It will be one of the most important duties of your Inquiry Officer to assist your Committee in deciding this point.

TABLE III. Shewing cases which now call for action to be taken.

Condition calling for such treatment.	Males.	Females.	TOTAL.
(1) Neglect, abandonment ...	5	3	8
(2) Guilty of criminal or other offence ... ..	2	0	2
(3) In prison, reformatory, industrial school, lunatic asylum, etc.			
Parkside, say ... ..	14	11	25
Upton, say ... ..	35	30	65
(4) Habitual drunkards ...	2	1	3
(5) In receipt of P.L. Relief at time of birth of illegitimate child ... ..	...	5	5
(6) Notice received from Local Education Authority (probable)	63	49	112
(7) Transferred from Guardians ...	2	2	4
(8) Other cases ... ..	14	16	30
TOTALS ...	137	117	254

90

6. Your Committee will see that it is hardly possible to move much further in the way of actually assisting these unfortunate persons until more exact information is before you. To begin with the majority of the persons of whose cases I have information can only properly be termed *alleged* mental defectives because the information has come to me very largely from lay sources. I have already stated that the classification of the cases is open to serious question for the same reason. Therefore before you can actually decide on the best course to be taken with them inquiries into all the circumstances of each case must be made and the diagnosis medically verified.

It was originally my idea that in order to secure a sound basis of enumeration and classification of the cases brought to my knowledge a medical examination of each case should be made as early as possible. But on submitting this idea to the Board of Control I was told that the Act does not authorise the medical examination of defectives whose existence has come to the knowledge of the Local Authority unless:

- (1) They are known to come within Section 2 (1) (b)—that is, are found neglected, abandoned, ill-treated, &c., &c.:
- (2) Unless the circumstances ascertained give reasonable grounds for believing that further inquiry would shew that they come within the above Section:
- (3) Unless the requests of relatives or other circumstances indicate that the assistance of the Local Authority might with advantage be given under the permissive powers conferred by the Act.

The Regulations require that investigations to ascertain the above matters shall be carried out by or under the direction of a Medical Officer and the method of investigation is left to the discretion of the Local Authority. The proper method of ascertaining the full scope of your Committee's responsibilities would therefore appear to be the appointment of an Inquiry Officer to carry out investigations into the circumstances of the cases of which we now have knowledge and to collect all non-medical particulars, after which medical examination could be carried out as we found ourselves prepared to deal with them. It would be unwise to have the medical examination made unless we were prepared to have the cases finally dealt with at once for the simple reason that the medical certificates to accompany petitions for orders under the Act must be based on examinations made within 7 and 14 days respectively of the date of presentation of the petitions.

Inquiries should be made by someone exceptionally tactful, because they would often be met with the indignant

statement that no one in the family came into the category of the mentally defective. I have already been faced with several very awkward situations when calling to interview persons alleged to be within the terms of this Act by medical practitioners—the alleged mental defectives proving to be nothing more than persons with exceptionally irritable tempers coupled with some slight peculiarity of manner but otherwise mentally normal.

I have already got details—some of them sordid and sad in the extreme—of a moderate number of these cases, and if your Committee consider it desirable I could arrange for any Inquiry Officer appointed to see any urgent cases, and make all necessary inquiries, so that they may be dealt with as early as possible in one or other of the ways prescribed by the Act. The offices of Assistant Clerk to the Committee and Inquiry Officer might be combined, making the appointment a whole-time one. Incidentally I may add that now the form of Register, Card Index, &c., is available the clerical work has assumed fairly large dimensions. The writing up of reports, entering up registers, card indices and inquiry forms, preparation of petitions and presentation of same, organisation of work of supervision, inspection of homes for guardianship will all demand more skill than the average clerk possesses and will take up considerable time, so that I am convinced there is ample work for a whole-time Inquiry Officer if such office be combined as suggested with that of Assistant Clerk to this Committee. The medical report besides being one covering the mental condition of the defective includes a complete medical examination of practically every system in the body, coupled with an examination of the urine for albumen and sugar, so that the fee of one guinea fixed by your Committee will at least be a well-earned one.

7. It will be necessary according to the Act and Regulations for your Committee to authorise one or more persons to present petitions under the Act, and I suggest that for the present the Clerk to the Committee (who would only be called upon to act in particularly complicated cases where legal points might have to be argued) the Inquiry Officer and myself should be so appointed.

8. There remains only the question of institutional accommodation for such cases as require detention. I believe that the existing accommodation in the country will begin at once to be seriously strained, and it is therefore imperative that you should retain beds in some Institution approved by the Board of Control without further delay. The Board have intimated to me that they consider £35 per bed per annum a reasonable charge for maintenance. Beds for suitable cases can be obtained for this sum at the Royal Albert Institution,

Lancaster. The charges, etc., at other similar Institutions are:—

- (a) *Burden Institutions*.—For clean, trainable, educable and healthy children 10/6 per week: for untrainable, low grade and hospital cases 14/- per week: each fee less any sum received from the Board of Education or Board of Control in respect of cases. About 400 vacancies on June 5th and accommodation being provided for a limited number of cases of idiots and imbeciles.
- (b) *Ashton House, Parkgate*.—Only for feeble-minded (high grade) girls able to do some work to help in maintaining the Institution. Charges—£3 in lieu of outfit and 9/- per case per week payable quarterly in advance. Only take girls between 14 and 20 years of age. Accommodation for 20 cases to be extended to 30 shortly. Only one vacancy on June 13th.
- (c) *The Grange, Altofts, Normanton (Yorks.)* Certified for 15 females: takes ladies only: charges from 1 guinea per week. No present vacancy but will have one at beginning of October.
- (d) *Monyhull Colony, Birmingham, Littleton House School, near Cambridge*, and a number of others have no vacancies and long waiting lists. I am corresponding with other certified Institutions of which the Board of Control has forwarded a list, and will report on these at the earliest opportunity.

I am,

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Your obedient Servant,

MEREDITH YOUNG.