



National Audit Office

**Ministry of Justice**

Reducing offending by young people

Detailed methodologies

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**DECEMBER 2010**

## Detailed methodologies

### Analysis of published data

1 We drew on a number of evidence sources to produce figures and graphs in the report. These included:

- Annual Workload Data published by the Youth Justice Board. These reports, published each year since 2002-03, summarise data returns from all 157 Youth Offending Teams. Data included information about the number of young offenders in a given year, the number of offences committed, and the number of disposals made.
- Ministry of Justice re-offending statistics. These are produced annually, with the latest set of data relating to 2008. The Ministry selects a cohort, representing all offenders who receive community sentences or exit custody, between January and March each year. Using the Police National Computer, it identifies which offenders are convicted within 18 months of the start point of committing an offence, which, in order to count, must be committed within 12 months of the start point.
- Inspections of Youth Offending Teams by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation. To date (1 December 2010) the Inspectorate has completed Core Case Inspections of 69 Youth Offending Teams, with two of these superseding previous inspections. We collated the results of these 69 inspections for our analysis.

2 For European Youth Custody rates we drew on research conducted by Muncie (2008). The numbers provided were estimated based on information across the years 2004-2007. There are some uncertainties related to the numbers; for example, definition of which custody is "penal" and which "welfare" may vary between countries, as may the accuracy of administrative data. The countries included in the analysis, in order of youth custody rates (highest to lowest) were:

- United States of America
- Netherlands
- England and Wales
- Germany
- Greece
- Spain (under-21s)
- Scotland
- Northern Ireland
- Austria

- Portugal (under-19s)
- Ireland
- France
- Switzerland
- Italy
- Norway
- Belgium
- Sweden
- Denmark
- Finland

**3** To calculate the proportion of offences committed by young people, we asked the Ministry of Justice to review its Police National Computer data for 2009, to identify how many offences resulting in cautions or convictions were committed by young people.

**4** To calculate the total cost of youth offending, we:

- took the Home Office estimate of the full cost of crime in 1999 terms;
- adjusted for Retail Price Index movements between 1999 and 2008;
- adjusted for changes in crime, using two measures to produce alternative figures – movements in crime as recorded by the British Crime Survey, and as found in Police Recorded Crime; and
- adjusted for the proportion of crime committed by young people, as identified per paragraph 3 above.

### **Document review**

**5** We reviewed published and unpublished documents authored by the Youth Justice Board, the Ministry of Justice, the Home Office and the Department for Education. The primary purpose of this review was to identify relevant policies, strategies, developments and analyses of effectiveness.

**6** In addition we searched 33 journals published in the UK between January 2005 and December 2009, in the field of children's services and youth justice, to identify any articles which included material on the following:

- factors that influence youth offending;
- factors that influence reductions in youth reoffending ('what works');

- how to design and operate services for young offenders and young people at risk of offending;
- international comparisons of youth reoffending rates;
- international comparisons of youth justice systems;
- prevention v. enforcement approaches;
- Young Offender Institutions;
- resettlement after custody; and
- support to young people on community sentences or at risk of re-offending.

We selected 87 articles.

**7** We developed a structured review template to be used for each of the articles. This included descriptive material (e.g. date, author and link to saved version), some quantitative assessments (e.g. robustness of work according to the Maryland scale, relevance for our study), a summary of the paper, and the areas of our study where the evidence might be relevant.

### Survey of youth offending teams

**8** We put the contract for delivering and managing a survey out to open tender and appointed Carol Goldstone Associates (CGA) to conduct the work.

**9** We undertook a two stage “Delphi” survey of all Youth Offending Teams. This involved an exploratory first round questionnaire, allowing respondents to identify and explain in their own words what they considered to be key issues. The second round was based on the issues identified in the first, with the aim of identifying consensus and quantifying agreement.

**10** We produced a draft questionnaire for the first stage and piloted this with a Youth Offending Team and with the Youth Justice Board. We then refined this in conjunction with CGA. The survey was web-based.

**11** The NAO and Youth Justice Board sent letters to each of the Heads of Service at Youth Offending Teams requesting their input. We then sent the survey to all 157 Youth Offending Teams. We gave heads of service the option to consult colleagues in the Youth Offending Team before replying. Non-respondents were contacted with three rounds of telephone calls.

**12** CGA conducted a preliminary analysis of the results of the first stage questionnaire, and on the basis of this we drew up a list of ten statements with set responses on a 4-point agree/disagree scale, except for a question about prevention funding which asked respondents to choose an approximate quantification. This questionnaire was also sent to all Youth Offending Teams.

**13** The timescale for both surveys together was 14 weeks from commission to draft report. Response rates were good. 68 of the Youth Offending Teams, or 43 per cent, completed the first round survey. In addition to this three further teams completed a Word version of the survey, and 12 submitted partial responses, giving a total response rate of 53 per cent. We received 105 responses to the second round survey, a response rate of 67 per cent.

**14** CGA's report can be accessed here: [www.nao.org.uk/Youth-Justice-2010](http://www.nao.org.uk/Youth-Justice-2010)

## Visits

**15** We undertook seven fieldwork visits to local sites during our audit. Six of the visits were to the following Youth Offending Teams (in date order):

- Newport
- Birmingham
- Gloucester
- South Tyneside
- Bury
- Hackney

**16** Each visit involved two or three audit staff and lasted for one day, with the exception of Birmingham, which lasted two days.

**17** The visits were primarily for fact-finding, ensuring that we developed a good understanding of the youth justice system, validating our process mapping exercise, and identifying common issues raised by Youth Offending Teams to help support our other findings, particularly from the survey.

**18** We produced a draft visit schedule for each Youth Offending Team which they populated with a list of staff and young people to meet. Typically visits involved meetings with the Heads of Service, meetings with a number of practitioners, discussions with young offenders regarding the work of the Youth Offending Team, and, where practical, observation of interventions provided to young people. Where consent was given, interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed and analysed. All data were handled in line with the provisions of the Data Protection Act and the NAO's own security procedures.

**19** We also visited Hindley Young Offender Institution, where we conducted a similar interview schedule. Due to security restrictions interviews were not recorded.

**20** In total, we interviewed more than 80 local practitioners and more than 20 young offenders.

## Interviews with Government staff

**21** We interviewed staff in key positions at the Youth Justice Board, the Ministry of Justice, the Department for Education and the Home Office. This was primarily to understand policies in youth justice, to obtain information about the operation of the Youth Justice System, and to test our emerging findings. We also met with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation to discuss their inspection work.

## Cohort analysis

**22** We obtained Police National Computer data from the Ministry of Justice which covered all offences committed by those who entered the justice system in 2000, aged 10 to 17. The data was transmitted and received securely in line with the Data Protection Act and NAO security policies.

**23** We filtered out any offences with a start date prior to 2000, any offences with clearly anomalous start dates, and offences with no start date. As a result, the analysis focused on 83,366 individuals.

**24** We then ran a number of descriptive analyses on the data to identify the following.

- Number of offenders and offences per year.
- Demographic characteristics (age, ethnicity and gender).
- Types of offence committed.
- Disposals received.
- Offending behaviour over time ("criminal careers").
- Propensity to reoffend by age of first offence.
- Breach offences committed.

## Process mapping and costing

**25** We produced a high-level process map of the journey young offenders make through the Youth Justice System. The information sources for the map were primarily the Youth Justice Board's Case Management Guidance for Youth Offending Teams, the National Standards, and the interviews we conducted with practitioners. We also reviewed a number of supporting documents to get more specific guidance about particular areas of the system.

**26** Where available, we identified relevant cost information for the Youth Justice System. Although there is insufficient information to conduct a "bottom-up" costing for the various stages of the Youth Justice System, this did help us identify sources of funding and expenditure.

**27** For Figure 12, we made estimates of potential costs for key youth justice disposals. Estimates were produced as follows:

- Key youth justice disposals were identified through discussions with staff from the Youth Justice Board and Youth Offending Teams.
- Resource requirements for typical disposals were identified through process mapping, reference to National Standards, interviews with practitioners, and with reference to time analysis work undertaken by the Ministry of Justice as part of its Juvenile Cohort Study, and the Youth Justice Board as part of its work supporting Youth Offending Teams.
- Contact hours were calculated for each type of disposal based on the Scaled Approach risk categorisations. We calculated a cost per practitioner hour based on total expenditure by Youth Offending Teams and the number of full-time practitioners. The cost per hour covered all work-related activity by Youth Offending Teams. We validated it to estimates produced for the Juvenile Cohort Study and used a consistent, rounded figure of £30 per hour.
- Estimates for other costs were obtained. For example, unpaid work costs were identified from a parliamentary answer. Costs of custody were identified from Youth Justice Board accounts and discussion with the relevant team within the Board.
- Indicative estimates were produced for low- and high-end disposals for each of the categories.
- We took an average based on the ranges of costs we identified and grossed this up based on the actual number of disposals given to ensure that our estimates were not inconsistent with spend by Youth Offending Teams overall.
- As noted in the table, actual low and high costs could still vary considerably from those shown. For example, where group work is undertaken the cost per disposal will be reduced considerably, but where the practitioner has to travel a long distance to meet with the young offender costs may be considerably increased. Cost estimates also assume that minimum National Standard requirements have been met.

## Stakeholder Meetings

**28** We met with a number of other relevant parties throughout the study. This included the Magistrates Association; Dame Sue Street, who conducted the operating and governance review of the Youth Justice Board in 2009-10, Safeguarding the Future; and several charities on a separate basis and through a formal workshop, including:

- Catch 22;
- The Howard League for Penal Reform;
- The Prison Reform Trust;
- The National Youth Agency;
- Barrow Cadbury;
- Social Research Unit;
- T2A; and
- The Association of Panel Members.

**29** A number of academics provided feedback on our methodological approach and preliminary findings, including Professor Brian Francis and Steve Aos.