



National Audit Office

**REPORT BY THE  
COMPTROLLER AND  
AUDITOR GENERAL**

**HC 663  
SESSION 2010–2011  
10 DECEMBER 2010**

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**Ministry of Justice**

The youth justice system in England  
and Wales: Reducing offending by  
young people

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National Audit Office

## Ministry of Justice

# The youth justice system in England and Wales: Reducing offending by young people

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**Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General**

HC 663 Session 2010–2011  
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Amyas Morse  
Comptroller and  
Auditor General

National Audit Office

8 December 2010

We estimate that, in 2009, offending by all young people cost the economy £8.5-£11 billion. Young offenders, like adults, are most commonly convicted of theft and violence.

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# Summary

## Background

**1** In England and Wales, young people between the ages of 10 and 17 can be held criminally responsible for their actions. Provisional data shows that young people committed 201,800 offences in 2009-10. Although they make up only 11 per cent of the population above the age of criminal responsibility, in 2009 people in this age group were responsible for 17 per cent of all proven offending. The youth justice system manages young offenders and contributes to preventing young people committing crimes in the first place. The system is overseen by the Youth Justice Board (the Board), an executive non-departmental public body of the Ministry of Justice (the Ministry). On 14 October 2010 the Ministry announced its intention to take over the functions of the Board. This is subject to Parliamentary approval.

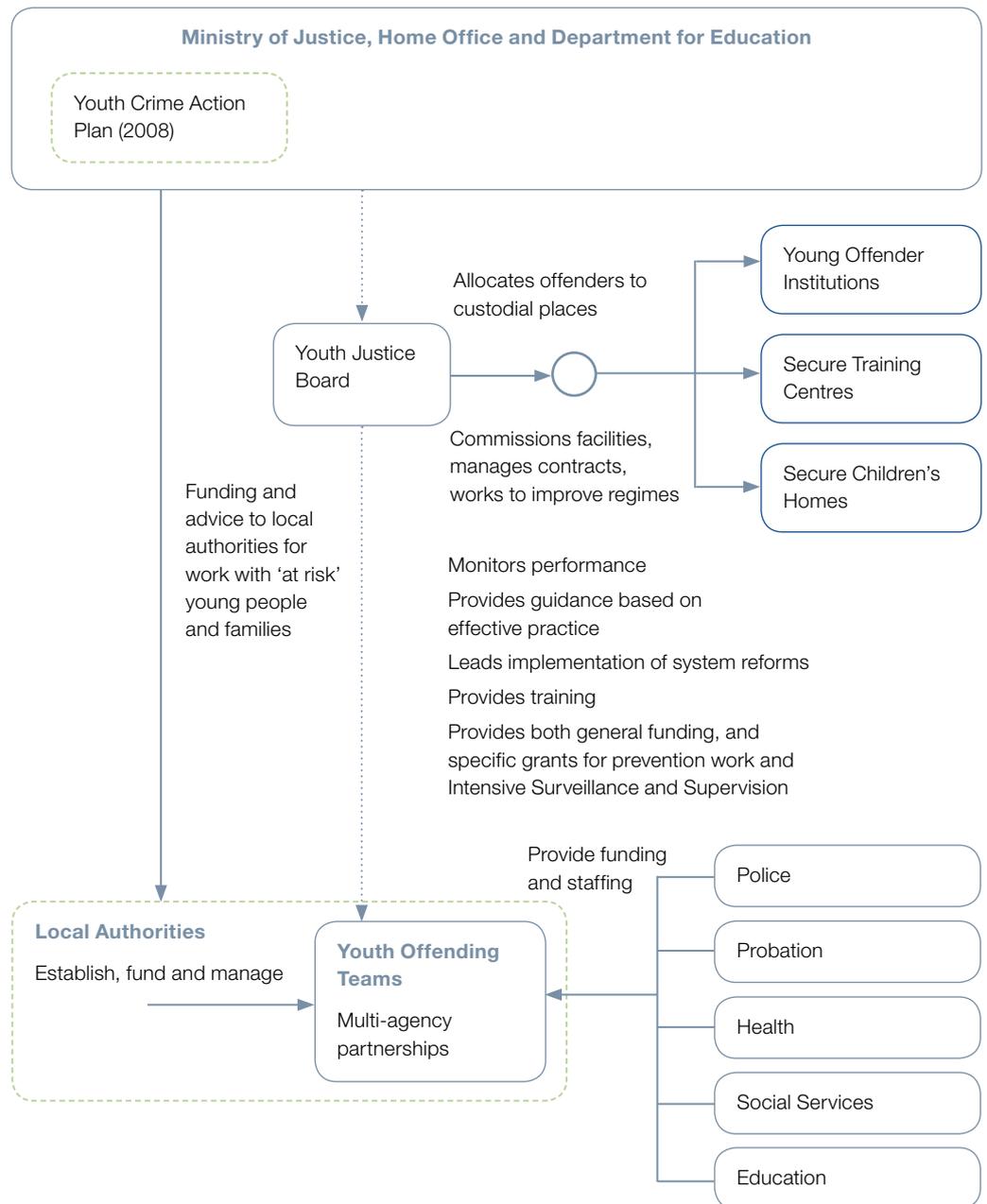
**2** Some 60 per cent of proven young offending is dealt with in court, with the remainder handled by the police through reprimands and final warnings. In 2009-10, the cost of managing young offenders, not including police and court costs, was £800 million, of which £500 million was spent through the Board. Most is spent on young offenders with court sentences. Although only three per cent of offences by young people brought to justice result in a custodial sentence, in 2009-10 38 per cent of youth justice system expenditure was incurred on custodial places in secure establishments.

**3** We estimate that, in 2009, offending by all young people cost the economy £8.5-£11 billion. Young offenders, as with adults, are most commonly convicted of theft and violence. Although they have had a shorter time to offend than adults, a third of those dealt with each year have previously been reprimanded, warned or convicted in relation to an offence. They also have a high reoffending rate: 56 per cent of those receiving court sentences are proven to reoffend within a year. For all young offenders – that is, those who are convicted in court or receive reprimands and final warnings, collectively known as disposals – the reoffending rate is 37 per cent.

**4** Family breakdown, educational underachievement, substance abuse, mental illness and other problems commonly affect young offenders. They are also more likely to have difficulty controlling their behaviour and understanding its impact on others. The youth justice system works on the basis that addressing such risk factors during the course of a sentence is the best way to reduce a young person's risk of reoffending.

**5** The overall goal of the youth justice system is to prevent offending by young people. Local and national government both play important roles in the system (**Figure 1**). There are 157 Youth Offending Teams in England and Wales, which are multi-agency partnerships with statutory representation from local authorities, the police, probation, health and social services. Youth Offending Teams are responsible for the delivery of youth justice services such as the assessment of offenders and supervision of community-based sentences, with the assistance of their statutory partners and other organisations.

**Figure 1**  
The youth justice system in England and Wales



**NOTES**

- 1 The Ministry of Justice was the main departmental sponsor of the Youth Justice Board and shared sponsorship for a time with the Department for Children, Schools and Families, now the Department for Education.
- 2 The three departments jointly introduced the Youth Crime Action Plan and provided funding through it to Local Authorities.
- 3 The Board has a joint strategy for youth offending in place with the Welsh Assembly Government which reflects the different situation in Wales.

Source: National Audit Office

**6** Where young offenders are sentenced to custody, the Board is responsible for their placement, and the institution for the majority of their management, but Youth Offending Teams maintain contact during and after custody. In Wales, local authorities are directly accountable to the Welsh Assembly Government, with which the Board has a joint strategy and delivery plan for youth offending.

**7** The Board provides more than 30 per cent of Youth Offending Teams' funding, and pays for the costs of secure accommodation for young people, with the exception of some remand costs met by local authorities. It is also responsible for monitoring the performance of the youth justice system, conducting research and issuing guidance, and leading the implementation of reform.

**8** In 2008 the Ministry, Department for Education, and Home Office introduced the Youth Crime Action Plan. This set out the previous Government's priorities for dealing with youth crime and anti-social behaviour, specifying action in respect of enforcement and punishment, support and prevention. The plan set out proposed funding of over £100 million to tackle youth crime and the causes of it, most of which was provided directly to local authorities.

**9** The Youth Justice Board is an Executive NDPB. The Ministry of Justice is its parent Department, responsible for the grant of funding for the Board. However, the Chief Executive is the Accounting Officer for the Board and is appointed by and responsible to the Chairman. Neither the Ministry nor its Principal Accounting Officer, the Permanent Secretary, employs the Chief Executive.

**10** This report looks at:

- the extent of offending by young people, and its cost;
- whether the assessments of young offenders drive resource allocation to reduce future offending;
- the extent to which work carried out with young offenders is effective in reducing the risk of offending; and
- the performance of the Board in improving outcomes in the youth justice system.

Our methods are described in Appendix One.

## **Key findings**

### **Assessing risks and allocating resources**

**11 The youth justice system is structured in a way that allows the most resources to be allocated to the riskiest offenders.** Many low-level offences are dealt with outside of court, and, for more serious offenders, sentencers receive recommendations based on assessment. This, together with the use of pre-court disposals, minimises the risk of excessive resources being spent on those who offend once but not again. The recently introduced 'Scaled Approach' should further improve this by explicitly matching resources to the level of risk as assessed by practitioners.

**12 Youth Offending Teams assess most young offenders according to evidence-based methodologies, but the quality of many assessments is not good enough.**

Practitioners across the country all use the same main assessment tool when working with offenders, thereby ensuring consistency, but Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation has found that around one-third of assessments are not of sufficient quality.

## Reducing the use of custody

**13 The number of young people held in custody has decreased by 14 per cent over the past five years, at a time when the adult prison population grew by 14 per cent, but there is scope for greater reductions.**

While necessary in some cases, custody is of limited effectiveness in reducing offending behaviour and is the most expensive sentencing option, considerably more expensive than alternative disposals. The Board has been meeting its objective to reduce custody numbers, partly through supporting caseworkers to produce recommendations for community sentences that sentencers have confidence in. Since 2009 the Board has targeted areas with high custody rates, writing to local authorities to highlight the number of their custodial sentences and the cost of this.

**14 Although custody rates have fallen, the savings from decommissioning places could have been realised sooner.**

The Board has prevented significant additional costs in recent years by avoiding the increase in custody observed in the adult estate, and recent decommissioning of facilities no longer required should lead to savings for the youth justice system of £30 million per year. The Board considers that 7 per cent of places need to be left vacant to allow for unexpected events and has set a safe operating limit of 93 per cent. However, in 2009-10 the occupancy rate was 82 per cent suggesting that 11 per cent of places in facilities could potentially have been decommissioned.

## Preventing offending

**15 Prevention programmes are generally based on pragmatic approaches and available evidence.**

Prevention work focuses on individuals, families and areas where there is an assessed risk of offending behaviour, which offers a good basis for achieving value for money. The Board has commissioned evaluations of its own prevention programmes which suggest they are having an impact on those targeted, and further research due to be published in 2011 should add to the evidence base.

**16 Although the number of first time entrants to the youth justice system rose until 2007, there has been a 44 per cent reduction since then. The current number of first time entrants is the lowest since comparable records began in 2001.**

The number of first time entrants has fallen at a greater rate in the 69 priority areas funded in England under the Youth Crime Action Plan. It is not known, however, to what extent falls in first time entrants reflect genuine reductions in crime.

## Reducing the risk of further offending

**17** The proportion of all young offenders who reoffend fell to 37 per cent in 2008, from 40 per cent in 2000, and the number of further offences recorded by these offenders fell by a quarter. Youth Offending Teams deliver interventions to reduce the risk of reoffending under a framework set by National Standards, although they are free to design their own content and there is no systematic external quality control.

**18** There appears to be little improvement in the reoffending rate amongst those offenders serving serious community sentences and custodial sentences, and there is a high likelihood that they will reoffend within a year and be convicted. Although there is a slight improvement in the rate of offending by young people leaving custody compared with those receiving serious community sentences, neither group shows sustained improvement in reoffending rates since 2000.

**19** Practitioners in the youth justice system do not know which interventions have the most impact on reducing reoffending. Seventy-six per cent of Youth Offending Team managers agreed with the statement, “it is difficult to find evidence on ‘what works’ for certain areas of our work”. There has been little research published in this area by the Board or Ministry since 2006. With the prospect of resources reducing in the near future, the youth justice system is, therefore, in a weak position to know which activities to cut and which to keep to ensure that outcomes do not deteriorate.

## The performance of the Board

**20** The Board has been an effective leader of efforts to create and maintain a national youth justice system with a risk-based approach, and in recent years key youth crime indicators have been falling substantially. In particular, it has introduced the Scaled Approach and the Youth Rehabilitation Order, has provided detailed guidance to practitioners on how to improve relations with sentencers, and has challenged local areas that have disproportionately large custodial populations.

**21** The Board has worked hard to improve processes in the youth justice system, but has not produced enough research in recent years into what works to reduce reoffending. The volume of research commissioned into effectiveness has declined in recent years and there is insufficient evidence-based guidance on how to address offending behaviour. The Board is in the position to offer vital support to Youth Offending Teams by identifying and sharing best practice, but has spent less than 0.5 per cent of its overall budget on research in recent years.

## Conclusion on value for money

**22** The youth justice system spends some £800 million annually on dealing with youth crime, which is estimated to cost as much as £11 billion each year. The Board has put in place a coherent structure for youth justice which is capable of delivering value for money, and key measures of youth crime, such as the volume of reoffending, are moving in positive directions. The Board has led successful attempts to reduce the use of custody, the most expensive sentencing option, and implemented reforms to align interventions more effectively with young people most at risk of future offending.

**23** However, many recent improvements must be set in the context of the preceding years, where custody rates and the number of first time entrants increased. Furthermore, despite the 25 per cent reduction in the volume of reoffending, young offenders who receive more serious community sentences or custodial sentences remain as likely to offend again as they were when the youth justice system was brought in. The Ministry and the Board would be in a stronger position to take corrective action to stop these young people offending, with confidence in the results, if they had established a better evidence base on what is working and what is not. For this reason the youth justice system is not yet in a position to know whether it is delivering value for money from the significant structural improvements that have been put in place.

## Recommendations

**24** Our recommendations are primarily aimed at improving the ability of youth justice practitioners to achieve cost-effective service delivery within available resources, often through the availability of better information.

**a** **There is little robust information available to youth justice practitioners about which activities are likely to be most effective in preventing offending, or reducing the risk of further offending.** The Ministry and the Board should urgently commission joint work to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of activities, whether preventative or rehabilitative, that are intended to reduce offending by young people. Where experimental designs are not feasible, and subject to resources, they should consider one of the following pragmatic approaches:

- **Evidence-based design:** new interventions created either locally or centrally should demonstrate how they draw on robust evidence, where available. This approach was used by Birmingham City Council to design its 'Brighter Futures' programme.<sup>1</sup>
- **Benchmarking:** the content of existing activities should be compared with available evidence – national and international, where appropriate – of 'what works'. Results should be published, so that local practitioners can see how their interventions compare to those elsewhere in the system.

<sup>1</sup> [http://ebriefing.bgfl.org/bcc\\_ebrief/content/resources/resource.cfm?id=4314&key=&zz=2010101209155511&zs=n](http://ebriefing.bgfl.org/bcc_ebrief/content/resources/resource.cfm?id=4314&key=&zz=2010101209155511&zs=n)

- **Making use of practitioner experience:** At least 50 per cent of Youth Offending Teams review the delivery of their interventions. Lessons learned from these reviews should be collated and common messages shared.
  - **Compiling outcome data for interventions:** A consistent approach to data collection should be used to aid comparison.
  - **Incentivising local practitioners to develop effective approaches:** The Ministry and the Board should consider ways to reward positive results such as reduced local reoffending rates.
  - **Building a practice network:** Including actively improving links between practitioners and research centres.
  - **Capturing the user experience systematically:** Making use of user feedback at a system level to identify evidence about existing interventions.
- b** **There is significant pressure on resources for youth justice services, with some funding likely to be lost.** Decision-makers nationally and locally should make reference to the best available evidence about cost-effectiveness when deciding where to allocate budgets. Where cost information is limited or unavailable the Ministry and the Board should conduct further work to quantify costs of youth justice disposals and interventions.
- c** **The Ministry and the Board have incurred some unnecessary expenditure on excess capacity in the juvenile secure estate due to falls in the number of young people in custody.** The Ministry and the Board should further develop their decommissioning strategy to realise the potential savings from falling custody, and reduce the number of unused places.
- d** **A third of assessments undertaken by Youth Offending Teams are not of the right quality, according to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation.** The Ministry should consider periodically summarising key lessons learned from these reviews, and disseminating them to Youth Offending Teams to help drive improvements.
- e** **The Board has collected a considerable amount of data from Youth Offending Teams through performance monitoring.** To aid transparency and comparability, the Ministry should consider what centrally collected data can usefully be made available publicly in the future.

# Part One

## Youth offending and the youth justice system

**1.1** Offending by young people causes significant costs to society. Some of these costs result from the offences themselves; for example, the cost of treatment for victims or higher insurance costs covering property. Other costs relate to dealing with the offenders, such as police time or the cost of custody for young people. This part of the report sets out the nature and cost of offending by young people, and explains how the current system is set up to tackle youth offending and thereby reduce its cost.

### Youth offending

#### The extent of the problem

**1.2** Crime is disproportionately committed by the young. Young people aged between 10 and 17 represent 11 per cent of people above the age of criminal responsibility, but were responsible for 17 per cent of proven offending in 2009<sup>2</sup>. The number of proven offences committed by young people has declined in recent years, with a 25 per cent fall between 2002-03 and 2009-10 (**Figure 2** overleaf). This is in a context where the amount of crime committed by all age groups, including crimes that do not come to the attention of the criminal justice system, has been falling by 22 per cent since 2003, according to the British Crime Survey.<sup>3</sup>

**1.3** Theft and violent offences are those most commonly committed by young offenders, accounting for over 40 per cent of proven offences in 2009-10 (**Figure 3** on page 13). In most categories fewer offences were committed in 2009-10 than in 2002-03, with the biggest falls in motoring offences, vehicle theft and theft and handling. Despite recent falls, some offences, such as violent offences, remain above 2002-03 levels according to this provisional data.

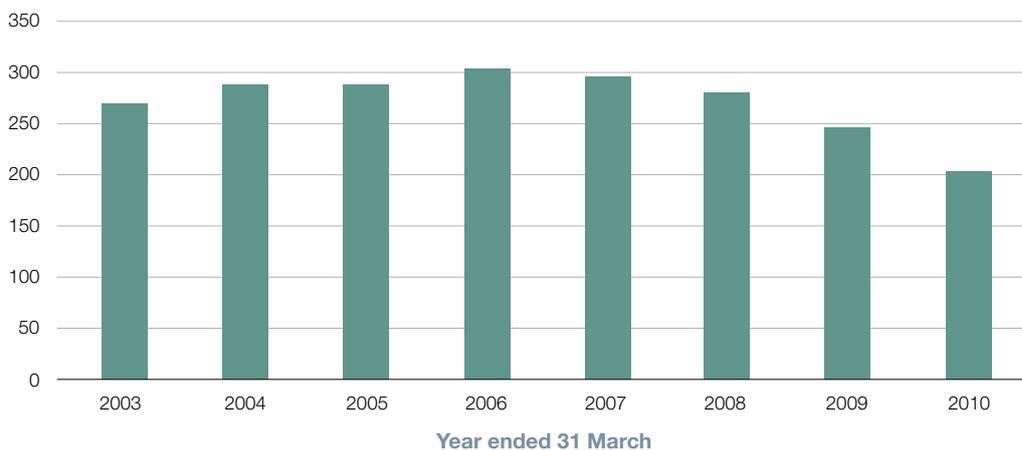
<sup>2</sup> Based on unpublished analysis of Police National Computer data for NAO by the Ministry of Justice – November 2010.

<sup>3</sup> The British Crime Survey (BCS) is a large-scale national survey of individuals aged 16 years and over living in private households.

**Figure 2**

Proven offences by young people, 2002-03 to 2009-10

Number of convicted offences (000s)



**NOTE**

1 Data for 2009-10 is provisional.

Source: Youth Justice Board

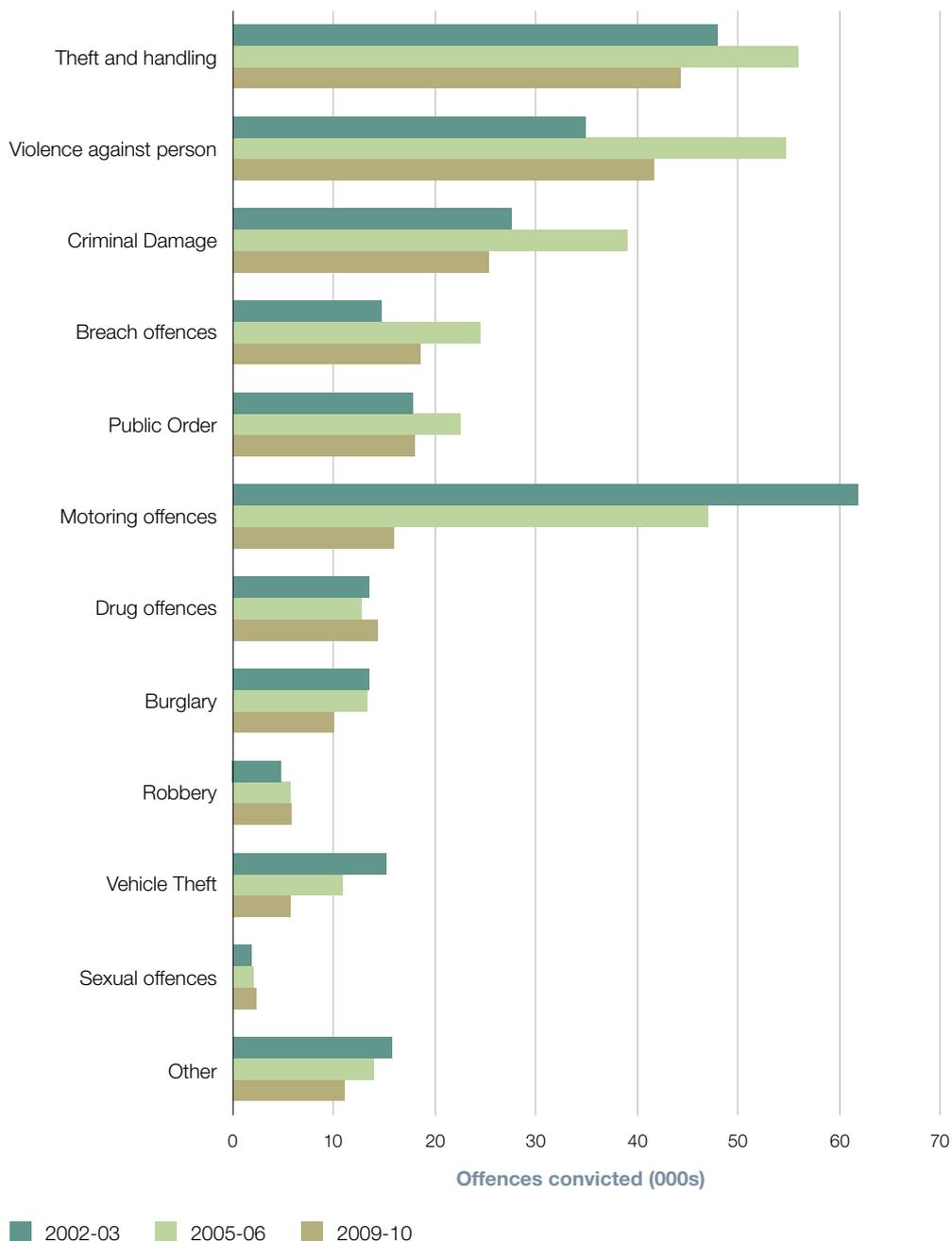
**1.4** Crime is costly, but calculating its full cost is difficult. The best estimate of the annual economic and social cost in England and Wales remains that made by the Home Office in 2000:<sup>4</sup> some £60 billion. We updated this figure to 2009, by adjusting for inflation and reported reductions in crime levels, to arrive at a figure of £50-£64 billion, depending on the crime measure used. Assuming that young people are responsible for 17 per cent of all crime, we estimate the cost of youth crime in 2009 may have been as much as £8.5-£11 billion.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Home Office Research Study 217, *The economic and social cost of crime*, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> This assumes that young people commit the same proportion of total crime as they do recorded crime, and that there is an equal probability that young people and adults committing similar offences are convicted. It also assumes that young people commit the same types of crime as the wider offender population.

**Figure 3**

Types of youth offending in 2002-03, 2005-06 and 2009-10



**NOTES**

- 1 "Breach offences" included breaches of Orders and Bail.
- 2 Data for 2009-10 is provisional.

Source: Youth Justice Board

## Dealing with the problem

**1.5** First time and low level offenders are usually dealt with by the police through reprimands and final warnings. More serious and repeat offenders are dealt with through youth courts. With the exception of serious crimes it is rare for cases to be heard in the Crown Court. **Figure 4** shows the main decisions, known as disposals, handed out in the last three years. There have been reductions across the board, with the greatest fall, of 30 per cent, in police disposals. Custodial sentences have also decreased by 26 per cent.

**1.6** Typically, around two-thirds of young offenders dealt with each year will not have been previously recorded as having committed a crime. They are known as first time entrants. After rising steeply, the number of first time entrants began to fall in 2006-07 and, by 2009-10, had reduced 44 per cent from its peak (**Figure 5**). However, it is difficult to draw wider conclusions about the actual level of crime from these figures. Trends for both first time entrants and the total number of offences followed a fairly similar path during the past decade, with peaks in 2006-07 and 2005-06 respectively, and considerable declines since then. These movements may, in part, have been driven by a wider target that was set for the criminal justice system to increase the number of offences dealt with through formal sanctions to 1.25 million in the year 2007-08.

### Figure 4

Number of disposals for young offenders by type, 2007-08 to 2009-10

Disposal Type	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10 (provisional)
Police reprimands and final warnings	89,600	75,100	63,100
First tier court sentences with orders	50,700	45,200	39,900
First tier court sentences without orders	22,400	19,200	17,600
Community orders	41,200	38,500	30,200
Custody	6,900	6,700	5,100
<b>Total</b>	<b>210,700</b>	<b>184,800</b>	<b>155,800</b>

#### NOTES

1 Columns may not add up due to roundings.

2 First Tier sentences are defined by the Youth Justice Board as less serious than Community Orders.

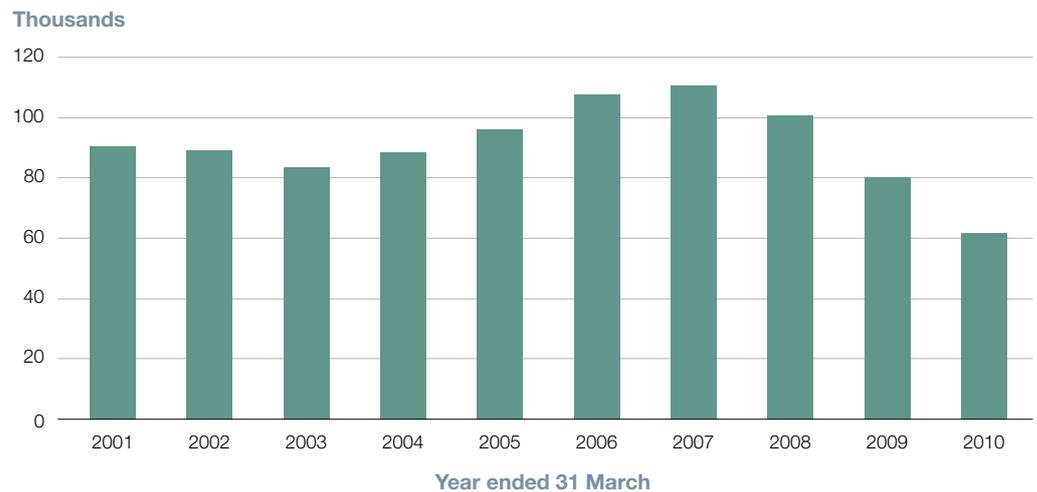
Source: National Audit Office analysis of Youth Justice Board Data

## Reoffending

**1.7** Many young offenders are convicted only once, but a small number quickly become very prolific. We analysed Police National Computer data for juvenile first time entrants in 2000. Forty-four per cent were not convicted of any further offences in the subsequent years to 2009. By 2009, however, 18 per cent had been convicted of more than 10 offences. In our cohort, an individual's propensity to commit a large number of crimes was strongly associated with their age when first convicted. Those aged 10 or 11 in 2000 were more than twice as likely as 16-17 year-olds to have been convicted of more than 10 offences by 2009 (**Figure 6** overleaf).

**Figure 5**

First-time entrants, 2000-01 to 2009-10



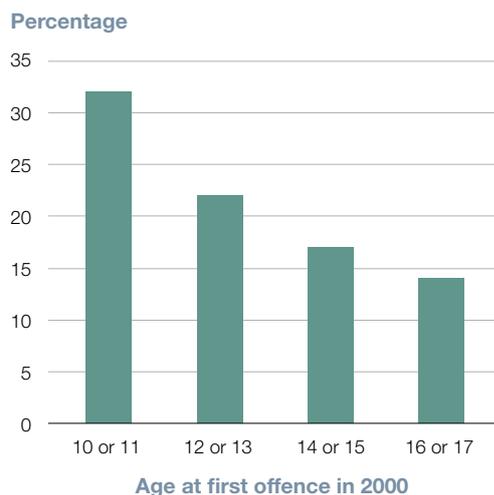
**NOTE**

1 These figures do not include Penalty Notices for Disorder.

Source: Ministry of Justice

**Figure 6**

Proportion of first time entrants in 2000 who committed more than 10 proven offences by 2009



Source: National Audit Office analysis of Police National Computer data

**1.8** Young offenders are more likely to reoffend after a conviction than adults, with 56 per cent of those dealt with in court committing a further offence within a year for which they are subsequently convicted, compared to 40 per cent of adults. In addition, young people convicted in court commit, on average, 30 per cent more proven offences in the following year than equivalent adults. However, reoffending rates and volumes for young offenders have fallen since comparable records began in 2000 (**Figure 7**).

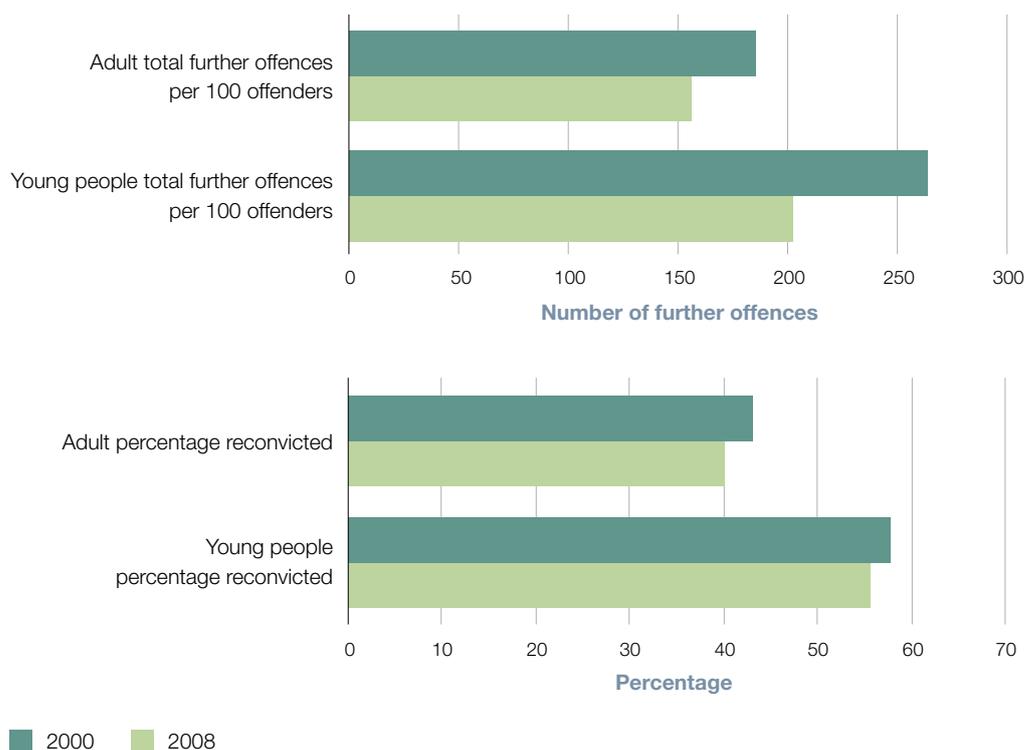
## The youth justice system

### The structure of the system

**1.9** The main legislation governing the youth justice system is the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, which sets out the system's primary aim as being 'to prevent offending by children and young persons'. This Act established the Youth Justice Board (the Board) centrally and Youth Offending Teams locally, in addition to the secure establishments that already existed. The Board reports to the Ministry of Justice (the Ministry). In Wales, local authorities are directly accountable to the Welsh Assembly Government, and there are differences in the outcome measures and targets which are used. The Board has a joint strategy for youth offending in place with the Welsh Assembly Government which reflects these differences. In addition to providing more than 30 per cent of Youth Offending Teams funding, the Board has the following duties:

**Figure 7**

Reoffending rates for adults and young people sentenced in court, 2000 and 2008



**NOTE**

1 This shows the total number of further offences committed, and the percentage of offenders who are subsequently reconvicted, per 100 offenders. Offences are only counted when they are committed within 12 months of the commencement of a community based disposal or release from custody, and convicted within 18 months of this start point.

Source: Ministry of Justice

- Monitoring the performance of Youth Offending Teams and secure establishments.
- Managing custodial placements in secure establishments which are commissioned from the National Offender Management Service, private contractors and local authorities.
- Conducting research into youth justice and promoting effective practice.
- Leading the implementation of reforms.

On 14 October 2010 the Ministry announced that the Board would cease to function as a public body, subject to Parliamentary approval, and its functions would transfer to the Ministry.

**1.10** Youth Offending Teams are multi-agency partnerships, comprising at least one representative from each of local police, probation, social, educational and health services. There are 157 such teams, each typically operating within the boundaries of a single local authority. The key tasks they carry out are:

- assessing the risks and needs of young offenders;
- making recommendations to sentencers about the type and content of sentences;
- delivering community-based sentences and ensuring compliance; and
- undertaking preventative work to reduce the number of first time entrants.

**1.11** The role of the Board was examined in 2009-10 by a review jointly chaired by Dame Sue Street and Frances Done, the Chair of the Board, who made a number of recommendations for improving performance.<sup>6</sup> The most recent major changes to the system were the introduction, in 2009, of the Scaled Approach and Youth Rehabilitation Order, described in detail in Part Two.

**1.12** For most of the period covered by this audit, the youth justice system was subject to a number of annual indicators at both national and local level intended to reflect and improve performance, as follows:

- Number of first time entrants.
- Proportion of young offenders (1) sentenced to custody, (2) in education, training and employment.
- Number of proven reoffenders and the volume of their reoffending.
- The degree to which Black and Minority Ethnic young people are represented disproportionately in the system (England only).
- Access to suitable accommodation for young people in the youth justice system (ceased as an indicator in England in April 2010).
- Access to substance misuse services for young people in the youth justice system (Wales only).

There have been encouraging trends in many of these indicators in recent years: the number of first time entrants, the use of custody and reoffending rates have all been falling, for instance. However, as described in the rest of this report, determining what proportion of these reductions is the result of Government spending on youth justice is not straightforward.

<sup>6</sup> *Safeguarding the Future*, 2010, <http://publications.education.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DCSF-00223-2010>

## The cost of the system

**1.13** Overall, the youth justice system cost some £800 million in 2009-10.

**Figure 8** shows the main sources of funding and where the money was spent.

The Ministry, through the Board, is the largest funder overall, providing £438 million (55 per cent), but other government departments provided 12.5 per cent, and local authorities 28 per cent. Of the £800 million, £306 million (38 per cent) was spent on custodial places for young offenders.

### Figure 8

Funding and expenditure in the youth justice system, 2009-10

Funding source	Amount (£m)
Ministry of Justice	438
Local funding for Youth Offending Teams	224
Department for Education	65
Home Office	36
Other funding for Youth Offending Teams	35
Welsh Assembly Government	3
<b>Total funding</b>	<b>801</b>
<b>Expenditure areas</b>	
Working with offenders	349
Custodial provision	306
Prevention	82
Other expenditure by Youth Justice Board	64
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>801</b>

#### NOTES

- 1 Funding figures for the Ministry, Department for Education and Home Office are drawn from the Board's accounts and Department for Education data on the Youth Crime Action Plan. Figures for local funding and other funding are drawn from data returns to the Board from Youth Offending Teams, with other funding adjusted by an estimate of how much Youth Crime Action Plan funding was spent through Youth Offending Teams.
- 2 The split between prevention and working with offenders is an estimate based on the best available data.
- 3 The Welsh Assembly Government provides around £4.5 million annually for work in support of the All Wales Youth Offending Strategy. The £3 million shown above is the proportion of this that is awarded to Youth Offending Teams.
- 4 In 2009-10 £504 million of Departmental funding was passed to the Youth Justice Board. The Accounting Officer of the Youth Justice Board is responsible for ensuring that these funds are spent in accordance with the purposes intended by Parliament.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of departmental data

**1.14** Funding for prevention work has grown in recent years. The Board has provided £127 million to Youth Offending Teams since 2006-07, and in 2009-10, the Youth Crime Action Plan provided further funding of £35 million direct to Local Authorities for prevention work. The Board's programmes have been aimed at provision for individuals across all local authorities, with further funding for work with families in some local authorities. The Youth Crime Action Plan has funded family work across all local authorities in England and community level prevention work, such as after-school patrols, in 69 areas identified as high priority.

### Youth justice system approach

**1.15** Criminal justice disposals received by offenders are set by either the police, in the case of reprimands and final warnings, or the courts, in respect of other sentences. Youth Offending Teams work with offenders during the course of some of these disposals, typically the more serious ones. Most of the work carried out by practitioners focuses on rehabilitation and public protection, with punishment and deterrence satisfied by the mandatory nature of all disposals, and, in the case of custody, the deprivation of liberty.

**1.16** The system recognises 12 risk factors, which are closely linked to the life problems that young offenders frequently face (**Figure 9**). Practitioners assess individuals for these risks and then attempt to address them during their sentence. This is done through interventions, one-to-one assistance and help from other agencies. The risk factors are as follows:

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**Figure 9**  
Risk factors for young offenders

Attitudes to offending	Lifestyles	Perception of self and others
Education, training and employment	Living arrangements	Physical health
Emotional and mental health	Motivation to change	Substance use
Family and personal relationships	Neighbourhood	Thinking and behaviour

*Source: Youth Justice Board*

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**1.17** The remainder of this report sets out to evaluate how the approach of the system to youth offending addresses the risk of offending by young people, and the extent to which this approach achieves value for money.

# Part Two

## Assessing young offenders

### Purposes of assessment

**2.1** All young offenders who are dealt with through the courts are assessed at least once by Youth Offending Team practitioners. Some cases handled solely by the police trigger assessments too. Assessments serve a number of purposes, including:

- identifying a young offender's vulnerabilities and the risk they pose to the public;
- judging the amount of work to undertake to reduce the risk of future offending; and
- providing the basis for recommendations to sentencers on appropriate sanctions.

**2.2** The quality of assessment is a key determinant of how much and what kind of resources each offender will have spent on them during their sentence. If assessments are of poor quality then caseworkers could fail to identify the reasons why a young person has offended, and money could be wasted on interventions that fail to address these issues. This section describes the methodologies used and presents evidence about the quality of assessments made.

### Quality of assessment

**2.3** Following comprehensive research, the Board introduced a detailed assessment tool called Asset in 2000, which remains the basis for assessments today. The assessor, typically a trained Youth Offending Team practitioner, completes Asset after interviewing the young offender and, as appropriate, consulting with guardians and other agencies. Asset's Core Profile Template scores the young offender on a zero-to-four scale against the 12 risk factors listed in Figure 9. Other templates are used for specialist assessments, for example, of mental health, and a reduced Asset is available for offenders who receive final warnings. Asset records are reviewed periodically during the course of the sentence.

**2.4** Good quality assessments are fundamental to achieving value for money in the youth justice system. Although practitioners receive guidance and training in completing Asset, making accurate assessments is difficult. Much of the information required is personal and offenders do not always cooperate or tell the whole truth. Other agencies do not always provide paperwork on time and caseworkers' judgements are always partly subjective.

**2.5** Evidence shows that on average, practitioner assessments need to be of better quality. In April 2009, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation embarked on a three-year Core Case Inspection programme of each of the 157 Youth Offending Teams. These inspections make qualitative judgements about practitioner assessments, using a number of benchmarked criteria. To date, 69 inspections<sup>7</sup> have been completed, and these show that, on average, a third of assessment work is not of a high enough quality. The range of performance is wide, with two Youth Offending Teams achieving the right quality less than half of the time (**Figure 10**). Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation has identified that practitioners are better at assessing what the problems are than stating how they plan to address them. There is therefore a risk that opportunities to address offending behaviour may not be taken, reducing the cost-effectiveness of work undertaken with young offenders.

**2.6** The Board's own evaluation of the quality of assessment work through the Youth Justice Performance Improvement Framework also showed problems. Thirty per cent of teams were assessed to be at or below the minimum acceptable standard for Assessment, Planning Interventions and Supervision.

**Figure 10**  
Quality of assessments and planning by Youth Offending Teams

Inspection criterion		Risk of harm		Risk of reoffending		Safeguarding		Quality of assessment and planning overall
<b>Average percentage of work at the right quality</b>		66		68		65		67
<b>Highest percentages achieved</b>	84	Merthyr Tydfil	91	Merthyr Tydfil	90	Pembrokeshire	<b>89</b>	<b>Merthyr Tydfil</b>
	84	Somerset	87	Pembrokeshire	88	Merthyr Tydfil	<b>85</b>	<b>Pembrokeshire</b>
	83	Knowsley	85	Somerset	79	Somerset York	<b>83</b>	<b>Somerset</b>
<b>Lowest Percentages achieved</b>	49	Liverpool Bournemouth and Poole Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly	50	Bournemouth and Poole	48	Stockport Gateshead	<b>52</b>	<b>Bolton</b>
	46	Bath and North East Somerset	49	Bolton	41	Hartlepool	<b>48</b>	<b>Hartlepool</b>
	45	North Somerset	47	Hartlepool	40	Bournemouth and Poole	<b>47</b>	<b>Bournemouth and Poole</b>

Source: Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation

<sup>7</sup> Two inspections have been superseded by reinspections and have not been included in this analysis.

## Sentence planning

**2.7** Youth Offending Teams use assessments to write Pre-sentence Reports and other documents, which tell independent sentencers about the young offenders before them and make recommendations about what sentence they should pass. Teams submitted some 22,000 Pre-Sentence Reports in 2008-09. These reports are the key means for practitioners to inform the sentencing decision about what interventions could be provided for the offender. When assessments are of good quality, they are an important element of value for money.

**2.8** Reforms introduced in November 2009 – the Scaled Approach and Youth Rehabilitation Order – have made the reports, and the assessments underpinning them, even more important. Under the Scaled Approach, practitioners must specify which level of support and supervision a young offender should receive, under three categories: Standard, Enhanced or Intensive. Reports should set out details of contact hours with the offender, proposed interventions, and where applicable recommended requirements under the Youth Rehabilitation Order. They also make an explicit assessment of the likelihood of reoffending, including through the use of data about the age at which a young person first offended, an important factor as our analysis of criminal records showed (see Figure 6).

**2.9** To complement this, sentencers now have recourse to the Youth Rehabilitation Order, a generic sentence containing 18 options (**Figure 11**). One or more options can be selected by sentencers, thus providing more scope to tailor sentences appropriately. Some options, however, such as Intensive Fostering, are only available in certain local areas.

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**Figure 11**  
Youth Rehabilitation Order Requirements

Activity	Supervision
Curfew	Electronic monitoring
Exclusion	Prohibited activity
Local Authority residence	Drug treatment
Education	Residence
Mental health treatment	Programme
Unpaid work (for 16 and 17 year olds only)	Attendance centre
Drug testing	Intensive Supervision and Surveillance
Intoxicating substance treatment	Intensive Fostering

*Source: Youth Justice Board*

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**2.10** Appropriately allocating resources to young offenders is crucial to achieving value for money in the youth justice system. The cost of different sentencing options varies greatly. **Figure 12** shows our analysis of the range of probable costs for typical sentences. This is based on the mandatory National Standards for youth justice, uses estimates and assumptions where accurate information was not available, and excludes costs of arrest and trial. Low estimates are based on offenders being recommended for Standard supervision, and high estimates are based on Intensive supervision, with the exception of the custodial element of Detention and Training Orders, which is based on type of establishment. Our analysis shows that Detention and Training Orders, where half of the time is typically spent in custody, are considerably more expensive than the most intensive community sentences. Improving the accuracy of assessment and the content of reports are therefore key objectives for the youth justice system in the future.

**Figure 12**  
Indicative cost estimates for typical disposals for young offenders

Disposal type	Content of example disposal	Low estimate (£)	High estimate (£)
<b>Final Warning</b> Issued by police. Offender may receive voluntary intervention	Low: no intervention provided High: one-to-one intensive intervention	200	1,200
<b>Referral Order</b> Common community sentence for guilty pleas	Supervision over 6 months 15 hours unpaid work	2,200	4,000
<b>Youth Rehabilitation Order</b> New community sentence introduced in 2009. Sentencers can choose from 18 different requirements, where available	6-month supervision requirement	1,900	4,100
	6-month Intensive Supervision and Surveillance requirement	7,800	9,300
<b>Detention and Training Order</b> Custodial sentence. Typically half of the sentence is served in custody and half in the community	3-months served in custody	19,000	47,600
	3-months in the community	1,300	2,900
	Total Cost for DTO	20,300	50,500

**NOTES**

- 1 Estimates do not include the cost of the crime itself, or police, legal aid or court costs, and are based on the provisions of National Standards.
- 2 Estimates are indicative, and, in practice, costs will vary depending on the specific needs of each offender.

Source: National Audit Office analysis

**2.11** In 2008-09, sentencers agreed with the recommendations made by practitioners in Pre-Sentence Reports 74 per cent of the time. Members of the Magistrates' Association Youth Courts Committee told us that, in addition to exercising their independent judgement, reasons why sentencers sometimes disagreed with Pre-sentence Reports included:

- unclear recommendations;
- poorly justified recommendations; and
- some sentencers' lack of confidence in the Youth Offending Team's ability to deliver the sentence (particularly important when custody is an option).

**2.12** Practitioners we spoke to were confident that these issues will be addressed, in part, by the Scaled Approach, but it is too soon to say if this will be the case. In our survey of Youth Offending Teams, 85 per cent agreed or agreed strongly that the reform allowed them to target resources at those young people who need them most. Separately, both practitioners and magistrates told us that efforts to build stronger relationships and mutual understanding between them were increasing. The Board assessed in 2010 that 78 per cent of Youth Offending Teams were operating above minimum standards in their efforts to build such relationships.

## Reducing custody numbers

**2.13** Custody is the most expensive disposal available, and can cost more than £200,000 per place per year in a Local Authority Secure Children's Home. A place costs on average £60,000 in a Young Offender Institution and £160,000 in a Secure Training Centre (**Figure 13** overleaf). Research in 2008 found that England and Wales had the second highest rate of child incarceration in Western Europe<sup>8</sup>, but over a third of sentences given are for a maximum of four months, with only half this period being spent in custody. Our 2010 report *Managing Offenders on Short Custodial Sentences* noted the limited scope for addressing offending behaviour during short custodial sentences for adults, and the Board's guidance to practitioners states that interventions in custody for young people cannot be recommended to sentencers as provision is uncertain. The Board previously operated under targets to reduce the level of custody for young people, and more recently has continued to encourage a reduction in custody, believing detention to be undesirable for all but the most serious or persistent young offenders.

**2.14** The Board, working together with practitioners, has succeeded in meeting this objective in recent years. Between 2005-06 and 2009-10, there was a 28 per cent reduction in the number of custodial sentences given (7,100 to 5,100), and a 14 per cent reduction in the average number of young offenders in custody (2,830 to 2,444). Although this happened while overall crime levels were falling, during the same period, the adult prison population actually grew by 14 per cent.

8 Muncie, J. (2008) *The 'Punitive Turn' in Juvenile Justice: Cultures of Control and Rights Compliance in Western Europe and the USA*, Youth Justice.

**2.15** This may, in part, reflect the reduction in the overall number of offences for which young people are being convicted. However, we saw some evidence from our review that greater confidence on the part of sentencers in community sentences, and the Board's efforts to challenge areas with particularly high rates of custody, are likely to be having an impact too.

**2.16** Youth Offending Teams could, however, do more to increase confidence in community sentences. In 2008-09, only 820 of 6,700 custodial sentences (12 per cent) were recommended in Pre-sentence Reports, indicating that sentencers do not agree that community sentences are appropriate for some offenders. At the same time, custody rates vary considerably between local authorities, even after basic differences, such as that between urban and rural areas, are controlled for. Amongst England's eight 'core cities',<sup>9</sup> for instance, the proportion of young offenders sentenced to custody in 2008-09 ranged from 2 per cent (Newcastle) to 12 per cent (Liverpool).

**2.17** Due to the cost of custodial detention, reductions in the use of custody can realise major savings. Although falls in youth custody levels have been relatively recent, the population of young people in custody was relatively stable prior to this during a period when the number of adults in custody continued to rise. For example, using the Board's published figures for the average cost of different types of establishment, we calculated that had youth custody levels risen in line with those of adults between April 2005 and April 2010, at least an extra £70 million of costs would have been incurred (Figure 13).

### Figure 13

Custody numbers and potential extra costs, 2005-10

	Young Offender Institutions	Secure Training Centres	Local Authority Secure Children's Homes
Population April 2005	2,240	227	226
Population April 2010	1,767	255	161
Potential April 2010 population if trend had followed adults	2,563	260	259
Stated average cost per place	£60,000	£160,000	£215,000
Potential costs avoided	£47,760,000	£800,000	£21,070,000
<b>Total</b>			<b>£69,630,000</b>

#### NOTE

1 Costs are as stated by the Youth Justice Board, but are not compiled on the same basis for all types of establishment.

Source: National Audit Office

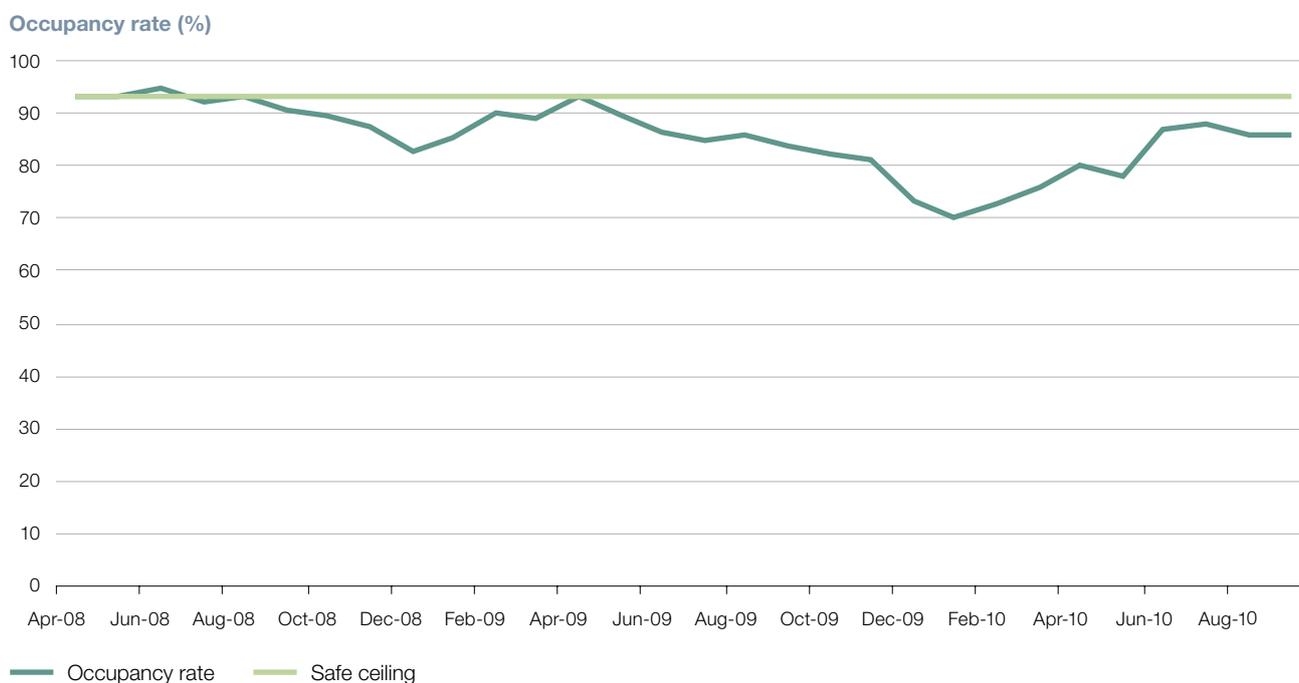
9 These are the eight regional capitals, excluding London: Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, and Sheffield.

**2.18** Reductions in custody numbers have the scope to release cash, because existing custodial spaces can be decommissioned. Decommissioning is not straightforward: to make savings whole wings or establishments need to be shut, and movements of offenders have to be handled carefully to avoid destabilisation and reduce the risk of disruption to sentence plans. There must also be some confidence that downward trends will not be reversed as, once closed, secure establishments cannot easily be reopened.

**2.19** Nonetheless, the Board could have been better prepared to begin the process of decommissioning, thereby realising savings sooner. The Board operates on the assumption that 93 per cent occupancy is a safe ceiling for the custodial estate. Although decommissioning immediately in line with falls is neither practical nor appropriate, according to provisional data during 2009-10 the average occupancy rate was 82 per cent, meaning an average of 374 places below the safe limit were unused (**Figure 14**). The Board did, however, decommission 710 places between February and August 2010, and has estimated savings arising from this will be £30 million per year. The most recent provisional data shows occupancy rates above 85 per cent.

**Figure 14**

Occupancy rates in secure facilities for young people, 2009-10



**NOTE**

1 Occupancy rates are based on counts at the end of each calendar month.

Source: National Audit Office Analysis of Youth Justice Board Data

## Assessing and planning for prevention work

**2.20** In contrast to work with offenders, the population of young people to be targeted for preventative activity is not clearly defined. Youth Offending Teams and other local partners must, therefore, identify which young people to work with. Most practitioners take a pragmatic approach to this, targeting known problem neighbourhoods, the siblings of existing young offenders, and young people involved in anti-social behaviour.

**2.21** Research by the Board in 2005 found that around a fifth of all young people were affected by the risk factors most closely identified with the onset of offending.<sup>10</sup> However, more recent analysis by the Ministry, shows that only 2 per cent of males and 0.6 per cent of females between the ages of 10-17 inclusive had a criminal record.<sup>11</sup> This means that it is very difficult to identify which young people who are 'at risk' are actually likely to offend in the future, as the majority will not. Practitioners aim to identify young people at risk of committing offences using similar criteria as for convicted offenders, allocating resources and formulating plans of action as a result. Although identifying which individuals may become offenders is extremely difficult, this approach offers a good basis for achieving value for money with prevention work.

**2.22** The Youth Crime Action Plan made it difficult for practitioners to spend resources in line with need, by allocating the same amount of funding to 69 Local Authorities, irrespective of their specific characteristics or the demand for prevention work. During 2009-10 and 2010-11, it paid a flat rate of £700,000 to each area (£48 million in total), even though the level of need – measured by the number of first time entrants – was 15 times greater in some areas than others.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.yjb.gov.uk/Publications/Resources/Downloads/Risk%20Factors%20Summary%20fv.pdf>, p.8.

<sup>11</sup> *Conviction histories of offenders*, 2010, <http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/docs/criminal-histories-bulletin.pdf>

# Part Three

## Having an impact

**3.1** The aim of the youth justice system is to prevent offending. To achieve this, it needs to reduce the number of young people who commit crime in the first place, and reduce the amount of reoffending by those already convicted. This part of the report examines evidence for the effectiveness of the youth justice system's work with young offenders, and the impact of prevention work.

### Work with offenders

**3.2** Efforts to reduce the likelihood of reoffending focus on assessed risk factors. **Figure 15** overleaf shows the degree to which offenders exhibited these factors in 2007-08, the most recent year for which data are available.

**3.3** Tackling risk factors accounts for most of the time that Youth Offending Teams spend with young offenders, and is also a major component of life in secure establishments. The detailed content of sentences is laid out in the sentence plan, but, at a high level, there are two main approaches:

- Reconnecting young offenders with mainstream services.
- Addressing their behavioural and attitudinal problems.

**3.4** In terms of reconnecting young offenders with mainstream services, efforts focus on connections to education and accommodation bodies, social work departments and substance misuse programmes. To be successful, such work requires strong interagency relationships, and there is evidence across much of the youth justice system that this is the case. According to the Board's 2010 Youth Justice Performance Improvement Framework, 75 per cent of Youth Offending Teams had good or excellent strategic relationships for providing access to other universal and specialist services. However, arrangements between Youth Offending Teams and Children's Services at local authority vary, and research by the Board in 2010 found there was inconsistency regarding the point at which support would be provided. This meant that some young people could have been helped with their needs prior to committing offences rather than afterwards.

**3.5** In terms of addressing behavioural and attitudinal problems, efforts are led by practitioners themselves, and focus on group interventions and one-to-one assistance. National Standards govern the level of contact required by young offenders serving different sentences and guidance is available from the Board and others on how to design interventions.

**Figure 15**

Incidence of risk factors amongst young offenders, 2007-08

Risk factor	Percentage for whom risk is assessed as significant		
	Custodial Sentences (%)	Community Penalties (%)	Final Warnings (%)
Thinking and behaviour	91	73	55
Lifestyle	87	60	32
Attitudes to offending	77	47	23
Family and personal relationships	73	50	23
Education, training and employment	68	46	26
Motivation to change	67	33	12
Substance use	63	39	15
Perception of self and others	57	30	12
Living arrangements	57	31	10
Neighbourhood	50	26	12
Emotional and mental health	47	31	13
Physical health	11	6	3

**NOTE**

1 On the zero to four scale, scores of two or more are counted as significant.

Source: Asset data, Youth Justice Board

**3.6** However, Youth Offending Teams and custodial establishments are largely free to decide the type and content of these interventions themselves. In practice, this means that different teams run different interventions that seek to address common issues, such as anger management, impulsivity management, victim awareness and teaching skills for independent living. Many of the examples of these interventions that we observed during fieldwork visits were interesting and innovative, but there is no system-wide quality control of these. Youth Offending Teams were developing their own interventions based on available information from the Board, their local authorities, and other sources. While this assists a flexible approach in dealing with local offending issues, it risks poor value for money as lessons learned from delivery of interventions at other teams may not be well disseminated, and errors and poor practice may be repeated. Even the Intensive Surveillance and Supervision requirement, for which the Board provides over £30 million annually, has almost no specified content. As discussed below, there is also a lack of information about which of these interventions are effective and which are not.

## Measuring effectiveness

**3.7** Overall, evidence from the 69 Core Case Inspections completed by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation to date indicates that practitioners deliver the content of sentences as planned in 77 per cent of cases. However, this is not in itself evidence of effectiveness, which can be gauged in two ways:

- By measuring whether the specific risk factors they address are decreasing.
- By evaluating the impact on reoffending.

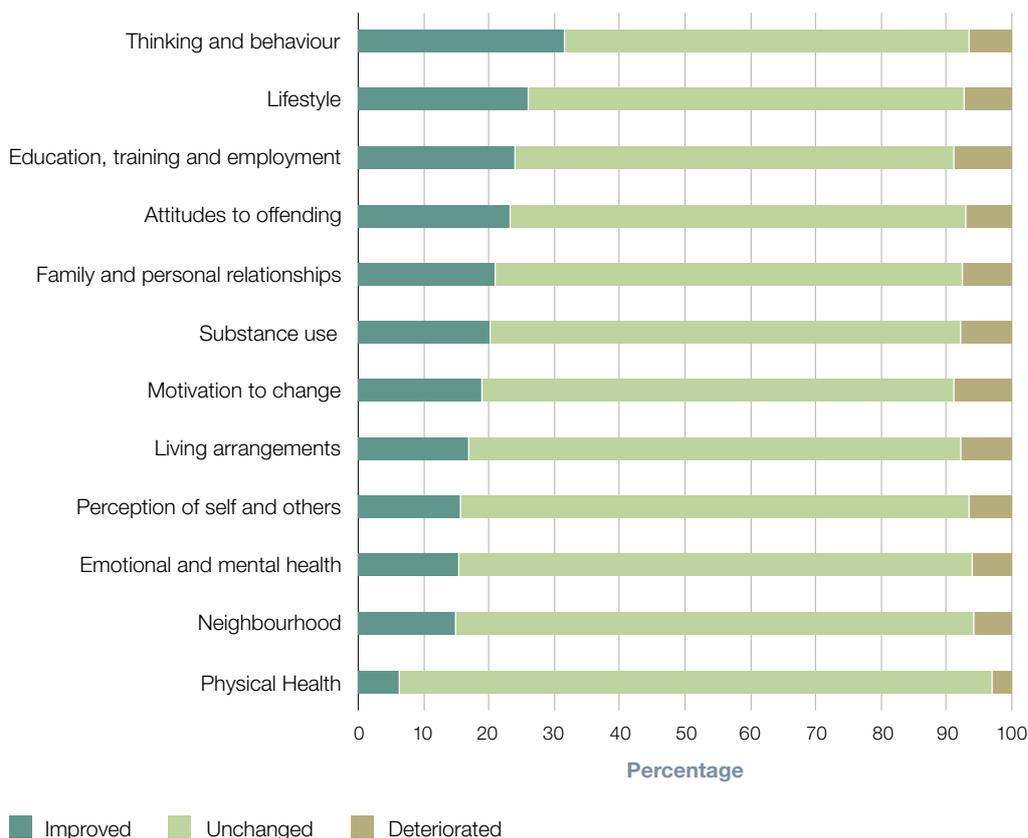
**3.8** To ascertain whether specific risks have been addressed, practitioners typically repeat Asset assessments at the end of sentences and compare the scores with those at the start. Reducing the risk factors that make young people more likely to offend is difficult, and in many cases Youth Offending Teams are unable to improve these during the course of a sentence, or the risks worsen in a small minority of cases (**Figure 16** overleaf).

**3.9** In terms of reducing reoffending, the evidence for effectiveness is also mixed. The proportion of young people who reoffend after being convicted has fallen since 2000 from 40 per cent to 37 per cent in 2008, and the number of offences these individuals subsequently commit has also fallen by 25 per cent. However, the proportion of young people who offend after being sentenced to more serious community sentences or being released from custody – those who have most contact with practitioners and consume the bulk of youth justice spending – have either worsened or stayed largely stable, respectively. The proportion who reoffend after leaving custody has reduced by only 2 per cent since 2000, while, for those on more serious community sentences, it has actually increased by 6 per cent.

**3.10** Very little is known about the relative effectiveness of interventions. Although the youth justice system has been operating in its current form for over a decade, and in spite of the variety of approaches, Government stakeholders and academics have published little research recently into which interventions work best and there is almost no information about relative cost.

**3.11** A number of factors outside practitioners' control can impact on the behaviour of young people, making it difficult to assess the effectiveness of interventions. The Board has not conducted randomised control trials, the most robust evaluations, due to considerable logistical and ethical barriers. The most ambitious recent research conducted is the Juvenile Cohort Study, a project co-sponsored by the Ministry and the Board at a cost of £1.3 million. Whilst this study is not a randomised trial or an evaluation, it has the potential to provide useful analysis on the type of young people going through the CJS, the nature of the interventions they received, and their risk of reoffending. Outputs from the study are expected to be available from 2011 onwards, slightly later than the original planned timing of late 2010.

**Figure 16**  
Changes to risk factors during community and custodial sentences, 2007-08



**NOTE**

1 Not all risk factors can, or should be expected, to improve. Fifty-eight per cent of risk factors assessed at the start of community and custodial sentences in 2007-08 were scored at zero or one, indicating no or a low impact on offending behaviour. It would not be cost-effective to target resources at addressing these risk factors. Data was not available to compensate for this in our analysis.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Board data

**3.12** Research producing inconclusive or negative results has not led always to significant reforms to programmes. Most importantly in 2005, although the Board’s evaluation of Intensive Surveillance and Supervision found encouraging results in terms of reoffending by participants and improvements to risk factors, it did not lead to better outcomes than alternative approaches, and could not find evidence that it had appreciably reduced custodial levels where it had been offered. The Board did use the lessons learned from this evaluation to support Youth Offending Teams in making improvements to delivery and conducting quality assurance checks, but the effectiveness has not yet been re-evaluated. More details on the Board’s role in research are in Part Four.

## Prevention work

**3.13** Traditionally, the evidence base for prevention work has been less good than for work with offenders. The Board has sought to remedy this in the last decade by commissioning a number of studies. The latest of these, a Prevention Cohort Study, is due to report in 2011.

**3.14** Available evidence suggests that both the Youth Crime Action Plan programmes and the Board's work have had some success. For instance, in the 69 priority areas the number of first time entrants fell by 27.5 per cent between 2008-09 and 2009-10, compared to a 19.5 per cent fall in the other areas in England. It is too early, though, to tell whether this will be a sustained trend. More generally, however, evaluations are yet to identify which of the activities that make up the content of these programmes are driving reductions and which are not. Since prevention work is discretionary, unlike work with offenders, the lack of evidence about the effectiveness of specific interventions may mean that funding is at risk in future, despite the strong overall 'spend to save' arguments. In our survey, 92 per cent of Youth Offending teams agreed that there was already too little stability in prevention funding.

# Part Four

## The performance of the Board

**4.1** This part of the report examines the Board's specific contribution to the developments described already, and to the operation of the youth justice system more generally. The central role of the Board gives it considerable power to drive the achievement of value for money in the youth justice system through leading improvements in practice and making system reforms.

### System reform

**4.2** Between 2006 and 2009, the Board took the lead in designing and implementing the most significant reform to the youth justice system since 1998: the creation of the Scaled Approach and the introduction of the Youth Rehabilitation Order. Though it is too early to say if these measures will be successful, we found that the Board had:

- conducted detailed analysis and piloting before introducing the new measures; and
- consulted widely with practitioners, offered training and advertised the likely impact of the changes well in advance.

On our visits to Youth Offending Teams, caseworkers told us that the training had been good. The Board piloted risk-based approaches in four Youth Offending Teams, testing variations in approaches. The lessons learnt from a process evaluation of the pilots, and from wider consultation, were used to develop the final Scaled Approach model. A second phase outcome evaluation of the pilots will be published in 2011.

### Reducing the level of offending and use of custody

**4.3** Outcomes in youth justice have been mixed since the inception of the Board. While the proportion of young offenders who receive more serious community and custodial sentences and subsequently reoffend has increased, the volume of further offences of which they are convicted has fallen. The number of first time entrants in 2010 to the youth justice system is the lowest recorded since 2001. The number of offences for which young people are convicted is now at the lowest level recorded since Youth Offending Teams began collecting this data in 2002-03, although some types of offences have not fallen or have increased.

**4.4** Due to its role overseeing the system, and the difficulties in isolating the causes for these changes, it is difficult to establish the extent to which the Board has contributed to these changes. However, as this report details, we consider that the Board has played a central role in the reductions in custody described in Part Two, particularly through introducing alternatives and assisting Youth Offending Teams in explaining how these may be more suitable for some offenders. Prevention programmes funded by the Board since 2005, and its general work in improving practice within the system, may also have contributed to the reduction in first time entrants to the system, and offences committed by those who have already entered it.

### **Performance monitoring**

**4.5** The Board has been criticised in the past for requiring too much information from Youth Offending Teams and custodial establishments about their performance. In 2008, the Lifting the Burdens Task Force found that Youth Offending Teams were required to provide more than 3,000 data items to the Board each year. The Board has since changed its approach and reduced the amount of data requested, although our survey of Youth Offending Teams found that almost half wanted further reductions in these requirements so that they could spend more time working with young people.

**4.6** In addition to its continuing targeted audit of the compliance of Youth Offending Teams with National Standards, in 2009-10 the Board introduced a new approach to monitoring performance, the Youth Justice Performance Improvement Framework. We reviewed this framework and found that although it provided good coverage of Youth Offending Team's activities, it could not demonstrate how performance in these activities translated into real world impacts such as reducing the number of first time entrants. Although the views of Youth Offending Teams responding to our survey were mixed on the framework, many disputed whether it could appropriately measure performance and stated that it required substantial time and senior management involvement to complete.

**4.7** To test whether the Framework's measurement of process efficiency was a good proxy for the effectiveness of Youth Offending Teams' work, we compared the performance of the top- and bottom-rated teams in National Indicators for reducing reoffending, custody and first time entrants. The results were surprising, showing that the top ten teams for process efficiency performed significantly worse on outcomes than the bottom ten. Whilst not necessarily invalidating the Framework, this is yet more evidence of the knowledge gap about what makes for effective practice.

## Research and guidance

**4.8** Operating at the centre of the youth justice system, the Board has a unique opportunity to conduct its own research into effectiveness and to disseminate good practice to practitioners. Indeed, this is its statutory responsibility. In recent years, however, it has carried out little research into the effectiveness of interventions, focusing instead on how to improve processes and on prevention work, and limiting itself to the publication of guidance on the high-level principles of effective practice. The *Safeguarding the Future* review in 2010 found that the Board needed to be more explicit about effective interventions, and recommended, among other measures, that it specify the twenty that are most cost-effective. The Board is currently considering new approaches to improving effective practice in conjunction with the Ministry.

**4.9** Between 2005-06 and 2009-10, the Board spent £6.7 million on research and evaluation, equivalent to an average of 8 per cent of its core running costs, or less than 0.5 per cent of total expenditure by the Board (**Figure 17**). However, little research published between 2006 and 2009 focused on evaluating the outcomes of interventions with offenders, concentrating instead more on processes (**Figure 18**).

**4.10** We heard from practitioners that they felt the lack of research keenly. Although many say that they find the high-level Key Elements of Effective Practice booklets the Board published in 2008 helpful, and some also use its Directory of Emerging Practice, the majority want more practical guidance. Of the 105 Youth Offending Teams who answered our survey, 86 per cent said the majority of programmes they implemented matched their understanding of best practice, 76 per cent said it was difficult to find evidence of 'what works' for certain areas of their work and only 50 per cent said the information disseminated by the Board had a convincing evidence base.

**4.11** In mid-2009, the Board identified serious failings in the management of its research and publications teams, which partly explained why there was a reduction in published research. A literature review about behaviour management at custodial establishments costing £35,000 was not published due to delays reducing its relevance. The Board instead published a short report on the experiences of practitioners.

**4.12** The Board has now brought in new staff and has recently developed stronger working links with the Analytical Services Directorate at the Ministry. It has recently published a number of delayed pieces of research. Fifteen further studies have been commissioned and are due to be completed during 2011 and 2012. Some of these will be focused on the impact of interventions, and with the Juvenile Cohort Study co-sponsored by the Ministry and the Board, this will provide more useful information to youth justice practitioners to inform practice and the use of resources.

**Figure 17**

The Board's spending on research, 2005-06 to 2009-10

Year	YJB Core Budget (£000)	Research & Evaluation (£000)	Core budget (%)
2005-06	13,807	933	6.8
2006-07	15,103	1,472	9.7
2007-08	16,281	1,861	11.4
2008-09	19,206	1,232	6.4
2009-10	19,849	1,182	6.0

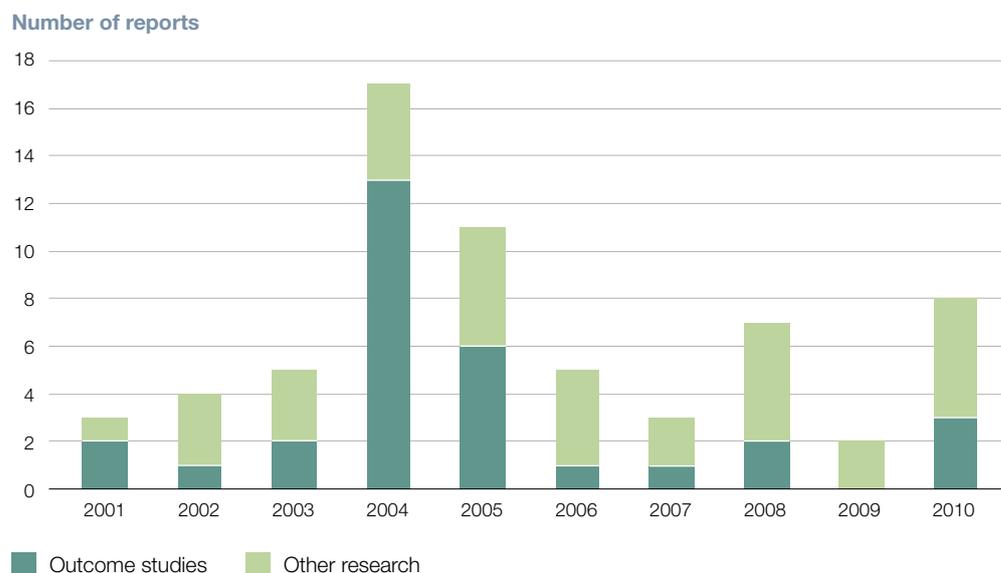
**NOTES**

- 1 In this analysis, YJB Core Budget is defined as staffing and administration costs, not including non-cash items or staff costs for research staff.
- 2 Research and evaluation is not part of the YJB's Core Budget in the above analysis.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Youth Justice Board data

**Figure 18**

Number of research reports published by the Youth Justice Board, 2001-10



Source: National Audit Office

# Appendix One

## Methodology

Fieldwork occurred between May and August 2010. Below is an overview of our study methods, with more detail available at [www.nao.org.uk/Youth-Justice-2010](http://www.nao.org.uk/Youth-Justice-2010)

Method	Description
Analysis of published data	Primarily data on offending by young people, on their characteristics and on the performance of the system.
Document review	Including published and unpublished research on youth justice and policy papers.
Survey of Youth Offending Teams	Two-stage qualitative and quantitative survey of 157 Youth Offending Teams. 83 responded to the first stage and 105 to the second.
Visits	Including six Youth Offending Teams (Birmingham, Bury, Gloucester, Hackney, Newport and South Tyneside) and one Young Offenders Institution (Hindley), interviewing staff and young offenders and observing interventions.
Interviews	Primarily with staff from the Ministry of Justice and Youth Justice Board, but also the Department for Education, Inspectorates, the Magistrates Association and voluntary organisations.
Cohort Analysis	Analysis of 83,000 records from the Police National Computer, representing 94 per cent of juvenile first time offenders in 2000.
Process Mapping and Costing	High-level mapping of the youth justice system to understand its operation and direct our audit fieldwork, and estimation of the cost of indicative disposals received by young offenders.







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