

Supporting information for the YOS education audit tool

Introduction

Young people in the youth justice system are much more likely than their peers to have poor experiences of education. They may have literacy, numeracy or communication difficulties, or have encountered exclusions or absenteeism. However, research suggests that supporting young people to achieve in education can have a positive impact in their offending behaviour, and the Youth Justice Board (YJB) states that 'engagement in ETE (education, training and employment) may be a key factor in reducing offending and re-offending' (2006). Staff in Youth Offending Services (YOSs) throughout England and Wales work very hard to support these young people to achieve in education, and they have a target that 90% of young offenders are in suitable full-time (25 hours per week) ETE. However, there is little guidance on how YOSs should go about achieving this aim.

With this in mind, the YOS education audit tool has been designed to allow YOSs to identify their strengths and needs with regards to how they support the education of their young people. The tool is divided into the following seven areas:

Good leadership and management of education

High quality assessment and identification of needs

Delivery of and access to appropriate education provision

Well-developed transition and monitoring arrangements

Specific help for vulnerable young people

Good working relationships with others

Staff who are skilled and have opportunities for development

Across these seven areas, a total of 27 individual markers of good practice have been identified. These items were developed from the research that exists about what may work in the education of young people in the youth

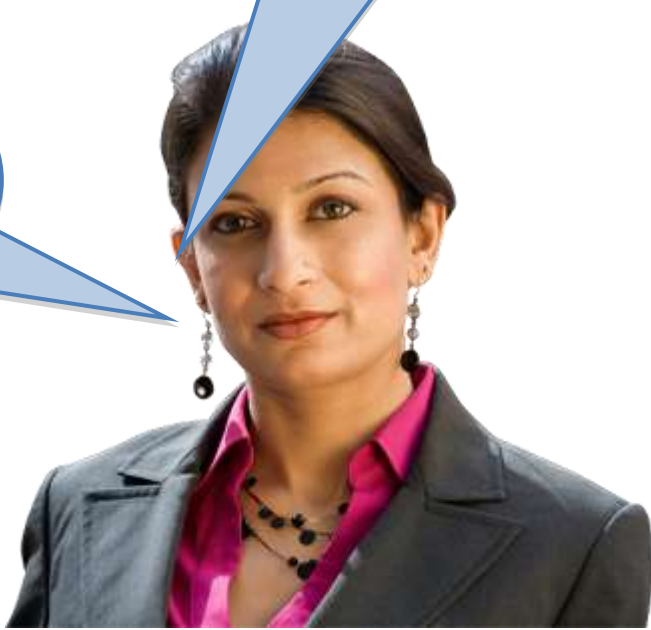
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justice system¹. The tool was also informed by a series of interviews, which were conducted with staff from an Inner London YOS about the strengths and needs they face in their work². Each of the 27 items within the tool is outlined below, with supporting evidence for its inclusion.

PART 1: GOOD LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF EDUCATION

This section highlights which aspects of YOS management are suggested in research in the staff interviews to be good practice.

1. The management team and/or education lead practitioner ensure education is kept high on the agenda within the YOS. Education is included within the YOS's strategic annual plan.



"I think [the YOS has helped my young person by] making [education] a priority, so it's always part of the plan to look at what's happening"

"...and I think education is becoming higher up on the caseworkers' agendas now, in that they're starting to value it more, and see the importance of young people going."

¹ Examples from research are indicated by a box.

² Extracts from staff interviews are illustrated by a speech bubble.

2. The education of individual young people is regularly discussed and reflected upon in line management supervision.

A paper by Taylor (2014) explored content and level of reflection in the supervision of youth offending service practitioners. The findings suggested that whilst supervision was well-embedded, it largely focused on the management function (ie. completing tasks and paperwork) and there was a lack of reflective supervision. The study also raised concerns about the how much impact such a style of supervision may have on practitioners.

3. A written protocol is in place for partnership working between the YOS and education partners such as the Educational Psychology Service, and reviewed annually.

The Youth Justice Board (2006) found in one study that there was a lack of agreed protocols between agencies, or that they were ineffective or may not be followed. This can lead to a lack of clarity with regard to working relationships, and Jamieson (2006) found that trainee Educational Psychologists working with different agencies experienced tension regarding the differing timescales, expectations etc. of the various services. One participant in a study by Talbot (2010) said 'If I had a magic wand, top managers would secure service level agreements for mental health and learning disabilities' (p. 57).

PART 2: HIGH QUALITY ASSESSMENT AND IDENTIFICATION OF NEEDS

This section considers the evidence regards to ensuring educational needs are identified by the YOS and its partners.

4. Within the first six weeks of an Order, the YOS has a clear assessment of each young person's educational needs in place, which is reviewed regularly

"There's another kid that I'm working with and he hasn't been assessed, in the slightest. And you can tell within 10 seconds of meeting the kid, that 'you do have some form of learning difficulties.' There's no doubt about it."

It was suggested by Loucks (2007) that 20-30% of adult prisoners had a learning disability or similar impairment. However, Stephenson (2006) suggested that ASSETs indicate that staff often under-estimate how far behind young people may be in relation to their peers. In her survey of YOS staff, Talbot (2010) reported that several participants recommended early and better identification of children with difficulties, including screening at the point of arrest, at the start of orders and while children were still at school.

5. To inform assessment, current and historical information about each young person is sought from the LA education dept, relevant education providers and the Educational Psychology Service at the beginning of an order.

"Well, it's really helpful to get those initial, kind of, background, sort of, information, because it just helps to have a sense of how the young person has engaged at school. And if they're at school, you know, how often are they going in, kind of thing."



The YJB concluded in 2006 that YOSs often receive poor information about the education situation of young people, hampering effective assessment of need. Furthermore in a survey of YOS staff by Talbot (2010), some participants said they do not receive information from SEN departments, or that it is often difficult or time-consuming to get.

6. Detailed educational information is provided to courts within pre-sentence reports. This includes information from a range of sources, as above.

Ball and Connolly (2000) analysed PSRs, and concluded that 'educational information...was sparse and often uninformative' and that 'educational situations were couched in terms that could best be described as vague, euphemistic or possibly misleading' (p. 601).

PART 3: DELIVERY OF AND ACCESS TO APPROPRIATE EDUCATION PROVISION

Part 3 relates to the evidence and views of staff in relation to what effective education for young offenders looks like.

7. Pathway plans are in place for each young person and include an education element where appropriate. They explain how YOS intervention may be tailored to meet individual needs, and include the views and interests of the young person.

The Ministry of Justice (2013) discusses the importance of interventions being matched to risks and needs, and cited previous research, which suggested this was not always the case. For example, a study by HMI Probation et. al in 2011 found that thorough assessments 'did not always lead to clear planning and delivery of the right interventions with the right individuals in the right way at the right time (p.3).

8. The YOS provides appropriate targeted, ongoing careers advice to young people who are post-16, which is incorporated into Pathway Plans and reviewed 3-monthly.

Stephenson (2006) noted that many young people aged 16-18 experience multiple training or employment placements and spend significant amounts of time completely detached, but this is not always picked up by services



"The majority of our post-16's are NEET, so about 50%, um, and so she [the careers advisor] is very very stretched in the amount of support she can provide."

"They tend to be, kind of, 16, like, coming up, so I've been getting young people now who should be sitting their GCSEs this year. So it's the real, real tail end of statutory schooling and then up to 18. And once they're finished with statutory school, forget education. Forget it. There's no duress on them to do it beyond their order. So...and services aren't as, they're not as concerned. That's the truth of it, you know. There aren't the repercussions on services to make sure that people post 16 are in education. So choices are limited."

9. YOS staff support and advocate for young people in education with the aim of reducing the risk of disengagement or exclusion.

“We then accompanied him to his interviews and went to the admissions panel to advocate on his behalf, act as a reference um, and since he’s been in college, we are....we’re speaking to him...we’ve seen him once and spoken to him two or three times this week, his first week, just to make sure he’s ok and he’s settling in.”



10. Whilst taking into account individual need, where appropriate, the YOS prioritises access to educational programmes which develop numeracy, literacy, and employable skills rather than focusing on internal states such as self-esteem.

In 1995, Lipsey looked at all the available research into ‘what works’ in the education of young offenders. He concluded that improvements in academic performance were related to a reduction in offending. Furthermore, Brazier, Hurry and Wilson concluded in 2010 that improvements in literacy and numeracy were had a positive impact on offending behaviour, and were particularly effective when the learning was embedded in real-life activities.

11. Any education provided within the YOS targets literacy and numeracy and is tailored as much as possible to the interests and goals of the young person.

“But there’s lots of, you know, sort of, stuff available for them. It’s just finding something that they’re interested in, something they’re willing to go to. Something they’re willing to travel to, and where they can go.”

PART 4: WELL-DEVELOPED TRANSITION AND MONITORING ARRANGEMENTS

Frequent moves between custody and the community, care placements or schools have been identified as a barrier to young people making progress in education.

12. Effective transition arrangements are in place for all young people moving between education providers, geographical areas, between adult and children's services or between the secure estate and the community.

“Also the fact that a lot of youngsters who are in care, looked after, then moved around so many times and that really causes a lot of disruption to their education. You know, sometimes I'm just amazed. There is a young boy now who I think has been to at least six different education. And sadly most of them he hasn't lasted that as well. But also he's been moved from different parts of the country, yeah, yeah.”

The YJB's review of 'Keeping Young People Engaged' in 2007 stated that 'transition documents' were a model of good practice. However, they acknowledged there is still a need for better information sharing between YOSs and the secure estate.

13. The YOS regularly monitors the educational progress and attendance of the young people through contact with providers.



“We look at attendance, punctuality, how they engage with peers, how they engage with members of staff, has there been a change? And we use that as a monitoring process.”

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14. The YOS has a clear policy in place for a fast response when a young person ceases attending a provision or becomes NEET, which includes systems for education, training and employment providers to notify them if a placement breaks down or there are attendance difficulties.

“It’s attendance, is our biggest, biggest problem. And I think by the time they get to us they haven’t been attending for some time.”

“He just stopped going because he doesn’t like it at all, he finds it very boring and that’s it. He doesn’t say what he doesn’t like, he just says he finds it boring.”



PART 5: SPECIFIC HELP FOR VULNERABLE YOUNG PEOPLE

Issues such as anxiety and stigma have been raised by participants in this study, and in other research.

15. The YOS delivers or has access to intervention to help young people to manage anxiety in relation to education.

“He has such anxiety around it that even a couple of weeks ago his caseworker tried to get a careers advisor to go to his house and meet with him. He got so anxious about that prospect that he actually punched his way through a glass door and ran away. Um, because he was just...the thought of anything to do with education was so overwhelming for him.”

16. The YOS has strategies in place to challenge the stigma young offenders may experience in the educational environment.

In their review of 'Keeping Young People Engaged,' Cooper, Sutherland and Roberts found that staff reported education providers demonstrated negative attitudes towards young people who have committed offences.

"And that's something that I've experienced, that he was treated...like, they would bring up the fact that he had a ref...that he was involved in the YOT and they would...as a means to punish him in school."

"I just think, I think the stigma attached to our client group is probably one of our biggest issues."



17. The YOS has systems in place to support young people with a statement of SEN or EHCP accessing appropriate provision whilst in custody.

The Special Educational Needs and Disability codes of practice (2015) states that if a young person has an EHCP and is detained, they MUST receive appropriate provision whilst in custody.

PART 6: GOOD WORKING RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS

Working relationships were generally seen as a strength by the participants in the study.

18. Young people and parents/carers are regularly consulted in relation to education provision.

Research suggests that the involvement of parents/carers in young peoples' education is a significant factor in strengthening attachment to school and learning (Stephenson, 2006). The involvement of parents/carers and the young people themselves in decision-making is also a key tenet of the SEND Codes of Practice (2014).

19. The YOS has developed relationships with education, training and employment providers and has systems in place for communicating with them.

"Yep, [staff in education providers are] really good. We have a lot of safeguarding meetings around gangs and stuff like that, so we'll go in and talk to them. But the work...face to face, they're brilliant, a lot of them, really really good. Like, really experienced."

In their review of 'Keeping Young People Engaged, Cooper, Sutherland and Roberts concluded that good working relationships were a key to the success of the projects.

20. The YOS supports parents/carers to reduce any barriers they may experience in relation to education.

"I think families don't...some of the families I work with haven't necessarily excelled in education themselves, the parents. So they might not be as motivated to, to encourage their children to go to school when they're not going."



“...the YOS education panel, which has got the head of alternative provision, representatives from the PRU, [the family intervention team] and children’s social care, education welfare service, looked after, the virtual school. So all of those, kind of, people overseeing the education of our young people.”

21. YOS staff are represented on multi-agency panels in relation to education.

In their Key Elements of Effective Practice: Education, Training and Employment document (2008), the YJB identified that information sharing protocols should be developed.

22. The YOS has a policy in place for the sharing of information, for example to support education providers in managing risk.

23. The YOS has established relationships with the Speech and Language Therapy service to support young people accessing the service.

“I did some work with [name] the speech and language therapist and she did some assessment on the young person around her communication and she wasn’t really able to, like...if she was annoyed or anything her reaction was, like, to shout and whatever at, like, school. So it was quite helpful to do that assessment around her communication, because [the speech and language therapist] can identify how professionals can support the young person and then that was shared with them, with the girl’s school.”

Bryan, Freer and Furling (2007) found that 66-90% of a sample of young people in custody had below average language skills, with 46-67% being classed as poor or very poor.

24. The YOS has established relationships with the Educational Psychology service to support young people accessing the service. YOS staff have direct access to an EP.

In her 2013 study, Wyton interviewed YOS staff and they reported that they would find direct access to an EP helpful. This led her to pilot some staff consultations, which were received positively by the YOS team. She also found that staff lacked confidence regarding their knowledge of special educational needs.

PART 7: STAFF WHO ARE SKILLED AND HAVE OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

Part 7 considers issues which have been raised with regards to the skills staff may need to successfully support the education of the young people known to the YOS.

25. YOS staff have a clear understanding of the role of Educational Psychologists.



“I’m not really sure [about the role of the EP], is the honest truth. Apart from, um, doing special educational needs statements, I don’t really know. I haven’t had much contact with educational psychologists.”

26. YOS staff and panel members have received training in relation to the types of Special Educational Needs which commonly affect young offenders.

As well as Wyton's study mentioned above, Talbot (2010) found that only 23% of YOS staff surveyed reported that there was a member of staff 'qualified' in special educational needs on their team.

The YJB (2006) found that many staff in secondary schools and further education lack sufficient knowledge about youth justice and working with young offenders.

27. Systems are in place for key education providers to receive training in youth justice and how to meet the learning needs of young people who offend.

For a full list of references, please refer to the audit tool itself.