

Have you got what it takes?

Working with the youth justice system

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Important facts

The youth justice system in England and Wales is a network of organisations working together under a legal framework and overseen by the Youth Justice Board. However, commissioning youth justice services in the community is dealt with at a local level.

Since the peak in 2006/2007:

- **youth crime (proven offences) is down by 40%;**
- **numbers of under-18 first-time entrants coming into the youth justice system are down by 59%; and**
- **the average percentage in custody under the age of 18 has fallen by 30%.**

The National Audit Office estimates that, in 2009, offending by young people cost the UK economy between £8.5 and £11 billion a year. Around one-third of young people re-offend.

Intervening early to prevent children from offending is more effective than dealing with the consequences of that offending. This is because the patterns of behaviour become well established and costs will be high.

The aim is for safer local communities, and for young people at risk of re-offending to be less likely to be tempted.

Background

Youth Justice Board

The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (YJB) works closely with youth offending teams (YOTs). The Board oversees and supports the performance of the youth justice system in line with its main aim, which is to prevent children and young people from offending.

The YJB provides national co-ordination, guidance and monitoring of locally managed YOT partnerships. It advises Ministers on the operation of the youth justice system and identifies and promotes effective practice. It is also responsible for commissioning (contracting) secure accommodation for young people who have been sentenced or remanded by the courts. It is a non-departmental public body (NDPB) created by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. The Ministry of Justice is the YJB's sponsor department.

Youth offending teams

YOTs are a partnership of organisations (including the police) with a legal responsibility to prevent offending and reduce re-offending. They are overseen by a management board usually chaired by a senior official within the local authority. It is the duty of every local authority, acting with partner agencies, to set up one or more teams for their area.

Police and crime commissioners have a duty to cooperate with other organisations in terms of criminal justice and reducing crime and disorder (Section 10 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011). Youth offending teams are included in this list of criminal justice bodies.

The YJB has worked with YOTs to develop a wide range of evidence-based youth-crime prevention programmes, alongside national and local partners such as the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), local authorities and charities.

The way the teams have been rolled out and developed has been recognised as a relatively successful model in terms of delivering a public service. There have been significant improvements in enforcing orders and holding young people to account, alongside work to improve access to services that can reduce the risk of re-offending. YOTs involve community volunteers in their work and have developed skills to connect with some of the hardest-to-reach young people.

More information

How are YOTs set up locally and how are they performing?

YOTs usually cover a single local authority area but there are some YOTs that cover two or more. The performance of the teams varies across England and Wales but overall performance is improving. The Youth Justice Board monitors the teams and encourages sector-led improvement. HMI Probation provides formal inspections of YOTs.

How are YOTs funded and who decides what they spend it on?

YOT funding comes from a range of different sources. In 2011/2012 the YJB provided £116 million to YOTs in England and Wales (about 30 to 40% of total YOT funding). The rest comes from local agencies, including the local authority and the police. Each YOT management board decides on local priorities and what they spend on them. They can use funding to commission services to reduce and prevent youth crime and antisocial behaviour.

What do YOTs do about antisocial behaviour?

YOTs work alongside local authorities and police to prevent antisocial behaviour by young people. They work to make sure young people keep to acceptable behaviour contracts (ABCs) and antisocial behaviour orders (ASBOs). They deliver

or commission targeted youth-crime prevention programmes such as Youth Inclusion and Support (YISP) and Positive Futures. These programmes provide support to help steer young people away from crime and antisocial behaviour. Many YOTs lead on providing or commissioning voluntary parenting interventions. These interventions support parents to help them recognise that family factors are strongly associated with managing a young person's risk of offending. In the hardest-to-reach families where parents will not agree to intervention voluntarily, YOTs will apply to a court for parenting orders.

How are young people placed in secure accommodation?

The YJB commissions secure places to stay for children and young people remanded and sentenced by the courts. They have developed a separate, distinct youth justice estate for children and young people including standards of care and regimes improved by stronger contracts with providers and specific investment in priority areas such as education and training, and substance misuse. The YJB holds contracts and service-level agreements for providing secure places in young offender institutions (YOIs), secure training centres (STCs) and secure children's homes (SCHs) across England and Wales. They can use funding to commission services to reduce and prevent youth crime and antisocial behaviour.

What do YOTs do about riots, serious youth violence and gangs?

YOTs work closely with the police and other local agencies to reduce serious youth violence, group and gang offending. In many areas this includes delivering the Knife Crime Prevention Programme (KCPP). Many YOTs hold and share information on gang links and this information can be shared with a secure establishment if a young person goes into custody. YOTs take part in YJB gang forums to share effective practice in reducing serious youth violence, including the victimisation of girls. During the riots in August 2011, a number of YOTs were actively involved in working with children to move them away from flash points and direct them to positive activities – this was effective as in some of these areas there were no riots.

More information

Youth Justice Board

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/youth-justice>

Youth Justice statistics for England and Wales published each year, Ministry of Justice statistics website publishes important youth justice statistics every three months
<http://www.justice.gov.uk/statistics/youth-justice/statistics>

The YOT Police Officer Review and Role Development – Joint advice from the YJB and the Association of Chief Police Officers
<http://www.acpo.police.uk/documents/children/2010/201011CYPYOT01.pdf>

HMI Probation inspects YOTs: <http://www.justice.gov.uk/about/hmi-probation/>