



The YJB Research Strategy

2006-08

Author: Nisha Patel

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Introduction

This paper outlines the 2006/07 – 2007/08 research strategy. In consideration of the 2007 Spending Review a two year research strategy is agreed. This will allow the strategy to look longer term in identifying research priorities. The strategy has been informed by an extensive consultation process, undertaken with SMT, Research Programme Board and academics, at the annual research seminar.

Priorities for the 2006/07 and 2007/08 strategy

According to the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, the statutory aim of the youth justice system is to ‘to prevent offending by children and young people’. The YJB’s function includes;

‘To identify, to make known and to promote good practice in the following matters namely-

1. the operation of the youth justice system and the provision of youth services
2. the prevention of offending by children and young people; and
3. working with children and young people who are or are at risk of becoming offenders;’

These principles, along with the requirement ‘to commission research in connection with such practice’ remain pivotal to the YJB’s research strategy, with the corporate plan targets continuing to inform the identification of future research priorities. The 2006/07 – 2007/08 research strategy will seek to assess the extent to which the youth justice system is reducing offending and the use of custody, improving outcomes for children and ensuring safe and appropriate use of custody. The YJBs research programme to date has sought to reflect both community and custodial policy and practice delivery. However the two year strategy will focus more than to date on strengthening the evidence base on what is known about the operation and impact of the secure estate. As with past research, future studies will continue to ensure that the views of minority ethnic young people, young women and victims figure significantly.

3. The research strategy will seek to continually inform the effective practice knowledge base of the Youth Justice System, through more robust research studies, supported with financial buy-in from internal directorates in the YJB, other government departments and external research organisations. Effective links have already been made across government (Home Office, Dfes, DoH) and with research agencies (JRF, ESRC, Nuffield, Dartington Trust) which has ensured there is a greater understanding of research being undertaken across the wider research community. The YJB traverses the gap between DfES, with responsibility for all children’s services and the Home Office with responsibility for the criminal justice system.

Therefore ongoing discussions will explore possible areas of sole or joint funding for future research, offering directorates within the YJB the opportunity to undertake research that is currently beyond the financial scope of the research budget.

4. The YJBs links with external research organisations and academics has been strengthened through its annual research seminar. The YJB held their third research seminar, which both academics and governments researchers attended, to consider the YJB's research priorities. In taking into account existing work, undertaken by government and external research agencies, the seminar provides the opportunity for additional areas requiring future research to be identified. This greatly informs the development of the YJBs yearly research strategy and this year's event held on 16th January provided an excellent forum for the proposed strategy to be discussed. This event was also supported by a methods seminar held July, aimed at exploring the various methodological designs required to answer key questions.

Budget

The YJB annual research budget is set at £1 million, a reduction from the initial £2 million previously set aside for research until 2005, which necessarily limits the scope of the proposed research programme. From ongoing research £395,000 has already been allocated from next year's budget. This includes the suggested £250k 2006-07 contribution from the YJB for the multi-modal cohort study. A significant amount of the budget, over the next two years, has been set aside to undertake an outcome study on the effectiveness of the secure estate. This reflects the YJB research programme's continued acknowledgement of the need to gather robust information on the role of secure establishments in reducing reoffending.

Next steps – 2006/7 – 2007/8

The research studies proposed have been informed by discussions with colleagues within the YJB and externally, with consideration also given to the corporate plan targets and identified gaps in evidence from available research. The research proposed seeks to strengthen the effective practice evidence base, enhancing the YJBs knowledge of youth crime prevention. In building on existing evidence this proposed two year strategy will provide further detail on the cost effectiveness of the system and a more informed knowledge of young people coming to the attention of youth justice agencies.

It is important that there is clear acknowledgement both within the YJB and externally, that the sole purpose of the research strategy is to fund research and not detailed data analysis. There has been some discussion in the past as to whether the research budget should fund any proposed enhanced data analysis of the YJBs performance data (in conjunction with other data sources). It has been agreed that this work falls outside the remit of the research strategy and that any issues in relation to data analysis will be covered by the ‘Data analysis project plan 2006/7-07/08’, which is being lead by Rakesh Gupta.

The following tables set out work proposed for 2006-08 and studies currently being undertaken and funded by both the research budget and other directorates in YJB.

Proposed future research priorities are set out in [Table A](#), with the aims, methodology and approximate costs specified. [Table B](#) provides details of ongoing work funded by the research budget and [Table C](#) sets out what research is being funded elsewhere in YJB.

Table A – 2006-07 - 2007-08 Research budget funded – new proposed studies

Corporate Plan Targets	Context	Project title	Key aims (in brief)	Type of study, methodology, Home Office research standards criteria
Target 2 – Reduce reoffending by young offenders	Enabling compliance	Effective engagement of young people in YJS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explore ‘who’ works in preventing and reducing offending, assessing the skills of staff? ▪ Explore the link between engagement and enforcement in reducing reoffending ▪ Map enforcement practices of Yots ▪ 	Process and Outcome. Level 4.
Target 2 - Reduce reoffending by young offenders Target 4 – Improving assessment and outcomes for children	Risk Management/Public protection	The needs of dangerous offenders and the ability of Yots and the secure estate to address these effectively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify the needs of specific groups of offenders ▪ Explore the means to which Yot and secure estate are addressing the needs of dangerous offenders ▪ Identify examples of 	Process/explorative study

Corporate Plan Targets	Context	Project title	Key aims (in brief)	Type of study, methodology, Home Office research standards criteria
			effective practice	
<p>Target 4 – Improving assessment and outcomes for children</p> <p>Target 5 – Reduce local differences by ethnicity in recorded conviction rates</p>	Promoting equality under race relations act.	The needs of minority ethnic young people and young women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Identify the needs of BME groups and young women ■ Explore the practices of Yots and secure estate in response to these needs 	Process – explorative study
<p>Target 1 – Reduce the number of first time entrants to the youth justice system</p> <p>Target 4 – Improving assessment and outcomes for children</p>	Assessment through ASSET and ONSET as the cornerstone of effective youth justice practice	Ongoing monitoring of ONSET and ASSET and implication of CAF on their use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Explore the validity and reliability of both ONSET and ASSET ■ Profile the characteristics and needs of young people assessed ■ Explore the link between assessment and interventions delivered ■ Assess the impact of practitioners use of ONSET and ASSET in light of CAF ■ Explore the use 	Process – includes qualitative and quantitative analysis

Corporate Plan Targets	Context	Project title	Key aims (in brief)	Type of study, methodology, Home Office research standards criteria
			of CAF locally, reviewing the implications of this on practice	
Target 2 - Reduce reoffending by young offenders Target 4 – Improving assessment and outcomes for children	Yots role in MAPPA/Public protection	Review of Yots links with MAPPA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Explore the implications of revisions made to risk of serious harm form on practice ■ Explore the links between Yots and MAPPA, and the sharing of information and impact made to practice 	Explorative, qualitative review on process
Target 2 - Reduce reoffending by young offenders Target 3 – Reduce the use of custody Target 4 – Improving assessment and outcomes for children Target 6 – safe and appropriate use of custody	Public Accounts Committee (PAC)	The cost effectiveness of secure estate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Identify characteristics of young people held in secure establishments ■ Explore the link between assessed need and provisions available in establishments ■ Map the contexts of regimes across establishments ■ Assess reconviction rates for those 	Process and outcome study (Level 4)– analysis of quantitative and qualitative data

Corporate Plan Targets	Context	Project title	Key aims (in brief)	Type of study, methodology, Home Office research standards criteria
			<p>released from different establishments according to services received in custody</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explore the links with Yots and secure estate in ensuring seamless supervision and provision of services for young people 	
<p>Target 2 - Reduce reoffending by young offenders Target 4 – Improving assessment and outcomes for children</p>	<p>Access to mainstream services</p>	<p>Review of social services provision for young offenders and young people at risk of offending</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify which young people involved with the YJS would benefit from social services provision ▪ Explore the links between social services and Youth Offending teams ▪ Identify gaps in provision for young offenders, those at risk of offending and young people on remand ▪ 	<p>Explorative , process study</p>

Corporate Plan Targets	Context	Project title	Key aims (in brief)	Type of study, methodology, Home Office research standards criteria
Target 4 – Improving assessment and outcomes for children Target 6 – safe and appropriate use of custody	Safeguarding	Literature review on historic child abuse suffered by young people entering custody/care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explore the prevalence of historic child abuse amongst looked after children and young people in custody ▪ Explore the negative long term consequences of child abuse ▪ Examine the approaches to the problem in the UK and elsewhere 	Literary review
Target 2 - Reduce reoffending by young offenders Target 4 – Improving assessment and outcomes for children Target 6 – safe and appropriate use of custody	Safeguarding	Literature review of effective safeguarding practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explore the vulnerability and safeguarding issues for young people in custody and in the community 	Systematic review
Target 2 - Reduce reoffending by young offenders Target 4 –	Safeguarding	Literature review on behaviour management in secure establishments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review the current and historical use of behaviour management 	Systematic review

Corporate Plan Targets	Context	Project title	Key aims (in brief)	Type of study, methodology, Home Office research standards criteria
Improving assessment and outcomes for children Target 6 – safe and appropriate use of custody			<p>processes,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Examine the views of practitioners, managers in secure estate on the application of behaviour management ▪ Analyse available records to determine frequency of incidences ▪ Explore experiences of young offenders 	
Target 2 - Reduce reoffending by young offenders Target 3 – Reduce the use of custody Target 4 – Improving assessment and outcomes for children	Youth Justice 2007	Pilot implementation of risk led approach to interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Build on the Oxford Youth Rehabilitation Order Study (YRO) ▪ Explore the practice requirements of the risk led approach to interventions. ▪ Identify implications for the proposed Youth Rehabilitation Order (YRO) 	Action research
Target 2 - Reduce	Public protection/ Promoting equality	Yots response to working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explore the nature and 	Explorative qualitative study

Corporate Plan Targets	Context	Project title	Key aims (in brief)	Type of study, methodology, Home Office research standards criteria
reoffending by young offenders Target 4 – Improving assessment and outcomes for children	under race relations act.	with racially motivated offenders	<p>availability of interventions targeted at racially motivated offenders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Discuss practitioners approach in working with this group of offenders 	
<p>Target 1 – Reduce the number of first time entrants to the youth justice system</p> <p>Target 2 - Reduce reoffending by young offenders</p> <p>Target 4 – Improving assessment and outcomes for children</p>	Effectiveness of the youth justice system	Longitudinal juvenile cohort study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review the cost effectiveness of the youth justice system ▪ Map distance travelled of young people at different stages of the system (prevention, community, custody) ▪ Explore differences in outcomes for different groups of young offenders 	Process and Outcome (Level 4)
Target 1 – Reduce the number of first time entrants to the youth justice	Diversion from court	The effectiveness of pre-court disposal (Base lining study)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify the characteristics of young people receiving pre-court disposals 	Process and impact (level 4)

Corporate Plan Targets	Context	Project title	Key aims (in brief)	Type of study, methodology, Home Office research standards criteria
system Target 2 - Reduce reoffending by young offenders			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explore the extent to which pre-court disposals are redirecting young people from more serious disposals ▪ Identify good practice and local policies ▪ Quantify/model reduction in post court disposals 	
Target 1 – Reduce the number of first time entrants to the youth justice system Target 2 - Reduce reoffending by young offenders	Monitoring of the youth justice system	Self report survey of offending behaviour and victimisation for excluded young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To either boost the excluded young peoples sample in the Home Office Offending Crime and Justice survey or commission a parallel survey 	Quantitative

Table B – 2005-06 – 2006-07 Research budget funded – ongoing studies

Corporate Plan Target	Project title	Key aims (in brief)	Type of study, i.e process or impact
Target 1 – Reduce the number of first time entrants to the youth justice system Target 3 – Reduce the use of custody Target 6 – Safe and appropriate use of custody	Review of sentencing decision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explore factors considered by sentencers in their decision making ▪ Assess what determines outcomes for young offenders on the cusp of community/custodial penalties ▪ Review quality of PSRs 	Explorative, qualitative based study
Target 1 – Reduce the number of first time entrants to the youth justice system Target 2 – Reduce reoffending by young offenders	Longitudinal juvenile cohort feasibility study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To test research processes and methods for main study ▪ Assess the quality of administrative data and case management information held by youth justice agencies ▪ Assess the feasibility of tracking samples of young offenders ▪ Identify weaknesses in the data and ways of overcoming these for main study 	Explorative
Target 1 – Reduce the	Validation of ONSET	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explore the use of 	Process – mainly quantitative

Corporate Plan Target	Project title	Key aims (in brief)	Type of study, i.e process or impact
number of first time entrants to the youth justice system Target 2 – Reduce reoffending by young offenders Target 4 – Improving assessment and outcomes for children		ONSET by YISPs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify the characteristics of young people ▪ Assess matching of need to intervention 	analysis

Table C - Other research currently being undertaken by YJB and proposed research not funded by research budget

Corporate Plan Target	Project title	Key aims (in brief)	Type of study, i.e process or impact
Target 1 – Reduce the number of first time entrants to the youth justice system Target 2 – Reduce reoffending by young offenders	Evaluation of YIPS (Phase II) (existing study)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Describe implementation issues ▪ Explore performance against KPI's ▪ Map distance travelled 	Action research methodology; process and impact (level 4)
Target 1 – Reduce the number of first time entrants to the youth justice system Target 2 – Reduce reoffending by young offenders	Evaluation of YISPs (existing study) <i>DfES led study, with YJB contribution</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explore implementation and process issues ▪ Assess performance against agreed objectives ▪ Detail characteristics of young people, service provided and outcome 	Process, with limited outcome data (Level 3) – mainly qualitative
Target 1 – Reduce the number of first time entrants to the youth justice system Target 2 – Reduce reoffending by young offenders	Evaluation of FGC/YISPs (existing study)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explore implementation and operation of the schemes ▪ Assess performance against agreed objectives ▪ Detail characteristics of young people 	Process, with limited anecdotal outcome data (Level 2/3)

Corporate Plan Target	Project title	Key aims (in brief)	Type of study, i.e process or impact
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> and details on service received ▪ 	
<p>Target 1 – Reduce the number of first time entrants to the youth justice system</p> <p>Target 2 – Reduce reoffending by young offenders</p>	<p>Evaluation of Children’s Trusts (existing study)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explore implementation and development ▪ Review role of Yots and other agencies, in its operation ▪ Identify examples of good and bad practice 	<p>Process</p>
<p>Target 2 – Reduce reoffending by young offenders</p> <p>Target 4 – Improving outcomes for children</p>	<p>Evaluation of substance misuse services (existing study)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explore implementation and operation of services developed in custody and community ▪ Review assessment and referral process ▪ Assess the effectiveness of the different tiers of the service ▪ 	<p>Process and impact (Level 4). Quantitative and qualitative analysis</p>
<p>Target 2 – Reduce reoffending by young offenders</p> <p>Target 4 – Improving outcomes for children</p>	<p>Evaluation of PLUS scheme (existing study)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explore the implementation and operation of the initiative ▪ Assess the effectiveness of the scheme in improving 	<p>Process and Impact (Level 2)</p>

Corporate Plan Target	Project title	Key aims (in brief)	Type of study, i.e process or impact
		educational achievements of young people in custody and community	
Target 2 – Reduce reoffending by young offenders Target 4 – Improving outcomes for children	Intensive Fostering evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explore the implementation of the Intensive fostering programme ▪ Identify benefits in soft outcomes 	Process study study with some quantitative element
Target 2 – Reduce reoffending by young offenders Target 4 – Improving outcomes for children	Keeping young people engaged in education project (existing study)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explore the implementation of the Keeping Young People in Education programme ▪ Identify education, training and employment outcomes 	Process and Impact (Level 4)
Target 2 – Reduce reoffending by young offenders Target 3 – Reduce the use of custody Target 4 – Improving outcomes for children	12 month ISSP evaluation (new)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explore the implementation and operation of the schemes ▪ Review targeting and referral process ▪ Identify examples of good and bad practice against agreed objectives ▪ Assess differences between 12 month and 6 	Process – mainly qualitative

Corporate Plan Target	Project title	Key aims (in brief)	Type of study, i.e process or impact
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ month ISSPs 	
<p>Target 2 – Reduce reoffending by young offenders</p> <p>Target 4 – Improving outcomes for children</p>	<p>Evaluation of RAP programmes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explore the implementation of the RAP programme ▪ Assess the impact on soft outcomes of the programme ▪ Identify good practice 	<p>Process, limited quantitative (Level 3)</p>
<p>Target 1 – Reduce the number of first time entrants to the youth justice system</p> <p>Target 2 – Reduce reoffending by young offenders</p>	<p>Prevention longitudinal cohort study (new)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assess the effectiveness of preventative measures ▪ Assess the impact made on future offending ▪ Map distance travelled by young people 	<p>Process and impact (Level 4).</p>

Research Delivery

All of the research undertaken and funded by the YJB requires initial approval by both the Research Programme Board (RPB) and the Home Office's Project Quality Approval Board (PQAB) before it can be commissioned. The RPB was set up to review research being undertaken across Directorates in the YJB. The aim was to prevent overlaps and improve links with YJB work streams, as well as inform the methodological design and rigour of research proposed. With all directorates and sections of the YJB represented on the RPB it was agreed that decisions on the need for proposed research should be made by the group. The RPB will also consider and inform the publication and dissemination process.

For all research commissioned by the YJB it was agreed that all directorates should adhere to the PQAB process. In ensuring colleagues at the Board are fully aware of what this process entails, a paper explaining this process has been circulated by the research team, with the offer of a member of the research team attending team meetings to discuss further. Details on the PQAB process and a copy of the application form are provided in Annex B and C. It is also imperative that research commissioned not only receives the approval of PQAB but that it also reflects the research standards devised by YJB and RDS/NOMS for impact and reconviction studies. A copy of these is provided in Annex A. The outputs of research studies therefore vary across a continuum from providing very basic level advice and guidance to Youth Offending Teams to informing strategic development within the youth justice system and across Government.

Alongside the PQAB process, it is essential that directorates across the YJB recognise the need for final reports to be peer reviewed and receive comments from RDS NOMS prior to publication. This should be considered and reflected in the timescales agreed at the commissioning stage. It is crucial that prior to project sign off that consideration be given to communicating emerging findings and recommendations of the research to relevant policy/practice sponsors for the study so that they can develop 'action plans' to inform both wider policy and the effective practice agenda. This is a systemic issue and one that is to be explored and developed further through internal discussions and liaison with the Senior Management Team.

Annex A

Home Office RDS and YJB minimum standards for reconviction studies – 11 February 2004

The Chief Executive of the National Offender Management Service has asked RDS and the YJB to agree minimum standards for reconviction studies carried out by their own staff or commissioned by them. These standards have been endorsed by the Research and Evaluation subcommittee of the Correctional Services Accreditation Panel.

[Table 1](#) shows the hierarchy of standards in reconviction research developed by Harper and Friendship¹ based on those devised by Farrington et al² to assess the methodological standards in crime prevention programme evaluation.

Table 1 - Hierarchy of Research Standards for Reconviction Studies

Standard	Description
Level 5	Random assignment of offenders to the intervention and control conditions (<i>Random Control Trial</i>)
Level 4	Comparison group matched to intervention group on theoretically relevant factors e.g. risk of reconviction (<i>well-matched comparison group</i>).
Level 3	Comparison group present without demonstrated comparability to intervention group (<i>unmatched comparison group</i>)
Level 2	Expected reconviction rates compared to actual reconviction rates for intervention group (<i>risk predictor with no comparison group</i>)
Level 1	A relationship between intervention and reconviction outcome. (<i>intervention group with no comparison group</i>)

¹ Harper , G. and Friendship, C. (forthcoming) in *The Impact of Corrections on re-offending: a review of What Works*. London: Home Office.

² Farrington, David P., Gottfredson, Denise, Sherman, Lawrence W., and Welsh, Brandon C. (2002). "The Maryland Scientific Methods Scale." Pages 13-21 in *Evidence-Based Crime Prevention*, edited by Lawrence W. Sherman, David P. Farrington, Brandon C. Welsh, and Doris Layton Mackenzie. New York: Routledge.

Currently reconviction studies in the UK have met standards 1 to 4 but rarely achieved standard five. The guidance laid out below is intended to help raise the standard of reconviction analyses and to ensure that it is possible to compare the reconviction results generated by evaluations of different correctional interventions. This guidance must be adhered to in all reconviction studies which use Offenders Index, PNC data or YJB Themis data

These standards shown in [Table 2](#) are a minimum requirement. They are not intended to restrict the range of comparisons made. Evaluators are free to make any *additional* calculations they wish but it is difficult to assess the value of new and different reconviction measures without reference to a common core.

Table 2 - Reconviction standards

Type		Definition
1	1-2 year reconviction rates	1-2 years counted from date of each offender’s release from custody or date of sentence for a community penalty for the ‘target offence’.
		Reconviction date is first court date with conviction, from release (custody) or start date (community penalty).
		Each sentencing occasion falling within the two-year window counts as a reconviction not each offence for which convicted. A sentencing occasion comprises all offences for which an offender is convicted on a single day (even if the offences are held on separate lines in the database). All subsequent convictions are reconvictions even if they occur the next day.
		Pseudo reconvictions are offences committed before the target offence resulting convictions during the 2 year follow-up window). These can only be discounted in analyses based on the PNC. OI does not currently hold the date of offence, only the date of sentence. The percentage correction previously applied is out of date and no longer used routinely. The existence of pseudo reconvictions makes it difficult to know whether the reconviction analysis is measuring the impact of the sentence given for the target offence or that given for the pseudo-reconviction (especially if the latter is custody). PSA analyses exclude such cases from the analyses. Samples sizes in impact studies may be too small to allow for this. Results should therefore be presented with and without such cases, broken down by the type of disposal for the target offence so that readers can consider the biasing effect of the decision to exclude.

2	Type of reconviction	<p>Given sentencing occasions are what constitutes the ‘reconviction’ event, a single reconviction may involve several offences. Use the first listed offence – ‘the principal offence’ - the one that attracts the most severe sentence, in reporting main results concerning the nature of subsequent convictions.</p> <p>There may, however, be interest in the degree of specialisation in reconviction in which case subsequent analyses might cover all offences for which reconvicted.</p>
3	Seriousness of offence	<p>The OI and PNC includes an offence which is labelled the principal offence at each hearing. For the time being this is all that can be used to assess ‘seriousness’. RDS is examining how the analysis of increases and decreases in seriousness of reconviction may be refined.</p>

4	Sentence on reconviction	This provides an indicator of how seriously the court took the offence.
5	Expected vs actual offences	<p>OGRS scores estimate the likelihood that offenders with certain criminal history factors will be reconvicted within 2 years of sentence. They can only be calculated using OI data (not PNC). Evaluators should take account of the following 4 factors in interpreting OGRS scores:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ OGRS is not recommended for assessing the impact of programmes on offenders under 18. The development and use of Asset, a risk assessment tool, with all young offenders in contact with the youth justice system provides a predicted likelihood of reoffending. ▪ Because it is calculated from date of sentence rather than date of release it is not as suitable for assessing those sentenced to custody as those on community sentences, but it is acceptable to use it provided the imprisoned offenders are serving short sentences. OGRS is less accurate when assessing offenders given a custodial sentence of 4 years or over. ▪ While it has been adjusted to make it more reliable for less common (sexual and violent) forms of offending, OGRS is most reliable for the normal range of offenders involved in acquisitive offending. ▪ OGRS needs to be recalibrated over time to allow for changes in the efficiency of the criminal justice system. Area variations in clear-up rates etc mean that its role in assessing differences between local schemes is also very limited. <p><i>Warning:</i> because OGRS is not suitable for assessing young offenders, some studies generate expected rates by assuming that an offender's rate of offending in the two years prior to a conviction will be similar to that in the two years following a conviction. This assumption is invalid, mainly because of 'regression to the mean' (Cook and Campbell, 1979),³ whereby extreme scores in the first observation tend to shift towards the mean on subsequent observations.</p>
6	Time to offence	This can only be calculated in studies using data from the PNC (not OI)

³ Cook, TD and Campbell, DT (1979) *Quasi-experimentation Design and analysis issues for field settings*. Chicago: Rand McNally.

The Offenders Index contains only a subset of the information on convictions held on PNC. RDS is has received in principle agreement from PITO for more regular access to PNC data. Until this is achieved, reconviction analyses will remain fairly crude. For example, we cannot use date of a further conviction as a proxy for time until next offence as the former is too dependent on factors such as whether the offender pleaded guilty, choice of court venue etc.

We anticipate that as access to PNC data becomes routine, these standards will be revised to reflect the greater range of analyses it will be possible to carry out. We are particularly keen to see studies investigate how interventions affect the frequency and seriousness of further offences, rather than seeing the two year cut-off point as a pass/fail criterion. The greater use of survival analyses is also to be encouraged.

Why does it take three years to produce two-year reconviction rates from the Offenders Index?

If a programme's first year ran from January to December 2001, the two-year reconviction period would not end until December 2003. It takes up to 6 months for full sentencing data to be received from courts and verified. It then takes up to 3 months for this to be available on the Offenders Index. Allowing at least another month for processing and analysis, the earliest date first two-year reconviction rates based on OI data could be produced would be October 2004.

When updates from PNC data become routinely available, sentencing data will be available 3 months after the sentencing date. Allowing 3 months for processing and analysis, the earliest 2 year reconviction information could be available within 6 months of the reconviction period ending.

RDS Contact for reconviction advice contact the Head of the Convictions Data and Analysis section of RDS: keith.spicer@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

Home Office RDS and YJB Standards for Impact Studies in Correctional Settings - 11 February 2004

The Chief Executive of the National Offender Management Service has asked RDS and the YJB to agree standards for assessing the impact of interventions in correctional settings in studies carried out by their own staff or commissioned by them. These standards have been endorsed by the Research and Evaluation subcommittee of the Correctional Services Accreditation Panel.

Common standards are necessary if we are to confidently attribute changes in reoffending/reconviction to the treatment provided, rather than other explanations such as selection effects, maturation, spontaneous remission or regression to the mean.⁴ The purpose of these standards is to ensure that evaluators, policy makers and practitioners make informed choices about the methods to be employed.

The choice of methods in conducting any piece of social research is determined by at least three factors. First, the precise nature of the questions to be addressed. Second, the amount and quality of data available. Third, the need to balance precision, comparability and generalisability against social, political and financial feasibility. For example, while the question "Does it work?" or "What effect does it have?" is best answered using random allocation trials (RCT), there is little point in specifying RCT unless control of allocation can be assured. To compare matched pairs involves collecting very detailed information (preferably prospectively) in sufficient numbers. This is expensive and gaining agreement to an RCT is time-consuming. Pre/post change comparisons are relatively cheap but hard to do well and they do not ensure against effects caused by factors other than treatment such as regression to the mean.

⁴ Regression to the mean describes the situation where extreme scores in the first observation tend to shift towards the mean on subsequent observations. See Cook, TD and Campbell, DT (1979) *Quasi-experimentation Design and analysis issues for field settings*. Chicago: Rand McNally.

There is a large literature on how to conduct process and outcome evaluations⁵ and several authors have devised standards against which to assess the evidence such studies produce.⁶ The current guidance is intended to supplement such material rather than to replace it. It starts from the premise that to inform effective policy and practice it is important to know not only whether a particular form of intervention is associated with a positive outcome *but also* whether that intervention yields better results than other forms of treatment or no treatment.

Testing a new idea

It is unrealistic to imagine that every element of policy and practice must be subjected to a full impact evaluation before it is regarded as 'evidence-based'. The process of evaluation is complex and therefore also costly.⁷

When the practical impact of a new technique or treatment is being assessed the most certain way of assessing its impact is by means of a carefully controlled pilot study. In this way the potential value of a theory or technique can be tested in an environment in which the danger of implementation failure has largely been designed out.

⁵ See, for example, Schalock, R. L. (2001) *Outcome-based evaluation*. Second Edition. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers; Jowell, R. (2003) *Trying it out: The role of 'pilots' in policy making*. London: Cabinet Office.

⁶ See, for example, Farrington, David P., Gottfredson, Denise, Sherman, Lawrence W., and Welsh, Brandon C. (2002). "The Maryland Scientific Methods Scale." Pages 13-21 in *Evidence-Based Crime Prevention*, edited by Lawrence W. Sherman, David P. Farrington, Brandon C. Welsh, and Doris Layton Mackenzie. New York: Routledge. Also see Harper, G. and Friendship, C. (forthcoming) in *The Impact of Corrections on re-offending: a review of What Works*. London: Home Office.

⁷ Chapman, T and Hough, M (1998) *Evidence-based practice*. London: HMI Probation

Ensuring implementation

One of the most common findings in social research is that ideas which work in carefully controlled pilot studies are less effective when they are rolled out more widely. A common reason for this is 'implementation failure' (ie it was not implemented as intended in terms of coverage, target group, intensity, duration etc). Before assessing impact after roll-out it is therefore essential to first check that implementation has occurred. The most economical way of doing that is to use standard monitoring information about the number of offenders allocated to a programme, the numbers attending, number of sessions attended etc. If such data are unavailable or of doubtful quality, it is most unlikely that full implementation will have occurred as it means that those managing implementation are doing so without being able to check and actively manage inputs and outputs. In these circumstances it is worth conducting a short process study of implementation and feeding the results back to those tasked with managing implementation before assessing impact.

Assessing impact

It is axiomatic that statistical correlations are not proof of causal relationships, but in this context it is important to try to rule out other explanations for apparent treatment effects such as maturation, spontaneous remission, regression to the mean, and selection effects.

There are at least 6 quantitative methods which might be employed to assess impact. Only the first of these is entirely experimental in the sense that it can, if successfully conducted, control for other factors such as maturation and selection effects. The remainder are quasi-experimental:

- **Random Control Trial (RCT):** offenders are allocated randomly to the treatment group(s) and to one or more control groups who will either receive a different treatment or treatment as usual. This approach minimises the chances that the treated and comparison groups differ in significant and important ways and that one group is biased from the outset to do better or worse. Thus when the treated group outperforms the controls it is because the treatment 'worked' rather than because the 'best bets' were in it. RCTs are rarely done in the field of corrections because of ethical arguments (mainly about how far an offender's participation can be regarded as voluntary) and because they are difficult to do well (eg samples get distorted as offenders drop out). Also, while RCTs are a good way of addressing the question 'Does it work?', they tend to be less useful in identifying which aspects of an intervention are most effective.

- Matched pairs (cohorts) – matching those entering treatment with offenders given no treatment or some other treatment. The matching can be done prospectively or retrospectively. This method is probably the one that has been most commonly used in evaluations commissioned or conducted by RDS. The quality of the results is very dependent on the closeness of the match. Retrospective matching is less satisfactory than prospective but more common (and cheaper) because the samples are matched on information contained in records rather than the evaluator making active decisions about what should be recorded and what the samples should be matched on. Currently records on adult offenders contain better information on static factors (eg criminal history, age and sex) than dynamic factors which can be changed through intervention. The greater use of psychometrics and the national roll-out of assessment tools such as OASys and ASSET is expected to improve retrospective matching once they have been shown to be reliable, valid measures.
- Hypothetical comparison groups- this might include all the other offenders on the same order but not able to access treatment or similar offenders from a year before the treatment became available.
- Longitudinal status comparisons involve checking an individual's change over time but, as there is no comparison group, there is a possibility that changes reflect maturation or some other process and are not necessarily a consequence of treatment. A comparison group can be included with this design to improve methodological rigour and assess other possible effects such as maturation. (Longitudinal status comparisons differ from pre/post tests in that they sometimes involve multiple tests before treatment and always involve more than one after test.)
- Pre/post change comparisons – 'before' treatment measures for each individual are compared with later applications of the same test(s). This approach is used when no experimental or comparison group is available. Other explanations such as maturation, selection and spontaneous remission cannot be discounted, with the result that this approach is much weaker than those listed above in ensuring that changes in outcome measures can be attributed to treatment.
- Person as own comparison: this single subject evaluation design is rarely suitable for impact evaluations in the corrections field as controls must be built into the design by repeating applications and measures to assess whether change is due to treatment or a range of other factors. It is sometimes used to identify and describe promising interventions in pilot studies where the total population of subjects is very low (eg female offenders and dangerous and severe personality disorder cases).

[Table 1](#) briefly summarises the relative ranking of different methods for assessing impact in terms of certainty, precision, comparability, generalisability and feasibility.

Table 1 - Standards for assessing impact vs feasibility of conducting the study⁸

Certainty	Precision	Evaluation design	Comparability	Generalisability	Feasibility
High	High	Random Control Trial Matched pairs (cohorts) Hypothetical comparison groups Longitudinal status comparisons⁹ (might be higher up with a control group). Pre/post change comparisons Person as own comparison.	Few assumptions	High	Low
Low	Low		Many assumptions	Low	High

⁸ Adapted from Schalock, RL (2001) *Outcome-based evaluation*. Second Edition. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.

⁹ Longitudinal status comparisons with a control group might be considered equivalent in terms of certainty to a matched pairs design.

Because implementation problems have been identified in so many studies which were expected to focus on outcome, it is worth considering the more frequent use of action research. However, action research tends to be qualitative and it involves the refining of both questions and methods while a study is in progress. It is unsuitable for studies when an immutable ultimate objective is fixed in advance (such as a reduction in reoffending or reconviction) for a number of reasons including the possibility that the evaluator's presence affects the results. As noted above, to obtain much the same advantages without the disadvantages, it is preferable to begin either with a period of basic monitoring or a short feasibility study so that implementation problems are resolved before the examination of impact begins.

Sample Size¹⁰

Sample sizes are critically important in ensuring useful results for all but the 'person as own control' approach.¹¹ If the sample size falls below a minimum the reliability of any reduction in reconviction rate is reduced and should be treated with caution.

Table 2 - Minimum sample size required by expected reduction in reconviction¹²

Expected percentage point reduction in reconviction	Minimum sample size in each group
10	325
7.5	572
5	1,273
2.5	5,024

Where interventions aim to reduce specific types of offending (eg interventions for sexual or violent offenders), the reconviction rates for these specific types of offences are far lower than general reconviction rates. For this reason these evaluations require larger sample sizes than estimated in Table 2.

¹⁰ Adapted from Harper, G and Friendship, C (forthcoming) op.cit.

¹¹ 'Person as own control' rarely yields useful results anyway for the reason explained above.

¹² It was assumed the average general reconviction rate for offenders was 50% within two years from the start of a community sentence or release from prison.

Qualitative methods

It is self-evident that qualitative research techniques cannot be used to quantify impact and they should not be employed to do so. Poor quantitative work is sometimes described erroneously as 'qualitative' which both excuses the former and does the latter considerable damage. This has led the Office of the Chief Social Researcher to issue a framework for assessing qualitative evidence.¹³ Qualitative techniques can usefully be employed in impact evaluations to explain why an intervention was effective or ineffective. As with quantitative techniques the reliability of answers derived qualitatively can be assessed on five dimensions (Guba and Lincoln, 1989):

- *credibility* - a true account of what respondents said
- *transferability* - findings should be applicable to other settings
- *dependability*- researchers should document the methods and decisions taken to produce the findings
- *confirmability* -findings should be backed up by evidence
- *authenticity* - the research increases understanding of the issue under study

The best qualitative research focuses on the meanings of the participants and on the uniqueness of each case as well as patterns emerging across cases. It pays attention to emergent categories and theories and applies mainly inductive analysis. It also offers explanations in terms of local causality (e.g. why certain interactions do or do not take place) rather than 'surface workings' (superficial description).

¹³ Spencer, L., Ritchie, J., Lewis, J. and Dillon, L. (2003) Quality in Qualitative Evaluation: a framework for assessing research evidence. London: Cabinet Office.