



ASSET

**YOUTH
JUSTICE
BOARD**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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A summary of the evaluation of the validity and reliability of the Youth Justice Board's assessment for young offenders

The introduction of *ASSET* in April 2000 meant that, for the first time, a common, structured assessment profile was being used across the youth justice system in England and Wales. Its implementation was a key initiative of the newly established Youth Justice Board who were keen to promote consistency of practice in the multi-disciplinary youth offending teams (Yots). High quality assessment was seen as central to achieving the objective of reducing offending by young people. The design of *ASSET* was shaped by a review of the research literature on the risk factors that contribute to offending by young people and by discussion with a wide range of individuals and organisations working in the field of youth justice.

This report presents the results of an 18-month study by Oxford University that involved 39 Yots. It is based on analysis of the following data:

- **3,395 *ASSET* profiles completed by Yot staff;**
- **627 'What do YOU think?' forms completed by young offenders;**
- **comparable self-assessment data from a school population.**

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The composition of the sample of 3,395 ASSET profiles was as follows:

- **82% were male and 18% were female;**
- **90% were white and 10% were from minority ethnic groups;**
- **31% were aged 10-14 and 69% were aged 15 and over.**

RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS IDENTIFIED

One significant benefit of an assessment that is used by all Yots is the potential to aggregate data (both locally and nationally) allowing a clearer picture to be developed of the youth offending population and of particular groups within it. When the risk and protective factors that contribute to youth offending were analysed, living arrangements and family and personal relationships were rated as positive factors in the lives of nearly three-quarters of the cases. However, the analysis also highlighted that:

- **only 30% of the young people were living with both their mother and their father;**
- **only 55% had contact with both their mother and their father;**
- **of those young people who did not live with their father, only 36% had contact with him outside of the home environment;**
- **40% of the young people were assessed as associating with pro-criminal peers;**
- **nearly 25% had friends who were all offenders.**



In half the cases, education and employment were also considered to be positive factors. However, the analysis highlighted that:

- **15% were currently excluded from school;**
- **27% had previous permanent exclusions;**
- **32% had experienced fixed-term exclusions in the last year;**
- **41% were regularly truanting;**
- **42% were rated as under achieving at school;**
- **25% of cases had special needs identified of which just over 60% had a statement of SEN.**



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Nearly three-quarters of the young people were considered to be impulsive and to act without thinking. **44%** were assessed as being easily bored/having a need for excitement and a similar proportion were assessed as giving in easily to pressure from others. Approximately **20%** of the young offenders were considered vulnerable to harm because of the behaviour of other people, specific events or circumstances.



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25% were vulnerable because of their own behaviour. **9%** were considered to be at risk of self-harm or suicide (**15%** in the case of females).

The risk and protective factors highlighted by the analysis of the sample fit well with existing research on the risk and protective factors associated with youth offending. This indicates that *ASSET* is identifying the factors likely to increase a young person's risk of reconviction.

VALIDITY

ASSET's ability to predict the likelihood of a young offender being reconvicted was tested in order to establish its validity and its relevance to Yot practice. The results are encouraging. Using the same methodology as that used to test assessment tools used with adult offenders, the current *ASSET* scoring system predicted reconviction with **67%** accuracy. This is as good as or better than the tools used with adult offenders. It is particularly encouraging given the greater difficulty in predicting the future behaviour of young people who are at an early stage in their criminal careers. The accuracy of *ASSET*'s ability to predict the risk of reconviction was also maintained in relation to specific groups such as females, minority ethnic young people, younger age groups and those on Final Warnings.

Though *ASSET* proved to be an effective tool for assessing young people, the testing identified some possible areas in which the scoring system could be improved. These were:

- including criminal history as well as factors that can potentially be changed;
- weighting existing factors.

Two alternative scoring systems were then tested in the same way and these were found to increase the accuracy of *ASSET*'s ability to predict reconviction to between **69%** and **70%**. They were also better able to differentiate reconviction rates across the scoring bands. Tables 1 and 2 illustrate the improved differentiation obtained with one of the alternative scoring systems ('Revised Score 2') when compared to the current scoring system.

Table 1: Percentage reconvicted within 12 months by current ASSET score bands (N=1081)

Score band	No. of cases	% reconvicted
0-4 (Low)	203	26.6%
5-9 (Low-Medium)	204	33.8%
10-16 (Medium)	238	49.2%
17-24 (Medium-High)	209	64.6%
25-48 (High)	227	75.8%
All cases	1,081	50.6%

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Table 2: Percentage reconvicted within 12 months by Revised Score 2 (weighted) bands (N=1063)

Score band	No. of cases	% reconvicted
0-7 (Low)	232	23.3%
8-14 (Low-Medium)	200	36.0%
15-24 (Medium)	214	48.6%
25-34 (Medium-High)	203	65.0%
35-64 (High)	214	83.6%
All cases	1,063	50.9%

Both tables: significance of difference (chi-square) = <.001

Any decision about future changes to the scoring system should, however, ensure that the method of calculation is easily understood by practitioners, as they need to see how the scores are derived for the individual young people with whom they work.

Another validation study based on 2-year reconviction data will be carried out in spring 2003. Further research is also in progress to analyse the accuracy of ASSET in measuring change over time.

RELIABILITY

Various tests were undertaken to assess the reliability of ASSET. For example, was it being used consistently by practitioners from the different professional groups within Yots? Initially, there appeared to be differences in scoring between police officers and social services/probation staff, but this could be explained by the fact that police officers tended to focus on the lower risk Final Warning cases. Overall, it was found that the different groups of professionals scored similar groups of young people in an acceptably consistent way.

A comparison of 9 Yots found that most of them scored cases consistently, but two Yots had divergent scores at the Final Warning stage and two at the post sentence stage. Analysis of the scores from one multi-team Yot found a good level of consistency between the different teams. Scores given by

individual practitioners who had completed at least 10 *ASSET* profiles were also analysed. This produced mixed results with some practitioners appearing to score consistently, but others showing a degree of inconsistency. Since these results were taken from the very early stages of *ASSET* use (June-September 2000), the reliability of these scores would be expected to have improved by 2002.

Research from one Yot provided further evidence that individuals assessed by more than one practitioner (whilst at the same stage in the youth justice system) were scored in a similar way. It was found that, in over **60%** of the cases analysed, the difference in scores was less than or equal to two points on the *ASSET* scoring system. It was also found that, where there were greater differences between scores, this could usually be explained by real changes in a young person's circumstances.

'WHAT DO YOU THINK?' FORM

Although practitioners were very positive in their feedback about the 'What do YOU think?' form, its use in practice was lower than expected. **627** completed forms were available. Comparison of the profiles completed by staff with 'What do YOU think?' forms suggested that there were a number of issues for which the offenders were more likely to identify problems than practitioners. These included:

- **problems with reading and writing;**
- **missing school;**
- **being bullied;**
- **living in areas where it is easy to get drugs;**
- **having a lot of friends who get into trouble.**



A comparison of ‘What do YOU think?’ forms with similar ones completed by young people from schools showed some similarities between the two groups (e.g. emotional problems), but the offenders were more likely to report problems with education, peer groups, being impulsive and anger management.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, the report presents encouraging findings on the validity and reliability of *ASSET* (based on 12-month reconviction data) and demonstrates the wealth of data that *ASSET* can provide. The key recommendations for further development of *ASSET* are:

- amendments to the scoring system to improve the predictive accuracy of *ASSET*;
- further development of the link between assessment and supervision planning;
- validation of the ‘What do YOU think?’ form;
- guidance for Yots on interpreting *ASSET* scores;
- software to support the short forms of *ASSET* for Final Warning and bail cases.



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NEW DEVELOPMENTS

Following discussions with practitioners, a standard format for intervention plans leading directly from *ASSET* profiles has been drafted which uses language that would be understood by young people. It has been pre-tested in a small sample of Yots and has been positively received by staff. Additional piloting is currently taking place.

A new shortened version of *ASSET* has been designed for use at the Final Warning stage and has recently been made available to Yots. This retains all of the sections of the core *ASSET* profile, but reduces the amount of detail required. Revisions are also being made to Bail *ASSET* and the 'Risk of serious harm: full assessment' form. These will be made available for use during 2003.

The full report on which this summary is based is available on the Youth Justice Board website.

Further copies of this summary can be obtained from:
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