

Youth Justice Management Information System



The new Youth Justice Management Information System, now in its pilot stage, will play a central role in improving practice and reducing risk for vulnerable young people.

“The Youth Justice MIS project will bring enormous benefits, not only in reducing the volume of reporting but also significantly increasing the capacity to analyse information. Combined with developments such as the Scaled Approach and alignment of performance reporting with the local authority reforms in England and the changes in Wales, we will be able to build further on the fantastic achievements of the past few years.”

David Hassan, Head of Performance, YJB



Providing information to the YJB can be time consuming for information and performance officers in YOTs and secure establishments. The new Youth Justice Management Information System (MIS) will not only make information provision easier, but will also give rise to more useful, robust data that will support better decision-making about vulnerable young people.

Having the right information at the right level of detail is vital for the smooth running of the youth justice system. Which is why the forthcoming MIS project, now in its pilot stage, has such potential both for practitioners and for the YJB.

Richard McTighe is the YJB’s Wiring Up Youth Justice Project Manager in charge of the MIS, and he is clear about the benefits it will bring.

“The limitations of the old THEMIS are legendary,” he says, “with the main problem being that data is sent in only every quarter, and only in summary tables, which are just too high level. If someone suddenly needs performance data split, say, by gender or ethnicity within the same report, it’s a real struggle.

“The new Youth Justice MIS will make it possible to drill down into data without going back to source,” he explains. “If we can

simplify more data reports from one source then that makes life easier for everyone. I’m looking forward to the day we switch off THEMIS, and get information from YOIS and Careworks direct into the Youth Justice MIS.”

And there are other advantages, too. According to Richard the information returns process will also be better, and the information itself will be more transparent.

Reducing the burden on information managers has been a central objective of the project – that and making the whole data return and reporting process as transparent

as possible. The new software will make it clearer which fields in the case management system end up in an MIS report, so it will be evident which fields it is most important to get right.

Guiding principles

The project team have taken care to adhere to a set of fundamental guiding principles that it established

at the outset, anticipating that there would be pressures that could compromise practitioners' interests and those of the project. Prime among these is the principle that the new MIS will not contain personal data that allows an individual to be identified.

And the worry expressed by some YOTs that data may be 'sucked' from

them without their control is also groundless. "On the contrary, unlike other MIS approaches, ours will be designed so that the information manager decides when the data goes. They can run checks, and then hit send when they're good and ready."

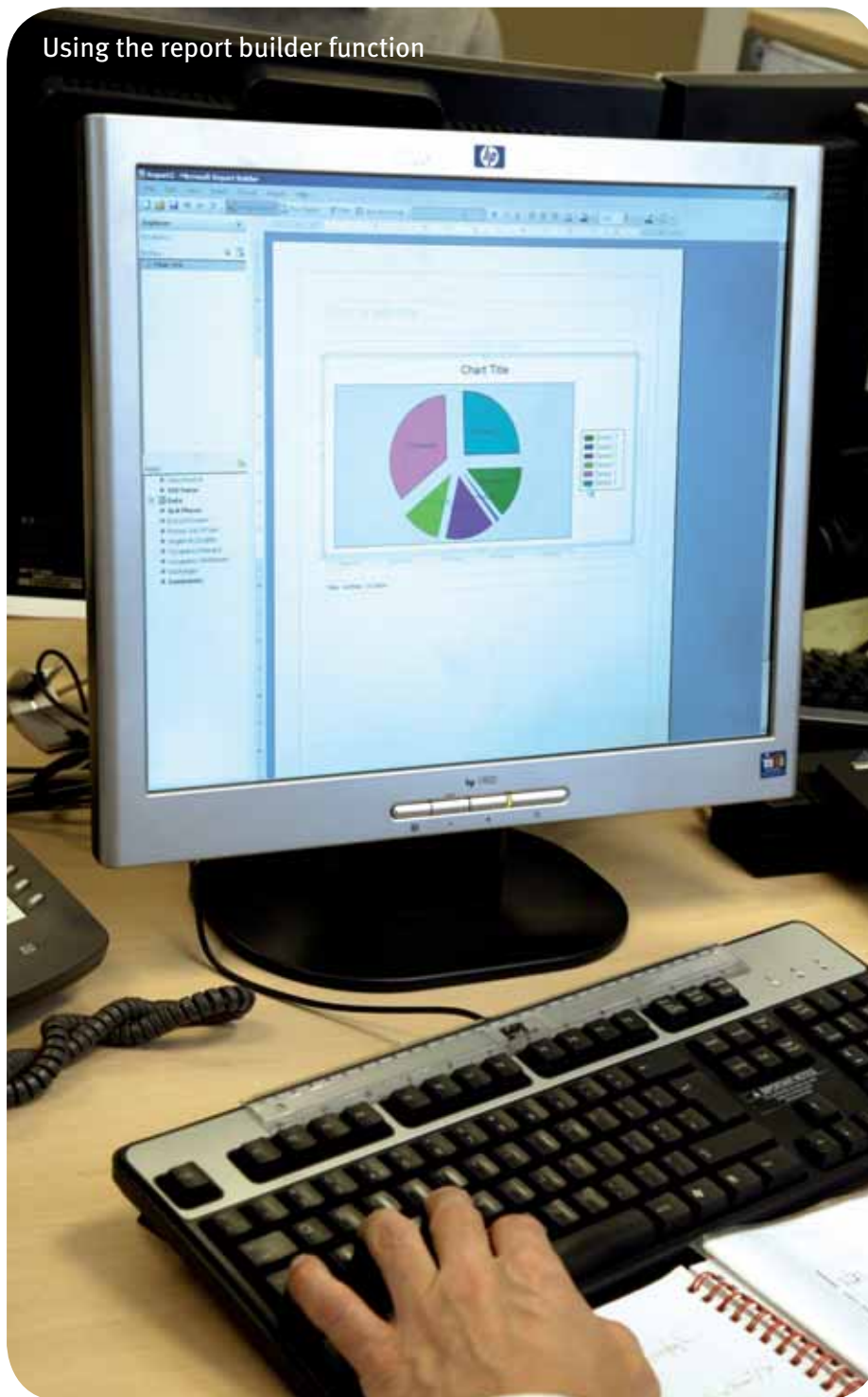
Another founding principle is that the MIS will not try to replicate the existing performance framework. "This will be significantly redesigned as part of the performance framework project arising from the local government White Paper," Richard explains. "We are also following the principle of 'start small' – growing data sets and functionality only in line with requests from information managers.

"We also realise, of course, that there will be significant data quality issues because of varying practices across the YOTs. But by doing it the hard way we'll get a better understanding of the good common practices that should be encouraged. We'll also get a better grasp of common data recording practice and common data standards that will make data returns more streamlined."

Easier to analyse

Central to the work so far has been a holistic, end-to-end approach achieved by getting all parties – case management suppliers, practitioners and the YJB – in the same room to design a pilot phase (see p.4). Eleven YOTs and five secure establishments are taking part in the pilot, which will run for six months until September.

"The areas we are looking at range widely, but essentially the pilot is trying to establish how we reduce the reporting burden while making the resulting information richer and easier to analyse," explains Richard. "We're really grateful for the assistance we are receiving



Pilot members in a training session



from information managers who are giving up their time to input their knowledge and experience.

“We’ve also set up two advisory groups, one for community and one for custody issues. These include a greater variety of people, such as heads of service and YJB staff. They are helping by providing an even broader range of views.”

To help make the practitioner perspective as acute as possible, Richard has co-opted the services of Paul Donnelly – previously Research and Performance Manager at Stafford Youth Offending Service, and experienced on the community side – onto the project team. Paul, who is currently doing a part-time Masters degree in Criminology, is clear about his role: “I want to help

develop a system that is really useful to practitioners, not just to the YJB. We all want time freed up to be able to do more analysis, and I want to make sure that the new Youth Justice MIS thoroughly supports that aim.”

So, finally, why is now a good time to be doing all this development work? “The YJB’s new performance framework and the secure estate’s Regime Development Programme, with all the change that they entail, make this a particularly good time to be doing this,” says Richard. “There is so much change around, from the new local area agendas and from the drive to reduce the burden on practitioners. It all combines to produce a real chance for a step change in information management, and in the tools used to do it.”

Improving the placement process

Kath Simmons, Systems Manager in the YJB’s Placement and Casework Service, is enthusiastic about what the MIS project will mean for the placement process.

“The main advantage is that we will be able to push data into the Youth Justice MIS, allowing us to do trend analysis on, for example, rates of occupancy. We’ll be able to see whether rates are fluctuating, not only by establishment and by region, but also across the whole secure estate. If you know that, say, over the last six months there’s been a steady increase in occupancy, you can use that to look ahead and see to it that the estate has the places to meet the likely demand.

“The main advantage is that we will be able to push data into the Youth Justice MIS, allowing us to do trend analysis on, for example, rates of occupancy.”

“At the start, establishments will be sending the same data in the same way as they do now, but in future they’ll be able to do it using a web form or maybe even using eAsset. This will let us produce ‘unlock’ information on weekends and bank holidays, giving a much more accurate picture of beds available in emergencies on those days.”

About the pilot

The pilot phase will run for six months until September 2008. With 11 YOTs and five secure establishments taking part, the team is benefiting from considerable hands-on experience.

The following central questions are being investigated: How is the burden to be reduced? What would make it easier to check and send data to the YJB? Are the reports useful to information managers? Is this the kind of MIS that people want? What are the issues that need to be tackled, including data quality, before national roll-out can take place?

One of the participants is Julie Firth, Deputy Director at Hassockfield STC, who has experience of working as a YOT manager. "I want a system that enables end-to-end sentence management," she says. "This should include seamless transfer of information to and from YOT systems that really supports resettlement after release.

"I know people are sceptical about change – they fear that practice

will become about number-crunching rather than about helping young people, but my experience is the opposite. Better systems save you time and allow you to analyse outcomes in more depth, so you can start to improve things and fill in gaps. It really is a very exciting development, and I think it will help both YOTs and secure establishments like ours enormously."

Margaret McGeehan, Information Manager at the YJB, also has YOT experience. "As the agenda for youth justice has developed and changed over the years, the YJB has required more data," she says. "But from 2008–09 that will lessen, by virtue of the Government's Reducing the Burden taskforce and the local government reforms.

"The Youth Justice MIS will support this by making it easier and quicker for YOTs to do quarterly data returns. They will still have to record data accurately and fully, but they'll be able to transfer the data to the YJB electronically and the YJB will produce the quarterly tables for them."

The following are taking part in the pilot:

YOTs

Birmingham; Bradford; Caerphilly & Blaenau Gwent; East Sussex; Hartlepool; Kent; Lancashire; Leeds; Somerset; Surrey; West Sussex

Secure establishments

Aycliffe SCH; Cookham Wood YOI; Hassockfield STC; Parc YOI; Rainsbrook STC

If you would like to contact any of the above, please email Paul Donnelly at paul.donnelly@yjb.gov.uk, who will forward your inquiry.

Getting data quality right

Any report is only as good as the data that goes into it. So assessing data quality is crucial to the success of the MIS project.

With this in mind, the project team is focusing on the following:

- assessing the current situation: which data areas are strong and which are weak?
- speaking a consistent language: introducing common data standards, definitions and exchange agreements
- acting in a consistent way: encouraging common practice
- making the process transparent: data will only be fit for purpose if its ultimate use and destination are properly understood
- simplifying processes: these must make sense, and not cause unnecessary work
- developing supporting tools: for example, for de-duping records or running quality checks
- demonstrating that good data supports better decision-making.

The team is identifying priority areas (such as eliminating duplicate data caused by YOT-to-YOT transfers) and tackling them, one by one.

Project timeframe

The project team are aiming to have a Youth Justice MIS that can support new performance frameworks for secure establishments and YOTs by April 2009.



How the Youth Justice MIS relates to the other Wiring Up Youth Justice projects

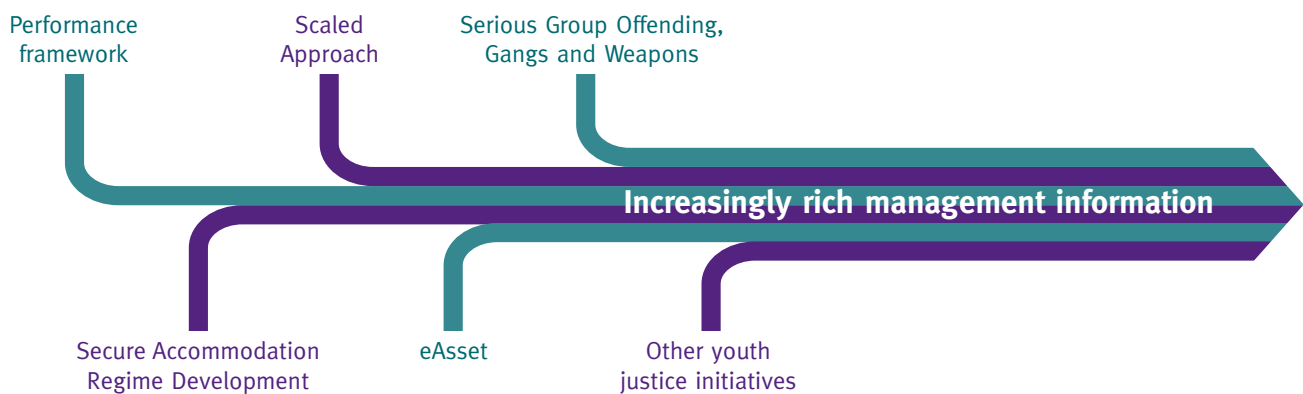
Phil Sutton, Head of Business Change for Wiring Up Youth Justice, explains how the new MIS fits in with the other projects that together comprise the Wiring Up Youth Justice programme.

“The Youth Justice MIS is one of several projects taking place over a three-year period, with particular objectives and focus for each year.

“The first year of the Wiring Up Youth Justice programme, 2006–07, was about joining up the YOTs, establishments and the YJB so that they could share information, particularly about young people going

into custody. 2008–09 is focusing on supporting efforts to prevent offending, by improving information transfer between YOTs and police forces, and with the new children’s information sharing index, ContactPoint. In future years, efforts will be concentrated on joining up effectively with the wider criminal justice community.

“Unlike the other projects, which will start and finish during the three years, the Youth Justice MIS project will run for the whole period. It’s my hope that the MIS will become an indispensable tool for youth justice managers, with the information becoming richer as other initiatives come together.”



FAQs about the Youth Justice MIS

Q: Is this new MIS only for the YJB?

A: The Youth Justice MIS aims to serve all youth justice practitioners interested in information leading to better decision-making and therefore better performance. The MIS will be accessible on the internet, so all registered users will be able to see the information and use it to support their performance management activities.

Q: We've just bought a data warehouse. Why do we need another one?

A: Some YOTs do have a reporting tool developed for them by CareWorks, which interrogates a local database. But this does not give a national view. The new MIS will hold data from both CareWorks and YOIS users, as well as related data from other systems, such as secure estate data.

Q: Will the new Youth Justice MIS only handle YOT data?

A: YOT data is only one element of management information for the youth justice system. We are already reviewing the data that is available from other systems, such as SACHS, eAsset and CaseTracker.

Q: Will the new Youth Justice MIS pull all our data from our case management system at the end of each day?

A: The MIS will not pull any data from case management systems. Instead, YOTs will push the data as per the existing process. They will be able to view the data it is about to send, and will trigger the process to send it. Also, pilot data is being taken from YOTs on a monthly basis rather than daily (although the occupancy data from the YJB Placements and Casework Service will be fed each day.)

Q: How will I get access to the Youth Justice MIS?

A: Initially we are giving user accounts to about 40 individuals taking part in the testing of the first release. We will contact them with instructions on registration.

Q: What data and what reports will be in the Youth Justice MIS?

A: Initially the MIS will include the existing secure establishment performance data, a selection of case-level data from YOTs, secure establishment occupancy data from the YJB Placements and Casework Service, and PYO data from CaseTracker.

The new performance framework

The new performance framework involves fundamental change, says David Hassan, YJB Head of Performance.

“Six indicators will form part of the new local authority performance framework, which will raise the profile of youth justice,” he explains. “Local authorities will have to report performance against the national set on an annual basis, and these can be included as local area agreement improvement targets where appropriate.”

To ensure effective alignment with the local authority reforms, planning requirements will be amended to incorporate an annual self-assessment and validation of service provider capacity. This will focus on reducing offending, and on other priority areas in the Criminal Justice Strategic Plan.

“Regardless of reported performance, I believe that the new arrangements will mean continued improvement,” says David. “For the first time all YOTs will be subject to year-on-year priority-setting, linked to grants and in-year reviews.”

For more information about the Youth Justice MIS email paul.donnelly@yjb.gov.uk.

For further information about the Wiring Up Youth Justice programme go to www.wiringupyouthjustice.info or email wiringup@yjb.gov.uk.

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