

Bringing evidence into practice: The story of the work to improve outcomes for young adults in prison and probation.

Georgia Barnett (Forensic Psychologist) and **Dr Helen Wakeling** (Research Psychologist) are both Senior Evidence Leads in the Evidence-Based Practice Team in HMPPS. **Lisa Short** is the Young Adults Lead for Public Sector Prisons, HMPPS.

Researchers suggest that in industrialised countries, the late teens to mid-twenties can be thought of as a period of emerging adulthood.¹ This is a time when people start to become more self-sufficient, explore their identity and consider and test different possibilities for their futures, before fully committing to adult roles and responsibilities, or making enduring choices. It is also a time of psychosocial maturation, when people change and mature in the way they make decisions and relate to themselves and others.²

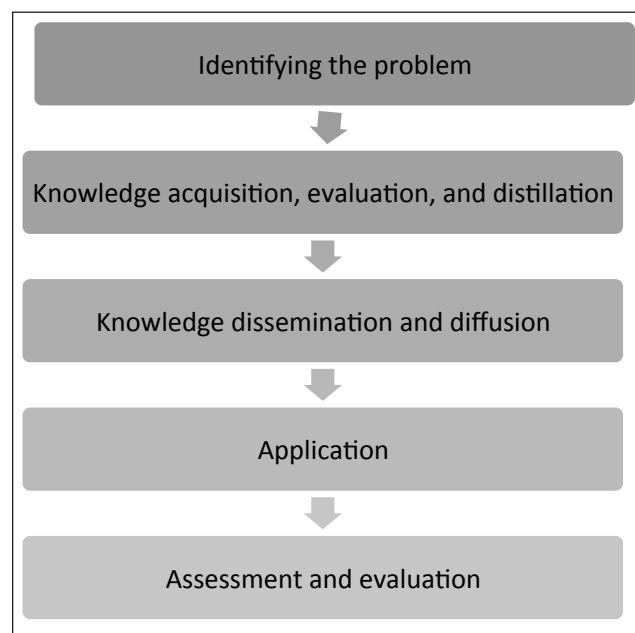
Young adults (18–25-year-olds) make up just under 10% of the population of the UK,³ while 14% of the prison population comprises those aged 18–24.⁴ As well as being overrepresented in our prisons, young adults fare worse in custody than older adults. Being younger is associated with a greater risk of being violent (and being a victim of violence) in prison, engaging in self-harm, as well as with higher rates of recall or breach of licence conditions in the community, and more frequent (proven) reoffending.⁵ This article describes how His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) has used research, expertise, and data to shape its approach to improving outcomes for young adults serving sentences in custody or in the community.

The steps of evidence-based practice

Evidence-based practice requires the explicit and conscientious use of evidence when making decisions.⁶

To illustrate our approach to bringing the evidence on young adults into the practice of HMPPS, we use a generic set of steps to evidence-based practice, based on the numerous models of EBP that have been put forward (Figure 1).⁷

Figure 1. Common features of models of evidence-based practice



Step 1: Identifying the Problem

The first step of evidence-based practice involves identifying the issue to be resolved and turning it into a

1. Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist*, 55, 469–80.
2. Steinberg, L. & Cauffman, E. (1996). Maturity of judgment in adolescence: Psychosocial factors in adolescent decision making. *Law and Human Behavior* 20, 249–272.
3. Office for National Statistics (2023). *Population and Household Estimates, England and Wales: Census 2021, Unrounded Data*. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/populationandhouseholdestimatesenglandandwales/census2021unroundeddata>
4. Prison Reform Trust (2023). *Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile: Summer 2023*. [prison_the_facts_2023.pdf](https://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/prison_the_facts_2023.pdf) (prisonreformtrust.org.uk).
5. HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2021). *Outcomes for Young Adults in Custody*. London: HM Stationery Office; Prison Reform Trust (2023). *Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile: Summer 2023*. [prison_the_facts_2023.pdf](https://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/prison_the_facts_2023.pdf) (prisonreformtrust.org.uk).
6. Sackett, D. L. (2000). *Evidence-Based medicine*. New York: John Wiley.
7. Fitzalan Howard, F. (2023). Implementing evidence-based practice: A synthesis of the evidence. *Prison Service Journal*, this issue.

question. This is a necessary step that enables identification of the relevant knowledge base(s), sources of information, and data, that could help answer that question and expose gaps in knowledge.⁸ In order to do this we synthesised the findings from several Government reviews on young adults in the justice system, as well as research into the period of emerging adulthood and neuroscientific insights into the process of brain maturation.^{9 10 11}

Evidence tells us young adults have distinct needs

As noted above, official statistics and accounts from young adults and those who work with them in the justice system indicate that they fare worse in many ways than older adults. The key questions to answer then, are why young adults have poorer outcomes than older adults in prisons and under probation supervision, and what is likely, or is evidenced, to improve the situation? All three government reviews were persuaded by a strong body of evidence regarding the young adult brain, that in their response to this group, criminal justice services were failing to take proper account of young adults' level of maturity. Research shows that the brain continues to develop after the age of 18, reaching maturation at around the age of 25.¹² Young adults are still maturing in important ways – psychologically and socially – during this period of brain development. Changes in the brain in adolescence and young adulthood mean that during this period, younger people are more likely to take risks and seek reward, to prioritise impressing their peers when making decisions in the presence of

friends and are more susceptible to peer influence, than at any other time in life.¹³ While there are important differences between individuals at this time in their lives, as a group, young adults also feel stress more keenly, have greater problems understanding others, and find it more difficult to manage their emotions and impulses when under pressure, than older adults.¹⁴

This type of maturity has been called psychosocial maturity. Psychosocial maturity is made up of three components: temperance, perspective and responsibility.¹⁵ People who lack temperance find it hard to hold back from acting on their impulses and emotions. People who have difficulties with perspective find it hard to take into consideration others' views, to think about and plan for the future, or to see the bigger picture when making decisions. People who lack a mature sense of responsibility are not wholly self-sufficient, do not have a strong and stable sense of who they are and might find it hard to resist peer influence.

People who lack temperance find it hard to hold back from acting on their impulses and emotions.

Research has linked lower levels of psychosocial maturity to anti-social decision making,¹⁶ while higher levels have been associated with desistance from crime.¹⁷ Psychosocial maturity is also likely to affect the way younger adults serving sentences in prison or in the community respond to sanctions and interventions. There is some

evidence that incarceration can inhibit maturation, possibly as a result of limiting opportunities to take on responsibilities, build relevant skills and develop prosocial relationships.¹⁸ At the most basic level, incarceration disrupts the normal process of socialisation in adolescence and early adulthood. These are times when social, especially peer, influence on thinking and behaviour is heightened.^{19 20} In prison,

8. See footnote 7, Fitzalan Howard (2023).
9. Harris, T. (2015). *Changing Prisons, Saving Lives: Report of the Independent Review into Self-inflicted Deaths in Custody of 18-24 year olds*. Available at: Harris Review: self-inflicted deaths in custody - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
10. Justice Committee (2016). *The Treatment of Young Adults in the Criminal Justice System; Seventh Report of Session 2016-17, HC 169*. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmjust/169/169.pdf>
11. Lammy, D. (2017). *A Review of Race in the Criminal Justice System*. The Lammy Review (publishing.service.gov.uk)
12. Prior, D., Farrow, K., Hughes, N., Kelly, G., Manders, G., White, S., & Wilkinson, B. (2011). *Maturity, Young Adults and Criminal Justice: A Literature Review*. Birmingham-University-Maturity-final-literature-review-report.pdf (t2a.org.uk)
13. Casey, B. J. (2013). The teenage brain: An overview. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 22, 80-81.
14. Steinberg, L. (2008). A social neuroscience perspective on adolescent risk-taking. *Developmental Review*, 28, 78– 106.
15. Steinberg, L. & Cauffman, E. (1996). Maturity of judgment in adolescence: Psychosocial factors in adolescent decision-making. *Law and Human Behavior*, 20, 249-272.
16. Cauffman, E. & Steinberg, L. (2012). Emerging Findings from Research on Adolescent Development and Juvenile Justice. *Victims and Offenders*, 7, 428-449
17. Monahan, K. C., Steinberg, L. Cauffman, E., & Mulvey, E. P. (2009). Trajectories of antisocial behavior and psychosocial maturity from adolescence to young adulthood. *Developmental Psychology*, 45, 1654-1668.
18. Dmitrieva, J., Monahan, K. C., Cauffman, E., & Steinberg, L. (2012). Arrested development: The effects of incarceration on the development of psychosocial maturity. *Development and Psychopathology*, 24, 1073-1090.
19. Sommerville, L. H. (2013). The teenage brain: Sensitivity to social evaluation. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 22, 121-127.
20. Chein, J., Albert, D., O'Brien, L., Uckert, K., & Steinberg, L. (2011). Peers increase adolescent risk taking by enhancing activity in the brain's reward circuitry. *Developmental Science*, 14, 1-10.

access to prosocial peers and networks is severely constrained; prisoners are surrounded by antisocial peers. Life inside prison is characterised by rigid rules and is highly repetitive and routinised, limiting opportunities to learn how to manage a life in the community which lacks the same rigid structure and requires self-motivation, and flexibility and persistence. Similarly, opportunities to become self-sufficient, to exercise autonomy, and to take on social roles that demand increasing levels of responsibility, are restricted in prisons.

Step 2: Knowledge Acquisition, Evaluation, and Distillation

The second step of evidence-based practice is the acquisition and critical appraisal of relevant evidence through systematic and comprehensive searches and review. In this step the evidence is scrutinised for its relevance and quality, weighted accordingly, and brought together to provide a meaningful overview of the findings.

In this step we set about searching for knowledge that would help us understand how we could do better for young adults in prisons. HMPPS (then the National Offender Management Service; NOMS), completed an in-house review of data and published research into the characteristics and needs of young adults, and commissioned a rapid evidence review of the effectiveness of interventions to reduce reoffending among 18-25 year olds.²¹ This culminated in the publication of a set of principles for commissioning services for young adult men, on whom most of the available research was based.²²

Opportunities to become self-sufficient, to exercise autonomy, and to take on social roles that demand increasing levels of responsibility, are restricted in prisons.

Achieving better outcomes for young adult men

The Achieving Better Outcomes for Young Adult Men document identified six priority outcomes for young adult men, based on the evidence that psychosocial maturation continues until at least age 25:

- ❑ Developing a stable, prosocial identity,²³
- ❑ Building resistance to peer influence,²⁴
- ❑ Gaining greater self-sufficiency and independence,²⁵
- ❑ Building skills in managing emotions and impulses,²⁶
- ❑ Increasing engagement with and planning for their futures (future orientation),²⁷ and
- ❑ Strengthening bonds with family and in other close relationships.²⁸

To address these six priority needs, Achieving Better Outcomes recommended seven interventions, services, and approaches to reduce reoffending and promote desistance from crime in young adults:

1) Structured programmes that build skills in thinking and emotional management.

The rapid evidence assessment of interventions to reduce reoffending among young adults concluded that there is good evidence for the effectiveness of structured interventions such as cognitive skills and anger

management programmes in prisons.²⁹ For those serving sentences for acquisitive offences research also suggests that addressing any substance misuse problems should be a priority.³⁰ Such programmes target important components of psychosocial maturity, teaching skills linked to temperance and perspective, as

-
21. McGuire, J. (2015). *What works in reducing reoffending in young adults? A rapid evidence assessment*. Ministry of Justice Analytical Summary, MoJ, London: England
22. National Offender Management Service (2015). *Achieving Better Outcomes for Young Adult Men: Evidence-Based Commissioning Principles*. Available at: 2 (publishing.service.gov.uk)
23. Wilson, T. D. (2011). *Redirect: Changing the Stories we Live by*. London, U.K: Penguin.
24. Albert, D., Chein, J., & Steinberg, L. (2013). The teenage brain: Peer influences on adolescent decision-making. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 22, 114-120.
25. Steinberg, L., Cauffman, E., & Monahan, K. (2015). *Psychosocial Maturity and Desistance From Crime in a Sample of Serious Juvenile Offenders*. Psychosocial maturity and Desistance from Crime in a Sample of Serious Juvenile Offenders.pdf (pitt.edu)
26. Steinberg, L., Albert, D., Cauffman, E., Graham, M., Banich, S., & Woolard, J. (2008). Age differences in sensation-seeking and impulsivity as indexed by behaviour and self-report: Evidence for a dual systems model. *Developmental Psychology*, 44, 1764-1778
27. Walters, G. D. (2019). Maturing out of delinquency: unpacking the effects of identity achievement and future orientation on crime desistance. *Self and Identity*, 18, 267-283
28. Salvatore, C. & Taniguchi, T. A. (2012). Do social bonds matter for emerging adults? *Deviant Behavior*, 33, 738-756.
29. See footnote 21, McGuire, J. (2015).
30. Mulvey, E. P. & Schubert, C. A. (2012). Some initial findings and policy implications of the pathways to desistance study. *Victims and Offenders*, 7, 407-427

well as helping participants engage with and plan for their future.

2) Re-entry schemes that help prisoners resettle into the community. There is good evidence that highly structured, rehabilitative programmes or schemes that help young adults integrate into the community on release from prison by helping ready them for and access secure housing, employment, training, or education and building life skills and networks of prosocial support, can reduce rates of recidivism.³¹ Early research suggests that such programmes might help reduce recidivism by building self-sufficiency and responsibility through financial independence.³²

3) Interventions to build resilience/stress management. As well as being more receptive to stress, many teenagers and young adults are not yet fully equipped to deal with strain adaptively.³³ Those in contact with the criminal justice system may suffer as a result and have limited role models or support on which to draw to help manage these challenges. There is insufficient evidence to establish whether resilience-building and stress management interventions affect the recidivism of young adults.³⁴ However, recent meta-analyses and systematic reviews of psychological therapies for people in prison conclude that cognitive behavioural treatment and mindfulness-based therapies have a moderate impact in the short-term on depression, anxiety, and stress on adults in prison.^{35 36}

4) Education, employment training and help finding a job. Providing young adults with engaging opportunities to increase their educational achievements and develop new work skills could be a good way to help them build independence and self-sufficiency, to develop prosocial networks and

contribute to a more prosocial identity.³⁷ Research suggests that education and training is more likely to lead to reduced reoffending if accompanied by help to get a job.³⁸

5) Activities and interventions that build psychosocial maturity. Given that research identified a risk that incarceration, and to a lesser extent, the restrictions placed on young adults serving sentences in the community, can disrupt normal developmental and socialisation processes, young adults in prison and on probation should have the opportunity to engage in activities that support psychosocial maturation.³⁹ In addition to activities to build independence and impulse and emotion management, activities should aim to build all aspects of psychosocial maturity, including i) prosocial identity, ii) resistance to peer influence, iii) perspective taking, and iv) future orientation.⁴⁰

6) Services that help young adults build or maintain healthy relationships with family and significant others. Research with prisoners in the U.K. found that young men were less likely than their older counterparts to maintain relationships with family members or significant others while inside.⁴¹ Internationally, research suggests that better social bonds, in particular family and intimate relationships, can act as a protective factor for those in emerging adulthood and this has been linked to lower rates of reoffending among young adults.⁴² Family support has also been implicated in prison safety for young adults. The Harris Review of deaths in custody of 18–24-year-olds emphasised the important role of families in supporting and being involved in decision-making for young adults at risk of suicide.⁴³

7) Building positive relationships and engaging with young adults. Finally, given the

31. See footnote 21, McGuire, J. (2015).

32. Hill, J. M., Van der Geest, V. R. and Blokland, A. A. J. (2017). Leaving the Bank of Mum and Dad: Financial Independence and Delinquency Desistance in Emerging Adulthood. *Journal of Deviant Life Course Criminology*, 3, 419–439.

33. Romeo, R. D. (2013). The teenage brain: The stress response and the adolescent brain. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 22, 140–145.

34. Hodgkinson, R., Beattie, S., Roberts, R., et al. (2021). Psychological resilience interventions to reduce recidivism in young people: A systematic review. *Adolescent Res Rev*, 6, 333–357.

35. Per, M., Spinelli, C., Sadowski, I., Schmelefske, E., Anand, L., & Khoury, B. (2020). Evaluating the effectiveness of mindfulness-based interventions in incarcerated populations: A meta-analysis. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 47(3), 310–330

36. Yoon, I. A., Slade, K., & Fazel, S. (2017). Outcomes of psychological therapies for prisoners with mental health problems: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*. Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/ccp000021> (18) (PDF) *Outcomes of Psychological Therapies for Prisoners With Mental Health Problems: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis*. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317297890_Outcomes_of_Psychological_Therapies_for_Prisoners_With_Mental_Health_Problems_A_Systematic_Review_and_Meta-Analysis [accessed May 17 2023].

37. Barnett, G. D., Boduszek, D., & Willmott, D. (2021). What works to change identity: a rapid evidence assessment of identity intervention. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 51, 698–719.

38. Visher, C. A., Winterfield, L., & Coggeshall, M. B. (2006). Systematic review of non-custodial employment programs: impact on recidivism rates of ex-offenders. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 2006, 1.

39. See footnote 18, Dmitrieva et al. (2012).

40. See footnote 17, Monahan et al. (2009).

41. Spark Inside. (2023). *Being Well, Being Equal: Prioritising the wellbeing of young men and young Black men in the criminal justice system*. Barrow Cadbury Trust. Available at: <https://barrowcadbury.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/BWBE-Report-Final-V.2-DIGITAL-Spreads-REDUCED-21-02-1.pdf>

42. See footnote 28, Salvatore & Taniguchi (2012).

43. See footnote 9, Harris (2015).

higher rates of violence and proven reoffending associated with young adults, there is work to do to challenge the stigma or stereotypes that many young adults feel staff apply to them, and to help staff to see the person and the needs behind challenging behaviour. This is a persistent problem. A recent thematic report on young adults in prison by HM Inspectorate of Prisons highlighted that they reported poorer relationships with staff and felt less able to access support for mental health, rehabilitation, and resettlement, than older prisoners.⁴⁴ Improving relationships between staff and young adults opens up opportunities to help this group see their worth as people who can contribute to their community and other people, for staff to act as role models and to coach and build skills in emotion management, self-sufficiency and independence, and to communicate hope for young adults' future.

In addition to identifying evidence-based interventions and services for young adults, the Better Outcomes review also concluded that as a service, HMPPS should have a way of identifying those who need most help with maturation, and that there should be a co-ordinated, strategic, operational response to improving the outcomes of young adults in prisons and probation.

Step 3: Knowledge Dissemination and Diffusion

The third step of evidence-based practice is dissemination and diffusion of the evidence; getting the right evidence to the right people at the right time, in ways that make it easy for them to know what to do and act on it. We were keen to hear from frontline staff about their preferred methods of learning and receiving information, so the Young Adults' Team developed and distributed a survey to this effect. The responses helped shape the subsequent communications, which have taken the form of a Knowledge Hub for staff working with young adults (a 'one-stop-shop' for staff who need to access information to support their work), and commissioned training, learning, and development products. The Young Adults' Team also collaborated with the Evidence-Based Practice Team and a range of other colleagues to deliver a variety of in-person and online awareness events over the last six years. These

They reported poorer relationships with staff and felt less able to access support for mental health, rehabilitation, and resettlement, than older prisoners.

have included: the Young Adults' Conference in 2018 at which a maturity screening tool and resource pack for working with young adults were launched (see step 4), and a subsequent re-launch event in September 2022 which attracted over 500 participants, Young Adults' Awareness week for prison and probation in February 2022, and a series of events covering the launch of the Transitions Policy Framework,⁴⁵ Young Adult Strategy, and Young Adults Model of Operational Delivery. Other bespoke workshops for staff have been delivered to prison Neurodiversity Support Managers, and senior leaders such as Prison Group Directors, Governors, the Safety Programme Board and Safety Learning Group, Use of Force Committee and the Use of Force Ethics committee, and others. A Young Adults summit was held at HMP Winchester for the South-Central Prison Group in November 2022.

Finally, The Evidence-Based Practice Team has written and disseminated evidence summaries on the young adult brain, and most recently on research focussed on young adults in prisons or on probation. The latter, a compendium of young adults' evidence, is to be disseminated over the next six months in a series of smaller, bite-sized, evidence resources, targeted at different staff groups.

Together, these learning events and products cover a range of issues pertinent to young adults, including neurodivergent conditions and traumatic experiences which are so prevalent in this group. They aim to help staff manage their interpretation of challenging behaviour, counter negative stereotypes of young adults, and respond to this group's needs more effectively.

Step 4: Application

The fourth step is application of the evidence to practice; incorporating evidence into decision-making and behaviour, facilitated by step three. In order to apply the knowledge from the evidence on young adults to both policy and practice, HMPPS appointed an Executive Director as operational lead for Young Adults, who established and chairs the Young Adults' Board, as well as a principal psychologist as clinical lead for Young Adults in the Directorate of Security. These

44. HMIP (2021). *Outcomes for Young Adults in Custody: A Thematic Review*. A short thematic report by HM Inspectorate of Prisons: Outcomes for young adults in custody: A thematic review by HM Inspectorate of Prisons January 2021 ([justiceinspectorates.gov.uk](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk))

45. Transition of Young People from the Children and Young People Secure Estate to Adult Custody Policy Framework - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

posts aim to ensure that the latest and best evidence on young adults is translated into practice, securing a focus on the needs and outcomes of young adults in prisons. As well as establishing the YA Board, HMPPS has developed a screening tool and resource pack to help identify and support young adults with maturity needs, and published a Young Adults' Custodial Strategy, Model of Operational Delivery and Transitions Policy Framework, to set out how the learning from research on young adults should be put into practice to improve outcomes for this group.

Young Adults' Board

In December 2018, the Young Adults' Board was established, to bring together people across HMPPS and the Ministry of Justice, professional partners, academics, external partners, and charitable organisations conducting research and delivering interventions and services for this group. The objective was to have a co-ordinated programme of work to directly understand and address the needs of young adults in custody, and to improve the understanding and skills of the staff working with them, thereby improving the custodial experience and outcomes for this group. This board routinely uses data and evidence to inform further research and projects to achieve the desired outcomes. The diverse membership encourages greater awareness and consistency of approaches, facilitates the sharing of good practice and research, and encourages collaborative working, reducing the likelihood of duplication and increasing the likely success of work with young adults by ensuring this is based on the latest and best evidence.

Maturity screening tool and Choices and Changes resource pack

In July 2019, HMPPS launched the Maturity Screening Tool (MST) and Choices and Changes

resource pack. The MST has two main aims; to establish likely demand for services and interventions which could support young adults' maturation, and to help practitioners identify those young men who need most support in this area, a recommendation of the Harris Review.⁴⁶ The tool uses information from ten items in the standard HMPPS risk and need assessment (thereby requiring no extra data gathering), identified through research as meaningful markers of psychosocial maturity.⁴⁷ Tests suggest that the tool is both a reliable and valid screen for psychosocial maturity for young adult men convicted of crime, providing meaningful risk-related information beyond that gleaned from someone's age alone.⁴⁸

Tests suggest that the tool is both a reliable and valid screen for psychosocial maturity for young adult men convicted of crime, providing meaningful risk-related information beyond that gleaned from someone's age alone.

To respond to the needs of those identified by the MST as having lower levels of psychosocial maturity, HMPPS developed Choices and Changes. Available across custody and community settings, this resource pack was designed to be used primarily on a one-to-one basis to promote conversations supporting pro-social choices and behaviour change, and provide opportunities for young adults to build skills in the six priority areas identified by a review of research in the Better Outcomes document.⁴⁹ It consists of structured exercises that can be used by a range of staff, allowing flexibility and enabling sites to tailor the work to fit with their local practices and resources. Choices and Changes can be used with young adults who have

no access to accredited interventions, who need further support following participation in an accredited intervention, or who are not yet ready to engage with an accredited programme, due to issues with maturation.⁵⁰

Following the introduction of the MST and the Choices and Changes resource pack, HMPPS has been continually monitoring uptake and use of the tools to inform and target efforts to implement these consistently across the estate. Despite a slow start, which was compounded by the impact of COVID-19, the latest (2023) data indicate that 81% of all prisons are using the

46. See footnote 9, Harris (2015).

47. Wakeling, H. & Barnett, G. (2017). *Development and Validation of a Screening Assessment of Psychosocial Maturity for Adult Males Convicted of Crime: Analytical Summary*. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/development-and-validation-of-a-screening-assessment-of-psychosocial-maturity-for-adult-males-convicted-of-crime>

48. See footnote 47, Wakeling & Barnett (2017).

49. See footnote 22, National Offender Management Service (2015).

50. Developing maturity before engaging with an accredited programme may increase chances of successful completion.

screening tool and 58% of prisons are using Choices and Changes to support their young adults.

Transitions Policy Framework

The Transitions Policy Framework was developed jointly by Public Sector Prisons (PSP) and the Youth Custody Service (YCS), in response to findings from six months of fieldwork commissioned by the Young Adults' Board. The fieldwork highlighted a range of problems in the process of young people's transition from the Children & Young People's Secure Estate (CYPSE) to the adult prison estate. Prisoners are at increased risk of harming themselves and others during the early days of custody,⁵¹ and fieldwork indicated that this is exaggerated for young people who had both no experience of the adult estate, and who were still maturing in ways that affected how they coped with this strain. This, coupled with the 'cliff edge' that young people and adults described existing between CYPSE and the adult estate in the level of support, intervention, and resource available, meant improvements to the transitions process were a priority.

The Transitions Framework introduced a number of measures to improve the timeliness, co-ordination, consistency, and comprehensiveness of transitions planning between the CYPSE and Public Sector Prisons (PSP). These included the introduction of a Central Management Team (CMT) in YCS who oversee the transition process for all young people, and a Transitions Board which brings together several prospective prisons to discuss and collaboratively decide the best location for the individual based on their distinct needs, as well as ensuring timely decision making and a comprehensive handover of information to the adult prison. Additionally, materials providing information for young people prior to transfer, presented in a variety of formats including pictures and videos, were devised to make the process and transition more predictable, reduce anxiety, and avoid re-traumatisation, all of which have the potential to influence violence, self-harming behaviours, or suicidal ideation.

The Transitions Policy Framework was launched in 2023 via a series of communications, including a national online event. This process is now being implemented across the prison estate, and a series of evaluations to review its effectiveness are underway.

Young adults' Custodial Strategy and Model for Operational Delivery

In 2020, the Young Adults Custodial Strategy was commissioned with a view to supporting more prisons across the estate to meet the specific needs of this cohort.⁵² The strategy set out evidence-informed principles that aim to improve young adults' safety,

wellbeing and relationships, sentence planning and continuity of care, as well as to provide more effective and bespoke training for staff, and build on the evidence base by testing out new initiatives to identify what works to produce positive outcomes. A range of evidence was used to develop this strategy, including extensive stakeholder engagement and input from across HMPPS and MoJ, professionals and academics, third sector partners, charities, and organisations. Listening to and understanding the lived experience of young adults in prisons was also key in informing this work. The Young Adult Model for Operational Delivery (YA MOD) was developed as an evidence-based guide on how to

The Young Adult Model for Operational Delivery (YA MOD) was developed as an evidence-based guide on how to practically apply the evidence base to deliver the desired outcomes identified in the strategy.

practically apply the evidence base to deliver the desired outcomes identified in the strategy. The YA MOD was updated in 2021, in response to changes in process and policy, and to incorporate the most current research and evidence, and examples of good practice. A 'What Good Looks Like' survey was distributed to prisons across the estate holding young adults to ask for examples of good practice. Several of these were referenced in the MOD to signpost prisons to suggestions that might suit their own strategic approach and local delivery plans.

Both the YA strategy and the MOD were officially launched in 2022 via a series of communications and a national online event. This included presentations from three different prisons who gave their own accounts of how they had used both documents to inform their

51. Slade, K., Edelmann, R., Worrall, M., Bray, D. (2012). Applying the Cry of Pain Model as a predictor of deliberate self-harm in an early-stage adult male prison population. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 19(1), 131-146.

52. The Probation Service has also published a policy framework for young adults, available at: Young Adults Policy Framework

own local strategies for working more effectively with their young adults, all of which were unique. The Young Adults' Team now works with prisons across the estate to provide advice and guidance for prisons developing their own local approaches, to ensure that these are in line with the best evidence.

Pilot site projects

HMPPS made a commitment in the YA Custodial strategy to continue to improve the evidence base for working more effectively with young adults. With additional requests from prison leaders for examples of good practice, a series of pilot site projects were launched, aiming to test new initiatives to meet the needs of young adults in prison that generated positive outcomes, and to improve our organisational learning. Each of the five projects were designed to build upon existing evidence:

- ❑ HMP Portland collaborated with the 100 and First Foundation to implement a rugby academy, using sport as the mechanism to promote trusting relationships and team working, perspective taking, challenge negative perceptions and stereotypes, and develop positive self-identity.
- ❑ HMP Wandsworth responded to the high levels of force being used on young adults by developing an enhanced Control & Restraint Refresher training package for staff which incorporated learning about the specific needs of young adults and included scenario-based approaches for practicing de-escalation techniques, as well as improved interpersonal skills.
- ❑ HMP Nottingham are in the process of developing a dedicated young adult wing to help understand the costs and benefits of holding young adults together, or whether to co-locate them with older prisoners. Current evidence on this matter is inconclusive.
- ❑ HMP Berwyn created an additional training package for new prison officer apprentices to improve their awareness of the needs of young adults.
- ❑ Finally, HMP Deerbolt developed a bespoke transitions unit to provide enhanced support to young adults coming from the CYPSE, with a view to reducing the 'cliff edge' of support experienced that can contribute to increased levels of violence and/or self-harm.

All pilot site projects have been allocated a psychologist to conduct an evaluation; these pieces of work are currently at differing stages of completion.

Step 5: Assessment and Evaluation

The final step is evaluation of the evidence-based changes or actions, determining their effect (good, bad, or null), and reasons for that effect, to add to the evidence base and shape future practice. A vital part of the work in improving outcomes for young adults in HMPPS is monitoring data, research, and evaluation. Evidence has informed the approaches HMPPS is taking to better respond to the needs of this group, but there are important gaps in our understanding of what works in practice in prisons, for whom, under what conditions, and how. Evaluation is at the heart of the young adult pilots, to enable HMPPS to learn from attempts to achieve better outcomes for this group. The young adults evidence reviews have also highlighted a number of gaps in the evidence base (e.g., how maturity is demonstrated specifically with young adult women, and the specific needs of young adults from ethnic minorities), which the YA Board will use to direct future research commissions. Finally, HMPPS continually monitor data around the use of the maturity screening tool and resource pack in order to assess and improve usage and uptake of available resources.

Conclusion

The efforts to deliver evidence-based practice for young adults has taken both time and significant resource, and there is still a way to go. Whilst significant progress has been achieved within all five steps of the evidence-based practice model, step 5 (assessment and evaluation) probably needs most focus now, to determine whether the changes HMPPS have introduced are having the desired impacts. However, all five steps need continued focus to ensure that knowledge continues to be built and shared, and practice continues to be shaped in line with the evidence. Furthermore, there have been significant challenges and barriers to application of evidence in practice with young adults. These will undoubtedly need to be continually addressed. Specifically, the two major challenges have been resistance to change, and the significant lack of resource currently in prisons.

Resistance to change has been evidenced by the slow uptake of the new tools and an apparent reluctance to take on board some of the messages around being more responsive to the needs of young adult men (or having negative attitudes towards young adults). Culture change, or new ways of working, can be difficult to introduce, but change is needed to improve practice, to be open to learning, and adapt to new evidence. The significant lack of resource in prisons has compounded difficulties in achieving

change. Whilst trying to embed the screening tool and resource pack, for example, many prisons at first indicated that they couldn't take this work on due to lack of staff and resourcing pressures. The resourcing issues (along with other problems with accessing data) have also hindered the evaluation work to date.

Whilst issues of resourcing will continue to be problematic, we will proceed with attempting to move forward and overcome issues in achieving evidence-based change by:

- ❑ Building momentum for change over time by communicating clearly and widely about why the changes are needed, and consistently using evidence and data to make the case for change to build motivation and support for change.
 - ❑ Building people's capability to apply evidence in their practice by providing them with the right knowledge and the right tools, and reducing friction in applying evidence to practice, making it as easy as possible for colleagues to engage in the change.
- ❑ Involving as many people as possible in developing new strategies and evaluating services, and in sharing evidence and good practice. Co-production and engagement are critical when trying to embed evidence into practice and getting people on board with change, as is highlighting the benefits of the work.
 - ❑ Evaluating the work we do as a service in this area as robustly as possible, and emphasising the importance of evaluation, to further learn and adapt where needed. This contributes to an open learning culture and a desire to strive to better understand 'what works' with this group.