



Introduction



The importance of assessment

Research has shown that children who get into trouble are often troubled children: those who come into contact with the criminal justice system often have multiple needs and difficulties which must be identified and addressed in order to reduce their offending. Assessments can help pinpoint these factors. A comprehensive assessment should take into account the nature of the young person's offence, the young person's personal circumstances and their attitudes and beliefs. This will provide a clear indication of the types of intervention needed to help a young person lead a law-abiding life in the future.

What is Asset?

Understanding the young person

Asset is a structured assessment tool to be used by Youth Offending Teams (Yots) in England and Wales on all young offenders who come into contact with the criminal justice system. It aims to look at the young person's offence or offences and identify a multitude of factors or circumstances – ranging from lack of educational attainment to mental health problems – which may have contributed to such behaviour. The information gathered from *Asset* can be used to inform court reports so that appropriate intervention programmes can be drawn up. It will also highlight any particular needs or difficulties the young person has, so that these may also be addressed. *Asset* will also help to measure changes in needs and risk of reoffending over time.

Although *Asset* has been used by Yots for some time, this folder contains the first validated version of the assessment tool. The new form has been developed following extensive consultation with practitioners and analysis of data of 3,395 *Asset* forms collected from 39 Yots across England and Wales. Further details of the history of *Asset* and the research undertaken by the Centre for Criminology, University of Oxford, can be found in Appendix A.

Understanding youth offending

In the longer term, the information collected through the new *Asset* tool will help to increase knowledge about offending by particular groups of young people and by young people in general. Much of the current evidence about youth offending focuses on young white men, for example, and less is known about young women who offend, or offenders from black or minority ethnic groups. Over time, *Asset* will provide detailed information about the needs and problems of these specific groups of young people.

Aggregate data from *Asset* will highlight the most frequent and/or significant issues associated with offending. At a local level, this information can be used to guide decisions about the

partnerships and programmes that will be most relevant to young offenders in that particular area. It will also inform strategic planning at a national level in order to improve the use and allocation of resources.

Using Asset in practice

According to the *National Standards for Youth Justice* (2000), *Asset* must be completed for all young people subject to:

- bail supervision and support;
- a request for a court report (pre-sentence report and specific sentence report);
- community disposals during the assessment, quarterly review and closure stages;
- custodial sentences at the assessment, transfer to the community and closure stages.

Specific *Asset* forms are available for those receiving Final Warnings.

To make a full assessment you will be required to engage in interviews with a young person and his/her family, obtain information from a range of other sources and make a series of judgements about the factors which affect his/her offending behaviour. Establishing relationships with the young person will therefore be central to the assessment.

Asset provides a structure for recording and analysing information. However, it does not prescribe the way in which interviews should be conducted and *Asset* should *not* be used as an interview schedule. You may wish to touch upon certain subjects at a particular time: a summary of the issues you must discuss is listed on page 4.

In view of the multi-disciplinary nature of Yots, most teams are likely to have staff with specialist knowledge who can provide advice and assistance regarding particular sections of *Asset* (e.g. health, education or substance misuse). Although the overall responsibility for completing *Asset* in any given case is likely to rest with one individual, a number of different people may all contribute to the assessment process.

More detailed 'rules' on the protocol for filling in *Asset* are outlined in the Youth Justice Board's *National Standards for Youth Justice* (2000).

Completing Asset – general notes

Detailed instructions for filling out each section are given in the 'Guidance' section of each assessment. However, some general points to note are outlined below.

Using the guidance

Asset is made up of many questions which, when answered fully, should provide a comprehensive picture of the young person and any issues in their life which may influence their offending behaviour.

A number of questions marked by asterisks on the *Asset* forms will require particular consideration. Further information on how best to answer such questions is given in the guidance notes.

The guidance notes broadly mirror the layout of the form so that they can be accessed quickly and easily.

Questions

A number of questions in the forms are essentially factual and descriptive. For these questions, please indicate all the options which apply to the young person.

Other questions require a 'yes/no/don't know' response. The 'yes/no/don't know' responses to the factor questions can only capture a limited amount of information, but you can use the evidence boxes to elaborate on the key issues. Ticking 'don't know' should not be seen as either an easy option to reduce the time required for an assessment or as a sign of an inadequate assessment. It is important to use this option constructively by, for example, indicating in the evidence box the reasons why something is not known or giving details of what additional information needs to be obtained in order to reach a decision. This will be useful for other colleagues who may become involved in a case. Details about 'don't know' responses also mean that, when an assessment is reviewed, it is easier to see what new information has come to light and what still needs to be ascertained.

Evidence boxes

You are expected to give details in the evidence box of the problems and needs that you have identified through the preceding tick-box questions in the section. This is important because it shows the basis for your decisions and judgements. It also enables you to explain the complexity of a young person's situation. You may also wish to give details about an issue that has not been covered by tick-box questions. If you are using *Asset* to review progress on a case, you can use the boxes to explain any changes in a young person's situation.

Rating

At the end of each section you are asked to rate the extent to which you think this issue is associated with the likelihood of further offending by the young person. This question is not an overall assessment of the extent to which a section is problematic; it is very specifically focused on the link to offending. This must be borne in mind when filling in the form.

When giving a rating it may be helpful to consider the following questions.

- Was this issue linked to past offending? If 'yes', do you think it is more, less or equally significant now?
- Has this issue a *direct* or an *indirect* link with his/her offending?
- Is this issue always relevant to his/her offending behaviour or only on certain occasions?
- Is the effect on offending behaviour likely to be immediate or over a longer period?
- Is this issue problematic enough to lead to offending by itself or is it only likely to contribute to offending behaviour when certain other conditions exist?

The extent to which a section is associated with the likelihood of further offending is rated on a 0-4 scale.

- 0 Not associated at all
- 1 Slight, occasional or only a limited indirect association
- 2 Moderate but definite association – could be a direct or indirect link. May be related to some offending, but not all. Tends to become offending related when combined with other factors.
- 3 Quite strongly associated – normally a direct link, relevant to most types/occasions of his/her offending
- 4 Very strongly associated – will be clearly and directly related to any offending by the young person. Will be a dominant factor in any cluster of offending-related problems.

Core Profile: issues for discussion

The main issues which must be covered are listed below. They do not have to be discussed in any particular order.

- Offending behaviour
- Living arrangements
- Family and personal relationships
- Education, training and employment
- Neighbourhood
- Lifestyle
- Substance use
- Physical health
- Emotional and mental health
- Perception of self and others
- Thinking and behaviour
- Attitudes to offending
- Motivation to change
- Positive factors
- Indicators of vulnerability
- Indicators of serious harm to others