



National Offender
Management Service

Better Outcomes for Young Adult Men

Evidence Based Commissioning Principles

August 2015

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Executive summary

Achieving Better Outcomes for Young Adult Men

Young adults make up a significant subgroup of the prison population or serving sentences in the community. In a data sample from December 2013, around three quarters were being managed in the community and most of these would be managed by CRCs.

This Better Outcomes document defines young adults as those aged 18-20, in line with current legislation. It should be noted, however, that as young adult men continue to mature into their mid-twenties, the commissioning principles articulated are likely to apply to, and therefore make a difference to, many adults over 20 and particularly those aged under 25. These principles concern young adult men only. Women mature at a different rate and manifest maturity in different ways to men.

This document is split into three sections, the first summarises how young adults differ to older adults. The second examines maturity, and how this is relevant to understanding the young adult population. The third synthesises the evidence to identify six priority needs for young adult men, and provides guidance on the most effective or promising ways of addressing each of these.

An [Annex of supporting evidence](#) for this document is available on gov.uk

Achieving Better Outcomes for Young Adult Men – Community & Custody

Challenges

Compared with older adults, young adult men are:

Still Maturing

More challenging to manage and harder to engage

More likely to reoffend

More likely to serve sentences for violent or acquisitive offences and more likely be involved in robbery or low level drug dealing

Have poorer outcomes (particularly in prison). They are:

- over-represented in fights
- more likely to be victims of assault
- more likely to self-harm

Six priority needs

We should support them to:

1 Develop a stable, pro-social identity

2 Build resistance to peer influence

3 Develop self-sufficiency and independence

4 Build skills to manage emotions and impulses

5 Increase future orientation:

- who they would like to be
- how they might get there
- what their lives could be in years to come

6 Strengthen bonds with family and other close relationships

How we can help

Staff should prioritise:

Structured programmes that enhance thinking skills and emotional regulation, such as cognitive skills and anger management

Re-entry schemes that provide extra support and structure during the transition from prison to community

Interventions designed to strengthen family bonds

Stress management interventions like relaxation or mindfulness

Education

Employment training and help to find employment

Activities that build independence, a positive identity, self-sufficiency and responsibility, such as voluntary work, peer support or restorative / reparative activity

Staff who are trained to understand immaturity, and who can relate to young adults using skills that include:

- Coaching in goal setting and problem solving
- Conversations that emphasise future orientation
- Use of reward and reinforcement
- Explicit recognition of independence and other positive attributes rather than communicating negative expectations and labels

1. Introduction

NOMS commissioning intentions from 2014¹, involve six overarching commissioning intentions that focus on the importance of delivering effective offender services, enhancing public protection and giving people the necessary support to help them to address their offending behaviour. The principles for achieving Better Outcomes for Young Adult men document are particularly aligned with three of these:

- (1) Enhance public protection and ensure a safe, decent environment and rehabilitative culture;
- (4) Ensure delivery is matched to population, purpose and NOMS outcomes; and
- (5) Ensure that delivery of services is responsive to individual needs and characteristics to maximise outcomes

What do we mean by ‘young adults’?

These principles define young adults as those aged 18-20, in line with current legislation. As young adult men continue to mature into their mid-twenties, however, these principles are likely to apply to, and therefore make a difference to, many adults over 20 and particularly those aged under 25. This document concerns young adult men only. Women mature at a different rate and manifest maturity in different ways to men. Young adult women are considered separately.

These principles do not consider categorisation and allocation including the mixing of young adult and adult prisoners. The data they draw on and consider apply to all young adult offenders, both held in custody and or supervised in the community. This is important given that the majority of the population is supervised in the community and the emphasis on through the gate services.

Sources of evidence

The priority needs identified in this document have been determined from internal management information², theory, literature and research relevant to understanding the particular needs of young adults, and what works in reducing reoffending or promoting desistance, among those in this group. This includes a Rapid Evidence Assessment of “what works” with young adult men³.

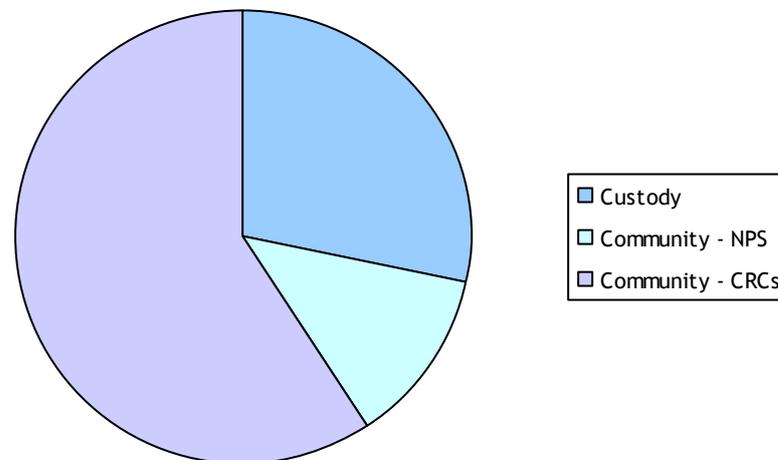
Young adult men managed in custody and the community

The number of young adults serving sentences or on remand in prison has been falling since 2010. However, those that are released from custody continue to have high rates of proven reoffending. Of those young adults released from prison in the 12 months ending September 2011, 56.1% reoffended within a year, compared with 45.6% of adults who were 21 or older⁴.

Since 2008, the annual probation caseload, which consists of people serving court orders, and those receiving supervision pre- and post-release, has fallen year on year. This trend continued in the year March 2013-2014. Published probation statistics are not broken down by age, so it is not possible to determine whether there are any differences in patterns among older or younger adults.

A snapshot on 31st December 2013, indicates that there were **15, 443** men aged between 18 and 20, who were serving sentences in custody or serving sentences or on licence in the community. We are able to estimate from this caseload data who would meet the now current CRC criteria and who would meet the NPS criteria. 59% of these young adults were in the community and would now be managed by CRCs.

We estimate that another 13% would have been managed by the NPS. The remaining 28% were in custody.



Young adults in the different settings differ in some important ways, and so some key characteristics of the 18-20 year old men are presented in Section 2 of this document. Regardless of setting, only around one in five were 18 years old; most commonly they were 20 years old; this age group accounted for around 45% of all the young adults in custody and in the community.

While NOMS recognises that **Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME)** people are over-represented in the criminal justice system^[i] and race, ethnicity and cultural background impact on individual identity, our review of evidence found no high quality research to suggest that we should take race/culture into account for young adults in a different way than we should do for all individuals.

This document does not add to published information on ethnicity in young adults – we did not do specific analyses in this area due to data recording and sample size problems. The emphasis in these commissioning principles on helping young adults with their developing identity means that services should take account of the importance of race and culture in understanding the individual context for developing identity.

There are particular points of vulnerability for young adults in the criminal justice system, of which it is important we take into account. The **transition** from youth justice services to the adult criminal justice system, and from designated young adults' facilities to the adult prison estate, can be a difficult time, when there is less support and a new and different system to adapt to.

There are also a disproportionately high number of **care leavers** in contact with the criminal justice system, and it is important that consideration is given to supporting the needs of this group.

2. How do young adult men differ to older adults?

The evidence suggests that young adults deserve special attention for three key reasons:

- Young adults are at higher risk of *any* proven reoffending, and of *violent* proven reoffending, than older adults
- Young adults commit different sorts of offences to older adults
- Young adults respond differently to NOMS' services, activities, systems and interventions, than older adults.

Young adults are more likely to reoffend than older adults

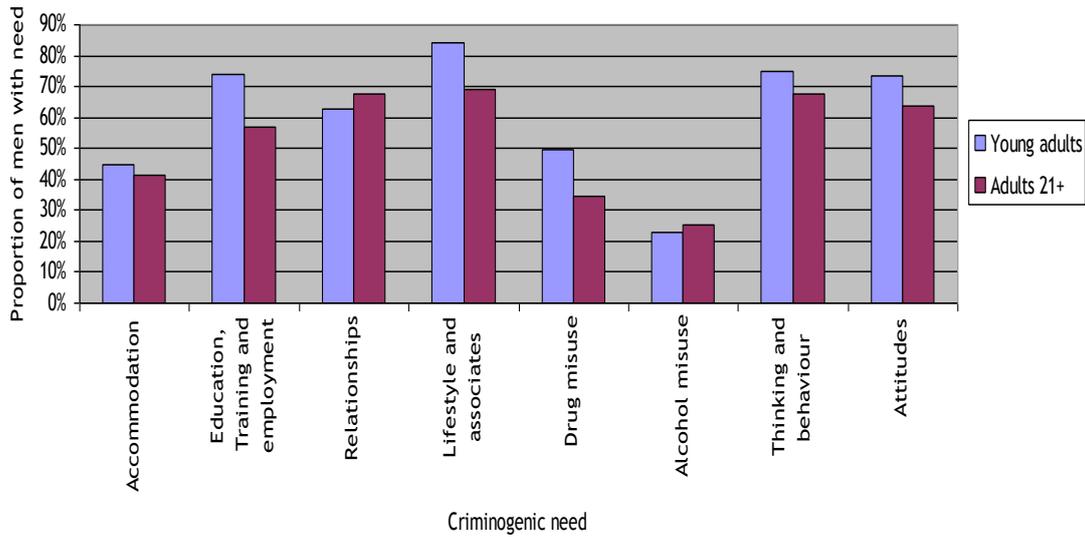
Young adults are a group that is at particularly high risk of recidivism, compared with older adults. Young adults have a higher rate, compared to older adults, of reoffending within one year of release⁵, and almost three-quarters (73%) of young adult men are assessed as having at least a 50% chance of proven reoffending within two years of being in the community after sentence (Table 2). Young adults are also at greater risk of reoffending with a violent offence, than are older adults. A fifth of young adult men were at the highest risk of violent reoffending over two years, compared with only 5% of men aged over 20 (Table 2).

Table 2. Proportion of adult men, by age group, with different levels of risk of any or of violent, proven reoffending over a two-year period, based on internal management information.

2-year general reoffending rate (OGRS 4G)	Young adults	Adults 21+
0-24%	5%	27%
25-49%	22%	30%
50-74%	41%	29%
75-99%	32%	15%
2-year violent reoffending rate (OGRS 4V)		
0-29%	29%	61%
30-59%	50%	34%
60-99%	21%	5%

As would be expected in a higher risk group, some of the criminogenic needs (needs relevant to reoffending) assessed using the Offender Assessment System (OASys), are more prevalent among younger than older adult men⁶. Figure 2 shows that a greater proportion of men aged 18-20 than men aged over 20, had needs relating to their lifestyle and associates, education, training and employment, attitudes and drug misuse.

Figure 2. Proportion of younger and older adult men assessed as having a need in each OASys reoffending domain.

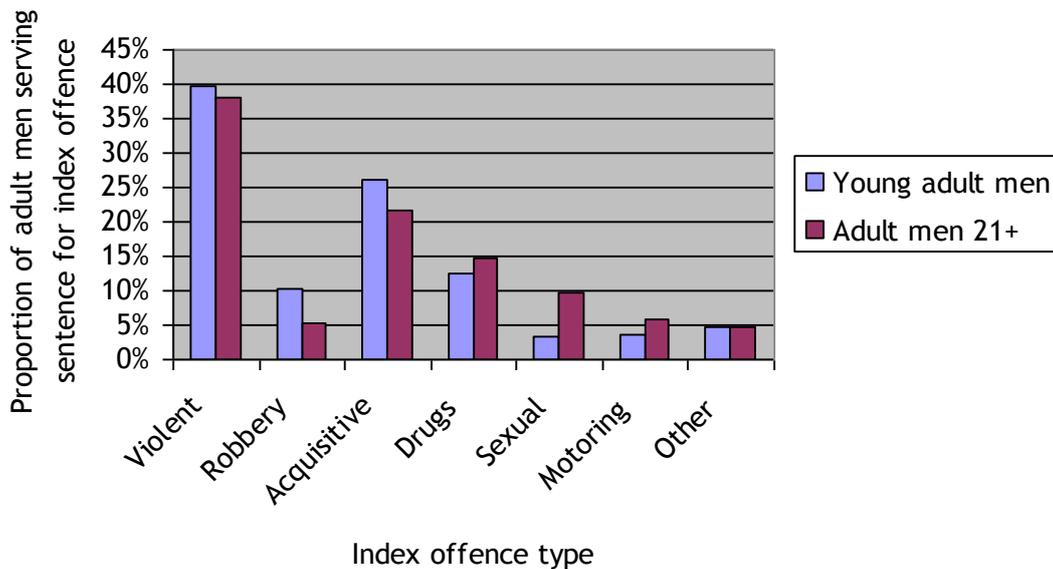


Having a lifestyle and associates linked to offending is the most prevalent need for young adults in all settings. This is important, because, for this group in particular peer influence is key in shaping the way they think about themselves, and in influencing what they do. Building resistance to peer influence, therefore, could be an important means of reducing reoffending.

Young adults commit different types of offences than older adults

There are some differences in the types of offences for which young adult men are serving sentences and those of older adults. Figure 3 shows that, overall, young adult men were more likely to be serving sentences for robbery than were men aged 21 or over, while a smaller proportion of young adults than of older adults were serving sentences for sexual or motoring offences.

Figure 3. Distribution of adult men in different age groups serving sentences for different index offence types, based on internal management information.



Of those who had committed drugs-related offences, a much smaller proportion of young adults than older adults had committed offences relating to drug importation (22% of young adults with drugs offences had such an offence, compared with 47% of adult men aged 21 or over). The vast majority of young adult men serving sentences for drugs were doing so for possession or small-scale supply (78%).

Just under a third (31%) of those young adults with acquisitive offences was serving a sentence for domestic burglary. Of those men with an index offence for acquisitive crimes, a smaller proportion of the young (6%) than the older adults (18%) were serving sentences for fraud or forgery, while a greater proportion of the younger adults (16%) was serving a sentence for vehicle-related theft than was the older adults (8%)⁷. What we see is a greater prevalence of the less sophisticated, more impulsive, crimes among young adults, compared to older adults.

Young adults respond differently to services, regimes and interventions, than older adults. There are clear differences in the behaviour of young adults in prisons, compared to older adults.

Young adults are over-represented in assaults in prisons, making up around 25% of assailants of assaults, being involved in 31% of fights, and making up 23% of victims of assaults in prisons in 2013⁸, despite representing only around 7.8% of the prison population during that year⁹. Similarly, 18-20 year-old men are involved in a disproportionately large proportion of recorded self-harm incidents, accounting for 16% of such incidents in 2013¹⁰.

Young adults also have higher attrition rates from some accredited programmes, compared to those of 21 or over¹¹. Research has suggested that younger adults may be more preoccupied with relationships and stress than older, more mature adults, and therefore, to improve engagement with interventions, these issues should be addressed. Interventions and services that understand these preoccupations are more likely to successfully engage young adults¹².

The role of maturity

Arguably, many of these differences between young adults and older adults can be explained by the fact that young adults are still maturing in important ways that will affect how they behave and respond to the justice system. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (2014), argued that maturity is fundamental to mitigating the risk posed by contact with the criminal justice system and responding to the needs of young adults, and suggested that increasing the level of purposeful activity improves the custodial behaviour of young adults, and makes prisons safer¹³. Extending this argument to the community, helping young adults to mature could also help increase rates of compliance with supervision and community orders.

3. Young adults are still maturing

While individuals tend to reach physical maturity during mid-adolescence, and intellectual maturity by the age of 18, emotional and social maturity continues into the mid-twenties¹⁴. Evidence suggests that the parts of the brain associated with impulse control and regulation and interpretation of emotions, are the last to mature, and continue to develop well into adulthood¹⁵. This type of maturity is sometimes called 'psychosocial maturity' and in its usual definition consists of three components (figure 4), which are thought to influence the maturity with which individuals judge situations and decide how to act in those situations: responsibility, temperance and perspective¹⁶.

Responsibility involves having a clear and stable identity, being able to resist peer influence and the ability to be self-sufficient. **Temperance** refers to the ability to regulate and manage emotional states, impulses and risk-taking. **Perspective** involves the ability to see beyond oneself when considering a problem, to consider others' perspectives, the wider context in which the problem sits and long-term consequences. Overall, the psychological research in this area suggests that psychosocial immaturity can lead to poor judgement and ill-considered decisions to offend, which can extend into young adulthood¹⁴.

Looking at the young adults managed by NOMS, we can see that these three issues are very relevant to this population. Table 3 indicates that, according to OASys assessments, the majority of young adults managed in custody and in the community have markers of psychosocial immaturity, and that each of these markers is more prevalent among adults under 21, than among adult men of 21 years or over.

Component of maturity		Young adult men	Adult men 21+
Temperance	Impulsivity	88%	75%
	Temper control	71%	65%
	Reckless/risk taking	87%	77%
Perspective	Awareness of consequences	92%	84%
	Understands others' views	73%	70%
Responsibility	Easily influenced by others	74%	47%
	Overreliance on others	61%	40%

Table 3. Proportion of young adult and adult men 21 or over assessed as having problems with different markers of maturity.

In particular, a far greater proportion of young adult men are assessed as being easily influenced by, or as being over-reliant on, others, than are those men over 20. Impulsivity, lack of awareness of consequences and recklessness and risk taking, were extremely prevalent among young adult men. These characteristics may go

some way to explaining the different response of young adults to imprisonment and to engagement in services and interventions.

There are suggestions from research that another aspect of psychosocial maturity, **future orientation**, could be important in helping to explain the poorer behaviour and outcomes for young adults. Research suggests that a limited ability to think about one's future self, which is responsible for a tendency to live in the now, and a failure to think through the longer-term consequences of behaviour, are related to criminal behaviour. There is evidence that both younger people, and people who engage in criminal behaviour have a weak future orientation – they are less likely to think of themselves as someone who has a longer-term future, or to actively engage in thought about that future self¹⁷. Individuals become more oriented to the future as they mature, and the parts of the brain associated with planning for longer-term goals continue to mature into early adulthood¹⁸.

4. How can we help young adults to mature and achieve better outcomes? Commissioning principles for young adult men

Young adults are still maturing, and for those serving sentences in custody or in the community, the majority are easily influenced by others, and overly rely on other people. Impulsivity and emotion management are prevalent issues for this group, which will impact on how young adults engage with and respond to prison regimes, licence conditions, supervision, interventions and services. These features of immaturity are also risk factors for reoffending, and therefore it is important that impulse and emotion regulation is addressed constructively.

What should we target?

A synthesis of the relevant evidence on maturity, 'what works' in reducing reoffending among young adults and desistance from crime and examination of the data on the young adults sentenced in England and Wales, indicates that the following are priority issues for intervention with young adults:



Development of maturity including

1. **A stable, prosocial identity** Research into those who successfully desist from offending suggests that an important part of this process is the development of a noncriminal, prosocial identity¹⁹. Young adulthood is an important time for the development of identity. Researchers have suggested that the late teens and early twenties is a period of 'emerging adulthood', when younger people start to become more self-sufficient, and to get a more fixed idea of who they are²⁰. It is important that young adults are given the opportunity, and are encouraged, to develop a noncriminal identity, to give them a better chance of living a more fulfilling, productive and offence-free life.
2. **Resistance to peer influence.** Young adulthood is a time when parental control is weakened, and the influence of peers on behaviour and on identity, becomes stronger^{21,22}. NOMS data suggests that the influence of lifestyle and associates

on young adults' offending behaviour is a pervasive problem; this is the most common need of those in this age group identified by Offender Assessment System assessors. There is also good evidence that peer influence is important in determining younger peoples' engagement in risky behaviour, including substance misuse and violence^{23,24}. Younger people tend to imitate the behaviour of their associates²⁵, and it is important that we work to mitigate the risks posed by bringing together young adults who tend towards recklessness and risk-taking. One of the key ways in which we can do so is by helping young adults to develop their ability to resist peer influence, by building their social skills and helping them to develop a stronger sense of who they are and what they value.

3. **Greater self-sufficiency and independence.** Developing responsibility – becoming more self-reliant and independent – is an important aspect of becoming an adult, and forms one of the three components of psychosocial maturity. This doesn't mean being entirely autonomous; a key part of making more mature judgements is identifying when you need help and seeking advice from appropriate sources²⁶. However, it does mean being able to take on adult responsibilities and to function independently. For those young adults who have been convicted of crimes, there are often fewer opportunities to take responsibility and develop self-sufficiency, as they are subject to a variety of restrictions, controls and supervision. Those in custody, by virtue of their confinement, have even fewer opportunities to become self-sufficient and to take on adult responsibilities. Concerns about lagging behind their peers, and about having opportunities to take on positions of responsibility, have been raised by young adults in both Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons surveys, and within NOMS' Measure of Quality of Prison Life surveys. Actively identifying opportunities, both in custodial and community settings, within which young adults can take on responsibility and become more independent is one way of mitigating some of the impact of having been convicted of a crime in adolescence or early adulthood.
4. **Building skills in managing emotions and impulses.** The areas of the brain associated with impulse management and emotion regulation are among the last to mature; these skills are unlikely to be fully developed in the young adult population²⁷. There is promising evidence to suggest that prison-based cognitive skills programmes addressing impulsivity and self-management can impact on rates of reoffending for this group²⁸. These are programmes that we would expect would help young adults to develop temperance; the ability to hold back and manage their impulses and emotions more effectively. Focussing efforts on this area is therefore an important part of any strategy aimed at reducing the reoffending rates of young adult men.
5. **Increasing future orientation.** Future orientation consists of three components, (1) the extent to which someone thinks about their future, (2) the extent to which someone prefers long-term to short-term goals, and (3) the extent to which someone formulates plans to achieve long-term goals²⁹. Individuals become more oriented to the future as they mature, and the parts of the brain associated with planning continue to mature into early adulthood³⁰. Research shows that people from more disadvantaged backgrounds, and younger people who engage in criminal or risky behaviour, have weaker future orientation than their more advantaged³¹ or law-abiding peers³². Increasing future orientation is therefore a promising approach to improving outcomes for young adults.
6. **Strengthened bonds with family and other close relationships.** Facilitating supportive family contact could help promote desistance among young adults.

Better social bonds, in particular family relationships and intimate relationships have been linked to lower rates of reoffending, acting as a protective factor for those in emerging adulthood³³.

Education and employment training. Evidence suggests that those who offend aged between 14-18, and who go on as adults to successfully desist from offending had greater stability in their daily routines, both in their living arrangements and in their attendance at structured activities, such as education, training or employment³⁴. Providing young adults with opportunities to increase their educational achievements and develop new work skills is an important way to help them build independence and self-sufficiency, and for them to develop pride in pro-social achievement.

For those in prison, structured support during the crucial period of re-entry to society.

Commissioning Principles to help address these priority needs.

There is a range of ways in which we can help young adults to mature, and to address those factors that are relevant to reoffending. It is through the interventions and activities we provide, and our relationship with young adults, that we can help young adults to flourish. The activities and interventions recommended below are those where we believe the evidence suggests the greatest chances of impact. NOMS commissioning strategy is to focus investment on these approaches and services for young adults in custody and the community.

1. **Structured programmes that enhance thinking skills and emotional regulation**, such as cognitive skills and anger management programmes. There is good evidence that cognitive skills programmes that aim to address impulsivity and self-management can reduce reoffending rates in young adults³⁵. For those serving sentences for acquisitive offences, who may be less likely to benefit from cognitive skills interventions, **substance misuse problems** should be the priority issue to address³⁶.
2. **Re-entry schemes** that provide extra support and structure during the transition from prison to community. Structured, purposeful activity is very important. There is good evidence to suggest that parole re-entry schemes, which provide support to those released from prison, mainly through linking them with relevant services, and helping meet resettlement needs, can have a sizeable impact on the recidivism of 18-25 year-olds. Those parole re-entry schemes that worked were well-planned and highly structured, and contained rehabilitative elements³⁷.
3. **Stress management** interventions such as relaxation or mindfulness training. Stress-management work could also help to improve engagement and retention in interventions and services, helping young adults who may be more preoccupied with stress and relationship issues, than their older counterparts³⁸. This could take the form of mindfulness-informed activities, which encourage a focus on awareness and acceptance of thoughts and emotions, and can lead to lower levels of stress and anxiety^{39,40} and help improve self-control among young adults in prison⁴¹.
4. **Education, employment training** and assistance in finding employment. Research suggests that these opportunities are much likely to assist desistance if accompanied by helping the young adult find a real job.

5. **Other activities that build maturity and independence**, a positive identity, self-sufficiency and responsibility, such as voluntary work, peer support or restorative /reparative programmes. Psychological research suggests that activities that expose young adults to positive, prosocial peers, activities that encourage young adults to engage with and contribute to the community, and to ‘do good’, can be effective in helping young people to develop a more prosocial identity; to ‘be good’^{42, 43}. In prisons, this could mean becoming peer supporters and mentors, and engaging in user councils. In the community, community payback schemes could be utilised as a ‘do good, be good’ activity. Staff should also use every informal opportunity to engage young adults with the idea of themselves in the future, how they see themselves in the future, and how they would get there, to increase future orientation.
6. **Family support services**. Services for young adults should therefore focus on improving the quality of family relationships, in addition to facilitating contact (where such contact is appropriate).
7. **Making every contact matter**. Staff who are trained to understand immaturity, and who can relate to young adults using skills that include: coaching in goal setting and problem solving, conversations that emphasise future orientation, use of reward and reinforcement, and explicit recognition of independence and other positive attributes rather than communicating negative expectations and labels, Regimes in prison and activities in the community, supported by consistent encouragement, coaching and reinforcement by staff, should try to help develop young adults’ level of maturity. Staff should both create and exploit opportunities to take responsibility and to develop skills for self-sufficiency. Staff who work with young adults should encourage and help them build skills to be independent and self-sufficient, being mindful not to do things for them, or to encourage or reinforce a tendency to overly rely on others.
8. In addition, we would like to develop and test some structured activities or an intervention to speed up the process of maturity. In particular, we would like to see trials of interventions that teach skills to help young adults to manage their relationships with peers, teach life skills, build pro-social, healthy relationships, and develop a more robust sense of self.

1	Structured programmes that enhance thinking skills and emotional regulation, such as cognitive skills and anger management programmes
2	Re-entry schemes that provide extra support and structure during the transition from prison to community
3	Interventions designed to strengthen family bonds
4	Stress management interventions such as relaxation or mindfulness training
5	Education
6	Employment training and assistance in finding employment
7	Other activities that build independence, a positive identify, self-sufficiency and responsibility, such as voluntary work, peer support or restorative / reparative activity.
8	Staff who are trained to understand immaturity, and who can relate to young adults using skills that include: coaching in goal setting and problem solving, conversations that emphasise future orientation, use of reward and reinforcement, and explicit recognition of independence and other positive attributes rather than communicating negative expectations and labels
<i>The NOMS Grants Programme and Innovation Board are possible avenues available to pilot, develop, test and evaluate new and promising approaches where the evidence-base is currently limited</i>	

Table 5. Methods of helping maturation and reducing reoffending among young adults

References

- ¹ National Offender Management Service (2014). *NOMS Commissioning Intentions: From 2014*. London: National Offender Management Service.
- ² Some of this information is based on a caseload of young adults who were being managed in custody or in the community on 31st December 2013. As a result, some of the numbers cited may differ slightly from official published statistics, because it uses a caseload of young adult men drawn on a different day, and unlike the published statistics, excludes those men on remand. This caseload is used because it provides more information about the characteristics, risk and needs of the young adults convicted and serving sentences, for which NOMS or Community Rehabilitation Companies are responsible, than is available from the sample used to derive the official statistics. As with any large administrative datasets, there are likely to be some issues with data quality and reliability, which mean this data will not provide a complete picture of the needs of this group
- ³ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/449347/reducing-reoffending-in-adults.pdf
- ⁴ Ministry of Justice (2013). *Proven reoffending statistics quarterly bulletin, October 2010 to September 2011*. Ministry of Justice.
- ^[1] <http://www.youngreview.org.uk/>
- ⁵ Ministry of Justice (2013). *Proven reoffending statistics quarterly bulletin, October 2010 to September 2011*. Ministry of Justice, London:UK.
- ⁶ Needs data is only available for those men who have had a recent and full OASys assessment, which was 51% of the young adults and 50% of the men aged 20 or over. The needs data presented, therefore, is based on around half of the men serving sentences managed by NOMS.
- ⁷ Based on NOMS segmentation data, 31st December 2013.
- ⁸ Ministry of Justice (2014). *Safety in Custody Statistics Quarterly Update to March 2014 - supplementary tables: Assaults in Prison Custody - 2004-2013*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/safety-in-custody-statistics-quarterly-update-to-march-2014>
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- ¹¹ Based on 13/14 completion rates of accredited programmes in custody and the community, from Performance Analysis Group.
- ¹² McGuire, J. (2015). *What Works in Reducing Reoffending in Young Adults: A Rapid Evidence Assessment*. Ministry of Justice Analytical Summary, London: England.
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Version Control

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P1.1 Type correction to diagram page 4 and additional paragraph page 6 explaining data/findings relating to BAME offenders. [21 September 2015]