



## Examining the Educational Background of Young Knife Possession Offenders

### Key Findings

For those young offenders with knife possession offences at some point in their childhood (aged 10-18), who reached the end of Key Stage 4 in the 2012/13 academic year:

<b>A lower proportion achieved each of the headline educational attainment levels</b>		In comparison with the wider offender cohort, theft offenders, and the overall pupil population. This is seen in the headline attainment levels at both Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4. For example, 91.1% achieved any pass at GCSE (or equivalent), compared with 99.7% of the overall pupil population.
<b>A higher proportion had been persistently absent and/or excluded from school</b>		In comparison with the wider offender cohort, theft offenders, and the overall pupil population (where data is available). Higher proportions also have Special Educational Needs and Free School Meal eligibility.
<b>Knife possession offences rarely followed exclusions</b>		Only a very small proportion committed the knife possession offence shortly after being excluded from school. For those with a permanent exclusion that came later than their knife possession offence, half were excluded within the next 30 days. Although it is not possible to identify from this analysis whether there is an association between exclusions and knife possession offending, the low volumes of knife possession offences following exclusions mean any such association could not be a significant driver of youth knife possession offending overall.
<b>Educational attainment is lower for those with more than one knife possession offence</b>		Lower proportions reached the headline attainment levels at Key Stage 4 among those with multiple knife possession offences, compared with those with a single knife possession offence. Lower proportions also reached these levels among those with school exclusions, compared to those without; and those who first offended prior to the end of Key Stage 4, compared to those who first offended afterwards.

## Introduction

This paper investigates the educational background of young offenders<sup>1</sup> who committed knife and offensive weapon possession offences (referred to as knife possession offences throughout this analysis)<sup>2</sup>, based on key variables from the 2015 data share between the Ministry of Justice and Department for Education.

The analysis has been produced to provide greater insight into the background of these young offenders, to help those interested understand how their educational background can differ from young offenders generally, and how the timing of their offending interacts with these characteristics. However, this analysis does not imply causality between the educational outcomes/characteristics and offending. It complements the December 2016 publication 'Understanding the educational background of young offenders', although the previous publication does not focus specifically on a single offence type.<sup>3</sup>

Section 1 includes a high-level analysis of several key education variables, including:

- Attainment at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4
- Special Educational Needs
- Free School Meal eligibility
- School Absences and Exclusions

Section 2 provides a more in-depth analysis of the interaction of school exclusions and knife possession offences, and the attainment of those committing knife possession offences. The analysis of the interaction of school exclusions and knife possession offences only considers knife possession offences committed prior to the end of Key Stage 4.

For more details on the data share that this analysis is based on, together with information on the December 2016 publication, please refer to the annex at the end of this paper. The data upon which the findings in this paper are based are presented in the accompanying tables (with the source table referenced in this paper, where relevant). Where previously published figures have been referred to, links are given to the source publication.

## Offender Cohort and Comparison groups

The cohort of young offenders for this analysis includes all knife possession offenders in the linked data with a Key Stage 4 (KS4) academic year (the year they reach age 16) of 2012/13, amounting to approximately 1,800 offenders. The offence may have been committed at any point over the coverage period of the data<sup>4</sup>. Within the cohort, 93% of offenders have one knife possession offence recorded, with 7% having two (and only a very small proportion three or more).

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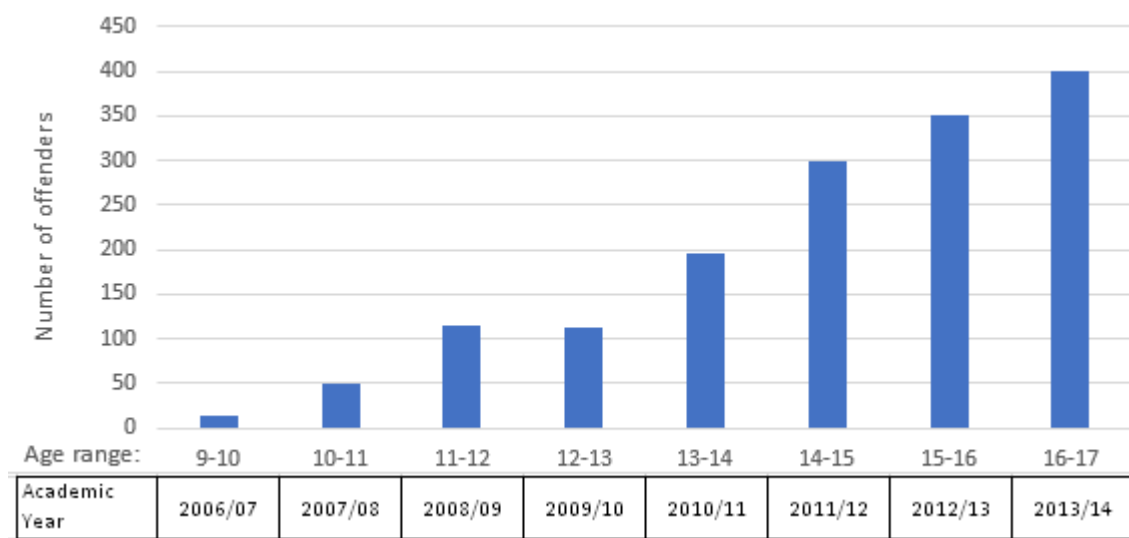
<sup>1</sup> Aged 10-18

<sup>2</sup> Knife possession offences in this paper relate to cautions and convictions for knife possession offences in England and Wales, and include offences involving the possession of a blade, point or offensive weapon, and offences involving threatening with one of these types of weapon. This is in line with Knife and offensive weapon sentencing statistics, England and Wales – year ending March 2018, which this paper is being published alongside.

<sup>3</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/statistics/understanding-the-educational-background-of-young-offenders-full-report](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/understanding-the-educational-background-of-young-offenders-full-report)

<sup>4</sup> The data share covers offences in the period 2000 – July 2015. However, the earliest knife possession offence recorded among the cohort of young offenders considered in this analysis was in February 2007.

**Figure 1: First knife possession offence committed, by age, for young offender cohort (Source: Table 0.1)**



Note: The coverage period for offences in the data share ends mid-2015, so only includes partial data for the academic year 2014/15. Where timing effects are considered in this analysis, 2014/15 offences are excluded, including in figure 1 above.

This cohort has been selected because concentrating on a single year minimises the impact of education policy changes, and this represents the most recent year for which we have one full year of post-KS4 information in the linked data. For comparison purposes, an ‘all offenders’ cohort has been included in the analysis, in relation to all (approximately 31,000) young offenders with a KS4 academic year of 2012/13 in the linked data, who committed any offence recorded on the Police National Computer over the same coverage period.

A ‘theft offenders’ cohort (about 12,000 offenders), similarly constructed, has also been included. Many young offenders commit typically less serious, summary offences, in contrast to the typically more serious, indictable offence of knife possession. Theft offences are being presented here for comparison because they are also indictable and have sufficient volumes for comparison to knife possession, but do not represent a similar behaviour. Approximately 6% of the ‘all offenders’ cohort are in the knife possession cohort, and 37% are in the ‘theft offenders’ cohort<sup>5</sup>.

Results are also provided, where available, for the overall pupil population (including both non-offenders and offenders at the end of KS4<sup>6</sup>) for comparison purposes<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> The analysis looks separately and independently at those with theft offences and those with knife possession offences. It does not consider any interactions between those with both a knife possession and a theft offence, and individuals can be considered as part of both groups.

<sup>6</sup> For school absence and exclusion, where end of KS4 data are not available, results for National Curriculum year group 11 have been used

<sup>7</sup> Offender numbers and pupil population figures quoted in this analysis may differ when analysing different education variables, since the information on these variables may not be recorded for all offenders and pupils

## **Key points on the analysis: interpreting results**

**Care should be taken when interpreting this analysis as it does not imply causality between the educational outcomes/characteristics and offending.** For example, approximately 41% of the knife possession offender cohort are known to have been eligible for free school meals (FSM) in the 2012/13 academic year, but it is not possible to conclude from these findings that there is a causal relationship between FSM eligibility and committing knife possession offences (or vice versa). Indeed, those knife possession offenders identified as being eligible for FSM make up less than 1% of all pupils at the end of KS4 in 2012/13, in state-funded schools, who were known to be eligible for FSM.

The education variables included in this paper have generally been analysed independently of each other. It is important to note that there may be links between these key variables which have not been factored into the analysis, and other factors which could not be taken into account.

The attainment and pupil characteristics analysis presents results for a cohort of pupils reaching the end of KS4 in a single academic year (2012/13).

Knife possession offenders represent a small, atypical group of young people; their results should not be assumed to be representative of young offenders or young people more generally.

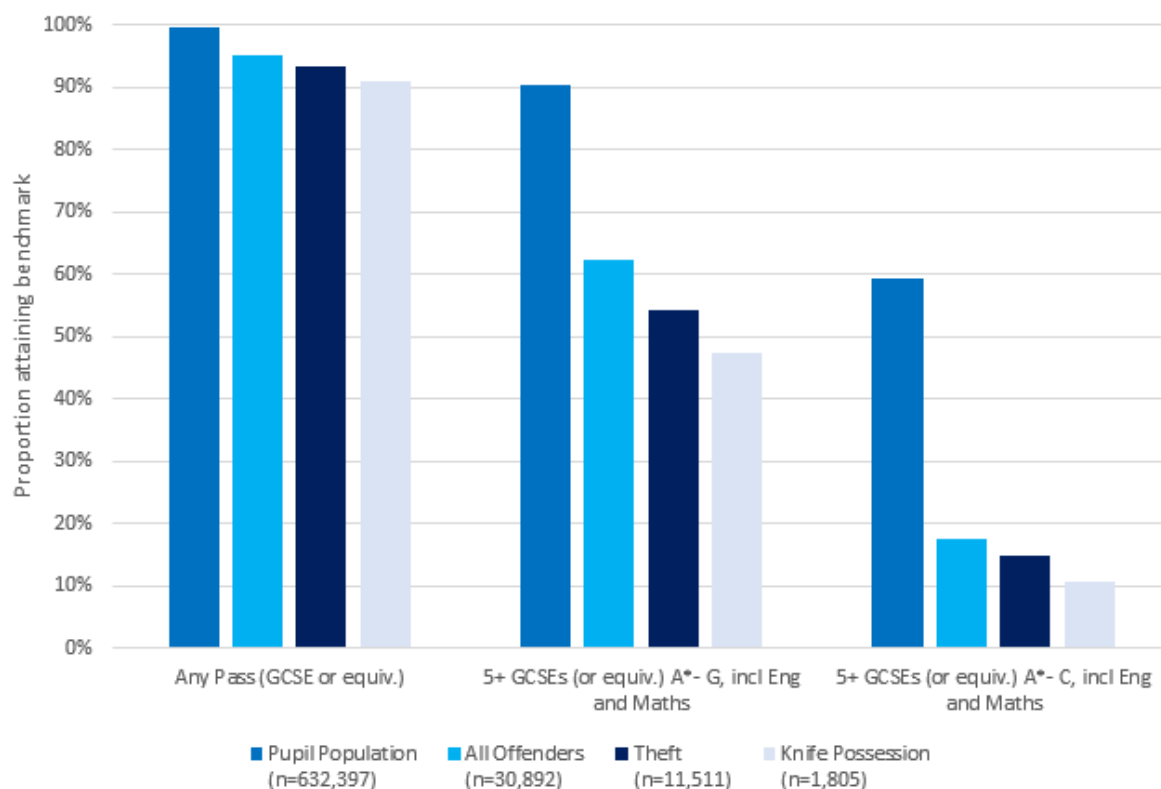
## Section 1: Analysis of Key Education Variables<sup>8</sup>

A high-level analysis of key education variables in relation to the young offender cohort included in this analysis reveals the following:

### Attainment at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4

A lower proportion of young offenders who have committed knife possession offences, reached the expected standard in reading, writing and maths at the end of Key Stage 2 (KS2, ending age 11, Table 1.1.1), or achieved various Key Stage 4 (KS4, ending age 16) benchmarks, than the comparison groups<sup>9</sup>. For example, 91.1% achieved any pass at GCSE (or equivalent), compared with 99.7% of the overall pupil population, 95.1% of the all offenders cohort and 93.2% of theft offenders.

**Figure 2: Key Stage 4 Attainment for pupil population<sup>10</sup> and young offender cohorts with KS4 academic year of 2012/13 (Source: Table 1.1.2)**



<sup>8</sup> Analysis in Section 1 considers all offences over the coverage period, including those committed after KS4

<sup>9</sup> New methodology was introduced for KS4 attainment from 2013/14 onwards, not applicable for the cohorts in this analysis (where KS4 end is in 2012/13), including entry level qualifications no longer counting in the performance tables and measures.

<sup>10</sup> For those pupils reaching the end of KS4 in the 2012/13 academic year. Source: GCSE and equivalent results in England: 2014 to 2015 (revised) - table 1a: Time series of GCSE and equivalent entries and achievements ([www.gov.uk/government/statistics/revised-gcse-and-equivalent-results-in-england-2014-to-2015](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/revised-gcse-and-equivalent-results-in-england-2014-to-2015))

## Special Educational Needs

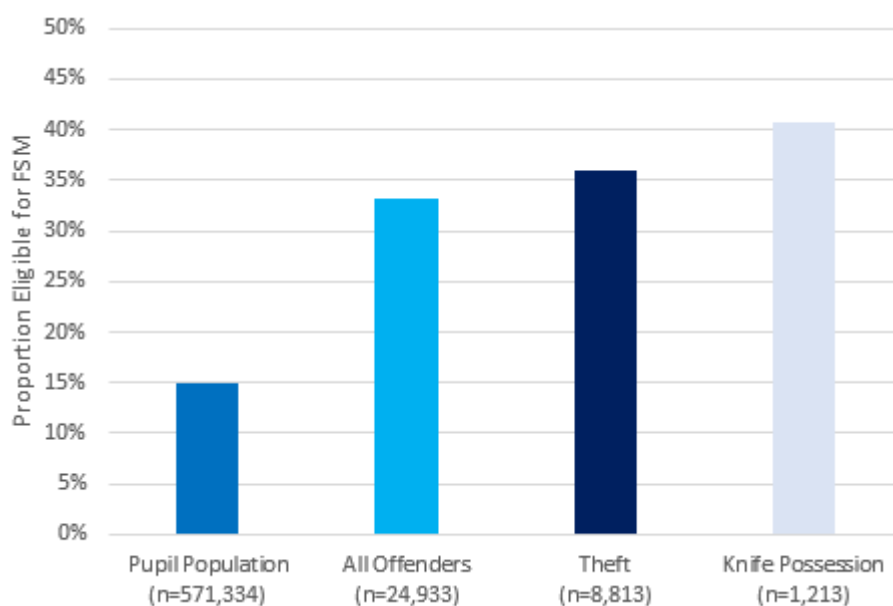
Young people identified as having special educational needs (SEN) may also have a SEN statement. A young person has a statement of SEN, or Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan<sup>11</sup>, when a formal assessment has been made. The statement or EHC plan sets out the young person's need and the extra help they should receive.

Among knife possession offenders, 16% had SEN with a statement and 40% had SEN without a statement during the 2012/13 academic year (Table 1.2). The corresponding proportions are lower for the overall pupil population<sup>12</sup> (4% having SEN with a statement, 17% having SEN without a statement), for the all offenders cohort (10% and 38% respectively), and among theft offenders (12% and 40%). This pattern also holds when considering those having SEN at any point in the five years prior to the end of KS4.

## Free School Meals

In relation to eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM), 59% of knife possession offenders were eligible for FSM at any point over the five-year period to the end of KS4 (academic years 2008/09-2012/13), compared with 51% of young offenders overall and 55% of theft offenders. Focusing just on the 2012/13 academic year, again there was a greater proportion of knife possession offenders eligible for FSM than among all comparison groups.

**Figure 3: Free School Meal eligibility in 2012/13 for pupil population<sup>13</sup> and young offender cohorts with KS4 academic year of 2012/13 (Source: Table 1.3)**



<sup>11</sup> From 2014 Education Health and Care Plans were introduced and no new Statements of SEN were issued

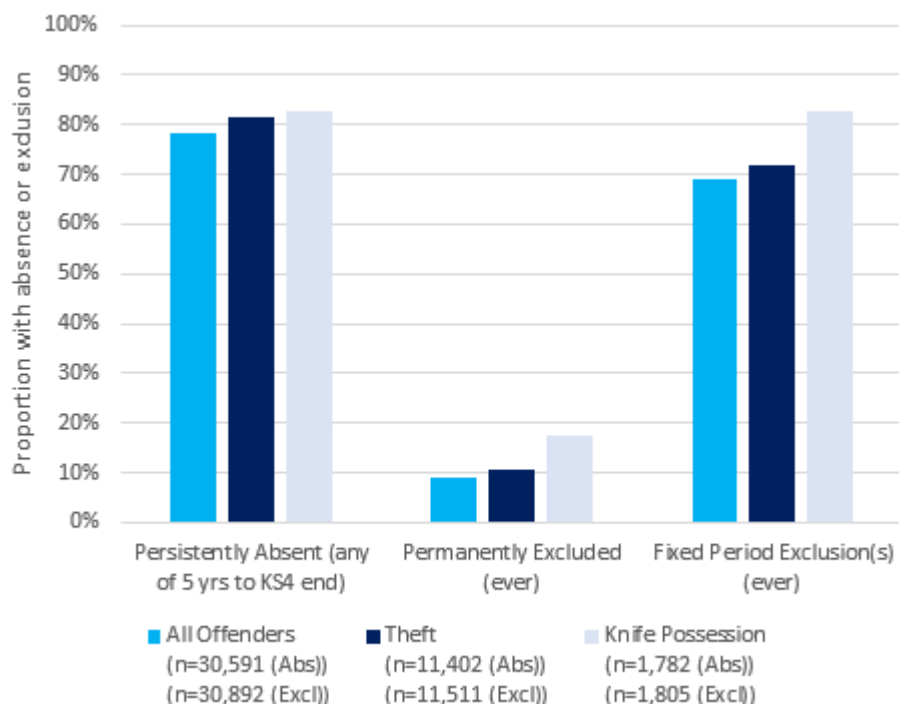
<sup>12</sup> For those pupils reaching the end of KS4 in the 2012/13 academic year. Source: Overall pupil population figures taken from - GCSE and equivalent attainment by pupil characteristics 2013- Table 2b ([www.gov.uk/government/statistics/gcse-and-equivalent-attainment-by-pupil-characteristics-2012-to-2013](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/gcse-and-equivalent-attainment-by-pupil-characteristics-2012-to-2013))

<sup>13</sup> Table 2a from 2012/13 pupil characteristics publication mentioned previously

## Exclusions and Persistent Absences from School

The incidence of persistent absence, fixed period and permanent exclusions from school among those with knife possession offences is greater than among all comparison groups. For example, 83% of knife possession offenders were persistently absent from school in at least one of the 5 academic years from 2008/09 to 2012/13, compared with 82% of theft offenders and 78% of all offenders and 78% of all offenders.

**Figure 4: School absences<sup>14</sup> and exclusions<sup>15</sup> for young offender cohorts with KS4 academic year of 2012/13, over periods described (Source: Tables 1.4.1 and 1.4.2)**



A direct comparison to the overall pupil population isn't available, but to put these results in context, in state-funded secondary schools in 2012/13, the Y11 pupil population were recorded as absent for 6.9% of sessions, and across all year groups 16.5% of enrolments were persistent absentees.<sup>16</sup> The permanent exclusion rate for the Y11 pupil population in state-funded secondary schools in 2012/13 was 0.1%, and the fixed period exclusion rate was 6.9%.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> A young offender has been classified as being persistently absent from school when they have taken absences (both unauthorised and authorised) during the school year that account for more than 10% of the total number of school sessions available. Where this has happened in at least one of the 5 academic years up to the end of KS4, they are included in the proportion shown.

<sup>15</sup> Where a young offender is recorded as having ever been permanently excluded, or ever having at least one fixed period exclusion from school (at any age), they are included in the respective proportions above

<sup>16</sup> Pupil absence in schools in England: 2015 to 2016 - [www.gov.uk/government/statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-2015-to-2016](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england-2015-to-2016)

<sup>17</sup> Permanent and fixed-period exclusions in England: 2015 to 2016 - [www.gov.uk/government/statistics/permanent-and-fixed-period-exclusions-in-england-2015-to-2016](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/permanent-and-fixed-period-exclusions-in-england-2015-to-2016)

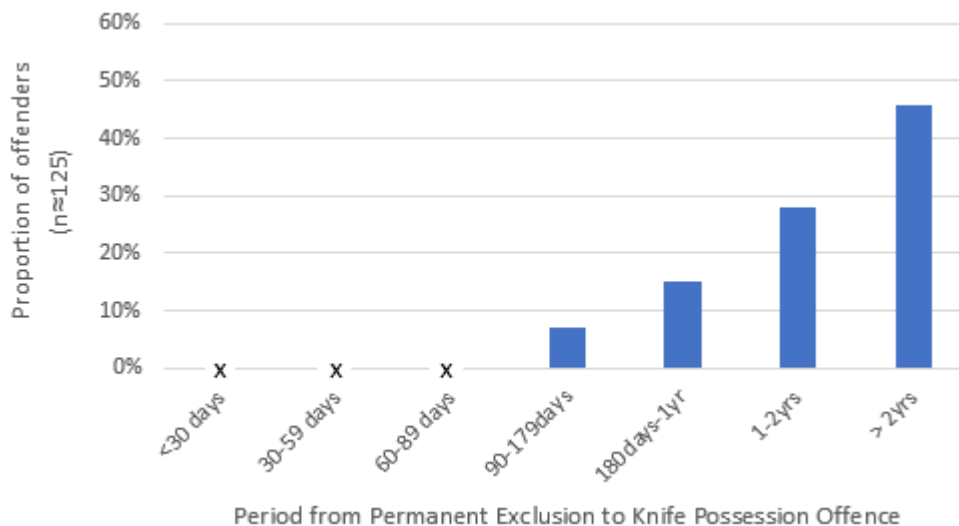
## Section 2: Further Analysis of Knife Possession Offenders

### Interaction of school exclusions and knife possession offences committed prior to end of KS4<sup>18</sup>

#### Permanent Exclusions

Of those knife possession offenders whose first offence was prior to the end of KS4, approximately 21% are known to have ever been permanently excluded<sup>19</sup> from school. Of these, there is an approximate 50/50 split between those whose first exclusion was prior to the offence, and those who were excluded at some point after the offence (and a small proportion [3%] where the offence date and exclusion date are on the same day). Figures 5 and 6 below look at the periods between these two events.

**Figure 5: Period between permanent exclusion and knife possession offence, where exclusion precedes offence, and offence is prior to end of KS4<sup>20</sup> (Source: Table 2.1.1)**



Note: where x is shown for a category above, counts of 3 or fewer have been suppressed.

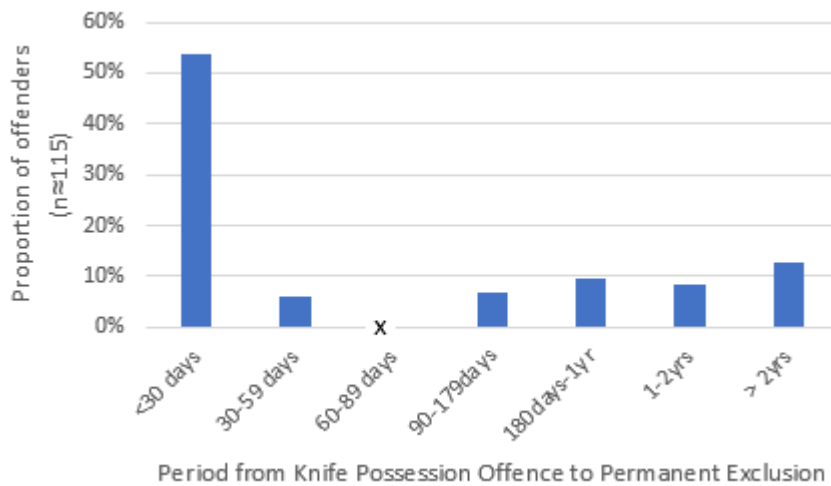
<sup>18</sup> Only those offending prior to KS4 have been considered here, because further school exclusions will not be possible for many young people after KS4.

<sup>19</sup> Local authorities are responsible for arranging suitable full-time education for permanently excluded pupils, and for other pupils who – because of illness or other reasons – would not receive suitable education without such provision under the Education Act 1996. Regulations set out that, in both cases, this should be provided from the sixth day of a fixed-period or permanent exclusion.

<sup>20</sup> For both figures 5 and 6, where an offender has multiple offences or multiple permanent exclusions, the first exclusion and/or first offence has been included. About 89% of those with both a permanent exclusion and a knife possession offence have exactly one of each. More details are provided in the supporting tables (see Table 2.3).



**Figure 6: Period between knife possession offence and permanent exclusion, where offence precedes or is on same day as exclusion, and offence is prior to end of KS4<sup>20</sup> (Source: Table 2.1.1)**



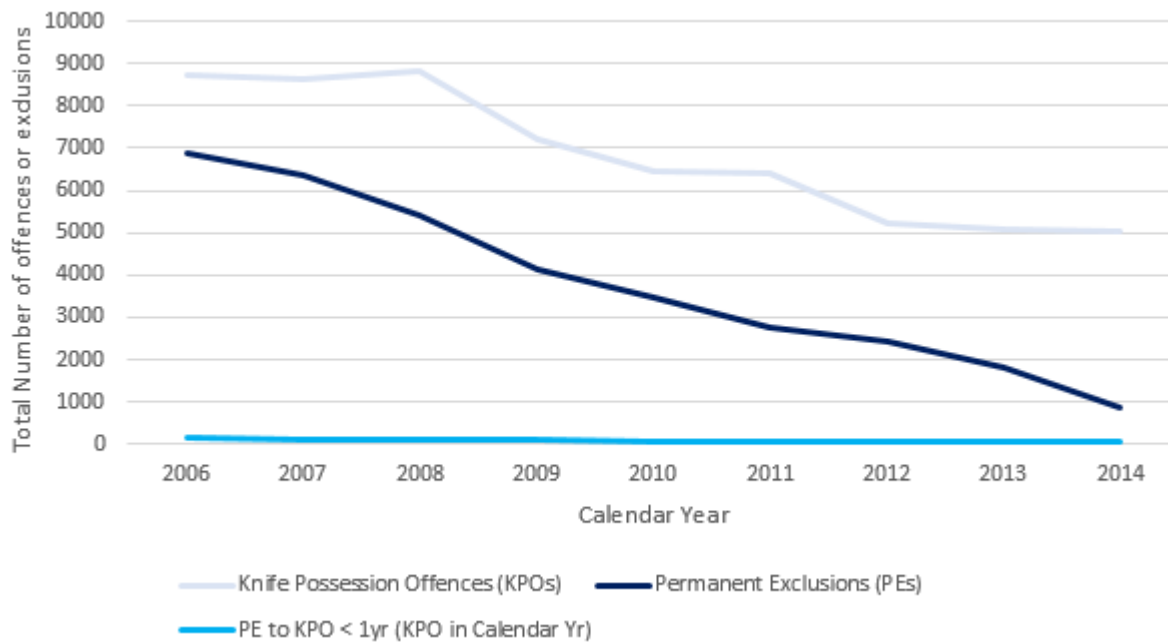
Note: where x is shown for a category above, counts of 3 or fewer have been suppressed.

Only a very small proportion of children permanently excluded from school who went on to commit a later knife possession offence, did so shortly after the exclusion. Almost three-quarters committed it more than a year later.

In contrast, where the knife offence precedes or is on the same day as the permanent exclusion, the gap between offence and exclusion is less than 30 days in approximately 54% of cases. It is highly likely that the exclusion is directly linked to the weapons possession offence in such cases, though this is impossible to prove directly from the data available.

To put the first observation into a broader context, figure 7 looks at the incidence and interaction of knife possession offences and permanent exclusions over time, across the whole linked data set. It shows, for each calendar year, across everyone in the linked data (not just those with knife possession offences): the number of knife possession offences recorded; the number of permanent exclusions recorded; and the number of knife possession offences that had been committed within a year of a permanent exclusion.

**Figure 7: Knife possession offences and permanent exclusions in the linked data, by calendar year (Source: Table 2.1.2)**



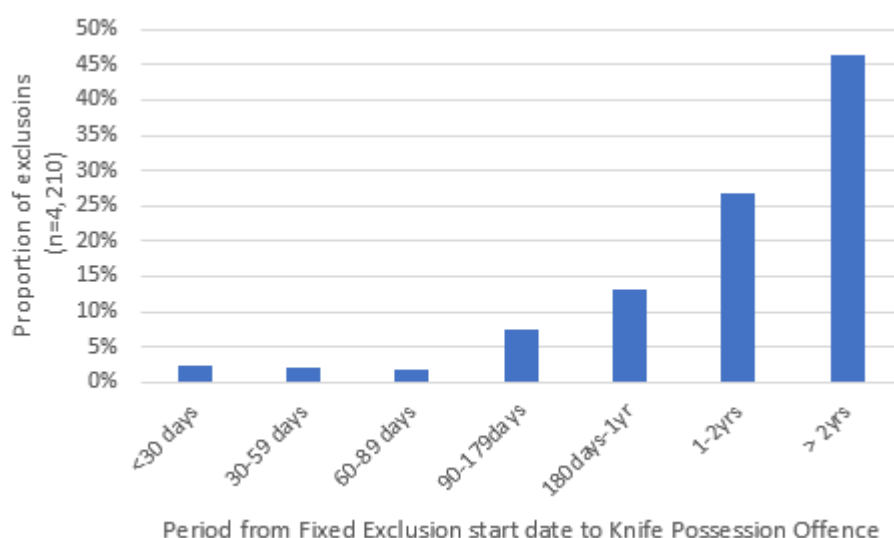
Among those in the linked data, permanent exclusions have fallen by 87% from 2006 to 2014, while the number of knife possession offences reduced more gradually by 42% over the same period. The proportion of these knife possession offences committed within a year following a permanent exclusion has remained extremely small throughout the period, fluctuating between 0.9% and 1.6%. This suggests that permanent exclusions cannot be a major short-term driver of knife possession offences, although it is still possible that there is an association that has not been picked up by this analysis.

## Fixed Period Exclusions

Of those knife possession offenders who offended prior to the end of KS4, approximately 85% have had at least one fixed period exclusion from school at some point.

Focusing on these fixed period exclusions, approximately 71% started prior to the first knife possession offence, with the remainder starting on or after the offence. Figures 8 and 9 below look at the periods between these two events.

**Figure 8: Period between start of fixed exclusion period and knife possession offence, where exclusion starts before offence, and offence is prior to end of KS4<sup>21</sup> (Source: Table 2.2)**



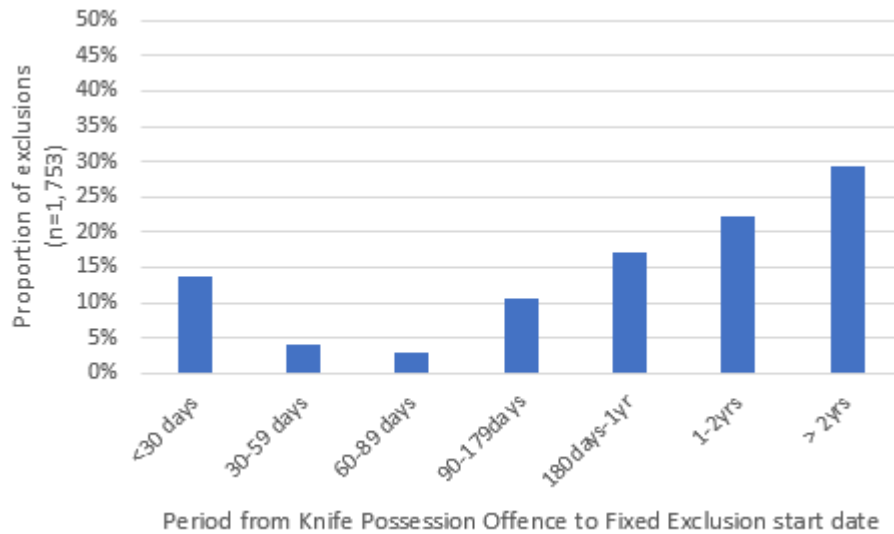
It is clear from the above figure that where a knife possession offender also has at least one fixed period exclusion from school, only in a very small proportion of such cases (2%) did the offence take place within 30 days of the start of the exclusion period<sup>22</sup>.

Although it is not possible to identify from this analysis whether there is an association between fixed period exclusions and knife possession offending, the low volumes of knife possession offences following fixed period exclusions mean any such association also could not be a significant driver of youth knife possession offending overall.

<sup>21</sup> For both figures 8 and 9, where an offender has multiple offences, the first offence has been included. About 95% of the fixed exclusions included relate to offenders with just one knife possession offence (KPO). Where offenders have more than one fixed period exclusion, all exclusions are included. More details are provided in the supporting tables (see Table 2.3).

<sup>22</sup> Governing bodies and proprietors of maintained schools and academies are under a duty to arrange for the provision of suitable full-time education from the sixth day of fixed-period exclusion under the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

**Figure 9: Period between knife possession offence and start of fixed exclusion period, where offence precedes or is on same day as the exclusion starts, and offence is prior to end of KS4<sup>21</sup> (Source: Table 2.2)**



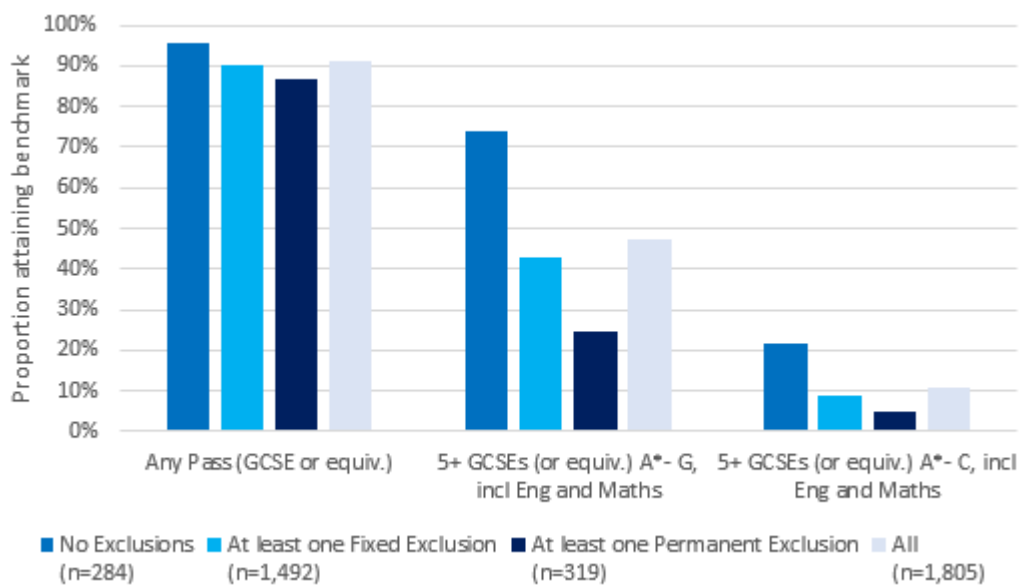
Where the knife offence precedes, or is on the same day, as the fixed period exclusion, the gap between offence and exclusion is less than 30 days for about 14% of exclusions. As with permanent exclusions, in such cases it is likely but not possible to show that the child's exclusion is directly linked to the weapons possession offence.

## Factors associated with Key Stage 4 attainment for knife possession offenders

Some further analysis on KS4 attainment was carried out, broken down by timing of offence, number of knife possession offences, and school exclusion types. It is clear from this analysis that:

- Those offending before the end of KS4 were less likely to have attained each of the KS4 benchmarks than those whose first offence was after the end of KS4 (Knife Possession Offence Timing, Table 2.4)
- Within the all offenders cohort, the proportion attaining each of the KS4 benchmarks becomes lower as the number of knife possession offences increases (Number of Knife Possession Offences, Table 2,4)
- The more serious the exclusion type experienced, the lower the proportion of knife possession offenders attaining each of the KS4 benchmarks (see figure 10 below)

**Figure 10: Key Stage 4 Attainment for knife possession offender cohort with KS4 academic year of 2012/13, by school exclusion type (Source: School Exclusion Types, Table 2.4)**



Note: 'All' relates to the whole knife possession offender cohort, regardless of any exclusions

## Annex: Data Sources and Methodology

This annex sets out basic details of the data share between the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and Department for Education (DfE), and the matching process between the MoJ and National Pupil Database data. However, more detail on this process can be found in the previous publication, at:

[www.gov.uk/government/statistics/understanding-the-educational-background-of-young-offenders-full-report](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/understanding-the-educational-background-of-young-offenders-full-report)

### Data sources

Data from several large datasets were brought together in this data share, as permitted by the Ministry of Justice's common law powers and section 537A(9) of the Education Act 1996. A brief description of the two main datasets is included below:

**National Pupil Database (NPD) – DfE.** A wide range of information about pupils and students which provides evidence on educational performance and context. The data includes detailed information about pupils' test and exam results, prior attainment, and progression between each key stage for all state schools in England. It also includes information about the characteristics of pupils in the state sector and non-maintained special schools, such as their gender, ethnicity, first language, eligibility for Free School Meals, awarding of bursary funding for 16-19-year olds, information about Special Educational Needs, and detailed information about any absences and exclusions.

### Police National Computer (PNC) – MoJ

This dataset includes recordable offences committed, with separate entries for each offence committed by a person, although only some information (e.g. personal characteristics) will be available through the linked data. The data analysed in this report is a subset of the total number of individuals. All individuals who commit an offence are recorded on the Police National Computer (PNC) and, as at July 2015, there were approximately 9.9 million individuals recorded on this database. This report is based on offenders from the PNC that were successfully matched to the NPD, covering the period 2000 – July 2015.

### How was the data matched?

The data were matched using combinations of six demographic variables from the PNC and NPD: forename, middle name, surname, date of birth, gender, postcode and, the derived variable, full name.

Not all offenders on the PNC were involved in the match to the National Pupil Database (NPD) as the NPD only began to record data from the 2001/02 academic year. Whilst attempting to match as many offenders on the PNC as possible, due to the limited time coverage of the NPD, it was only possible to match offenders between the ages of 10 and 29 as at June 2015. This meant the records of around 1.74 million offenders, aged between 10 and 29 years, from between 2000 and 2015 were shared with DfE. Of those, around 1.22 million were matched and included in the final matched dataset after cleaning. A good match rate of around 70% was achieved. Figures in this publication are based on matched offenders only and, as a result, volumes will be lower than published statistics from individual data sources. The matched data has been quality assured and cleaned

Further details on the matching and cleaning of the data sets is given in the previous publication.

## Further information

### Accompanying files

As well as this report, the following products are published as part of this release:

- ODS tables presenting data in relation to the findings in this report

### Official Statistics status

These are experimental Official Statistics. Official statistics are produced under the remit of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They are produced impartially and are free from political influence. More information can be found on the UK Statistics Authority website, accessible via the link below.

[www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/monitoring-and-assessment/code-of-practice/](http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/monitoring-and-assessment/code-of-practice/)

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Other enquiries about these statistics should be directed to the Justice Statistics Analytical Services division of the Ministry of Justice:

James Teasdale, Ministry of Justice, 7th Floor, 102 Petty France, London, SW1H 9AJ

Email: [statistics.enquiries@justice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:statistics.enquiries@justice.gsi.gov.uk)

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