

SCALING IT DOWN? A STUDY TO IDENTIFY HOW 16+ YOUNG OFFENDERS ACROSS LEICESTERSHIRE ENGAGE WITH EDUCATION, TRAINING OR EMPLOYMENT

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Abstract *This paper describes research into the education, training and employment (ETE) status of young offenders in Leicestershire, England. The study uses data collated by the Youth Offending Service (YOS) of over 600 young offenders which includes offending history, sentence outcomes, disposals, gravity scores (seriousness of offences), ASSET scores (for assessing risk and need) and ETE status. The analysis confirms that around 30% of young offenders aged 16 years or older were likely to be not in education, education, employment or training (NEET). The Youth Justice Board (England and Wales) policy demands that 90% of young offenders should be in ETE (YJB 2006). This study has uncovered a shortfall which has revealed some important continuities in the proportions of young people that disengage in ETE. The analysis outlines that the ways in which actuarial mechanisms like ASSET are currently used is not fully exploiting the potential of these kinds of assessments. Certain features of ASSET can indicate potential risks of NEET and could thus provide practitioners with early indicators to make referrals and seek out meaningful ETE. Leicestershire YOS is currently reviewing the ways in which they target, assist and support this particular cohort in response to this research.⁸*

Keywords *NEET, ETE, ASSET, young offenders, gravity scores, scaled approach*

Background

The Youth Justice Board (YJB: 2006) has stipulated that 90% of all supervised young offenders are expected to engage with education, training or employment (ETE). This is also echoed in the National Indicators stipulated by *The New Performance Framework for*

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Local Authorities and Local Authority Partnerships: Single Set of National Indicators (2007), in particular NI045 under the *Safer Communities* remit of this initiative. The achievement of this target is counted during the last week of their official supervision with the Youth Offending Service (YOS). According to Leicestershire YOS's records they suggest that many young people routinely engage with education, training and employment (ETE) throughout their order and beyond. This is not a seamless or continuous experience for these young people, as echoed by Sutherland (2009:48) and the Audit Commission (1998:1). This particular cohort also features in the growing NEET population with 16% of 16-24 year olds in England according to DfE information (2012). Offenders are over represented within the NEET population (Coles et al 2002) as outlined by the end of order statistics on ETE engagement.

Successful and sustainable engagement with ETE has been identified as one of the pathways to reduce or even desist from future offending (Machin et al 2010). It is also noted that there are barriers to engagement with ETE and interventions need to respond to these (YJB 2006). Cooper et al (2007) also identified barriers in relation to ETE for serious and persistent offenders such as low self-esteem, behaviour and emotional problems, issues with mental health and poor social skills. In addition, practical factors like finance, transport and childcare also hindered engagement.

Actuarial assessments

The role of the ASSET, introduced in 2000, can also be informative in relation to understanding a young person's needs or difficulties across a range of factors. It is also an indicator for agencies across the youth justice system to implement the right interventions and work towards helping the young person desist or reduce any future offending (YJB 2006, 2003, Sutherland 2009). The YJB's study *Barriers to Engagement* (2006) found that '45% of the young people in the sample had access to full-time provision...and 28% had no provision at all'. Of those not engaging in full-time ETE they found that these young people tended to be 'older (particularly those aged 16), were female, had been in the care system, had literacy and numeracy difficulties, had previous convictions, had been subject to more serious disposals and were more likely to reoffend'. Despite the emphasis on compulsory schooling, young people known to the criminal justice system even under the statutory school age (16 years old) were also found not to be successfully engaging in full time education. The YJB reported that this was around half of all young offenders. Disengagement with ETE is not uncommon amongst young offenders, yet the direct relationship between disengagement with education and offending continues to be contested and problematic (Baker 2005; Knight and Hine 2009).

ASSET includes a range of factors that are discussed with the young person. Overall the core profile seeks to address 12 issues (or dynamic factors) relating to a young person's lifestyle and well-being. These include the following, for which a score from 0-4 is identified in order to indicate risks of further offending: *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 and offending*

behaviour (see also Case and Haines 2009:298 for a summary). The ASSET scale is as follows:

ASSET scores relating to the likelihood of further offending:

0= not associated at all

1= Slight, occasional or only a limited indirect association

2= Moderate but definite association, but could be direct or indirect

3= Quite strongly associated- normally a direct link

4= Very strongly associated- directly related to any offending

(YJB 2002)

These scores are based on practitioner judgement and therefore are open to interpretation and should not be treated as being factual. However these ASSET assessments can provide valuable insights into a young person's life and in particular selecting suitable interventions is assisted by practitioners using the ASSET algorithm. Concurrently, the introduction of the 'Scaled Approach' (YJB 2010) seeks to 'ensure that interventions are tailored to the individual and based on an assessment of their risks and needs' (2010:5). The 'scaling' technique stipulates intervention based on the ASSET scores and risks of harm, tiered into three levels; *standard, enhanced and intensive*⁹ (2010:7 & 11). Triggers for referrals occur normally at the enhanced level where 'programmes' of intervention and treatment, but not available at the standard level (ibid: 11; Sutherland 2009:47). This is an important dimension in terms of how professional judgements are made by practitioners and how groups of young offenders are selected for intervention. This model of risk assessment means that those who appear within the 'standard' risk bracket may not be identified and referred for intervention at all.

Sutherland (2009) found that interventions were planned as ASSET scores increased in severity, with fewer referrals and interventions occurring with lower scores (2009:47). Sutherland found that those with higher risk scores in ETE were not necessarily put forward for ETE intervention (9 out of 21: 2009:48). However other dimensions to the ASSET score also highlight how other interventions are not being made despite being scored highly on risk. For example, 3 out of 18 for living arrangements, 5 out of 21 for family and personal relationship received intervention or treatment. Sutherland describes a risk overload, whereby young offenders present with a range of problems which services cannot necessarily or sufficiently address. Barriers to this included resources, expertise, waiting times, time available to work with young people (orders are time-bound), access (ibid: 56) and also readiness (Kemshall and Wood 2007) (see also Baker 2005). Planning ETE interventions may have less practical barriers for practitioners to identify and access

⁹ Total ASSET scores for tiers: Standard 0-14, Enhanced 15-35 and Intensive 33-64 (YJB 2010:7)

points of entry and support than compared to other risk associated factors like interventions for relationships. As Sutherland usefully points out there is a 'dearth of standardised programmes that 'fit' these areas...[but] sections which cannot be immediately addressed (such as relationships with peers)' (2009:54). Case and Haines (2009:257) are critical of the risk based tools which according to them results in 'misappropriation and misapplication within risk assessments' .As a result the ASSET tool 'is meant as a guide to support practitioner expertise, but it has promoted narrow, quantified, factorised and reductionist conception of risk factors and their relationship to offending' (ibid: 266). This kind of paralysis can also result in 'that risk assessment does not inform planned and actual intervention' (Sutherland 2009:56) and the Leicestershire example means that failures in addressing the ETE needs of 16+ offenders may also be a victim of these kinds of barriers. The way that ASSET is currently adopted and operationalised provides important methods for reducing risk of reoffending, improving a young person's ETE engagement is one of the many risks that could be identified to achieve desistance. How practitioners prioritise these risks is absent from guidance and is a further reminder that the process of assessment requires practitioners to make a series of judgements about the young people. This Leicestershire study begins to point towards identifying priorities in relation to ETE by also taking into account the range of other risks identified by the ASSET process alongside other information such as offending and disposal outcomes. The analysis of the data proposes a different approach to the use of ASSET as it currently stands.

Methods

The data set was prepared by Leicestershire Youth Offending and this was extracted from *Careworks* systems/databases which includes biographical, offending histories, gravity scores (seriousness of offence), sentences and disposals and ASSET scores.

The data was collected in relation to young offenders aged 16 years or older between April 2006 and March 2008. All young people who appear in this data set were already aged 16 years by the first month (April) of this sample period. In other words they had to be aged 16 years or older to be included in the sample presented. Two whole years, instead of one were selected to increase the size of the overall sample. This represents all young offenders aged 16 years or older known to Leicestershire YOS during these periods. Since this sample contains all 16 and 17 year olds during this reporting period, some will have finished their orders and some will have continued serving their orders beyond the end of the sample period. This study therefore contains young offenders sentenced to a full range of orders from pre-court to post custody licence.

A total of 617 young offenders featured in the entire data set with 312 young offenders in cohort 1 (2006-7) and 305 in cohort 2 (2007-8). The sample comprised of 20% females and 80% males and the vast majority of young offenders are White British at 90% of the cohort. This study is unable to sufficiently explore how minority ethnic groups are represented with respect to ETE status and ASSET scores. This is because the size of minority ethnic groups is too small to be robustly interrogated. As a result an examination of differences relating to ethnicity was excluded from this study. Categories for the ETE

status for each young person were recorded in line with YJB (2009) counting rules as 0 hours (NEET), 1-15 hours, 16-24 hours and 25+ hours.

The information provided was suitably anonymised before it was forwarded. Researchers known to the Youth Offending Service only accessed and analysed the data and due care was taken to secure and handle this detail. The research team prepared the data sets for entry into SPSS to enable analysis of the information based on analysis of means and correlation between different factors¹⁰.

Using the number of hours young people in this sample were engaged with ETE in the last week of their order it is possible to identify differences between means across a range of factors. It is also possible to indicate if the differences between these means are statistically significant. Information about the young people's ETE status throughout the course of their order/s is not recorded and measured until the end of the order. The first available ASSET score was used which is usually documented by practitioners at the beginning on their first order. As a result, time between this and the recording of their ETE status at the end of their last available order will have passed. It is therefore likely ASSET scores may have changed. The first ASSET score was selected since it is the earliest set of indicators available to practitioners. The relationships described here should be understood in terms of association. This study, therefore, does not claim causation between and across the different variables.

Findings

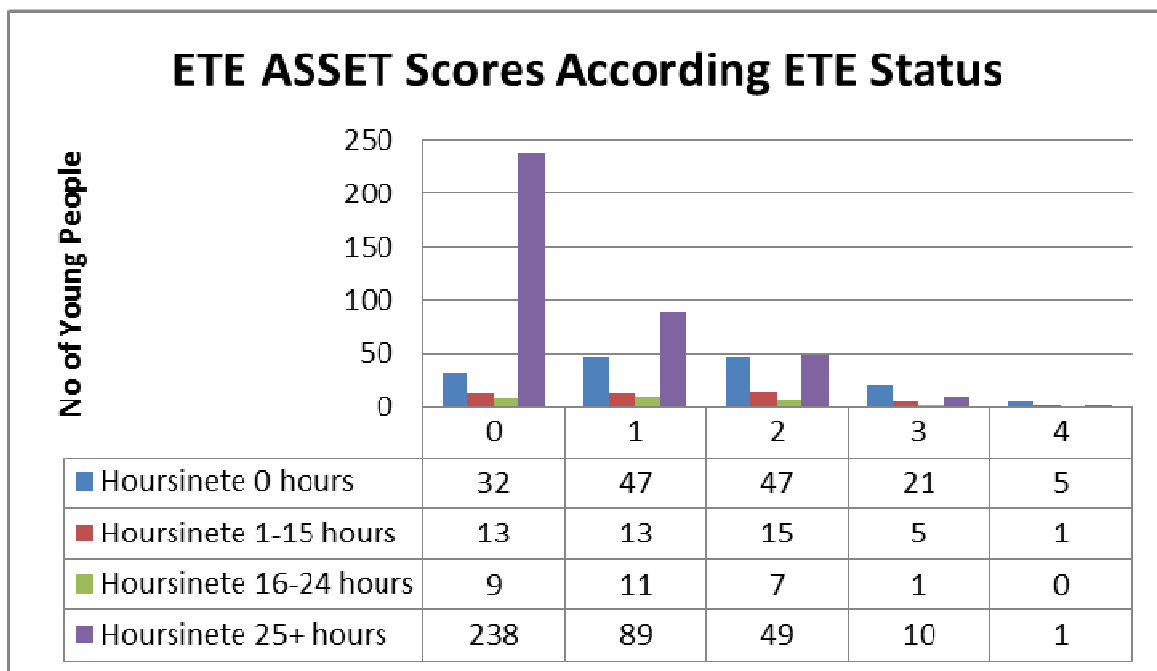
The analysis aimed to identify key factors in order to understand ETE status with respect to seriousness of crimes recorded, sentence outcomes, first available ASSET scores and young people's gender. As a result the analysis was limited to examining relationships within and through these variables only and excluded further interrogation for example with respect to ethnicity.

¹⁰ Analysis of means used one-way ANOVA followed by a post-hoc test using Scheffe to identify where difference lies within the groups analysed. Significance is noted >0.05 in all cases. If this is the case then the differences between different groups are unlikely to be by chance. The post hoc test identifies the size of the effect between the groups examined. Analysis using correlation employs the Spearman Rank (Rs) test as data across the variables is non-parametric. This test examines variability that is shared amongst and across variables. This test can identify positive (+0.1) and negative correlations (-0.1). Correlation was noted between 0.3 and 0.7 (minus or plus). This does not identify causality between and across variables. Similar to the analysis of means, tests for correlation are useful in understanding the relationships between groups of data based on how they are ranked or ordered next to each other (Denscombe 2003:263). Using the variable that identifies the number of hours the young people in this sample who are engaged with ETE, tests for correlations were employed to examine their relationship against (an) other variable/s.

ETE status is categorised by the YJB into four categories and this is counted in the final full week or their last order¹¹. 63% of the cohort was in full time ETE at this point, with a smaller number 4.7% engaged for 16-24 hours per week, slightly more engaged for 1-15 hours per week at 7.6 % and 24.6% were identified as NEET (0 hours). Therefore 67.7% were identified and recorded as ETE at the end of their last order which highlights an important shortfall of the YJB targets of 90%. 56% females and 65% males were in full time ETE (25 hours). 31% females and 23% males were 0 hours (NEET) in this sample.

Chart 1 presents the range of ASSET scores across the a range of ETE groups. These groups represent the number of hours young people were engaged in ETE each week. This chart defines the young people’s ETE according the score they were given in relation to ETE. Higher first ETE ASSET scores appear more abundantly in the 0 hours (NEET) and 1-15 hours groups, such as ASSET scores of 2, 3 and 4. Lower ASSET scores appear more abundantly for 25 and 16-24 hours groups such as 0 and 1. It is worth noting that referrals for ETE are usually triggered by a score of 2 or more.

Chart 1: ETE ASSET Scores According to ETE Status



Number of hours in ETE for seriousness of offending and convictions¹²

Highest gravity score¹³

Gravity scores for offences recorded by the YOS are a framework for gauging the seriousness of crimes committed by the young people in this sample rather than using the

¹¹ Defined as 0 hours, 1-15 hours, 16-24 hours, 25+ hours. 0 & 1-15 hours groups are understood to be NEET.

¹² Convictions include all disposals including police reprimands and final warnings with and without intervention in this study.

¹³ This is the highest gravity score recorded for the young person of all the offences listed in the period of study.

offence description. These are scored on a scale of seriousness from 1-8. 1 denotes the lowest and 8 being the highest. Gravity 1-2 scores are the first tier penalties, 4-5 are mainly community penalties, 7-8 receive mainly custody and 3 and 6 scores are transitional bands. Here the ranking of their crime dictates the disposal that is administered at the time of sentencing.

The differences identified between the mean highest gravity score has indicated that young people who were engaged with 1-15 hours of ETE per week have a slightly higher mean highest gravity score than all the other sub-groups of ETE at 4.23¹⁴. Those engaged in full time ETE at 25 hours per week have a lower mean gravity score at 3.61. Those who were NEET (0 hours) have a mean score of 3.90. However these differences are small. The strongest relationship for the sub-groups of ETE status is for the 1-15 hours group. Further tests employing gender here outline significance for the highest gravity score. For male offenders the mean highest gravity score is 3.78 and for female offenders is 3.54.

Total number of offences recorded for each young person from the point they enter the Youth Justice System

The differences across the ETE groups show that the mean total number of offences differs significantly across this section of the data. Where the difference lies within this group is between those in full time ETE (25+ hours) and those who are NEET (0 hours) and 1-15 hours¹⁵. In particular those who were engaged with minimal ETE at 1-15 hours have the highest mean total of offences at 3.6, with the NEET group at 3.5. Those who were full time ETE have a mean total of offences at 2.71. The test demonstrates that there is an association between the total number of offences and ETE status at the end of the order.

Total number of convictions recorded for each young person from the point they enter the Youth Justice System

The mean total of convictions is higher for young people who are less engaged with ETE at the end of the last order. The results indicate that the NEET group have a mean total of 4.42 convictions, 1-15 hours received 3.96 convictions, 16-24 hours received 3.45 convictions and full timers received a mean total of 2.49 convictions. However these trends mean that the relationship between the total number of convictions and engagement with ETE at the end of their order is small and are not statistically significant and therefore this relationship might be coincidental. The lack of a statistical relationship here is noteworthy; this could challenge the commonly held views that ETE engagement is like other factors a protective feature in relation to 1) offending and their likely outcomes (convictions) (Nagin and Land, 1993). However further tests in relation to gender were administered which showed significance for the mean total number of convictions for male offenders at 3.31 and for female offenders 2.51.

¹⁴ The differences across the group for the analysis of means using one-way Anova are significant at $p < 0.001$.

¹⁵ A p value of 0.01 is calculated for post-hoc tests in relation means. This means that the differences are significant because the p value is less than 0.05.

Number of hours in ETE and ASSET scores¹⁶

ASSET acknowledges a number of factors associated with the risk of re-offending. These are: 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. An examination of the breadth of these features has identified associations between these factors and their ETE status.

1st ASSET total- sum of first ASSET¹⁷

The analysis shows that there is a significant difference across the ETE groups¹⁸. Correlations between the number of hours a young person was engaged with ETE and overall first total ASSET score and separate ASSET scores exist amongst this data set.

For the first ASSET total a negative correlation exists at -0.346 ($P < 0.01$), which indicates that the overall ASSET score is higher for those young people who at the end of their order are noted as 0 hours or 1-15 hours in ETE. It also tells us that as the overall first ASSET is lower for young people who at the end of their order are engaged with ETE for either 16-24 hours or 25+ hours.

For the first total of the ASSET scores 0 hours are at 12.10, for 1-15 hours at 11.51, much higher than those at 16-24 hours at 8.62 and 25+ hours at 6.57. The NEET groups (0 and 1-15 hours) have the highest first total ASSET score, whereas those in full time education have a lower first ASSET total in comparison. Those who are confirmed as full time ETE have nearly half the total first ASSET score than those who are NEET.

Living Arrangements, Family and Personal Relationships and Neighbourhood

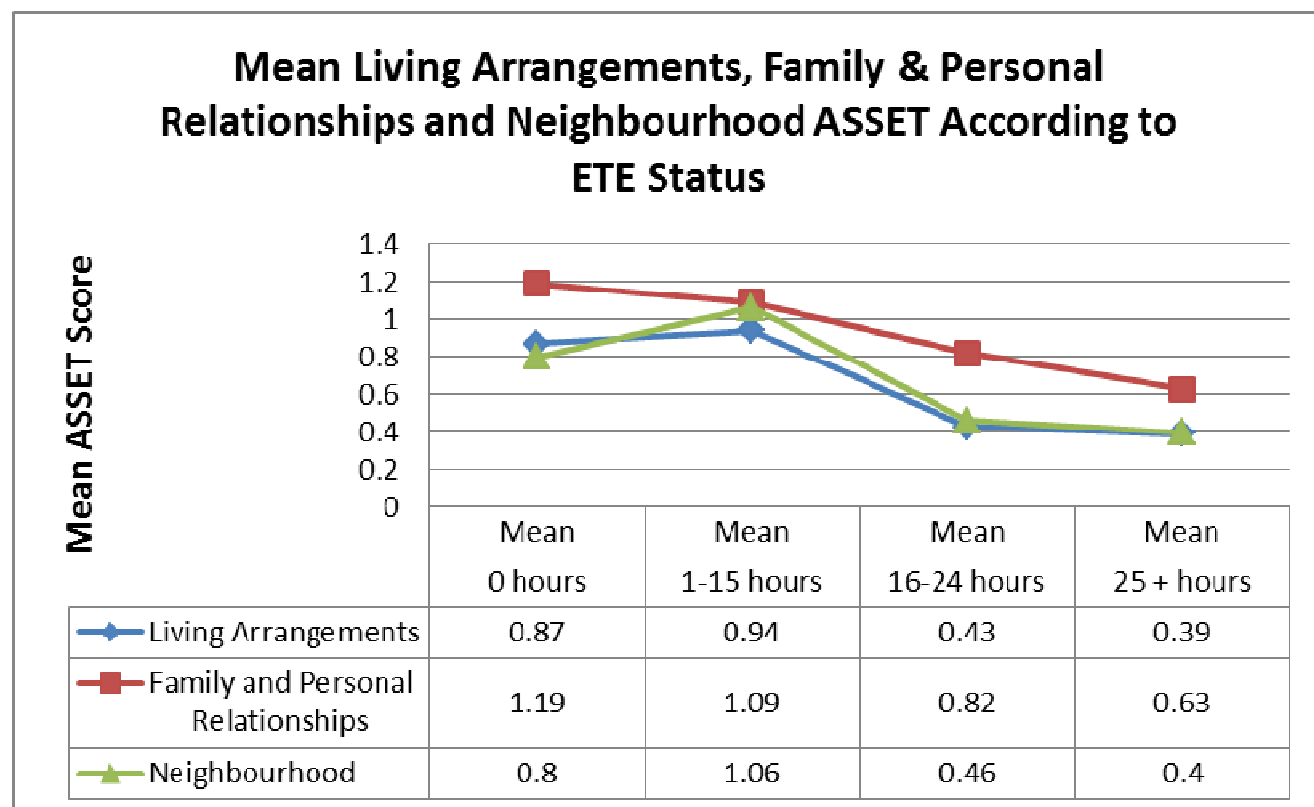
Overall the mean score for each of these elements is low at around 1, which according to YJB (2002) guidelines identifies a slight association to the risk of re-offending. As a result this would not warrant intervention or referral from practitioners. Chart 2 indicates that the highest average score for these elements are located across the NEET group (0 hours) and 1-15 hours group. Those in full time ETE achieved the lowest mean score across all of the cohorts.

¹⁶ The first available ASSET scores were used for each case in this study.

¹⁷ The total ASSET is the sum of all the 12 risk factors

¹⁸ Significance is noted $p = 0.01$ for correlations using Rs.

Chart 2: Mean Living Arrangements, Family & Personal Relationships and Neighbourhood ASSET According to ETE Status



For all of the ETE groups family and personal relationships on the ASSET algorithm achieves the highest score. In particular the 0 hours group has a mean score of 1.19, the highest of all the groups.

Education, Training and Employment ASSET

For those recorded as engaged in ETE the first ETE ASSET score given was 0.57 for 25+ hours and 1 for 16-24 hours. For 1-15 hours the mean ETE ASSET score was 1.32 and for 0 hours it was 1.49. If ASSET scores for ETE recorded at the onset of their first sentence were recorded low it is more likely that they will be engaged in ETE at the end of their last disposal.

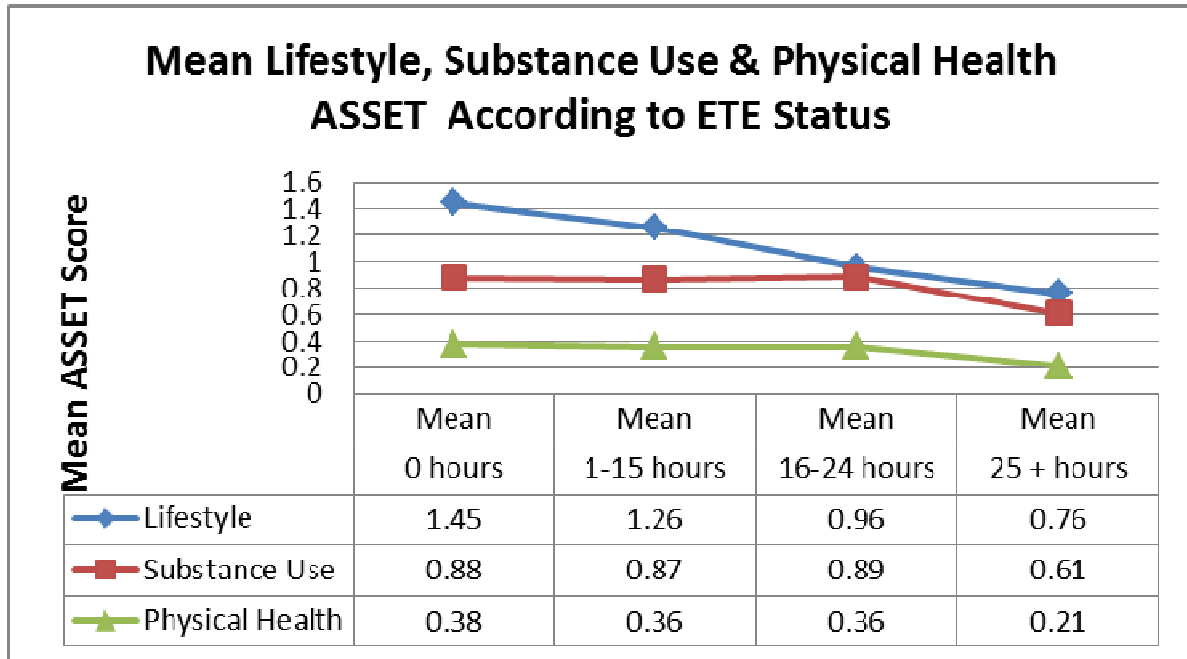
The first ETE ASSET score does increase as the disposals increase in severity. It was also observed that the first ETE ASSET has the strongest association with Supervision and ISSP, Reparation Orders and Detention and Training Orders. The most serious disposals such as Detention and Training Orders (1.88) score higher mean ETE ASSET scores than less serious disposals such as Final Warnings at 0.60.

Lifestyle, Substance Use and Physical Health ASSET

Of all of these components lifestyle presents the most problematic, but this still remains a very small mean over all the groups at 0.97, under 1 on the ASSET scale. Mean score for substance use is highest in the 16-24 hours group, but these differences are very small across the whole sample. The most significant difference appears in lifestyle. The NEET

group has a mean score of 1.45 and the 1-15 hour group at 1.26 for the mean lifestyle ASSET score. These mean scores are significant but the range of scores across the whole group are slim and fall around the mean score of 1 on the ASSET scale and therefore practitioners would not necessarily identify an increased risk to future offending. Lifestyle however has the strongest association to the ETE groups than the other components. Physical health is not recognised as having a significant difference. Chart 3 below outlines the trends for these mean ASSET scores.

Chart 3: Mean Lifestyle, Substance Use & Physical Health ASSET According to ETE Status



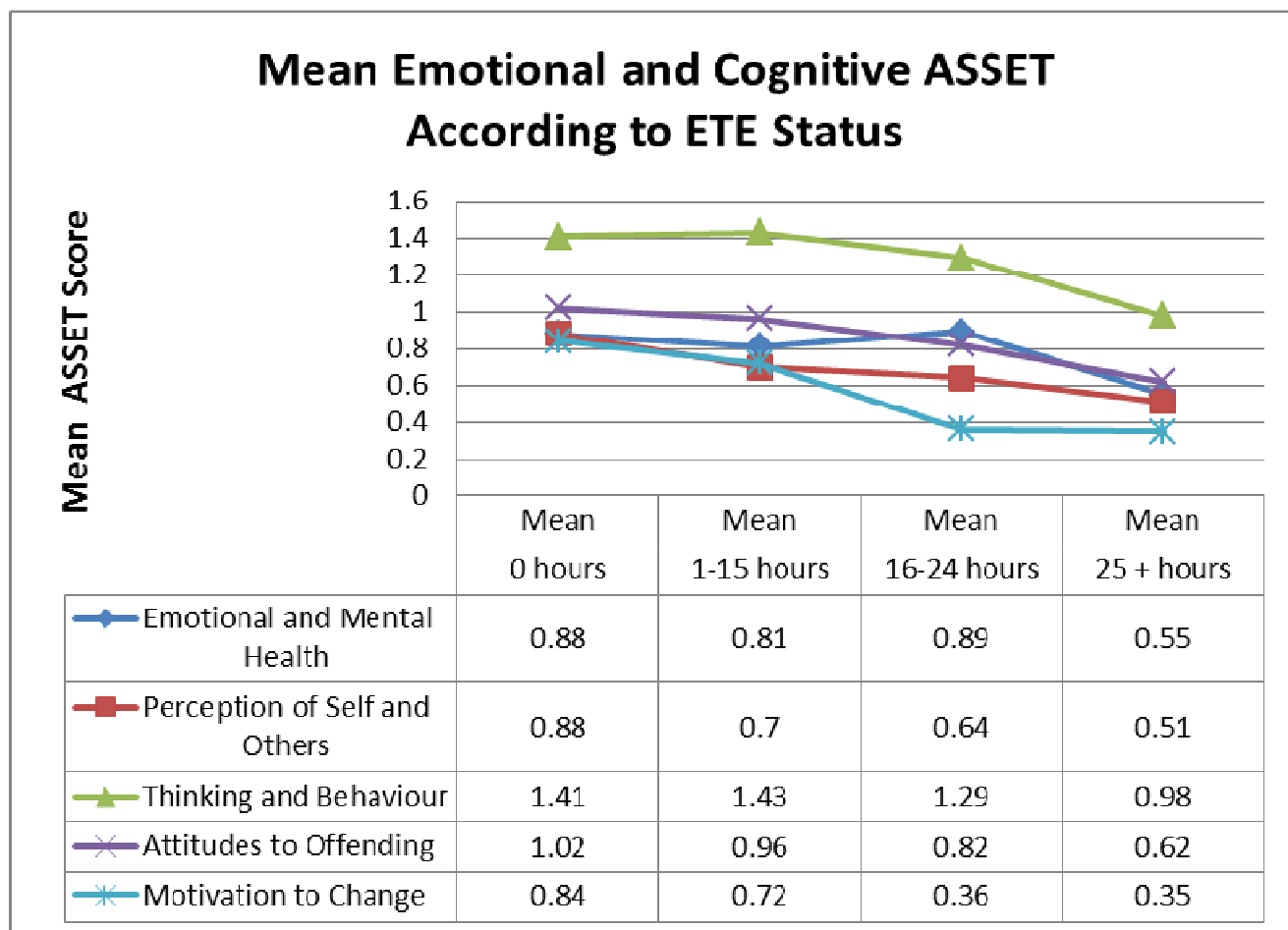
The ASSET score for lifestyle is also negatively correlated at -0.31 ($P < 0.01$) with number of hours in ETE. The score for lifestyle is likely to be higher for those that are NEET (0 hours) and 1-15 hours at the end of their final order.

Emotional and Cognitive Elements to ASSET

Five elements of the ASSET tool focus on emotional and cognitive aspects. These include emotional and mental health, perception of self and others, thinking and behaviour, attitudes to offending and motivation to change.

Young people engaged in full time ETE (25+ hours) at the point of counting had a lower mean ASSET score across all the different ASSET fields relating to emotional and cognitive abilities than all the other groups. In particular there is a strong association between the first mean score for the motivation to change component for those in full time ETE. The size of the effect of these variables can account for a relationship between the cognitive elements of the first mean ASSET scores and ETE status at the end of their most recent order.

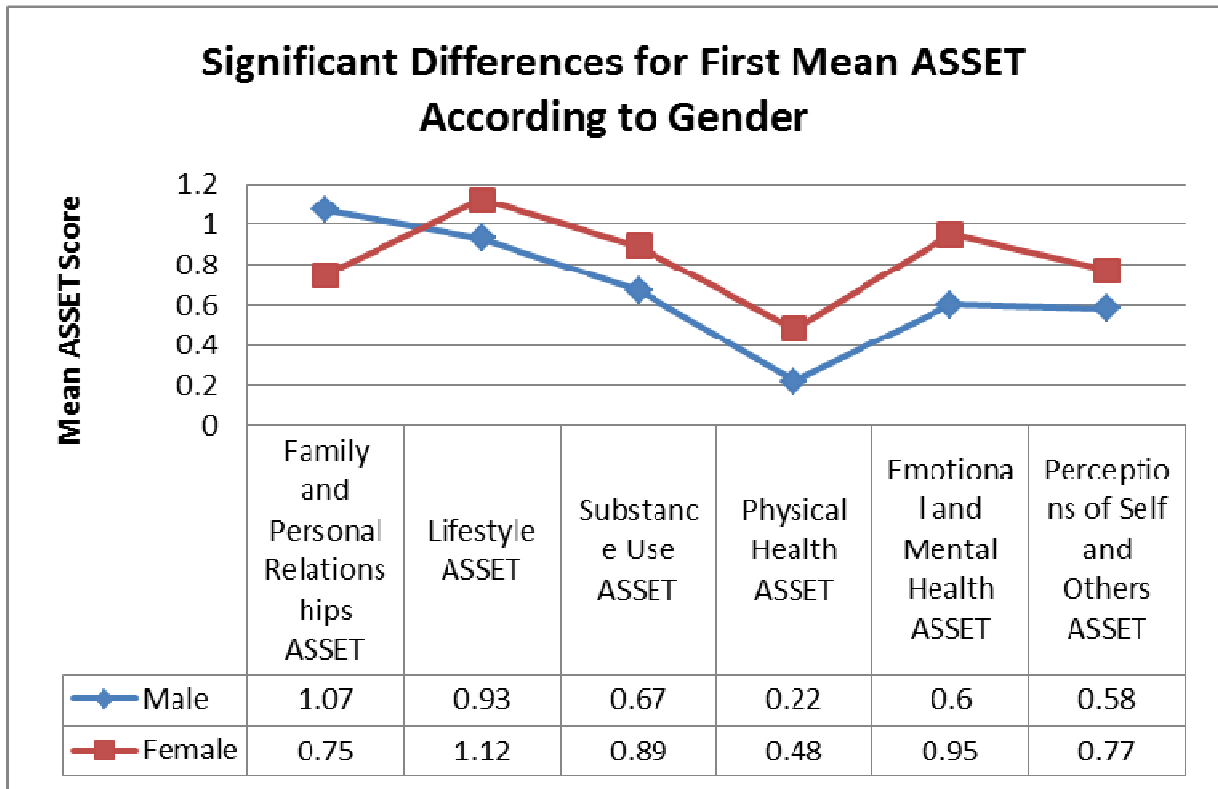
Chart 4: Mean Emotional and Cognitive ASSET According to ETE Status



For the NEET group and 1-15 hours group the mean score for thinking and behaviour is calculated as the highest across all the ETE groups. For the same ASSET score the NEET (0 hours) has a mean score of 1.41 and 1-15 hours it is slightly higher at 1.43. A noted association can also be attributed with the score relating to their attitudes towards offending. Across the ETE groups the 0 hours group has a mean score of 1.02 and 0.96 for 1-15 hours group. For perceptions of self the mean score is lower for the young people who were recorded as engaged with ETE at the end of the order such as 16-24 hours and 25+ hours, but this relationship is associated only weakly.

Chart 5 below outlines the significant differences noted for separate mean first ASSET scores according to gender. These listed below are statistically significant and as a result there is an association between these scores and gender.

Chart 5: Significant Differences for First Mean ASSET According to Gender



It can be observed that females score higher than males for most mean ASSET scores presented here except family and personal relationships. Males on average have a higher score for family and personal relationships at 1.07.

Discussion: Assisting 16 + young offenders into meaningful ETE

The findings provide a useful set of indicators that can be used to target young people who are likely to be disengaged or at the risk of NEET at the end of their order. This guidance is therefore only applicable to the current system employed by the YOS in England and Wales. By using the first ASSET score it may give the YOS time and opportunity to work towards assisting the young person into ETE, reduce offending, seriousness of crimes and subsequently sentences and disposals given. Based on the analysis of this dataset the indicators for being NEET are listed below:

- A total of 3 or more convictions could put young people at risk of NEET (0 hours). A total of 2 or more convictions could reduce the opportunity of engaging with ETE at the end of their order and could result in engagement to 1-15 hours.
- The presence of high gravity scores at 3 or more for offences committed can also be associated to disengagement from ETE at the end of their order.
- If the total length of sentence exceeds 12 months they are more likely to be NEET; 0 and 1-15 hours.

- A total ASSET score of 10 or more can also be an indicator of NEET; 0 and 1-15 hours.
- A mean ASSET score for ETE that exceeds 1 can also be an indicator for NEET; 0 and 1-15 hours.
- ASSET scores that appear as 1 or more for family and personal relationships can also be an indicator for NEET; 0 and 1-15 hours.
- ASSET scores that appear over 1 for lifestyle are an indicator for NEET; 0 and 1-15 hours.
- Average ASSET scores more than 1.5 for thinking and behaviour at risk of becoming NEET; 0 and 1-15 hours.
- Gauging young people's self-esteem and attitudes towards themselves and others, such as ambivalence is important. Low self-esteem and ambivalence could be common amongst NEET; 0 and 1-15 groups. ASSET scores above 2 for thinking and behaviour may help to identify low self esteem.
- There are some differences between males and females and therefore some responses to assisting engagement may need slightly different approaches. For females a score of 1 or more on lifestyle ASSET and a score above 0 for perceptions of self and others ASSET are important. For males a score of 1 or more on the family and personal relationships ASSET deserves attention.

These indicators are not meant to be predictors but a guide to how those young people who are at risk of NEET might be identified by practitioners at the earliest possible moment. Furthermore a guide for practitioners to observe that specific ASSET scores require discrete attention in order for their ETE status to be successful and meaningful. Working towards the YJB target of 90% ETE engagement for this cohort is problematic. However the indicators outlined above may help the YOS firstly identify those groups earlier on in their orders (as soon as first ASSET is complete), organise referrals to the ETE teams and specialists and work with the young people to reducing risks identified with NEET. This research suggests that ETE intervention and assistance should not be dealt with in isolation and that a consolidated approach, which takes into account other risk areas, is necessary to facilitate sustainable ETE. Moreover mean scores for a range of first ASSET scores do not score very highly and therefore the referral process (often identified of scoring 2 or more for a referral to be made) may need to respond to scores below 2 in order to assist young people with respect to their ETE status. The indicators listed above gives examples of which ASSET scores this especially applies to. As it currently stands the 'scaled-approach' only recommends intervention for those young people who have scored highly and appear in the 'enhanced' tier of risk. Overlooking scores under 2 or those that are not categorised as 'enhanced' means that some groups may not have their needs fully addressed in order for them to be successfully engaged in ETE. These oversights mean that

YOSs, as in the Leicestershire case, are not picking up risks associated with ETE engagement. Exploring the dimensions outlined above could mean that those young offenders who are NEET or at risk could be better identified by services.

Some challenges to scaling down

Aggregation of this kind of data can often mask the diversity of the individuals themselves. The range of responses and outcomes against offending, convictions, sentencing and ASSET scores can be lost by treating data in these ways. In addition, the selection of the data used also presents limitations; for example the use of the first available ASSET scores when ETE status is identified at the end of their most recent order. Therefore outcomes, patterns and trends are not as a result of concurrent events. Consequently this means that a period of time has passed between their first ASSET assessment and the recording of the ETE status at the end of the order. It is important to acknowledge that ASSET scores may have certainly changed since they are regarded as 'dynamic' factors in a young person's life. Case and Haines warn of the dangers of using research findings in an 'over-simplified' (2009:266) way resulting in 'factorisation' and 'determinism' of the complexity and diversity of young people's lives. However, practitioners have a difficult job to do, using the ASSET framework workers are presented quite often with complex decisions to make like 'what needs dealing with?', 'how do we address these needs?' and 'what needs sorting first?'. However this is a mechanism that the practitioners are required to work with and by revisiting the information that is collated within this framework in different ways could open up new ways of addressing strategic barriers. Wholesale criticism of ASSET based on its core principles of assessing risk associated with reoffending does not necessarily consider how the information collated through this tool could be interpreted in different ways. Moreover its emphasis on the risk of offending can distract practitioners from working towards the reduction of other targets such as securing sustainable ETE for the young people in their care.

Sutherland (2009) suggests there are resource implications, limits on time, 'too many risks' (2009:49) and the 'scaled approach' is probably 'wholly reactionary rather than preventative' (ibid: 56). In the case of this study there are questions around what prevention is, is it to reduce and prevent offending or promote engagement in ETE? Case and Haines (2009) frame this as 'risk or need; risk and need' (2009:276), they warn that the *scaled approach* can result in 'disproportionate intervention- young people may slip through the cracks' and failed to be noticed. Like Sutherland (2009:56), this study outlines 'that risk assessments does not inform planned and actual interventions', the frequency of 16+ young people not in full time ETE highlights this. This study has helped to provide some early indicators to enable practitioners to work towards sustainable ETE. It is evidenced here that aspects of young people's lives are complexly embroiled in disengagement and working solely on the risk of offending agenda is not the best way forward (Sutherland 2009:57, Mair et al 2007). Sutherland also found that ETE intervention is addressed relatively easier than other types of planned intervention (2009:52) such as help with living arrangements and emotional and mental health. Accessing educational and training services it seems has more scope for points of entry for some young offenders, such as one-to-one tutoring, colleges, schools, alternative education initiatives, distance learning etc. Whereas addressing a young person's living

arrangements, relationships and motivations to change are understandably more difficult to provide 'expert' intervention and consequently formal points of entry are limited. This however does not make ETE intervention necessarily easy or 'right' for the young person and practitioners need to work hard to help young people overcome barriers to ETE entry. As Sutherland (2009: 54; see also Baker 2005) highlight relationship problems and lifestyle areas are 'poorly addressed' and can get in the way of successful ETE. There is also 'due to the dearth of standardized programmes that 'fit' these areas' (ibid: 54). This must paralyse and stifle practitioners regularly in their decision making and options available to them to best meet the needs of young people. Moreover adopting a scaled down approach to identify risks associated with ETE status could mean there is a danger of over-intervention, whereby YOSs become increasingly more accountable to deliver and support a wide range of young people's lives. This could have resource and skills implications for services.

Securing ETE success

The future for 16+ year old young people means that soon all will be expected to attend education up to the age of 18 years old by 2015 in England (DCSF 2007) and the delivery of ETE could be exacerbated, as spaces in mainstream learning sites like schools and colleges could also be limited. Therefore meaningful ETE, whereby individuals progress, develop, enjoy and find ways to substitute offending for crime free alternatives such as employment, lifelong learning and citizenship is a particular challenge for youth justice. The Gilbert Review (2006) acknowledges that formal and mainstream education needs to bring in the disengaged and methods to innovate and invigorate educational provision are necessary. Coincidentally youth justice are well rehearsed in some of these methods such as 'pro-social modelling' (Trotter 1993) and individualised learning (Knight 2006) in tackling many of the barriers young people experience in both education and also learning. The challenge for practitioners is assisting meaningful engagement for the young people they serve. Resources to enhance this are important to ensure ETE successes are achieved. Leicestershire YOS have responded creatively to findings of this study, in so much that the trends and patterns are providing them with early indicators to direct 16+ year olds towards planned interventions based on the first ASSET scores suggested in this study, number and types of offences and convictions. Their review of 'risk' has widened in order to include the incidence of NEET. By acknowledging that preliminary and also concurrent work is necessary with young people to assist other factors in their lives such as living arrangements, motivation to change and reduce attrition (Cooper et al 2007). Therefore 'readiness' (Kemshall and Wood 2007) and preparation to engage in ETE requires and deserves flexible and holistic responses which includes scaling down the use and interpretation of ASSET scoring so educational, training and employment journeys can be fruitful for young offenders.

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