

Hints and tips to help improve practice

Quality assurance and gate-keeping

Quality assurance and gate-keeping processes must be embedded in day-to-day practice. All court recommendations, including bail and remand proposals, sentencing reports and breach information, must be subject to robust quality assurance and should be recorded against agreed criteria using standardised gate-keeping forms. This includes written reports, stand down/day of sentence reports and any verbal recommendations made to the court. The individual gate-keeping forms should be reviewed collectively on a regular basis to identify emerging themes to improve operational practice and inform ongoing staff training and development.

Correlation and trend analysis

Youth Justice Teams should regularly review the correlation between Youth Justice Team report recommendations and court decisions. It is important to identify any variance and trends, and to understand if there is a problem.

Dip-sampling

Dip-sampling of reports and assessments should be routinely undertaken to assess completeness and quality. Theme-based audits should also be undertaken to assess how the following issues are being dealt with: diversity, children or young people risk of harm to themselves or others and issues relating to accommodation.

Feedback from sentencers and courts

Feedback from sentencers and courts on the quality and timeliness of reports should be formally sought and recorded. Feedback forms can be attached to reports at agreed intervals for judges, and magistrates to complete.

Service user feedback

Court experience feedback should be gathered from children and young people, their families, victims and partner agencies.

Monthly review meetings

Monthly meetings to review the quality of Pre-Sentence Reports and other processes to:

- Analyse emerging themes and issues arising from gate-keeping
- Check business processes are working as effectively as possible
- Identify individual and team learning and development needs.

Comprehensive court induction and training

Comprehensive court induction and training should be mandatory for all new Youth Justice Team staff, who should have the opportunity to 'shadow' and 'buddy' before being given direct responsibility for delivering court services. Alongside court skills, staff should also be trained in identifying young peoples' mental health, learning difficulties and speech, language and communication needs, to ensure that they are fully aware of the court process. Youth Justice Team court staff should be subject to a probation period and a minimum standard court training programme during their first year. Court training and development audits should be undertaken as part of local performance appraisal to inform rolling court skills learning and development.

Direct observations

Direct observation of Youth Justice Team Court staff should be routinely undertaken to appraise the quality of their 'court craft' or court practice and skills. The appraisal should include feedback from other court users who witness Youth Justice Team court staff on a regular basis.

Court user group meetings and joint training

Court user group meetings and joint training events between sentencers and Youth Justice Teams are excellent ways to improve relationships and build sentencer confidence. Youth Justice Teams should require all appropriate staff to attend on a regular basis, and their attendance and contributions should be monitored to maximise their potential to engage and influence local sentencers.

Team meeting and training audits

Attendance at training events and meetings should be routinely audited to ensure that the relevant staff fully benefit from learning and development opportunities.

Review of operational procedures and service level agreements

Youth Justice Teams should have agreed written strategy documents, service level agreements, protocols and procedures in place to regulate the quality and effectiveness of court practice by Youth Justice Team staff and/or by partner agencies, including bail and remand strategy, court procedures, service level agreements or procedures with children's Services, placements and accommodation providers, sentencer communications strategy, information sharing protocol etc.