



## Using Standardised Assessment Tools: Asset in Scotland

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## INTRODUCTION

The Scottish Government Concordat with Local Authorities (November 2007), which underpins the funding to be provided to local government over the period 2008-09 to 2010-11, established Single Outcome Agreements (SOA) for every council, based on the agreed set of national outcomes (underpinned by agreed national indicators), and supported by streamlined external scrutiny and effective performance management. A new performance reporting system will, over time, replace the myriad of existing systems including National Standards for Scotland's Youth Justice Service.

National Standards for Scotland's Youth Justice Services (Scottish Executive 2002) introduced the requirement to use standardised assessment tools in youth justice practice across Scotland. Objective 1 of the National Standards indicated that every comprehensive assessment should be completed using one of two existing tools, Asset or Youth Level of Service - Case Management Inventory. No distinctive tool has been designed or validated for Scotland as a whole and as a consequence under the Concordat Local Authorities will be expected to continue to make use of existing standardised systems.

### **Standardised Assessment, Need and Risk**

In their efforts to capture the steady progression of assessment technologies over the past several decades, commentators have come to describe assessment tools in generational terms (Bonta, 2002). The first generation of assessment instruments was based on 'clinical' approaches - professional knowledge, skills, judgment and the intuition of the individual practitioners conducting the assessment. Second generation tools involved more standardised assessments that made use of actuarial methods over subjective judgment. Typically, tools focused on static (unchangeable) risk factors, such as age at first arrest and age of first alcohol or drug misuse. These are statistically strong but offer no assistance in planning interventions and are virtually useless in making service referrals to address the problems and issues identified. Second generation tools tend to produce inconsistent decisions and so can contribute to inequalities, particularly in dealing with young people involved in crime.

Third generation instruments have tended to incorporate static and dynamic (changeable) risk and need factors in a more comprehensive framework that can better guide decision making, including type and levels of services to assist with supervision and placement decisions (Bonta, 2002). Furthermore, need and risk assessments can provide agencies with important aggregate information about the levels and types of service demand and usage, as well as information on service gaps and unmet need. A fourth generation of tools is emerging to compliment the others. These involve a series of more specialised instruments for particular or specific needs in such areas as education, family and peer relationships, substance misuse, sexually harmful behaviour and violence, in addition to psychometrics relating to mental health (Ferguson, 2002).

The purpose of need and risk assessment is to consider if there is evidence that a young person is likely to offend again, how this might be prevented or reduced, while considering what evidence there is of the degree of harm that might occur; all of this is in order to plan intervention that might best assist, prevent/reduce re-offending and its consequences, and promote the well-being of the individual and the community. Matching service and other responses to needs and risks is an essential element in advice offered to decision makers, particularly on how best to shape compulsory measures and ensure that service providers as well as young people and their families are held to account for delivery of appropriate services. The value of standardised classification, however, is less the accuracy of predicting re-offending and much more in the profiling of needs and risks for the purpose of planning interventions and achieving effective outcomes. Standardised data can assist in ensuring that those considered 'high' and 'medium' need/risk are subject to the greatest intensity of effort and provided with the greatest assistance.

There is general agreement that there is no well-developed social model of risk assessment that takes account of individual factors alongside environmental factors and social networks (Gurney, 2000). It is difficult to 'factor in' poverty and disadvantage, poor housing and ill health as equally harmful as unacceptable behavior. The idea of trying to present better integrated need and risk formulations within formal assessments does not in itself negate the value of examining and highlighting those need and risk factors that are viewed as supporting and sustaining criminality (criminogenic factors). This remains an

important aspect of direct planning towards tackling priority social factors (dynamic need and risk), which, if changeable, may contribute to reducing offending.

Nonetheless practitioners have to communicate to decision makers and others just how prone risk assessment is to error (Quinsey et al, 1998). In the context of youth crime, assessment is further complicated by the complexities of life transitions and the influence of neighbourhood, peer association, social networks, family and school experiences, all of which are important to the melting pot of normal adolescent transition. It is generally recognised that a combination of professional judgement alongside and guided by appropriate actuarial data present the best available option

### **The Asset Tool**

Specialised and standardised need and risk assessment tools, such as Asset, are widely used across UK jurisdictions to support evidence-based interventions in youth justice and to classify and focus resources at those priority issues that can be changed. Asset<sup>1</sup> was designed and developed by The Centre for Criminological Research at the University of Oxford on behalf of The Youth Justice Board, and was introduced for use across England and Wales in April 2000. The tool is intended to:

- Identify the key factors contributing to offending by young people
- Provide a prediction of reconviction
- Help identify young people who may present a risk of serious harm to others
- Identify situations in which a young offender is vulnerable to being harmed
- Identify issues where more in-depth assessment is required
- Assist in matching intervention programmes to the assessed need of the young person

Asset is intended for use with young people up to the age of 18 to facilitate systematic assessment of circumstances and key characteristics associated with offending. As well as identifying both static (unchanging) and dynamic (changeable) factors recognised in research as contributing to the persistence (and also desistance) of offending behaviour, Asset is also intended to facilitate the recording of factors related to the needs and difficulties experienced by the young person. Dynamic factors are recorded in 13 different sections within the Asset form. For each section, a score rating of zero to four is given. The score reflects the assessor's view of the degree to which each of the factors within these sections is related to the likelihood of further offending by the young person. This allows for a cumulative standardised 'risk of reoffending' score to be reported for each young person assessed, while the individual factor scores provide a helpful 'map' of priority needs and risks.

Some of the core domains such as education, substance misuse and mental health are likely to require specialist assessment and input from other disciplines to assist the practitioner in generating evidence for their rating of the respective section. Criticism can also be levelled at such tools as encouraging a 'tick box' mentality and on over-reliance of negative risk factors. While risk assessment tools attempt to reflect a broad range of 'criminogenic' needs including social factors such as neighbourhood, education and employment, the balance of 'needs' is still located *within* the personal and family domain. In a descriptive study examining the factors youth justice practitioners tend to consider in assessing possible harm, Baker (2007) found little evidence of theory-driven information gathering, although a mixture of theory and experience seemed to influence judgements. The core Asset tool is supplemented by a self-completed section for the young person ('What do you think?') to facilitate the young person's direct involvement in the assessment. It is equally important to involve the young person's family and to use approaches such as a network or family conference to provide positive means of allowing the young person and their 'network' to influence, contribute to and, where possible, direct the assessment and planning.

The designers have always emphasised that such tools can only ever be aids to practice and, in effect, are only as good as the practitioner completing them. The real strength of standardised approaches is less their predictive validity and reliability and more their transparency in identifying which individual domains practitioners associate strongly with criminality, evidence that can be accepted or challenged, and the degree to which those identified 'needs and risks' can then be incorporated meaningfully into an action

1 Full details of the background and development of ASSET can be found at the Youth Justice Board website: [www.youth-justice-board.gov.uk](http://www.youth-justice-board.gov.uk)

plan which is dynamic, open to revision and for which service providers as well as service 'users' are accountable. The core Asset profile also contains a section on indicators of serious harm to others intended to operate as a screening aid to highlight where more detailed enquiry and assessment may be needed. The issue of harm has to be addressed in its own right using additional aids.

Asset was validated for England and Wales (YJB 2003) based on a sample of 3395 young people drawn from 39 Young Offenders' Teams (YOTs). The evaluation showed that the overall rating score predicted reconviction with 67% accuracy; reliability levels were assessed as good (Baker et al, 2003). As yet there is no data on how effective the tool is in assisting measuring change over time. Nonetheless the prediction rate for Asset, statistically speaking, is good, but there remains a high margin of error in regard to individual cases. All standardised tools have strengths and disadvantages. Most will produce, on average, 25% 'false positives' (finding risk when there is none) and 25% 'false negatives' (finding no risk when there is).

## THE STUDY: SCOTTISH DATA AND COMPARISON TO YJB REPORT FINDINGS

In 2001 the Criminal Justice Social Work Development Centre for Scotland established a national development (champion's) group to promote good practice in the use of standardised assessment in Scottish local authorities using Asset. Following consultation with the designers, Asset was adapted for the Scottish context. An electronic version of the tool was also developed. Data was gathered from 5 Scottish local authorities using Asset and examined against findings from England and Wales (YJB 2003). This paper examines these findings

The Scottish Asset forms submitted to the Centre were completed between July 2001 and October 2005. Data from the forms were entered into an electronic version of Asset which was completed in December 2005. The Scottish data is comprised of 475 cases from 5 local authorities, while the sample utilised in the Youth Justice Board report (YJB 2003) comprised of 3395 cases from 39 YOTs. As a rough comparator, the 2001 Census data<sup>2</sup> reports that 13% of the population in both Scotland, and in England and Wales, was aged between 10 and 19. When the number of Asset forms is calculated as a percentage of all those aged between 10 and 19, the Scottish Asset forms related to 0.07% of all Scottish young people in this age group and 0.05% of all English and Welsh young people in this age group. As such it could be argued that the samples are of comparative size.

With regards to the data itself, Scottish Asset forms were, generally, completed to assist the compilation of a social background report on young people referred to a Children's Hearing for their offending. YJB data is drawn from 'final warning' cases and from cases at 'pre-sentence report stage (PSR). Unfortunately, however, information on case stage is missing in 60% of the Scottish sample and so it is not possible to confirm this assumption. Young people at the pre-sentence report ('PSR') stage in the YJB sample are more likely to be equivalent to the Scottish sample than those at final warning stage. This may be reflected in differences between Scottish and YJB data may

### General Profile Information

The proportions of males (80%) and females (20%) in the Scottish sample are comparable to those in the YJB sample (82% & 18% respectively). It is worthy of mention that a number of differences between the males and females in the sample were noted, and a preliminary report on these differences can be found on the Centre website<sup>3</sup>. For example, it was recorded in the Asset forms that over 3-times as many females (96%) than males (27%) had been subject to Child Protection registration at some time, while over twice as many females (50%) than males (23%) had been remanded to local authority accommodation. In addition, a higher proportion of females (47%) than males (32%) had been in a home or institution in the 6 months prior to the Asset form being completed, while a lower proportion of females (12%) than males (20%) had lived with both of their birth parents during that period. One-tenth of females were also recorded as having 'no fixed abode' in comparison to only 1% of males.

A higher proportion of females (43%) than males (25%) were recorded as having significant contact with people involved in alcohol abuse, as well as being in contact with significant adults that were failing to show adequate care (33%) more often than males (20%). Almost twice the proportion of females (54%) than males (29%) were recorded as having experienced some form of abuse. One of the few sections in which males were more likely to show in higher proportions than females was that related to education and employment; for example, almost double the proportion of males (60%) than females (34%) were recorded as under-achieving at school, while 31% of males were noted as having difficulties with literacy and numeracy in comparison to 9% of females. Males were also more likely (42%) than females (25%) to have an absence of non-criminal friends, and were more often recorded as taken part in reckless activities (70%) than females (45%).

Females were more often recorded as using both heroin (20%) and methadone (17%) than were males (11% and 1% respectively). Mental health issues also appeared to be more commonly recorded for females, with 43% noted as having self-harmed in comparison to 18% of males, with 18% of females having attempted suicide in comparison to 9% of males. Overall, one-third of females were considered to be at risk of self-harm

<sup>2</sup> Available at [www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk)

<sup>3</sup> The report - 'Asset Male/Female Differences' - can be found at <http://www.cjsw.ac.uk/cjsw/5253.html>

or suicide while only 6% of males fell into this category. Higher proportions of females were also considered to be vulnerable because of the behaviour of other people (64%) or because of events or circumstances (58%) than were males (37% and 38% respectively). Interestingly, the proportions of males (68%) and females (72%) considered to be vulnerable due to their own behaviour was comparable.

The age of the client was recorded in 53% of the Scottish Asset forms (n=250), i.e. no date of birth was on the form, with 69% of both the Scottish and YJB samples aged 15 to 18 (where data was available). Age data was available in 93% of the YJB sample.

### Offence Data

It was not possible to conduct a useful comparison across offence categories as the offence classifications in Scotland, in many instances, do not match directly to those used in England and Wales. In approximately 46% of YJB cases the main offence was a crime of dishonesty, with the same category accounting for 30% of Scottish cases. Miscellaneous offences such as breach of the peace and petty assault accounted for a further 30% of Scottish cases, while non-sexual crimes of violence comprised at least 14% of cases. The YJB data records 21% of offences in their 'violence' category. A racial element to the crime was recorded in a higher proportion of Scottish cases (10%) than in YJB cases (3%).

One obvious change that could be made to the Asset form would be the capacity to record offences under the headings employed in recorded crime statistics. For example, 'assault' was frequently stated as an offence but often not categorised as 'serious' (a non-sexual crime of violence) or 'petty' (a miscellaneous offence).

Difficulties arise in comparing referrals to Children's Hearings with previous convictions as only those referrals accepted as 'grounds' for Hearings are technically equivalent. Most referrals to SCRA are diverted from Hearings. For the purpose of this analysis, however, referrals on offence grounds are compared with previous convictions. In Scottish cases a higher number of previous referrals were recorded than were convictions in YJB cases. For example, only 13% of Scottish cases were recorded as having no previous offence referrals in comparison to 52% of YJB cases. In contrast, in 63% of Scottish cases six or more previous offence referrals were recorded in comparison to only 12% of YJB cases. Time since last offence was on average marginally longer in Scottish cases than YJB cases. The proportion of young people convicted of a Schedule 1 offence was lower (1%) in the Scottish data than the YJB data (4%), which may be related to the use of the non criminal Children's Hearings System in Scotland.

Various types of disposal/outcome that the young person may have received are recorded on the Scottish Asset but there is no comparable information noted in the YJB report. Also, in the original version of Asset used in Scotland, the English terms of 'Final Warning', 'Reparation Order', 'Attendance Order' and 'Action Plan Order' were preserved, but as of September 2008 have been removed and replaced with terms more appropriate to the Scottish system. As such, information from this section is limited.

**Table 1: Disposals/Outcomes received**

Has the young person ever received a....	N	Yes (%)	No (%)
...Supervision Order?	186	78	22
...Place of Safety Order?	96	32	68
...Secure Authorisation?	99	32	68
...Community Service Order?	80	11	89
...Probation Order?	86	22	74
...Another Community Disposal?	84	25	75
<i>Failure to comply with previous Order?</i>	<i>201</i>	<i>33</i>	<i>67</i>

Information on offending behaviour obtained from the young person is included in the Scottish Asset, but is also absent from the YJB report. The information recorded in Table 2 has been summarised from an open text box in the 'Offending Behaviour' section in accordance with the guidance for content of this text box provided in the Asset form.

**Table 2: Information on offending behaviour**

Information on offending behaviour	N	Yes (%)	No (%)	N/A
Actions/description of events mentioned	183	84	13	3
Reference made to victim	170	69	24	7
Consequences for young person mentioned	175	85	13	2
Reference made to family	178	80	19	1
Motives/reasons mentioned	184	92	7	1
Attitude after offence mentioned	167	79	19	2
Any pattern of offending behaviour mentioned	178	79	14	7
Other reference made	99	79	37	9

Also in the 'Offending Behaviour' section of the Scottish Asset form, 'offence summaries' (i.e. reasons for the offending behaviour) were recorded in 87 cases. The most common of these was peer pressure (15%), followed by the influence of alcohol/drugs (14%). Boredom (10%), provocation/self-defence (10%), 'spur of the moment' (9%), needed/wanted goods or money (8%) and 'lost temper' (8%) were also cited as reasons for the offending behaviour.

Gravity scores were rarely used in the Scottish sample, with this being recorded in 27% of cases. Scores were proportionately higher for the Scottish sample than for the YJB sample; for example, 23% of the YJB sample scored 5 or above compared to 64% of the Scottish sample. This would seem to imply that the gravity (or seriousness) of the offending behaviour is of a higher level in Scotland than in England and Wales. However, the concept of gravity scores is not widely used in Scotland so the usefulness of this finding is limited, particularly as the guidance being used at the time these Asset forms were completed was in a developmental stage.

### Victim Information

The 'victim' section was completed in 52% of the Scottish cases compared to 63% of the YJB cases. Given the differences in offence categorisation between Scotland, and England and Wales, it is difficult to assign any real value to these figures however, as the actual nature of the victimisation is unclear without accompanying information on offence. However, with regard to the Scottish figures alone it would appear that violent offences are more likely to be directed at a specific (15%) or vulnerable (11%) victim rather than a stranger (9%). In contrast, crimes of dishonesty are more likely to be directed at a stranger victim (31%) than a specific (14%) or vulnerable (6%) victim.

**Table 3: Victim characteristics**

Victim characteristics	Victim(s) in this category	
	% of YJB cases	% of Scottish case
Specific targeted victim	33	64
Vulnerable victim	8	15
Repeat victim	4	9
Victim not known to the young person	62	87

### Information Sources

Overall, Scottish assessors appeared to obtain information from a wider range of sources than did their YJB counterparts, as can be seen in Table 4. Obtaining information from the victim is the most notable exception to this.

**Table 4: Information sources**

Information source	% of YJB cases obtaining information from this source	% of Scottish cases obtaining information from this source
YP interview	80	83
Case record	22	66
Police	57	47
CPS/PF	44	5
Previous convictions	37	16
Victim	16	4
YOI	6	6
Secure Unit	1	3
Hostel	1	1
SSD	24	46
GP	1	1
Mental health services	2	4
Other health services	1	2
Family	53	82
Drug agency	1	10
Alcohol agency	1	9
School	20	66
LEA	7	4
Careers Guidance Service	2	11
Other source	5	35

The figures in Table 4 would seem to imply that, in many cases, the issue of information sharing requires to be addressed. In Scotland, this would seem particularly relevant with regard to communications with the police, the Procurators Fiscal and, by association, the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration, not only for information on the current offending behaviour but also previous convictions.

### Care History

While similar proportions of Scottish cases (16%) and YJB cases (18%) had been accommodated by voluntary agreement with parents, a much higher proportion of Scottish cases admitted to LA accommodation (25% against 11% of YJB cases), being placed on the child protection register (25% against 10%) and where there was children services involvement with siblings (59% against 22%).

### Living Arrangements

Figures for individual caregivers in the previous 6 months were broadly similar across both samples. One notable difference, however, was that a higher proportion of the Scottish sample (14%) were recorded as having been accommodated in a local authority home or institution during this time period than in the YJB sample (7%). Marginally smaller proportions of the Scottish sample were living with both birth parents (26%) or with their birth mother but not their birth father (37%) than in the YJB sample (30% and 43% respectively). The proportion of young people experiencing negative living arrangements was broadly comparable in both jurisdictions.



**Table 5: Negative living arrangements**

Living arrangements	Usual living arrangement		Current living arrangement	
	% YJB	% Scottish	% YJB	% Scottish
No fixed abode	2	3	3	3
Unsuitable for young persons needs	4	11	4	11
Deprived household	12	21	9	25
Living with known offenders	8	18	8	20
Absconding/Staying away	10	16	3	9
Disorganised/Chaotic	7	14	5	14
Other problems	5	18	7	33

The mean rating for the association of 'living arrangements' with the risk of re-offending was marginally higher for the Scottish sample (1.36) than for the YJB sample (1.03).

**Table 6: Association of 'living arrangements' with risk of re-offending: ratings**

	% of YJB cases <sup>4</sup>	% of Scottish cases
Not associated (Score: 0)	49	37
Slight association (Score: 1)	19	23
Moderate association (Score: 2)	15	17
Quite strong association (Score: 3)	9	14
Very strong association (Score: 4)	7	9

<sup>4</sup> YJB percentages estimated as they are presented in the form of a bar chart, but not as raw scores, in the YJB report

### Family and Personal Relationships

Significant adults and others with whom the young person had contact within the 6 months prior to the Asset form being completed were recorded. Figures related to contact with either of the birth parents, adoptive or stepparents, and foster parents were all broadly comparable across both samples. However, contact with siblings, grandparents, other family members, other significant adults and boy/girlfriends were proportionately higher in the Scottish sample.

Incidents of negative relationships with family and significant others were all recorded more frequently for the Scottish sample than the YJB sample, with the 'don't know' and 'not applicable' figures being comparable across both samples. The exception here was with the category 'involved in criminal activity', where the 'not applicable' percentage was much higher in the Scottish sample (33%) than the YJB sample (1%).

**Table 7: Negative relationships with family and significant others**

	% YJB cases	% Scottish cases
Someone involved in criminal activity	25	35
Someone involved in heavy alcohol abuse	12	28
Someone involved in drug/solvent abuse	12	39
Significant adults fail to show care	19	23
Young person subject to inconsistent supervision	24	50
Young person has experience of abuse	16	34
Young person is witness to other violence in the family	15	37
Experienced significant bereavement or loss	21	44
Other problems	22	66

The mean rating for the association of 'family and personal relationships' with the risk of re-offending was marginally higher for the Scottish sample (1.97) than the YJB sample (1.35).

**Table 8: Association of 'family and personal relationships' with risk of re-offending: ratings**

	% of YJB cases <sup>5</sup>	% of Scottish cases
Not associated (Score: 0)	37	19
Slight association (Score: 1)	22	19
Moderate association (Score: 2)	19	25
Quite strong association (Score: 3)	15	22
Very strong association (Score: 4)	9	16

<sup>5</sup> YJB percentages estimated as they are presented in the form of a bar chart, but not as raw scores, in the YJB report

### Education, training and employment

In the YJB report, those completing the assessment are asked to complete only one of the sections - either 'statutory education' or 'employment, training and further education', whereas in the Scottish Asset, these topics are covered under one section - 'education, training and employment' - and are scored solely under this heading. Therefore, the ratings may not be directly comparable across the two samples. However, in the most recent versions of both Asset forms at September 2008, this topic is covered under one section: employment, training and further education.

There is also a difference in phraseology between the two Asset forms which has an impact on comparability. In the Scottish Asset, the question asked relating to both education and employment/training is what the young person's 'current' situation is in this regard. However, in the YJB report this is only true with regard to education/training. For statutory education the question is phrased to obtain information on the young person's education provision in the past six months. This difference makes the data on education provision difficult to compare, as the language used is now comparable.

**Table 9: Source of education**

	YJB Sample: % in this education type in the past 6 months	Scottish sample: % in this education type currently
Mainstream School	25	35
Special School	12	28
Pupil referral unit	12	39
Other specialist unit	19	23
Community home	24	50
Home tuition	16	34

The high proportion of missing data in categories related to permanent and fixed-term exclusions in the Scottish sample make reporting and comparing the data unhelpful. It can be said, however, that the proportion of the Scottish sample excluded at the time the Asset form was completed (16%) is comparable to that recorded for the YJB sample (15%).

The exact same proportion, (27%) of the Scottish sample and the YJB sample, were recorded as having difficulties with numeracy and/or literacy. All other negative factors related to the young persons' experience of education - these being regular truanting/absence, under-achievement, being bullied, poor relationships with teachers, lack of attachment with school, and negative parent/carer attitudes towards education - were recorded in higher proportions for the Scottish sample than for the YJB sample. This may, of course, be as a result of a higher proportion of information gathered from schools in the Scottish sample.

With regard to employment, training and further education, the Scottish sample appeared to include 79 cases where this information was relevant. Full-time employment was recorded in a lower proportion of these Scottish cases (6%) than in the comparable cases from the YJB sample (19%), while being unemployed was recorded in a higher proportion of Scottish cases (49%) in comparison to the YJB sample (39%). The figures for 'college/further education' were broadly comparable between the Scottish (13%) and YJB (16%) samples. A higher proportion of these Scottish cases (14%) was recorded as 'doing something else' in employment/training terms than was the YJB sample (3%).

With regard to barriers to employment, the proportion of Scottish cases where a lack of qualifications etc was cited (75%) was notably higher than that for YJB cases (54%), as were incidences of 'other problems' (16% compared to 10% of the YJB cases). This may imply that issues around education, exclusion and the like require particular attention in the Scottish context. Negative attitudes towards education and/or employment were recorded proportionately less often in Scottish cases than in YJB cases.

Bearing in mind the caveats mentioned above, the risk of further offending ratings for this category are displayed below. Although the categories are not directly comparable, the figures in Table 10 may imply that factors related to education and employment have a greater impact on offending behaviour in Scotland than they do in England and Wales.

**Table 10: Association of 'education, training and employment' with risk of re-offending: ratings**

	% of YJB cases in 'statutory education' category	% of YJB cases in 'employment, training and further education' category	% of Scottish cases in 'education, training and employment' category
Not associated (Score: 0)	26	46	15
Slight association (Score: 1)	21	21	23
Moderate association (Score: 2)	23	20	31
Quite strong association (Score: 3)	18	15	19
Very strong association (Score: 4)	10	6	12

### Neighbourhood

A higher proportion of the Scottish sample (71%) were recorded as spending most of their time in council estates than in the YJB sample (52%). Proportions of young people spending most of their time in rural areas, modern family housing and older housing (terraced or otherwise) were all lower in the Scottish sample than in the YJB sample.

The proportion of young people living in neighbourhoods with recorded signs of drug-dealing, that were isolated/had a lack of transport, had a lack of age-appropriate facilities or racial/ethnic tensions was broadly similar across the two samples. The proportion living in areas with 'other' identifiable problems was higher in the Scottish sample (19%) than in the YJB sample (9%).

The mean rating for the association of 'neighbourhood' with the risk of re-offending was marginally higher for the Scottish sample (1.68) than for the YJB sample (1.16).

**Table 11: Association of 'neighbourhood' with risk of re-offending: ratings**

	% of YJB cases	% of Scottish cases
Not associated (Score: 0)	38	20
Slight association (Score: 1)	27	26
Moderate association (Score: 2)	19	29
Quite strong association (Score: 3)	12	17
Very strong association (Score: 4)	4	8

### Lifestyle

A higher proportion of the young people in the Scottish sample appear to have negative issues impacting upon their lifestyle than those in the YJB sample, although the proportion of young people reporting 'inadequate personal income' is higher in the YJB sample (34%/) than in the Scottish sample (23%).

**Table 12: Negative lifestyle factors**

	Negative lifestyle factors affecting young people	
	% YJB cases	% Scottish cases
Lack of age appropriate friends	19	40
Associating with pro-criminal peers	40	68
Absence of non-criminal friends	24	39
Non-constructive use of time	53	77
Participation in reckless activity	36	66
Inadequate legitimate personal income	34	23
Other problems	27	53

The mean rating for the association of 'lifestyle' with the risk of re-offending was marginally higher for the Scottish sample (2.31) than for the YJB sample (1.83).

**Table 13: Association of 'lifestyle' with risk of re-offending: ratings**

	% of YJB cases	% of Scottish cases
Not associated (Score: 0)	25	9
Slight association (Score: 1)	19	19
Moderate association (Score: 2)	21	26
Quite strong association (Score: 3)	21	24
Very strong association (Score: 4)	15	22

### Substance Use

Overall, it would appear that a higher proportion of the young people in the Scottish sample had used illegal and/or prescription drugs than those in the YJB sample.

**Table 14: Substance use**

	YJB Sample		Scottish Sample	
	N	% known to have used this drug	N	% known to have used this drug
Tobacco	3016	74	252	85
Alcohol	2920	73	269	86
Solvents	2578	12	133	26
Cannabis	2765	46	220	79
Ecstasy	2555	10	142	36
Amphetamines	2563	10	129	26
LSD/Acid	2537	5	108	5
Poppers	2536	5	114	13
Cocaine	2544	8	112	11
Crack	2544	4	107	4
Heroin	2558	6	113	12
Methadone	2549	2	106	4
Illicit prescription	2566	5	113	22
Other drugs	2672	1	86	24

An impact of the substance use on the young person was also recorded more frequently in the Scottish sample than in the YJB sample, with this being particularly noticeable in connection with cannabis, ecstasy, amphetamines and illicit prescription drugs.

**Table 15: Impact of substance use**

	% of YJB cases	% of Scottish cases
Practices which put the young person at risk	5	10
Views substance use as a positive part of life	10	17
Views substance use as detrimental to life	14	26
Offending to obtain money	11	18
Other links to offending	18	27

The mean rating for the association of 'substance use' with the risk of re-offending was marginally higher for the Scottish sample (1.41) than for the YJB sample (1.08).

**Table 16: Association of 'substance use' with risk of re-offending: ratings**

	% of YJB cases	% of Scottish cases
Not associated (Score: 0)	50	36
Slight association (Score: 1)	19	22
Moderate association (Score: 2)	13	17
Quite strong association (Score: 3)	9	14
Very strong association (Score: 4)	8	11

### Physical health

Only one factor related to physical health was recorded for the Scottish sample, this being where a physical condition affected everyday functioning. This factor was recorded as impacting on the young person in the same proportion (8%) for both the Scottish and YJB samples.

The mean rating for the association of 'physical health' with the risk of re-offending was marginally higher for the Scottish sample (0.42) than for the YJB sample (0.32). The proportion of cases where physical health was considered not to be associated with the risk of re-offending was the same in both the Scottish and YJB samples (78%).

### Emotional and mental health

Emotion and mental health issues impacting on the young person were recorded more frequently for the Scottish sample than the YJB sample.

**Table 17: Emotional and mental health issues**

	YJB sample		Scottish Sample	
	N	% affected by this	N	% affected by this
Coming to terms with significant past events	3210	32	313	59
Formal diagnosis of mental illness	3217	2	314	4
Any other contact with MH services	3136	11	305	23
Affected by other emotional or psychological problems	3187	9	307	11
Deliberately harms themselves	3203	8	315	22
Previously attempted suicide	3186	5	316	10

The mean rating for the association of 'emotional and mental health' with the risk of re-offending was marginally higher for the Scottish sample (1.39) than for the YJB sample (0.96).

**Table 18: Association of 'emotional and mental health' with risk of re-offending: ratings**

	% of YJB cases	% of Scottish cases
Not associated (Score: 0)	52	32
Slight association (Score: 1)	19	23
Moderate association (Score: 2)	16	26
Quite strong association (Score: 3)	9	15
Very strong association (Score: 4)	5	5

**Perception of self and others**

Issues affecting the young persons' perception of themselves and others were recorded more frequently in the Scottish sample than in the YJB sample, as can be seen in Table 19. However, in the YJB figures, empathy issues (33%) and the young person viewing themselves as an offender (26%) were recorded marginally more often than in the Scottish sample (30% and 24% respectively).

**Table 19: Perception of self and others**

	YJB sample		Scottish Sample	
	N	% affected by this	N	% affected by this
Difficulties with self-identity	3183	9	314	20
Inappropriate self-esteem	3209	26	318	44
General mistrust of others	3207	22	319	40
Displays a lack of empathy	3184	25	318	30
Displays discriminatory attitudes	3169	6	316	19
Sees him/herself as an offender	3189	9	313	24

The mean rating for the association of 'perception of self and others' with the risk of re-offending was marginally higher for the Scottish sample (1.52) than the YJB sample (1.09).

**Table 20: Association of 'perception of self and others' with risk of re-offending: ratings**

	% of YJB cases	% of Scottish cases
Not associated (Score: 0)	43	24
Slight association (Score: 1)	23	25
Moderate association (Score: 2)	18	31
Quite strong association (Score: 3)	11	16
Very strong association (Score: 4)	4	4

**Thinking and behaviour**

Issues impacting upon, or resulting from, the young persons' thinking and behaviour were recorded more frequently in the Scottish sample than in the YJB sample (Table 21). The YJB figures show a marginally higher proportion of young people showing a lack of understanding of the consequences of their behaviour (54%) than in the Scottish sample (51%).

As can be seen in Table 22 the mean rating for the association of 'thinking and behaviour' with the risk of re-offending was marginally higher for the Scottish sample (2.26) than for the YJB sample (2.01).

**Table 21: Thinking and behaviour**

	YJB sample		Scottish Sample	
	N	% affected by this	N	% affected by this
Lack of understanding of consequences	3260	45	314	51
Impulsive - acting without thinking	3252	74	314	81
Need for excitement (easily bored)	3235	44	314	59
Giving in easily to pressure from others	3232	44	315	49
Poor control of temper	3238	40	314	59
Inappropriate self-presentation	3196	9	312	19
Destruction of property	3204	27	313	52
Aggression towards others	3204	42	314	71
Sexually inappropriate behaviour	3174	4	313	6
Attempts to manipulate/control others	3168	10	312	18

**Table 22: Association of 'thinking and behaviour' with risk of re-offending: ratings**

	% of YJB cases	% of Scottish cases
Not associated (Score: 0)	43	24
Slight association (Score: 1)	23	25
Moderate association (Score: 2)	18	31
Quite strong association (Score: 3)	11	16
Very strong association (Score: 4)	4	4

**Attitudes to offending**

Issues related to the young persons' attitude to offending were recorded more frequently in the Scottish sample than the YJB sample.

**Table 23: Attitudes to offending**

	YJB sample		Scottish Sample	
	N	% affected by this	N	% affected by this
Denial of the seriousness of offence	3264	25	314	45
Reluctance to accept responsibility	3272	15	314	27
Lack of understanding of effects on victims	3253	34	312	55
Lack of remorse	3255	27	310	41
Lack of understanding of the effects on family	3280	27	312	35
Belief that certain types of offending is acceptable	3222	17	310	37
Belief that certain people/groups are acceptable targets	3225	8	311	20
Thinks further offending is inevitable	3218	13	304	23

The mean rating for the association of 'attitudes to offending' with the risk of re-offending was marginally higher for the Scottish sample (1.84) than for the YJB sample (1.40).

**Table 24: Association of 'attitudes to offending' with risk of re-offending: ratings**

	% of YJB cases	% of Scottish cases
Not associated (Score: 0)	38	18
Slight association (Score: 1)	20	27
Moderate association (Score: 2)	17	24
Quite strong association (Score: 3)	15	17
Very strong association (Score: 4)	10	15

## Motivation to change

Factors related to motivation to change were recorded marginally less frequently for young people in the Scottish sample than those in the YJB sample.

**Table 25: Motivation to change**

	YJB sample		Scottish Sample	
	N	% affected by this	N	% affected by this
Some understanding of problems in life	3206	85	314	81
Some evidence of wanting to deal with problems	3198	81	314	79
Understands consequences of further offending	3214	88	312	79
Can identify reasons to stop offending	3202	81	310	75
Some evidence of wanting to stop	3195	82	312	76
Likely to receive support from family etc.	3198	82	310	80
Willing to co-operate to achieve change	3156	83	311	73

The mean rating for the association of 'motivation to change' with the risk of re-offending was marginally higher for the Scottish sample (1.39) than for the YJB sample (1.01).

**Table 26: Association of 'motivation to change' with risk of re-offending: ratings**

	% of YJB cases	% of Scottish cases
Not associated (Score: 0)	49	29
Slight association (Score: 1)	22	30
Moderate association (Score: 2)	14	21
Quite strong association (Score: 3)	9	13
Very strong association (Score: 4)	6	7

Total ratings for Asset were available in 100% of Scottish cases compared to 84% of YJB cases, with Scottish cases scoring higher on average.

**Table 27: Asset ratings**

Rating	% of YJB cases	% of Scottish cases
0-9	43	24
10-19	23	25
20-29	18	31
30-39	11	16
40 +	4	4

## Positive factors

Positive factors related to both social and family circumstances, and personal factors, were recorded more often for young people in the Scottish sample than in the YJB sample. These are split between two tables below.

**Table 28a: Positive factors - Social and family circumstances**

	YJB sample		Scottish Sample	
	N	% affected by this	N	% affected by this
<b>Social and family circumstances</b>				
Living arrangements etc.	3010	74	215	77
Family/Personal relationships	3009	74	252	87
Education and employment	3009	50	225	66
Professional help/support	3006	30	265	76
Other positive factors	3005	11	127	64



**Table 28b: Positive factors - Personal circumstances**

Personal circumstances	YJB sample		Scottish Sample	
	N	% affected by this	N	% affected by this
Lifestyle	3008	33	182	37
Resilience	3008	29	196	64
Attitudes and thinking	3007	54	203	64
Actions and behaviour	3008	36	192	55
Motivation	3009	59	247	75
Other positive factors	3008	8	112	46

**Indicators of vulnerability**

Factors related to indicators of vulnerability were recorded more often for young people in the Scottish sample than for those in the YJB sample, though the figure related to risk of self harm/suicide is broadly comparable.

**Table 29: Indicators of vulnerability**

	YJB sample		Scottish Sample	
	N	% affected by this	N	% affected by this
Vulnerable because of the behaviour of other people	3094	21	289	41
Vulnerable because of events or circumstances	3044	17	290	42
Vulnerable because of own behaviour	3033	25	296	68
Young person at risk of self harm or suicide	3075	9	295	11
Protective factors that reduce vulnerability	2549	25	235	36

**Indicators of serious harm**

The frequencies of 'yes' responses to questions related to indicators of serious harm are lower for young people in the Scottish sample than those in the YJB sample.

**Table 30: Indicators of serious harm**

	YJB sample		Scottish Sample	
	N	% affected by this	N	% affected by this
Behaviour that could - unintentionally - have led to serious harm	885	81	254	48
Behaviour by the young person which resulted in serious harm actually being caused	857	37	252	17
Any other intuitive or 'gut' feelings about possible harmful behaviour	857	23	242	10
Concerns about possible harmful behaviour expressed by other people e.g. family, school etc.	873	21	244	13
Behaviour which indicates that s/he was intending or preparing to cause serious harm	874	20	252	12
Other features of the offending which indicate that there may be a risk of serious harm	891	18	254	11
Attitudes/motives which indicate that there may be a risk of serious harm	886	17	254	13
Concerns about possible harmful behaviour expressed by the young person	880	12	242	8
Any other disconcerting or disturbing behaviour by the young person	886	5	246	4
Current interests/activities which indicate that there may be a risk of serious harm	886	4	255	3

## RELIABILITY OF ASSET

In order to examine the reliability of an assessment tool it is necessary to know whether or not it is being used consistently and fully. To go some way towards exploring the reliability of the Asset tool in the Scottish context, the forms were examined to determine the level of completion - i.e. how often (or not) data was missing - in two different areas:

- Across each section of the form for the full sample
- Across each pilot area that submitted Asset forms

Ideally, an examination would have been made of rater differences but low numbers in most cases negated this possibility.

The measure of how well the forms have been completed is to compare each section on the terms of whether that section has been completed or not. There may, of course, be a number of reasons why a particular section has not been completed (e.g. the information was unknown, the section was not applicable to that particular client, or the completer simply missed the section) so this issue will not be addressed.

### Asset Form Sections: Full Sample

The information sources section in the Scottish sample is recorded as having been completed in 58% of cases and not completed in 42% of cases. This compares poorly with the data from the Youth Justice Board ('YJB') report, where it is recorded that the information sources section was 'left blank' in 12% of cases. Also in the Scottish Asset forms, in 8% of cases it is recorded that not all relevant information had been obtained. This would seem to imply that in anywhere from 8% to 42% of cases, information required for completion of the Asset form was, for some reason, unobtainable. This lack of information could have an impact on decision making, and therefore outcomes for the young person.

The care history section was recorded as not being completed in 38% of the Scottish Asset forms, while the criminal history section was not completed in 34% of the forms. Again, this compares unfavourably with the YJB data, where it is recorded that these sections were not completed in 11% and 5% of forms respectively.

The positive factors section was completed in 309 (65%) of the Scottish Asset forms, compared to 89% of the YJB forms. Of these 309 completed forms, evidence was recorded as available in 70% of cases.

The 'indicators of vulnerability' section was completed in 315 (66%) of the Scottish Asset forms, compared to 93% of the YJB forms. Of these 315 forms, evidence was recorded as available in 58% of cases.

There are 13 sections in the Scottish Asset form where scoring takes place that goes towards the overall Asset rating; however, little data was recorded for the 'further education, training and employment' section and this is discussed separately below. Details relating to the remaining 12 sections can be found in Table 31 below. Notations in the table are as follows:

\* It is acknowledged that this figure is different from the number completed; however, this was the number of cases in which a response to 'no association with offending' was recorded and is not an error in the table.

\*\* The proportion of cases overall that had not been evidenced in regard to the impact of statutory education on future offending was 48%.

**Table 31: Asset scoring sections**

	<b>Number completed</b>	<b>% missing</b>	<b>No association with offending</b>	<b>% evidenced</b>
Living arrangements	349	27	170	52
Family and personal relationships	377	27	39	77
Statutory education	336	29	Data missing	48**
Home neighbourhood	336	29	91	51
Lifestyle	343	28	41	46
Substance use	319	33	161	40
Physical health	341	28	347*	63
Emotional and mental health	343	28	143	31
Perception of self and others	296	38	110	40
Thinking and behaviour	304	36	44	7
Attitudes to offending	341	28	81	27
Motivation to change	344	28	133	45

As can be seen, in around one-third of all cases (27% to 38%) sections had not been completed. Markings related to the likelihood of further offending should be recorded in each case, ranging from 'Not associated at all' to 'Very strongly associated'. For the purposes of this paper the category of 'no association with offending' was examined to assess what proportion of cases where this option was selected were recorded as evidenced to this effect. As can be seen, the proportion of cases that were evidenced ranged from 77% (Family and Personal Relationships) to only 7% (Thinking and Behaviour). On the surface this would seem to imply that decisions are being made without the evidence to support them. Alternatively, as the proportion of evidenced cases rises as the likelihood of an association with offending rises, it may be the case that evidence is considered more important the greater the negative finding.

With regard to 'further education, training and employment' information on these topics was reported as irrelevant in 71% of the Scottish Asset forms, no doubt due to the age of the client concerned. This creates a complex relationship with the factors of evidence and association with risk of offending, which results in relatively small figures being produced by the subsequent analysis; it is therefore of little use to report these findings.

### Scoring and evidence

***NB: Scoring, by default, is going to be lower in Scottish Asset forms as statutory education not scored individually. Therefore, scores are based on 12 sections instead of 13.***

It has become clear that the findings from the Scottish Asset forms, if taken at face-value, indicate that a number of decisions appear to have been made without all the necessary evidence. Table 32 below shows how this is distributed across the total Asset scores. It can be hypothesised from the findings in this table that the higher the Asset score, the wider a range of evidence was available. However, that any kind of decision is being made with no apparent basis in evidence is of concern; e.g. 61% of those cases where no evidence was recorded in any of the 13 scoring sections have a total Asset score of 0 to 9, indicating low risk. Again, it could be hypothesised that evidence is less likely to be sought when no great risk or need is identified for the young person and therefore no negative outcome is anticipated in relation to a particular factor.

**Table 32: Asset score by number of sections with evidence recorded**

Number of sections with evidence recorded	Total Asset score											
	0-9		10-19		20-29		30-39		40+		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
0	53	61	28	32	7	5	0	0	0	0	<b>87</b>	<b>100</b>
1-3	19	54	15	43	1	3	0	0	0	0	<b>35</b>	<b>100</b>
4-6	9	17	19	37	18	35	5	10	1	2	<b>52</b>	<b>100</b>
7-9	6	10	27	44	21	34	7	11	0	0	<b>61</b>	<b>100</b>
10-12	19	9	55	27	72	35	52	25	6	3	<b>204</b>	<b>100</b>
13	3	8	9	25	11	31	13	36	0	0	<b>36</b>	<b>100</b>

If the scoring sections are examined individually, it can be seen in Table 33 that those with the highest proportion of 3 and 4 scores are the sections related to 'thinking and behaviour', 'lifestyle', and 'family and personal relationships' respectively. The proportion of cases in each section where the scores were 3 or 4, and no evidence was recorded is 11%, 10% and 13% respectively.

**Table 33: Individual section scores, by section**

Sections <sup>6</sup>	Individual section scores					% of 3 & 4 scores with missing evidence
	0	1	2	3	4	
Living arrangements	36	22	17	14	9	13
Family and personal relationships	18	19	24	22	15	13
Statutory education	15	23	30	18	11	6
Home neighbourhood	19	26	28	16	8	14
Lifestyle	9	19	25	23	21	10
Substance use	34	21	16	13	10	17
Physical health	73	13	7	1	0.2	0
Emotional and mental health	30	22	24	14	5	45
Perception of self and others	23	23	29	15	4	13
Thinking and behaviour	9	19	22	28	17	11
Attitudes to offending	17	26	23	16	14	14
Motivation to change	28	28	19	12	7	10

<sup>6</sup> 'Statutory education' section not scored individually in the Scottish ASSET therefore only 12 sections in Table

### Asset Form Sections: Pilot Areas

Five pilot areas submitted Asset forms to the Centre for analysis; the numbers of forms and brief descriptor for each area are reported in Table 34.

**Table 34: Number of Asset forms submitted by each pilot area, plus area descriptor**

	Area 1	Area 2	Area 3	Area 4	Area 5
Area descriptor	City	City	City	Town (urban/rural mix)	Town (urban/rural mix)
Number of Asset forms	65	202	118	57	33
% of total Asset forms	14	43	25	12	7

The information sources section was completed in 59% of all the Asset forms submitted, and it was further recorded that all information had been obtained in 92% of cases.

**Table 35: Static factors: Percentage of sections completed**

	Area 1	Area 2	Area 3	Area 4	Area 5	All
Information sources section completed	74	44	74	61	61	59
All information obtained	94	89	90	98	97	92
Care history section completed	95	51	86	11	64	62
Criminal history section completed	83	52	86	46	73	66
Victim section completed	48	36	78	58	52	52

Overall, Area 2 appears to have been least likely to complete these sections of the Asset form related to static risk factors, although Area 4 shows a particularly low proportion (11%) of the section on care history being completed. The low Area 2 figures will obviously have an impact on overall percentages; for example, if the Area 2 figures are removed from the calculation on information sources completed, the overall proportion of forms with this section completed rises to 70%.

With regard to the dynamic/scoring factors in the Asset form, the proportion of sections completed and evidence supplied in each area are detailed in Appendix I. As can be seen, there is a wide variation from across the areas, particularly with regard to evidence, with Areas 4 and 5 performing worst in this respect.

The mean ratings for each area can be found in Table 36 below.

**Table 36: Mean Asset rating by pilot area**

	Area 1	Area 2	Area 3	Area 4	Area 5	All
Mean	18.34	18.33	20.27	15.30	15.88	18.49
Standard deviation	8.58	10.94	9.06	8.86	12.25	10.14

### Staff completing the Asset forms

There are 66 different individuals ('raters') noted as completing the Asset forms across the 5 pilot areas. Of the 475 Asset forms submitted to the Centre, 59 (12%) had no name entered. Also, 24% of the forms had no date of completion entered. Overall, 47 forms (10%) had neither staff name nor completion date entered. The majority of raters (67%) entered the completion date on all occasions, while 6 raters (9%) never entered the completion date. How these numbers break down across the pilot areas is presented in Table 37.

**Table 37: Asset raters and dates of completion, by pilot area**

	No of Asset forms	No. of 'raters'	Asset forms with no name		Asset forms with no date		Asset forms with no name or date	
			N	%	N	%	N	%
Area 1	65	14	7	11	27	42	7	11
Area 2	202	12	9	5	30	15	8	4
Area 3	118	14	11	9	32	27	11	9
Area 4	57	10	25	44	17	30	15	26
Area 5	33	19	7	21	8	24	6	18

Differences across raters who had completed at least 10 Asset forms can be found in Table 38. As can be seen, scoring and level of evidence used varies considerably across the raters.

**Table 38: Individual Asset raters (who completed 10 or more forms)**

	Pilot Area	No. of Asset forms	Asset Rating		Mean number of sections with evidence provided
			Mean	SD	
<b>Rater 1</b>	1	10	12.50	5.91	10.5
<b>Rater 2</b>	2	10	24.10	9.46	10.5
<b>Rater 3</b>	2	15	21.73	8.22	7.7
<b>Rater 4</b>	2	15	15.60	7.49	4.5 <sup>c</sup>
<b>Rater 5</b>	2	41	7.46	4.12	0.3 <sup>a</sup>
<b>Rater 6</b>	2	90	23.27	10.92	10.3 <sup>d</sup>
<b>Rater 7</b>	3	12	20.08	8.84	9.6
<b>Rater 8</b>	3	13	20.46	9.98	11.4
<b>Rater 9</b>	3	13	20.77	9.66	9.8
<b>Rater 10</b>	3	14	21.86	7.26	10.3 <sup>b</sup>
<b>Rater 11</b>	3	25	17.92	7.64	10.0

<sup>a</sup> 95% of sections had no evidence provided

<sup>b</sup> 7% of sections had no evidence provided

<sup>c</sup> 27% of sections had no evidence provided

<sup>d</sup> 13% of sections had no evidence provided

## CONCLUSIONS

This study is a first effort at providing a systematic analysis of aggregated and standardised data using Asset on young people who have come to the formal attention of a small group of Scottish authorities because of their offending. As part of a developmental process, many of the issues will have changed as the tool and practices have been refined since this data was gathered. Nonetheless, given the growing expectations on Local Authorities to demonstrate their effectiveness in this and other areas of practice, a number of valuable lessons can be highlighted for future consideration.

As Asset was developed for another jurisdiction, where possible, comparisons with published data from England and Wales have been examined. However the differences between the two jurisdictions have only allowed for the most speculative of comments.

In both jurisdictions, young people subject to formal and standardised assessment because of their persistent or serious offending are seen to present with multiple difficulties across the Asset domains, particularly in relation to accommodation and neighbourhood issues, family difficulties, inconsistent parenting and lifestyle issues, trauma and loss, education, peer associations, drug misuse, attitude and thinking, and inappropriate self esteem

However if the data were taken as comparable at face value, it could suggest that Scottish young people subject to formal assessment present with far fewer indicators of serious harm and serious offending. The issues of net-widening and drawing young people unnecessarily into formal proceedings to address offending, which is a challenge for all jurisdictions, may need further examination in the Scottish context.

Asset is an offence focused tool, primarily aimed at identifying needs and risks judged to sustain and support criminality so that these can be tackled as a matter of priority. The tool also allows for other vulnerabilities and strengths to be identified. It is possible that in this early stage of the use of Asset, practitioners were using the tool as a general needs inventory to identify needs less directly associated with criminality, which could lead to over scoring. At the same time the data indicates that the tool is being used appropriately for young people entering the adult criminal justice system.

As noted in the introduction, the absence of strong baseline data for Scotland may make prediction problematic. Nonetheless the data available highlight very clear areas of needs that can be used to assist individual planning and, in aggregate form, to assist resource and services planning.

The relatively high levels of negative relationships experienced by these young people (Table 7) point towards the need for pro-social and positive supports and family services. Similarly the levels of recorded

drug usage (Table 14), violence and aggression (Table 21), peer association, inappropriate self-esteem (Table 19) and schooling issues (Table 10) all serve to identify the kinds of provision likely to be required to respond effectively to the recorded individual and family crime related needs.

The data suggest that information sources consisted of extensive use of case records on the young person, school and family. There was less obvious use of data from police, reporters (SCRA) or procurator fiscal services (COPFS). Developments associated with 'Getting it Right for Every Child' are likely to support access to a wider range of relevant information sources in the future. At the same time, data on 'neighbourhood' issues, combined with the very high levels of social housing recorded, point to the need for integrated strategies and responses for issues that are generally beyond the direct influence of social work, never mind individual young people and their families.

If the scoring ratings are to be taken seriously, it is reasonable to expect that 'needs' scoring 3 and 4 will be responded to as a matter of priority. An adaptation of Table 33 (below) provides a summary of priority needs for a substantial group of Scottish children and young people. The data provides a very clear steer as to the service priorities for these children and young people, and it will be the responsibility of each local authority to 'complete the table' by considering the expected service response required to meet specific criminogenic needs individually or collectively. High levels of family and personal relationship as well as lifestyle issues, for example, are documented. Strategic and operation plans should direct resources as well as case managers to appropriate services responses, which in these instances might involved structured or 'functional' family work and the involvement of community resources to support leisure and recreation action planning. They equally highlight priority training issues for staff.

**Table 33 adapted**

	<b>% scoring 3</b>	<b>% scoring 4</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Expected service response?</b>
<b>Living arrangements</b>	14	9	23	?
<b>Family and personal relationships</b>	22	15	37	?
<b>Statutory education</b>	18	11	29	?
<b>Home neighbourhood</b>	16	8	24	?
<b>Lifestyle</b>	23	21	44	?
<b>Substance use</b>	13	10	23	?
<b>Physical health</b>	1	0.2	1.2	?
<b>Emotional and mental health</b>	14	5	19	?
<b>Perception of self and others</b>	15	4	19	?
<b>Thinking and behaviour</b>	28	17	45	?
<b>Attitudes to offending</b>	16	14	30	?
<b>Motivation to change</b>	12	7	19	?

In addition to the very instructive data, both for practitioners and managers, emerging from the use of standardised assessment, very striking gaps in information or evidence to support judgments are apparent. Some of these may reflect a lack of rigour in completing forms and the need for administrative oversight to pick up obvious omissions such as the notably high proportion of dates of birth missing from the data. Others may reflect a lack of research focused inquiry. For example the Scottish data has much less information on reasons for offences or information on victimisation, and limited evidence documented to justify the judgements of recorded positives in the lives of young people. The issue of victims is crucial in understanding criminality and in exploring the possibilities of reparative or restorative responses. There is relatively limited Scottish information on permanent or fixed term school exclusions; the care history section was not completed in 38% of the Scottish Asset forms, and the criminal history section was not completed in 34% of the forms. The 'indicators of vulnerability' section was completed in 315 (66%) of the Scottish Asset forms, compared to 93% of the YJB forms.

A lack of information or evidence, or cases where information is unobtainable can have a serious impact on decision-making and outcomes for young people. If these findings are taken at face-value, they may suggest that a number of judgments or decisions appear to have been made without all the necessary evidence.

Overall the study indicates that progress is being made in the use of standardised assessment and highlights its value in generating important data on the priority areas of needs and risks presented by young people involved persistently or seriously in offending.

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## Appendix I: Information recorded on dynamic/scoring factors: percentage of sections completed, by pilot area

	% Area 3	% Area 2	% Area 3	% Area 4	Area 5	% All
<b>Living arrangements</b>	100	68	95	5	94	73
Evidence supplied	85	56	87	23	18	61
Not associated with offending behaviour	22	36	39	40	45	36
<b>Family and personal relationships</b>	100	67	95	11	94	74
Evidence supplied	88	60	93	58	58	72
Not associated with offending behaviour	6	19	14	26	39	18
<b>Statutory education</b>	85	85	88	9	88	64
Evidence supplied	72	72	83	40	70	60
<b>Further education, training and employment</b>	54	23	22	7	6	24
Evidence supplied	49	26	18	23	3	25
Not associated with offending behaviour	28	17	10	28	33	19
<b>Neighbourhood</b>	94	64	92	5	94	70
Evidence supplied	82	58	86	9	24	60
Not associated with offending behaviour	28	17	10	28	33	19
<b>Lifestyle</b>	95	66	92	9	94	72
Evidence supplied	82	62	88	60	58	71
Not associated with offending behaviour	28	17	10	28	33	19
<b>Substance use</b>	94	53	93	11	88	66
Evidence supplied	82	55	71	39	24	59
Not associated with offending behaviour	14	41	40	18	39	34
<b>Physical health</b>	95	66	92	11	94	72
Evidence supplied	69	49	74	39	42	56
Not associated with offending behaviour	60	85	68	53	82	73
<b>Emotional and mental health</b>	94	67	92	4	88	70
Evidence supplied	49	48	45	19	21	41
Not associated with offending behaviour	14	41	14	37	27	30
<b>Perception of self and others</b>	94	67	92	5	88	71
Evidence supplied	78	55	82	7	21	57
Not associated with offending behaviour	17	26	19	25	27	23
<b>Thinking and behaviour</b>	92	67	92	4	85	70
Evidence supplied	74	62	90	56	70	71
Not associated with offending behaviour	2	13	2	14	21	9
<b>Attitude to offending</b>	92	67	91	5	91	71
Evidence supplied	74	61	84	23	24	61
Not associated with offending behaviour	8	20	10	23	33	17
<b>Motivation to change</b>	89	67	92	9	94	71
Evidence supplied	72	60	88	37	64	66
Not associated with offending behaviour	28	28	19	44	33	28

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