

YOUTH JUSTICE

SUPPORTING A SKILLED WORKFORCE



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Overview

The youth justice workforce operates across education, policing, local authorities, health and social care, and custodial and probation services. Services are aimed at preventing offending or reoffending, working to support behaviour management and education, with a strong commitment to reducing the number of young people remanded or in custody and exploring non-custodial routes. Some of the main duties the youth justice workforce carries out includes:

- Providing an Appropriate Adult to young people in police settings (which is also a volunteer activity)
- Helping young people and their families throughout a court process
- Supporting young people awaiting sentence
- Supervising young people serving a community sentence
- Working with young people to agree behaviour contracts with their families
- Working with parents, guardians or carers to help them understand their responsibilities
- Facilitating restorative justice where appropriate
- Running programmes aimed at supporting those at risk of entering the criminal justice system, or schemes to address offending behaviours, or physical education / sports therapy etc
- Support the resettlement of children and young people as they return to their communities or into a custodial setting



There are many people across the justice sector and wider public services that interface with youth justice, through multi-agency and multi-disciplinary approaches. People working in youth justice can expect to be working alongside social workers, probation officers, police officers, youth workers, educational and healthcare staff, adolescent mental health staff, court staff and workers across the secure estate.

In addition there's a strong layer of oversight and involvement from the secure estate, inspectorates, and, of course, the Youth Justice Board in England and Wales, the Youth Justice Improvement Board in Scotland and the Youth Justice Agency in Northern Ireland.

The criminal justice system is underpinned by many in the workforce's supporting services, such as learning and development, education and training, research, violence reduction units, courts and tribunals, prosecution and more. Youth justice pathways are supported by all of these services in the same manner as any other part of the criminal justice system.

The question is,
what support does
the workforce need
in such a multi-
agency and
complex part of
the justice system?



Career pathways and skills

To examine this, we first need to look at career pathways to see the types of roles and competences expected of the youth justice workforce.

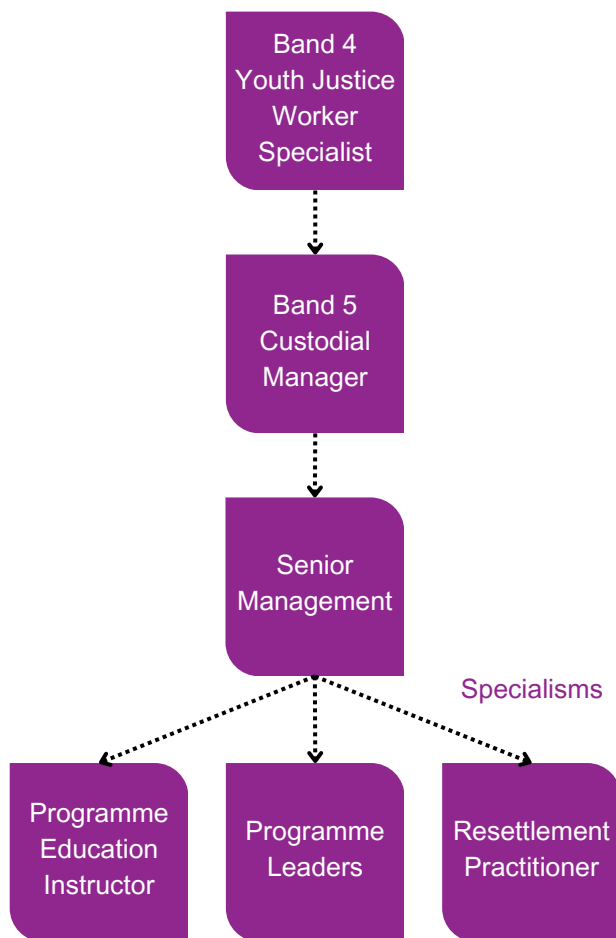
Entry level roles include Youth Offending Service Officers working to prevent under 18s from offending and reoffending, or Youth Justice Worker / Youth Custody Worker, who work with young people in custody (and are often based out of a Youth Offender Institution [YOI]).

Other typical role titles include: Intervention Worker, Reparation Officer, Youth Offending Service Case Manager, Youth Support Worker, Youth Club Leader, Youth Development Officer, Community Safety Officer, Anti-Social Behaviour Officer.

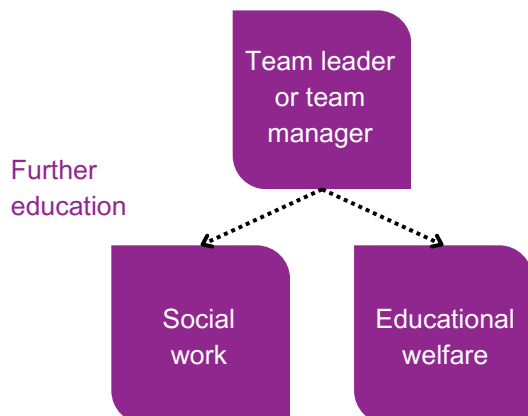


Progression routes

Youth Justice Worker



Youth Offending Service Officer



Skills and education routes

Many of the skills are the same as other parts of the justice or even healthcare systems – youth justice workers need to have a base level of regulated and mandated skills and knowledge. These include:

- Safeguarding, exploitation and preventing harm
- PREVENT (in relation to radicalisation)
- Mental health awareness
- Minimising and Managing Physical Restraint (MMPR) techniques, practical skills
- Conflict resolution
- Computer literacy
- Equity/equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) awareness

Some specific skillsets include

- Motivational interviewing
- Restorative justice
- Trauma-informed approaches
- Knowledge of psychology
- Counselling skills, such as active listening
- Knowledge of adolescent development
- Knowledge of liaison and diversion services and projects

Alongside any career specialisms skills, such as physical education.

Apprenticeships

Youth Justice Practitioner

- Level 5
- Typical duration: 25 months
- Work with children who have offended or who are at risk of offending

[Institute for Apprenticeships specification](#)

Youth Worker

- Level 6
- Typical duration: 36 months
- Enable and work with young people to facilitate personal, social and educational development

[Institute for Apprenticeships specification](#)

Youth Support Worker

- Level 3
- Typical duration: 18 months
- Work in a support role with young people to promote their personal, social and educational development

[Institute for Apprenticeships specification](#)

Anti-Social Behaviour and Community Safety Officer

- Level 4
- Typical duration: 24 months
- Investigate reports of anti-social behaviour

[Institute for Apprenticeships specification](#)

Beyond apprenticeships there are several qualifications that may be used by the youth justice sector, including certificates in early interventions or probation services, certificate or diploma in youth work practice, or others that are aligned to skills and specialisms such as those highlighted above.

However, there is no dedicated qualification framework that pulls these together to provide direct entry or progression routes for the workforce.

Youth work is a skilled profession with its own code of practice and it's important that youth workers have the right qualifications and training to help them support young people to the best of their ability.

Whichever route people take they need to gain a qualification that's recognised by the Joint Negotiating Committee for youth and community workers (JNC).



Opportunities for workforce development

A common element of reports that look at youth justice is that the workforce is highly committed to the work that they do and the children and young people that they work with.

In a challenging and highly regulated part of the criminal justice system, the themes we see emerging from reports and inspections is that the challenges are mainly around:

- Increasing efficiency and shared knowledge in multi-agency working.
- Ensuring that governance and oversight continue to make progress in non-custodial pathways and preventative measures.
- Education, safety and quality of life within custodial settings.

The question we must answer is - how do we caretake a motivated workforce and ensure that they have the skills and tools available to them to meet these challenge, to ensure they continue to work in youth justice? Additionally, how would achieving this help with recruitment into the youth justice workforce?



Training provision

“

YJS managers should make sure that YJS practitioners and social workers have access to and use guidance and training that sets out how bail and remand processes work.

”

“

For many YJSs, an RYDA [remand to youth detention accomodation] is a rare event, and there were occasions when practitioners were unsure of the legal and procedural framework they were operating in.

”

A joint thematic inspection of work with children subject to remand in youth justice detention, Joint Criminal Justice Inspection Report, November 2023

To achieve this, current training provision needs to be looked at across the system to ensure they contain the relevant regulatory information, and that learners are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to navigate this part of the youth justice system.

Similarly, the report notes that “The child in care status given to children when they are RYDA is implemented inconsistently and there is a lack of guidance on how to deliver care planning for children on remand to capitalise on this status to improve children’s lives.” This presents another opportunity to review current training provision.



These are just two examples of development opportunities – there are likely many more areas where a similar approach would help support the development of the workforce.

Across services, a standardised approach to training provision can help to ensure that the whole system works to the same level of competence.

Current training provision should be quality assured and audited to ensure recommendations like the above are accurately met in future inspections.



Recommendation

Leaders, service managers and those with oversight of the youth justice system need to think strategically about the level of skills and training provision across the multiple organisations and workers involved.

Utilisation of frameworks

Career and competence frameworks that services can use to map learning outcomes, skills and knowledge sets to training provision could be developed for the youth justice workforce. This could help ensure their staff have the right knowledge, and provide a method of measurement for career progression.

In addition, these career and competence frameworks can help consolidate and centralise the operational frameworks that already exist within the youth justice sector – for example the [Standards for children in the youth justice system 2019](#).

The starting point for these developments should be the [Youth Justice Skills Matrix](#) (Youth Justice Board 2023) which sets out core skills in 8 areas:

- Child development – implications for youth justice practice
- Engagement and communication
- Assessment
- Effective practice
- Multi-agency working, advocacy and brokerage skills and sharing information
- Risk of harm
- Transitions
- Safeguarding.

Each of these core skills can be significantly developed to standardise sets of skills and knowledge and learning outcomes across the sector.

Recommendation

Employers should develop tools to help them check and measure the skills and knowledge of youth justice practitioners, across levels and across organisations.

Qualification routes

In addition to the above, the sector needs to ask if dedicated qualification entry or progression routes need to be implemented. Whilst there are a number of apprenticeship standards available, numbers are low for those starting and finishing this route into the workforce.

And whilst there are many qualifications that could be applicable to the youth justice workforce, we need to ensure these are meeting the needs of this part of the system.

Are there considerations omitted from generalised justice qualifications that are essential for youth justice practitioners? Are there elements in existing training that are not relevant to youth justice practitioners?

Even if current training and progressions routes are fit for purpose, understanding how to navigate them for individuals within the workforce needs to be increased, and may help the workforce feel supported and aid in retention efforts.



Recommendation

Regulated qualification provision for progression within the youth justice workforce needs to be made clearer.

Understanding current and future demand

One of the biggest challenges for the sector is understanding the scale of the current demand, and planning for how it will evolve in the future. Do we on a local or a national level know how many YOJ placements are needed? Or per placement, how many support staff need to be engaged?



Into the future, have we looked at trends to see whether an increase in the workforce will be needed to tackle, for example, a rising number of young people needing preventative support from youth justice services? Or could the opposite be true?

Skills for Justice are advocates of effective workforce planning, which helps organisations understand what people they need, and with what skills, to maintain and deliver an excellent standard of public service.

Recommendation

Workforce planning is a key activity every organisation in the multi-agency youth justice environment needs to undertake to be able to meet the needs of young people at risk of offending or within the criminal justice system.

Recruitment and retention



In Probation Service, there has been a concern around ongoing vacancies in Probation Officer posts within youth justice services. While there is a statutory obligation for these posts to be filled, wider pressures on the Probation Service have meant that they have often been left vacant. These gaps have significant implications, including for effective transitions from youth to adult services. The Youth Justice Board, Association of Youth Offending Team Managers and the Youth Justice Policy Unit at the ministry of Justice are all actively monitoring unfilled probation secondee roles.

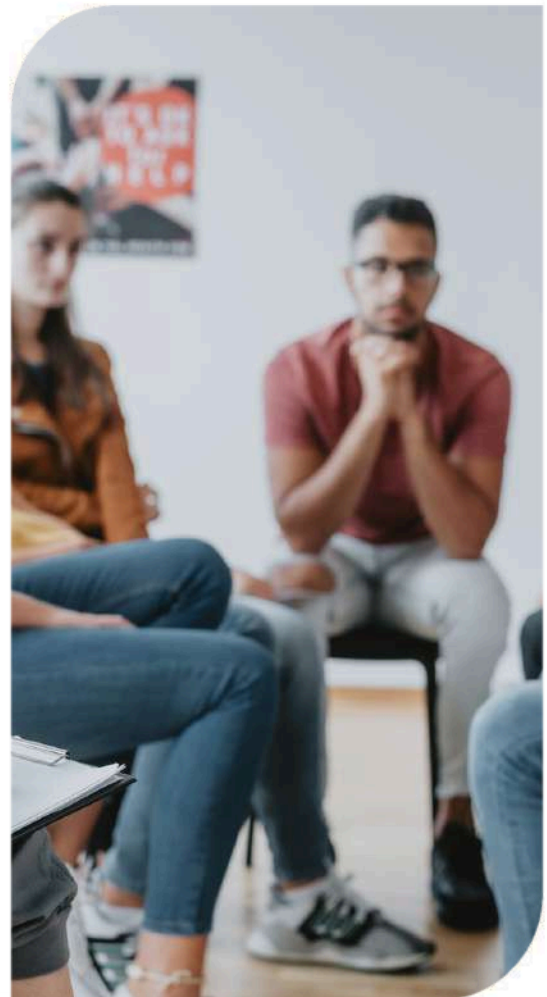


Criminal Justice Joint Inspection, Efficiency spotlight report: The impact of recruitment and retention on the criminal justice system (February 2024)

Overall recruitment and retention challenges in probation services are clearly having a knock-on impact for the youth justice system.

One aspect of retention for a qualified workforce is that if there is a continuous commitment to developing and keeping their skills up to date, they will feel better empowered to carry out their individual roles.

By providing clearer progression pathways – either to other roles within the youth justice sector, or to other parts of the criminal justice system – we can ensure that individuals with first-hand experience of



working in youth justice remain a part of the conversation.

Providing continuous development – especially when it responds to identified or upcoming challenges or areas of improvement – not only helps individuals respond to the changing needs of young people and the wider system, but ensures they remain skilled and knowledgeable to progress within the sector. All of this factors in to how likely individuals are to stay within their job roles, or how attracted they are to a career in the justice system.



Recommendation

Leaders and those with strategic oversight need to factor in the impact to the youth justice system when they are planning for future of probation services, and consider how to address overarching recruitment and retention challenges within the youth justice sector in their workforce plans.

Building a workforce strategy

We believe that workforce strategies should be underpinned by four strategic pillars.



Capacity

- Growing and evidencing capacity using data
- Tracking and evaluating capacity changes
- Resource allocation and support



Capability

- Collaborative framework design
- Standardised training programmes
- Pathways into career
- CPD and blended learning



Professionalisation

- Certification and accreditation strengthening
- Job descriptions and banding guidelines refinement
- Registration



Recognition

- Advocacy and awareness campaigns
- Embedding criticality of workforce



About us

Skills for Justice is a not-for-profit organisation, registered as a charity in the UK.

Skills for Justice is the Sector Skills Council for the UK Justice sector, providing consultancy and research to meet operational requirements.

Skills for Justice is staffed with passionate individuals and teams who deliver against our charitable aims, to meet the varied needs of the sectors they support.

Our products and services are tailored and relevant to the challenges faced by clients who are seeking skills and workforce development in their specific industries.

We support justice, fire and rescue, defence and local authority sector employers and are the trusted partners of hundreds of organisations, delivering training, quality assurance, audits, strategy development, leadership and organisational programmes, coaching, research and evaluation.

Our vision

Improving lives through better skills and better jobs, delivering better services.

Our ambition

We build genuine partnerships, helping people and organisations find the balance between ideas and solutions, whilst navigating the complexities of our public service environment.

Get in touch with us today to see how we can help you build a workforce fit for today, and fit for tomorrow.



Skills for
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