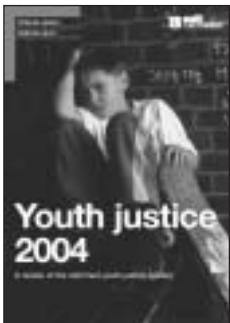


Youth justice 2004

A review of the reformed youth justice system

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The youth justice system has undergone a radical overhaul since *Misspent Youth* was published in 1996, including the creation of the Youth Justice Board (YJB) and Youth Offending Teams (Yots) in all areas.

The new system is a considerable improvement on the old one.

- Young offenders are dealt with more quickly – the average time from arrest to sentence has been more than halved since 1997.
- Young offenders are more likely to receive an intervention – in 2003 nine-out-of-ten young offenders said something happened to them after they were caught by the police compared with seven-out-of-ten in 2001.
- Offenders are less likely to commit offences on bail than in 1994
- Young offenders are more likely to make amends for their wrong-doing – more than 30,000 young offenders now receive the new Referral Orders or Reparation Orders.
- Magistrates are very satisfied with the service they receive from Yots, including pre-sentence reports, information provided in court, bail supervision programmes and community sentences.
- The new structures work well. The YJB sets a clear national framework with minimum standards and takes a lead role in monitoring progress and developing policy. The 155 Yots are critically placed between criminal justice, health and local government services to coordinate and deliver services to young offenders and the courts.

But there are some areas where more could be done.

- Although the reconviction rates for young offenders given the new alternatives have fallen, they have not fallen for those on the older community penalties and the overall amount of contact time has hardly changed.
- To free up more resources to focus more on the most persistent and serious offenders, more minor offences could be dealt with outside the court.
- Young people and their parents could engage more effectively with the court process if there were fewer, more specialised magistrates who were able to provide more continuity in the cases that need it.
- Black and mixed race young people are disproportionately likely to be remanded or sentenced to custody and the imbalance has widened.
- Custody is expensive and ineffective in reducing re-offending. Most of the persistent young offenders who might otherwise be sentenced to custody should receive Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programmes instead.
- Public knowledge about youth crime and confidence in the achievements of the youth justice system should be improved.
- Young offenders have wide ranging needs, but these are not always met. Schools, social services, health, substance misuse services and housing agencies should be more directly involved with young offenders and in preventing them from offending in the first place.