

YOUNG ADULTS TODAY

EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT & YOUNG ADULTS IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Education, training and employment are crucial in helping to reduce reoffending. In 2010, 66% of offenders without qualifications were reconvicted within a year of leaving prison compared with 45% of those with qualifications.¹ And in 2008, 74% of prisoners with employment and accommodation problems were reconvicted a year after release compared with 43% without such problems.²

Changes in education policy and rising levels of unemployment are placing a great deal of pressure on young adults today – the late 2000s recession, the lack of availability of apprenticeships and the rise in university fees have all contributed. Young adults are being encouraged to stay in education longer, seek out training and succeed in work at a time when there are more people entering the labour market than there are jobs to go round.

This fact file explores education, training and employment issues for young adults in the criminal justice system. It covers key trends, both current and historical, and contextualises young adult offenders in the wider population by exploring similar data relating to other young adults and older offenders.

KEY FACTS

- In 2005/06, 34% of offenders were age 15 or under when they left school
- Less than 50% of offenders have any qualifications at all
- One in five 18-24 year-olds is not in education, training or employment
- Young people from the most deprived areas of the UK are three times less likely to go on to higher education
- In 2008, 60% of 18-20 year-olds were unemployed the month before entering custody; 37% were unemployed for a year before

EDUCATION

CHANGES OVER TIME: PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION

1971

1.7 million in further education (FE);
621,000 in higher education (HE)

1991

2.2 million in FE;
1.07 million in HE

2008

3.4 million in FE;
2.5 million in HE

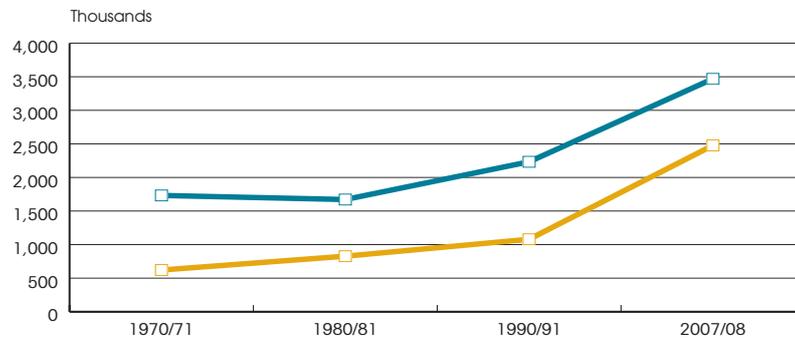
Education levels amongst people with a history of offending are notoriously low. In 2007/08, 53% of people serving a community sentence were assessed as having an 'education, training and employability' problem.³ In addition, 48% of offenders in custody were found to have a reading age at or below the level expected of an 11 year-old. 65% were at that level with regard to their numeracy skills and 82% with their writing ability.⁴

A key difficulty appears to be in the tendency for young people who offend to have short or incomplete educations. Indeed, in 2005–06, the 2007 Arrestee Survey found 34% of offenders were 15 or under when they left full-time education, 39% were aged 16, and only 23% were 17 or over.⁵ And this marks an improvement on previous years.

PARTICIPATION AND ACHIEVEMENT

Participation in education in the general population has dramatically risen since the 1970s. As **Chart 1.1** shows, in 1970/1971 there were just over 1.7 million students enrolled on further education (FE) courses – i.e. college level education. By 2007/08, this number had increased by 50% to nearly 3.5 million. Participation in higher education – i.e. university level, has seen a similar surge. As **Chart 1.1** also shows, the number of students in higher education (HE) has quadrupled since the 1970s. Figures have risen from 621,000 in 1970/71 to just under 2.5 million in 2007/08.⁶ To put this in perspective, in 2009, one in five 18 year-olds and one in ten 19 year-olds started on a higher education course. The Government estimates that 45% of the population will go on into some form of higher education by the time they are 30 year-old.⁷

1.1 Participation in further and higher education in the UK, 1970/71-2007/08



SOURCE: Office for National Statistics. (2010). Social Trends, No. 40.

Participation in further education is not nearly as common amongst young adults with a history of offending. And participation in higher education is rare. In the Office for National Statistics' 2000 *Psychiatric Morbidity Survey Among Young Offenders in England and Wales*, it was found that the highest qualification most 16-20 year-old offenders had was at GCSE – over a third of the sample. Further, fewer than 4% were educated to A' Level standard, and almost none were educated to degree or higher education level.⁸

For many offenders, it is unlikely that they will have any qualifications at all. In 2008, it was found that 48% of newly sentenced young adult offenders, 18-20, did not have any form of qualification at the time of starting a prison term.⁹ And in 2010, statistics released by the Ministry of Justice showed that fewer than 50% of prisoners held a valid educational qualification.¹⁰

However, these figures do mark an improvement on the position a decade or so ago. The *Psychiatric Morbidity Survey Among Young Offenders*, showed that in 1998 only 35% of 16-20 year-old offenders had any form of qualification.

KEY FACT

The highest qualification most 16-20 year-old offenders have is at GCSE level

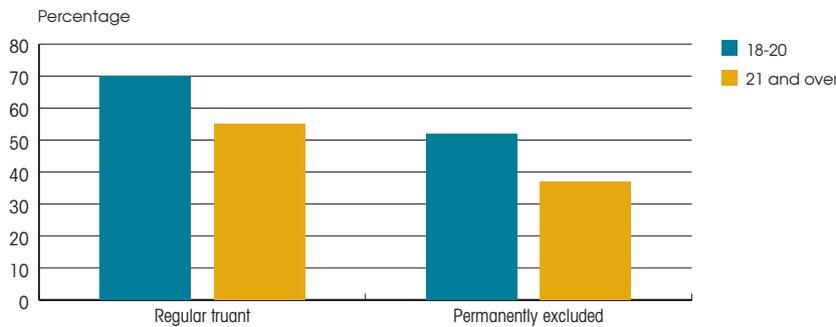
TRUANCY AND EXCLUSION

One of the more common experiences amongst young adults with a history of offending is a preceding history of truancy and school exclusion. In 2008, results from a survey amongst newly sentenced prisoners revealed that 70% of 18-20 year-olds had been a regular truant at school and 52% had been excluded. As **Chart 1.2** shows, the rates were much higher amongst young adults than they were amongst older offenders.

In addition, in 2005–06, the *Arrestee Survey* found that 41% of newly arrested offenders had been excluded from school temporarily and 23% had been excluded permanently. Young adults were also the most likely group to have experienced some form of school exclusion. And in the 2000 *Youth Lifestyles Survey*, it was found that 47% of male offenders and 30% of female offenders, aged 12-16, truanted at least once a month. Also, 24% of male offenders and 13% of female offenders, aged 11-16, and 23% of male offenders and 12% of female offenders, aged 17-30, had at some point been excluded from school.¹¹

KEY FACT
70% of 18-20 year-old offenders truanted at school; 52% have been excluded

1.2 Truancy and exclusion rates amongst newly sentenced prisoners, 2008



SOURCE: Ministry of Justice (2008). *The Problems and Needs of Newly Sentenced Prisoners: Results from a National Survey*. Research Series 16/08, October 2008.

CHANGES OVER TIME: QUALIFICATION LEVELS

1998
35% of 16-20 year-old offenders had at least one qualification

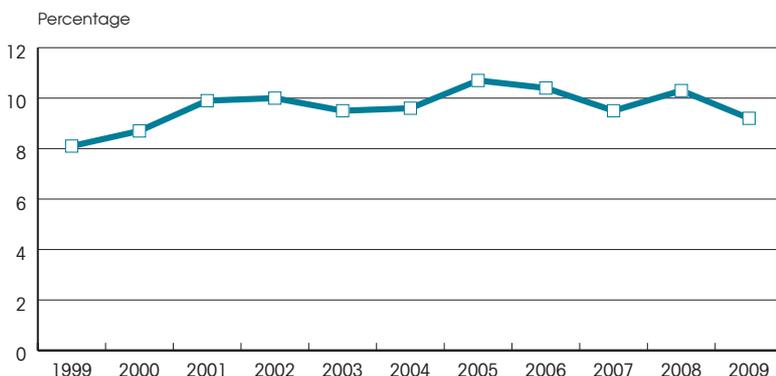
2010
50% of 18-20 year-old offenders had at least one qualification

NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT OR TRAINING (NEET)

There are strong links between offending and NEET status. Young people who are not in education or employment are on average twenty times more likely to be convicted of a crime.¹² And the number of young people who qualify as NEET is continuing to rise.

In 2009, there were 183,200 16-18 year-olds not in education, employment or training – 9.2% of all 16-18 year-olds. Despite a number of rises and falls over the past decade, the NEET rate has remained consistent at around 10% – see **Chart 1.3**:

1.3 16-18 year-olds not in education, employment or training in England, 1999-2009



SOURCE: National Health Service. (2010). *Statistics on Alcohol: England, 2009*.

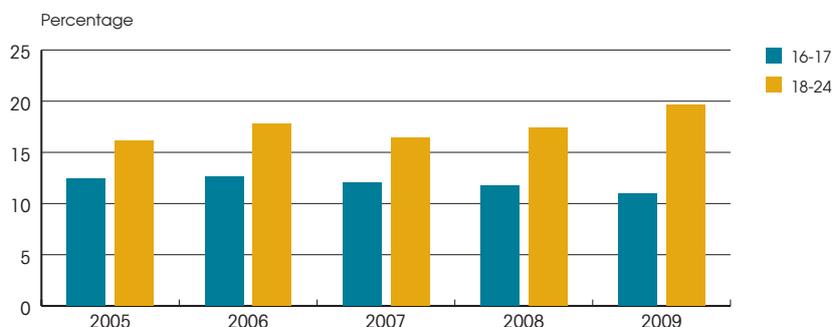
KEY FACT
In 2005/06, 53% of 17-24 year-olds were NEET at the time of their arrest

KEY FACT

50% of inspected Youth Offending Institutions (YOIs) have poor quality work placements and do not provide vocational qualifications

However, although the rate is high for 16-18 year-olds, it is in the young adult group where we see the most problematic figures. The NEET rate for 18-24 year-olds is now just under 20%, meaning nearly one in five young adults will find themselves in a position in which they are not in any form of education, training or employment. Further, the NEET rate amongst 18-24 year-olds has seen a steady rise over the past five years. This is in contrast to 16 and 17 year-olds where we can see the NEET rate has been slowly falling – see **Chart 1.4**:

1.4 16-24 year-olds not in education, employment or training (NEET) in England by age, Q3 2005 to Q3 2009



SOURCE: DCSF. (2010). NEET Statistics Quarterly Brief. November, 2010.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN CUSTODY

Participation in education and training amongst offenders in custody is generally high. In the academic year 2008-09, 98,324 prisoners were engaged in some form of learning or skills training.¹³ And in 2008, a survey of 468 male and female prisoners revealed that 85% had participated in education or training whilst in custody. The same survey found that those serving longer sentences were considerably more likely to participate than those serving shorter sentences – 66% of those who had been in prison for three months or less, compared with 96% (22/23) who had served ten years or more.¹⁴

However, prison based skills training is often not enough. In 2009, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons concluded that only 59% of the inspected adult male closed prisons were performing 'well' or 'reasonably well' with regard to education and training provision, and only four out of the 34 were assessed as 'performing well'. In addition, it was found that over 50% of the inspected Youth Offending Institutions (YOIs) had high levels of unemployment, poor quality work placements, and did not provide vocational qualifications.¹⁵

One of the difficulties prisons face in providing adequate education and training is the broad range of ability and educational experience. Not only do the age-groups vary widely in adult prisons, age 22 and above, the intellectual and educational differences between people are often considerable. In 2008, for example, it was found that 25% of prisoners had an IQ under 80. And in 2006, it was found that 8.7% of people in custody had a potential learning disability.¹⁶

ETHNICITY AND EDUCATION

Some minority ethnic groups are consistently overrepresented in crime figures, particularly amongst Black and mixed ethnic groups.¹⁷ As there is a clear relationship between education and involvement in the criminal justice system, it is also important then to look at the relationship between ethnicity and education.

At school, young people from Asian and White ethnic groups consistently outperform young people from Black ethnic groups. In 2009/10, 58% of young people with an Asian background and 54.8% of young people with a White background achieved 5 GCSE A*-C grades (or equivalent), both exceeding the national average. This is compared with 48.9% of young people from Black ethnic groups, who fell below the national average. The result is consistent over preceding years.¹⁸ Some ethnic groups experience high levels of socio-economic deprivation, which is associated with lower levels of educational achievement (see page 8).

KEY FACT

In 2008-09, 98,324 prisoners were in some form learning or skills training

Nevertheless, the rates of young adults from some minority ethnic groups entering higher education are rising. Although students with an Asian background have consistently represented around 10% of all higher education enrollments over the past decade, participation amongst Black and mixed ethnic groups has risen from 2.8% and 1.9%, respectively, in 2002, to 4.8% and 3.2% in 2009.

GENDER AND EDUCATION

In the wider population, young women have much higher rates of participation in further and higher education than young men. For young women with a history of offending though, the pattern varies somewhat.

In the general population, more and more young women are participating in further and higher education. In 1970/71, there were 725,000 young women in further education and 205,000 in higher education. In 2007/08, this figure had risen to 1.97 million in further education and 1.4 million in higher education. Equally, young women have overtaken young men in participation rates. In 1970/71 women represented 42% of FE numbers and 33% of HE numbers, and in 2007/08 they represented 57% of all FE and HE numbers.¹⁹

However, for young women who offend, participation and achievement either matches that of their male counterparts, or they do less well than them. For example, in 2008, it was found that young women were as likely as young men to both truant from school and leave school without any qualifications.²⁰ And the 2000 *Psychiatric Morbidity Survey Among Young Adults* found that 42% of sentenced males, 16-20, had at least one GCSE, compared with just 30% of sentenced females of the same age.

KEY FACT

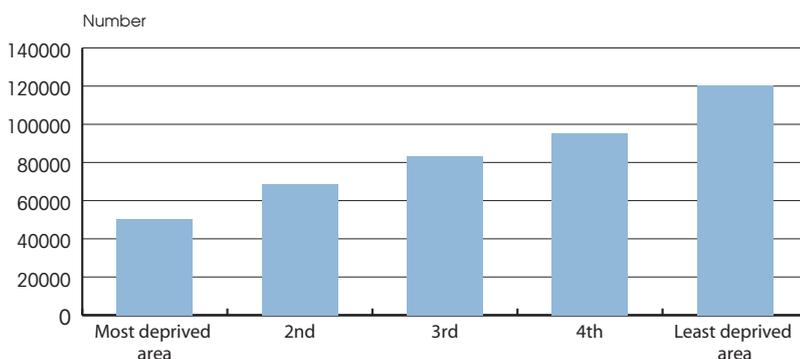
Young adults from 'well-off' backgrounds are three times as likely to go to university, than those from less advantaged backgrounds

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS AND EDUCATION

There is also a clear relationship between education and social and economic status, particularly in terms of participation in higher education. Data from the Universities and Colleges Application System (UCAS) show that young adults coming from 'well-off' or more socially and financially advantaged backgrounds are much more likely to attend university than those from poorer and less advantaged backgrounds.

As **Chart 1.5** illustrates, there is a clear pattern in participation, with students from poorer areas (as denoted by their postcode^A) being demonstrably less likely to enter higher education than their higher earning, more socially advantaged counterparts. Additionally, those from more advantaged areas are more likely to get accepted into higher education than those from more deprived areas. In 2009 148,996 young people from the least socially deprived areas applied to university, of which 81% (120,177) were accepted. This is comparable with 67,628 young people living in the most deprived areas, of which only 74% (50,344) were accepted.

1.5 Participation in higher education by deprivation level in area of residence, 2009



SOURCE: UCAS – online data: www.ucas.ac.uk

A. See UCAS – www.ucas.ac.uk for details on categorisation of demographic details

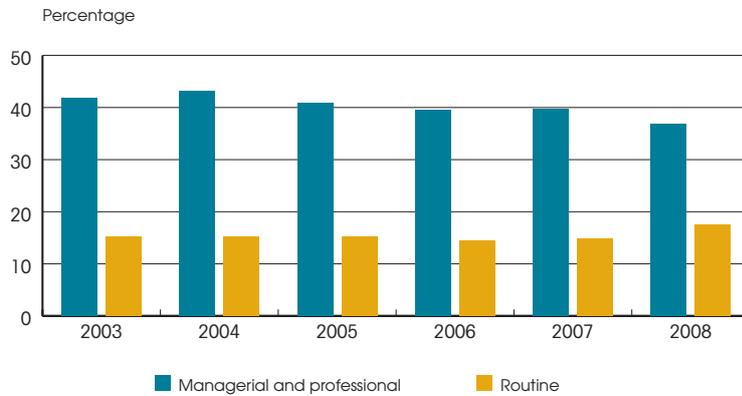
KEY FACT

One in five 18-24 year-olds are not in education, training or employment

Further, young people coming from families where the highest earner is in a managerial/professional role are much more likely to enter higher education than those coming from families where the highest earner has mainly a 'routine' occupation – see **Chart 1.6**. Again, the former are also more likely to get accepted into higher education – 180,042 young people with professional/managerial parent(s) applied in 2008 of which 83% (149,163) were accepted, compared with 91,072 young people with parents holding routine occupations of which 78% (70,797) were accepted. Interestingly, this 83%/78% ratio is consistent from 2003 to 2008.²¹

However, as **Chart 1.6** also shows things are beginning to change. The percentage of young people from lower socio-economic groups entering HE is starting to increase – 15.2% in 2003 compared with 17.5% in 2008. By contrast, the number of young people from higher socio-economic groups is starting to go the other way – 41.9% in 2003 compared with 36.8% in 2008.

1.6 Applicants accepted into higher education in the UK by occupation of highest earner in the family, 2003-2008



SOURCE: UCAS – online data: www.ucas.ac.uk



EMPLOYMENT

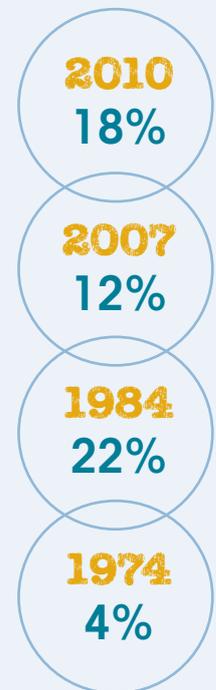
Sixty eight per cent of offenders cite 'having a job' as the most important factor in reducing their reoffending.²² Yet, employment levels amongst young adults with a history of offending are often low, particularly for those with a previous custodial sentence. Indeed, just 36% of those leaving prison go into education, training or employment upon release.²³

UNEMPLOYMENT RATES

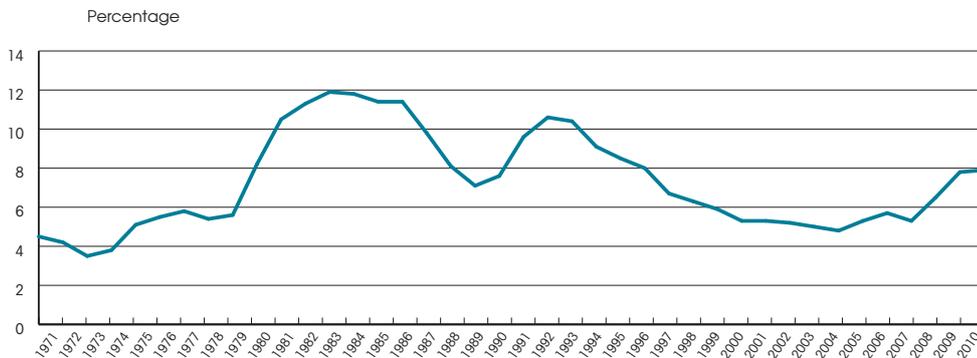
Employment, or more specifically unemployment, is a key obstacle for offenders. In 2008, it was found that over 60% of young adult offenders, 18-20, were unemployed the month before entering custody, and 37% were unemployed for a year before going into custody.²⁴ And in the 2007 *Arrestee Survey*, it was found that 53% of 17-24 year-olds were not in employment or education at the time of their arrest. In addition, in the 2000 *Psychiatric Morbidity Survey Among Young Offenders*, 24% of males and 15% of females reported they were 'living off crime'.

The national picture of unemployment does not help the situation. Since the 1970s, unemployment rates in the UK have varied significantly, ranging from a low of 3.4% in 1970 through to a record high of 11.9% in mid-1984, reflecting the after-effects of the early 80s recession.²⁵ Indeed, the impact of economic recession on employment rates can also be seen in the early 90s and in the latest figures for the late 2000s – see **Chart 1.7**.

CHANGES OVER TIME: YOUNG ADULT UNEMPLOYMENT RATES



1.7 Unemployment rates in the UK, 1971-2008 (figures are for Oct-Dec of each year)



SOURCE: Office for National Statistics. (2011). Labour Force Survey: Unemployment Rates by Age (SA).

Without question, the hardest hit by this most recent recession has been the young adults group. The current unemployment rate amongst 18-24 year-olds is 18.1%, according to October-December figures for 2010.²⁶ By comparison, the unemployment rate in October-December 2007, just as the recession began, was 11.9%. Although young adults typically experience much higher rates of unemployment than average as it is – see **Chart 1.8** – the recession has made an already difficult situation considerably harder. It is clear from looking at the variation in unemployment rates over the past 30 years or so, that the economic context in different eras presents different challenges or opportunities. Young adults today face a bleak context akin to that experienced by their counterparts in the early 1980s when unemployment rates peaked at around 25% for 16-24s, compared to those growing up in the late 1960s and early 1970s when rates were around 5%.²⁷

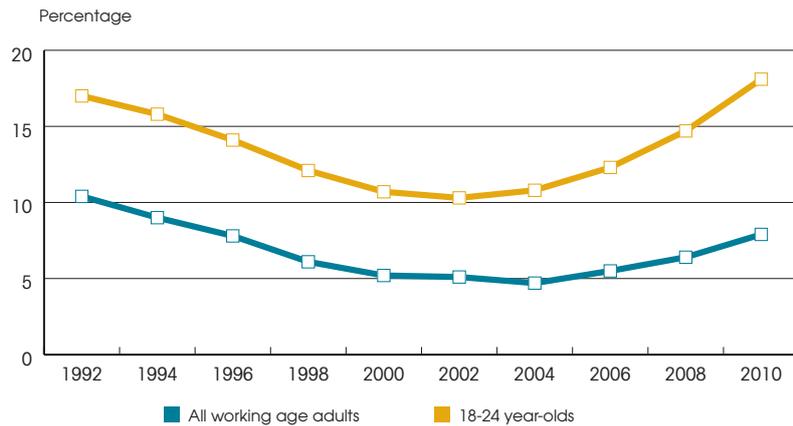
KEY FACT
27% of unemployed 18-24 year-olds, have been unemployed for over 12 months

KEY FACT

In 2008, only 54% of men and 33% of women were employed the year before custody

The duration that young adults are unemployed is also important. Data shows that rates of longer-term unemployment have clearly been affected by the recession. In Oct-Dec 2008, there were 622,000 unemployed 18-24 year-olds in the UK, of which 106,000 (17%) were unemployed between 6 and 12 months and 106,000 (17%) were unemployed more than 12 months. Figures for Oct-Dec 2010, however, show that of the 775,000 unemployed 18-24 year-olds, 143,000 (18.4%) had been unemployed between six and 12 months and 210,000 (27%) had been unemployed for over 12 months. The latter figure marks a 10% rise in two years.²⁸

1.8 Unemployment rates in the UK by age, 1992-2010 (figures are for Oct-Dec of each year)



SOURCE: Office for National Statistics. (2011). Labour Force Survey: Unemployment Rates by Age (SA).

PROMISING PRACTICE CASE STUDY

The Yard Project: The Yard Project, based in Lowestoft, is a work-based training project that takes on young adults who find it difficult to sustain or engage with education, employment or training. The project helps 16-24 year-olds by working with them on a range of practical skills that will hopefully lead them on to finding rewarding and stable employment.

More information:
<http://youngpeopleinfoocus.fastnet.co.uk/madetomeasure>

THE YARD PROJECT
 opening doors for young people and the community

GENDER AND EMPLOYMENT

Women generally have lower levels of employment than males – 79% for men and 70% for women, in the second quarter of 2008 (consistent over the decades)²⁹. The employment gap between men and women who go to prison is much wider. Indeed, in 2008 54% of men reported being employed the year before custody compared with just 33% of women.

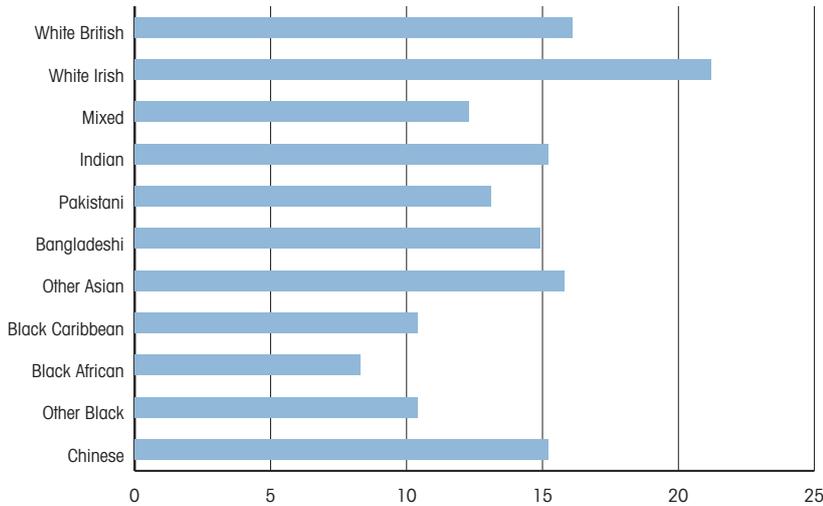
With regard to unemployment rates, males are more likely to be unemployed than females, regardless of offending status. For example, in January-March 2010, 9.1% of all men in the UK aged 16 and over were unemployed compared with 6.7% of women. This pattern is roughly consistent over the decades.³⁰ And amongst offenders, in 2008 13% of newly sentenced women reported being unemployed and looking for work (prior to being sent to prison) compared with 27% of newly sentenced men.

Amongst young adults, the unemployment pattern is consistent – 18-24 year-old males make up a greater percentage of unemployment figures than same age females, 59% and 41% respectively in Dec-Oct, 2010. However, it appears that unemployment amongst young women is increasing. In 2008, the unemployment split amongst young adults was 63% (male) and 37% (female).

ETHNICITY AND EMPLOYMENT

People from White ethnic groups are more likely to be working, and holding higher level jobs, than those from other ethnic groups. For example, in 2007, people from White ethnic groups were the most likely group to be living in working households – 57.7%. The least likely to be living in working households, by a significant margin, were Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups at just 14.3%.³¹ In addition, people with a White Irish background are the most likely to be employed in managerial and senior official occupations, followed closely by those from White British and 'other' Asian groups. Those least likely to hold senior managerial positions are from Black ethnic backgrounds – see **Chart 1.9**:

1.9 Percentage in managerial and senior official jobs by ethnicity, 2008



SOURCE: Office for National Statistics. (2009). Social Trends, No. 39.

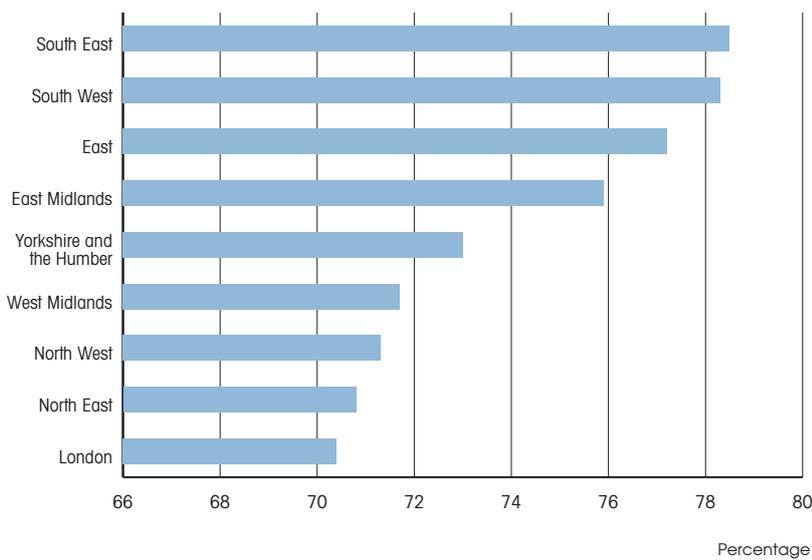
KEY FACT
 People from White ethnic groups are more likely to be working, and holding higher level jobs, than those from minority ethnic groups

REGIONAL TRENDS IN EMPLOYMENT

Regionally, young adults from inner-city London and the north are the most likely to struggle to find employment. As **Chart 1.10** shows, employment is highest in the south east and south west – over 78%, and lowest in London and the north east, both at around 70%.

KEY FACT
 One in five 18-24 year-olds are not in education, training or employment

1.10 Employment rates by region, 2008



SOURCE: Office for National Statistics. (2010). Social Trends, No. 40.

POINTS FOR POLICY: EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT AND YOUNG ADULT OFFENDERS

This Fact File shows the strong associations between socio-economic deprivation, low levels of educational achievement and offending for young adults. The expansion of both further education (FE) and higher education (HE) in recent decades has unfortunately left a significant group of young adults behind, and many end up in the criminal justice system.

Employment offers a route out of offending, but many young adults are caught up in a cycle where their criminal records and their low levels of qualifications make it very hard for them to get jobs. The recession has made matters worse, and nearly 20% of young adults aged 18-24 are not in education, training or employment (NEET). This means that:

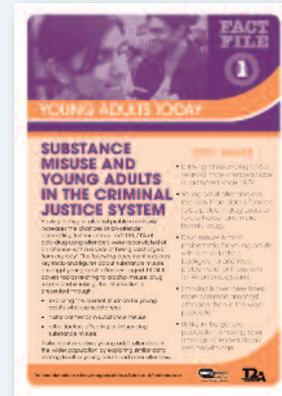
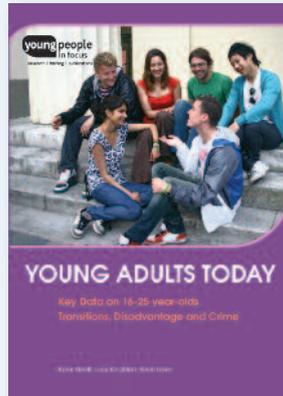
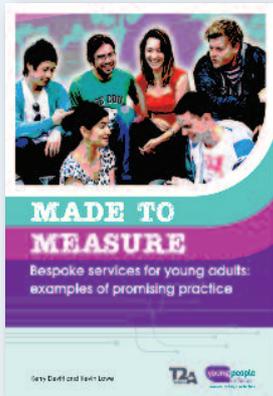
- Tackling deep-rooted social exclusion and educational inequalities will help reduce offending.
- Helping children with educational difficulties when they are young (and reducing school exclusions) would prevent many from entering the criminal justice system when they are older.
- The needs of Black young people, and those from mixed ethnic backgrounds, are not being met adequately by the educational system. Improvement would help reduce the overrepresentation of these groups in the criminal justice system.
- The quality of education and training for most young adults in custody needs to improve, especially for those on short sentences. Better links between education and training in custody and in the community are essential.
- A national employment programme for ex-offenders, coupled with individualised support tailored to the specific needs of young adults, would go a long way to help reduce reoffending.



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- ²² Ministry of Justice. (2010). Op. Cit.
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MORE INFORMATION ABOUT YOUNG ADULTS IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM



AVAILABLE FROM:

- <http://youngpeopleinfocus.fastnet.co.uk/madetomeasure>
- www.youngpeopleinfocus.org.uk
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- carrying out research and evaluating services
- running projects that develop professional practice
- producing practical resources such as guides, toolkits and training packs
- training professionals in a range of topics
- influencing policy-makers.

YPF works across the UK and covers: health and emotional wellbeing; learning and education; parenting and family life; youth social action and participation; youth justice.

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The Trust provides grants to grassroots voluntary and community groups working in deprived communities in the UK, with a focus on the West Midlands. It also works with researchers, think tanks and government, often in partnership with other grant-makers, seeking to overcome the structural barriers to a more just and equal society.

www.barrowcadbury.org.uk



The T2A Alliance (convened by the Barrow Cadbury Trust) is a broad coalition of organisations and individuals working to improve the opportunities and life chances of young people in their transition to adulthood, who are at risk of committing crime and falling into the criminal justice system. The T2A Alliance aims to raise awareness of the problems this group face and to secure policy change to improve their lives.

www.t2a.org.uk/alliance