



Young Offender Assessment Profile

Explanatory Notes

**Prepared by
University of Oxford
Centre for Criminological Research**

**Scottish Version
May 2004**

Contents

	Page
Introduction	2
Core assessment profile	
Personal information	5
Offence analysis	6
Criminal history	7
Care history	7
Sections 1-12: general information	8
Living arrangements	9
Family and personal relationships	10
Education, training and employment	12
Neighbourhood	14
Lifestyle	15
Substance use	16
Physical health	18
Emotional and mental health	19
Perception of self and others	21
Thinking and behaviour	23
Attitudes to offending	26
Motivation to change	27
Positive factors	28
Indicators of vulnerability	29
Indicators of serious harm	31
‘What do YOU think?’ self-assessment form	35
Annex A (Core assessment profile – summary of headings)	36

Introduction

Scope of the explanatory notes

The explanatory notes relate to the following *Asset* documents:

- core assessment profile
- mini assessment profile
- self-assessment form ('What do YOU think?')
- risk of serious harm: full assessment

The notes are intended to define, explain and illustrate the content of the *Asset* forms. To that end, they consist of: clarification of some of the terms and concepts used in *Asset*; background information about why particular topics have been included; examples of how the different sections link together and guidance on how the assessment should relate to practical decisions about intervention and supervision.

The development of ASSET

In 1999, the Youth Justice Board (YJB) set out a specification for a structured assessment tool to be used by all Youth Offending Teams (Yots) in England & Wales. The University of Oxford Centre for Criminological Research undertook the development and design of the new tool.

The key requirements for the tool were that it should:

- identify the factors most closely linked with offending by young people
- measure changes in needs and risk of re-offending over time
- assist practitioners in planning intervention programmes
- contain triggers to indicate the need for further assessment in specific areas

The theoretical basis for *Asset* was obtained from a thorough review of the research literature relating to young offenders. It was also recognised that, if the tool was going to have a positive impact on practice, it needed to be in a form that staff perceived as helpful and relevant. Extensive consultation with practitioners from a range of professional backgrounds therefore took place during the initial design phase (March – July 1999).

Piloting of the first draft of *Asset* took place in 18 Yots. The self-assessment form was also tested in Young Offender Institutions and secondary schools. A revised version of *Asset*, amended in the light of the feedback from pilot areas, was introduced across England and Wales in April 2000. Use in Scotland began in 2001 and *Asset* has been adopted by a number of local authorities, voluntary organisations and other service providers since then.

The purpose of ASSET

Asset will inform both policy and practice at a number of levels – case by case, within teams, regionally and nationally. This will be achieved in a number of ways, as set out below.

- *Asset is an aid to professional judgement*

Evidence shows that unstructured clinical assessments are often variable in regard to which factors are included or excluded and tend to be inconsistent between assessors. The use of *Asset* should help to ensure that all assessments take account of a comprehensive range of factors, thereby lessening the possibility of important information being overlooked. It will also promote greater consistency between assessors.

➤ *Asset is an aid to the development of practice*

When the *Asset* assessment is repeated with a particular young person, it can be used to evaluate changes over time, to measure those changes against particular interventions and to assess the impact of other important factors in his/her life during that period.

➤ *Asset is an aid to case management*

Asset can be used to structure proposals for PSRs or other court reports, to assess a young person's suitability for an intervention and to match programmes to the particular needs of different young people.

➤ *Asset is an aid to developing knowledge*

The information collected through *Asset* will help to develop the knowledge base about offending by young people in general and by particular groups of young people. Much of the current evidence about youth offending focuses on young white men, for example, and less is known about young women who offend or offenders from ethnic minorities. Over time, *Asset* will provide detailed information about the needs and problems of these specific groups of young people.

➤ *Asset is an aid to managing resources*

Aggregate data from *Asset* will highlight the most frequent and/or significant issues relevant to offending by young people. At a local level, this information can be used to guide decisions about the partnerships and programmes that will be most relevant to young offenders in that particular area. It will also inform strategic planning at a national level in order to improve the use and allocation of resources.

Ultimately, improvements in practice and service delivery will depend on the combined impact of all of the above features of *Asset*. The thorough and accurate completion of individual assessments, for example, will contribute to the development of the knowledge base. This will feed into strategic planning and decisions about resource allocation which, in turn, should lead to improvements in services for young offenders.

Using *Asset* in practice

A full assessment will require you to engage in interviews with a young person and his/her family, obtain information from a range of other sources and make a series of judgements about the factors which affect his/her offending behaviour. *Asset* in no way diminishes the professional skills required for any of these tasks. It provides a structure for recording and analysing information, but it does not prescribe the way in which interviews should be conducted. Neither does it take away the need for skills of engaging with young people and their families - establishing relationships with them will still be central to the assessment.

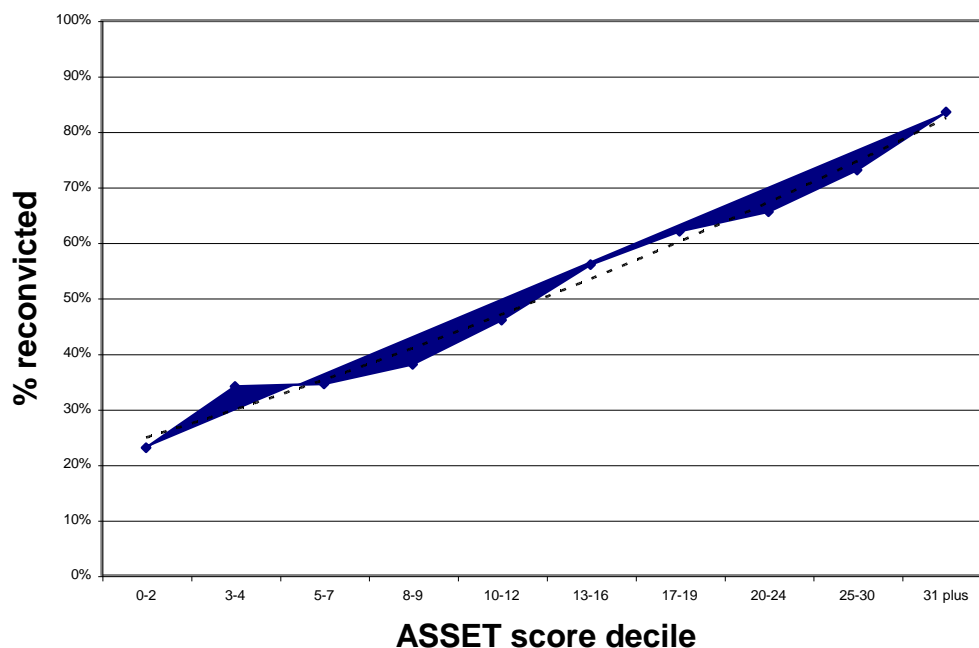
Asset should **not** be used as an interview schedule, but it will clearly be important to keep the *Asset* framework in mind throughout the assessment. During the initial piloting of the forms, practitioners suggested that it would be helpful to have a 1 page summary of the different sections of *Asset*. It was felt that this would provide a useful reminder of issues that needed to be addressed and could be referred to quite easily without disrupting the flow of an interview. A copy of the summary is attached at annex A.

Some teams will include staff with specialist knowledge who can provide advice and assistance regarding particular sections of *Asset* e.g. health, education or substance use. Although the overall responsibility for completing *Asset* in any given case is likely to rest with one individual, a number of different people may all contribute to the assessment process.

Validity and Reliability of *Asset*

An 18 month research study to investigate the validity and reliability of *Asset* was funded by the YJB and carried out by the Centre for Criminological Research, University of Oxford. This involved the collection of qualitative data concerning practitioners' views on the use of *Asset* and analysis of data from 3395 completed *Assets* collected from 39 Yots across England and Wales. The final report includes profile data on the young people in the sample, analysis of the reliability of *Asset* and investigation of its predictive accuracy. This study demonstrated that the accuracy of *Asset* in predicting reconviction (within 12 months) was as good as – or better than – similar tools used with adult offenders in the UK. The graph below illustrates the association between *Asset* scores and the risk of reconviction.

Figure 1: *Asset* score by % reconvicted



Copies of the full report and a short summary of the key results are available from the Youth Justice Board: 'Validity and reliability of *Asset* – Findings from the first two years of the use of *Asset*' (Baker et al 2002, London: Youth Justice Board).

Future plans for *Asset*

Research into the validity and reliability of *Asset* is ongoing, for example, analysis of two year reconviction data will be available in summer 2003. A further study examining how *Asset* scores change over time and how this relates to reconviction will be completed in summer of 2004.

Based on the results of this research the rating system will be amended in due course to incorporate weightings of individual sections (reflecting the strength of association between particular risk factors and reconviction). There is also ongoing work to develop software packages that will provide interesting visual/graphic ways of comparing the core and final warning assessment profile with the 'What do YOU think?' form.

Assessment profile: personal information

Pages 1-2 of the assessment profile record key factual information about the young person and his/her offending. With a computerised version of *Asset*, it may not be necessary to complete everything on these two pages as some of the information may already be recorded within the IT system. Where necessary, additional clarification and guidance for specific questions is provided below.

Referral no.

Unique number used to identify each young person (the format of this may vary across teams).

Address/postcode

This refers to the young person's current address or the address to which s/he plans to return if in custody.

Ethnic classification

This is the provisional classification for the 2001 census. It is acknowledged that the categories are quite broad and that some young people may wish to classify themselves more specifically e.g. 'Scottish' rather than just 'British'. In addition, the categories do not easily accommodate certain groups e.g. travellers. In such cases, please tick the box that most closely applies to him/her and use the space underneath the 'any other' box to give additional information. Where there is any significant difference between your view and that of the young person, please use the space to provide details.

Gravity Score

Work is in progress to produce a specific list for Scotland of gravity scores for offences – this will be added to the guidance in due course. Until then, this question can be left blank.

Case stage

Review hearings should be recorded as 'review' and not as 'hearing'. If 'other', please specify.

Victims

The purpose of this section is to analyse the offender's behaviour and is NOT an assessment of the victim. Tick all the options which apply to the current offence/s (i.e. current index offence and any additional offences). Leave the section blank if none of them apply at this particular time.

Specific targeted victim

This includes any victim who is chosen for a particular reason e.g. because they belong to a particular group (e.g. ethnic or religious) or because the young person has a grudge against them. The key issue here is not whether the victim was already known to the young person (this point is addressed separately in the question 'victim not known to him/her'), but whether s/he was selected for a specific reason.

Vulnerable victim

This includes the elderly, people with disabilities and children younger (or much smaller) than him/her.

Repeat victim

This means more than one offence by the young person against the victim of the current offence/s.

Information sources

Please tick **all** those that apply. It is important for other people who may pick up the case to know what information your assessment was based on and to be aware of any significant information that was not available to you when completing *Asset*. This can also highlight issues about information that is routinely unavailable to teams.

Offence Analysis

This section provides a framework for the **analysis** of the young person's offending behaviour. It should be the foundation for the 'analysis of offending' component of any report for a hearing or for court. Any intervention with the young person will also be informed by this analysis.

The young person's needs, problems and attitudes are, for practical reasons, considered separately in the different sections of the *Asset* profile. In real life, however, these issues will clearly be inter-linked. This 'offending behaviour' section provides an opportunity to draw all these strands together to explain the often complex range of factors which underpin a young person's offending behaviour. A full analysis here will also contribute to other sections of *Asset*. For example, it will highlight information that may be relevant for the 'indicators of serious harm' section and the 'risk of serious harm: full assessment'.

This section is entirely narrative and no scoring or rating is required. The 1-4 headings are intended to indicate the type and range of information needed for a thorough analysis, but they need not be followed rigidly.

1. Actions and intentions

These are not necessarily the same and it can be quite informative to explore the differences between them. If a young person intended to carry out a very violent act, for example, but actually committed a much more minor offence it would be important to identify the mediating factors which prevented him/her from fulfilling the original intention. Conversely, if the outcome of an offence was far more serious than s/he had intended it would be essential to explore the reasons for this. The absence of any clear intentions would also be an interesting issue to consider.

The relationship between his/her intentions and actions will also be important when it comes to completing the 'indicators of serious harm' section (p.11) which asks you to distinguish between behaviour that *resulted* in harm being caused and behaviour which indicates *intention* to cause harm.

2. Outcomes and consequences

This includes the outcome for the victim/s - consider both the immediate and the longer-term consequences of the offence/s for them. The consequences of the offending for the young person and his/her family should also be considered here.

3. Reasons and motives

These are often linked, but are not necessarily the same. 'Reasons' can include the external events or circumstances which act as triggers for an offence and factors which act as disinhibitors. 'Motives' tend to be more internal and personal e.g. attitudes, beliefs and desires. It will be particularly important, for example, to be specific about any racially motivated offending.

Again, the apparent absence of any reason or motive for offending could be significant. Seemingly random or unpredictable behaviour may cause considerable concern.

4. Patterns of offending behaviour

This sets the current offence/s into the broader context of his/her patterns of offending behaviour and any previous periods of desistance. Consider any similarities or differences between current and previous offences and, in particular, whether there is any evidence of increasing frequency or seriousness of offending behaviour.

Criminal history

Past criminal behaviour can be a very strong predictor of future criminal behaviour and it is important to record this information in regard to each young person. Please circle the appropriate response for each of the first five questions in this section.

Time since last conviction or pre-court disposal

If s/he has been previously sentenced or received another disposal at any time within the last '3 months', circle this option. If it occurred in between 3 and 6 months ago e.g. 5 months ago, circle '6 months' etc. If s/he has no previous convictions, circle N/A.

Other disposal

This includes fines, compensation and discharges etc.

Has the young person ever been convicted of schedule 1 offences?

The question is framed quite broadly in terms of whether the young person has ever been convicted of schedule 1 offences and is **not** restricted to whether s/he is currently registered as a schedule 1 offender. The ambiguities surrounding the definition and use of schedule 1 mean it is vital that you put any explanatory details in the evidence box. A list of schedule 1 offences will be attached to the guidance shortly.

Any other previous contact with youth justice services?

This refers to any contact not already referred to in the 'criminal history' section e.g. preventive work.

Care history

The section refers to both current and previous care experiences – please use the 'details' box to give information about any aspects of his/her care history which you consider relevant. It may be useful to give some details about past events but there is no need to provide a very long account if the young person has a long history of involvement with social work services. The focus should be on a young person's recent situation and/or events which are clearly related to his/her offending behaviour.

Other care experiences not specifically listed can be included under question (g) 'any other referrals to or contact with social services'. In such cases, it is important to explain the reason for his/her contact with social work services in the 'details' box.

If you tick a 'don't know' option in this section, you should use the evidence box to say why you don't know and to identify what other information needs to be obtained.

Sections 1-12

Sections 1-12 are made up of the following types of questions.

Status questions

These occur in sections 1-3 and section 6. They are essentially factual and descriptive. For these questions, please indicate **all** the response options which apply.

Factor questions

These are designed to highlight specific key issues within each section and most require a yes / no / don't know response. Ticking 'don't know' should not be seen as either an easy option to reduce the time required for an assessment or as a sign of an inadequate assessment. It is important to use this option constructively by, for example, indicating the reasons why something is not known or giving details of what additional information needs to be obtained in order to reach a decision. This will be useful for other colleagues who may become involved in a case. Details about 'don't know' responses also mean that, when an assessment is reviewed, it is easier to see what new information has come to light and what still needs to be ascertained.

Evidence box

You are expected to give details in the evidence box of the problems and needs that you have identified through the factor questions. This is important because it shows the basis for your decisions and judgements. It also enables you to explain the complexity of a young person's situation. The yes / no / don't know responses to the factor questions can only capture a limited amount of information, but you can use the evidence boxes to elaborate on the key issues. You can also use the evidence box in any other way that you find helpful. For example, you may wish to give details about an issue that has not been covered by the factor questions or additional information relating to the status question. If you are using *Asset* to review progress on a case, you can use the boxes to explain any changes in a young person's situation.

Rating

At the end of each section you are asked to rate (on a 0-4 scale) the extent to which you think this issue is associated with the likelihood of further offending by the young person. This question is **not** an overall assessment of the extent to which a section is problematic. It is very specifically focused on *offending* and requires you to make a judgement about the link between the problems you have identified and the likelihood of him/her re-offending.

When giving a rating it may be helpful to consider the following questions:

- Was this issue linked to past offending? If 'yes', do you think it is more, less or equally significant now?
- Is it a *direct* or an *indirect* link with his/her offending?
- Is it always relevant to his/her offending behaviour or only on certain occasions?
- Is the effect on offending behaviour likely to be immediate or over a longer period?
- Is this issue problematic enough to lead to offending by itself or is it only likely to contribute to offending behaviour when certain other conditions exist?

- 0 Not associated at all.
- 1 Slight, occasional or only a limited indirect association.
- 2 Moderate but definite association. Could be a direct or indirect link. May be related to some offending, but not all. Tends to become offending related when combined with other factors.
- 3 Quite strongly associated. Normally a direct link, relevant to most types/occasions of offending.
- 4 Very strongly associated. Will be clearly and directly related to any offending by the young person. Will be a dominant factor in any cluster of offending-related problems.

1. Living arrangements

This section focuses on the young person's accommodation. It includes: who s/he lives with; the quality of the accommodation; the stability of the arrangements and issues such as absconding. It does not cover wider questions about the local area as these are addressed in section (4) 'neighbourhood'.

Status questions

Some young people have quite complex living arrangements and may be moving between different addresses. It is difficult to capture all of this in a short amount of space so question 1(a) asks you to focus on those people that s/he has *mostly* been living with. Circle all the options that apply. If s/he is in custody, answer this question on the basis of his/her living arrangements in the 6 months prior to this. If, at the time of the assessment, his/her living arrangements are different (e.g. s/he is living with remand foster carers or has had to leave home as a result of the offending) please give details at 1(b).

Factor questions

If the young person is in custody, section (c) should be completed on the basis of his/her living arrangements in the 6 months prior to this.

1c)i) No Fixed Abode

This includes those who are homeless, living on the streets, staying in night shelters or constantly moving between different friends' houses.

1c)ii) Unsuitable

Refers to physical conditions/facilities in the accommodation e.g. amenities, safety, hygiene, personal space.

1c)iv) Living with known offenders

Refers to people living within the same home/household/institution (not neighbours).

1c)vi) Disorganised/chaotic

Examples could include: different people constantly moving in/out of the accommodation, living in a squat or a young person unable to cope with the practical/domestic aspects of living alone.

1c)vii) Other

This can include anything else which you consider to be problematic e.g. isolation, accommodation provides opportunities for offending, availability of drugs within house/home.

Rating

To what extent are the above issues associated with *offending* for this particular young person? Some specific examples for this section are given below. See also p. 8 for guidance on the 0-4 scale.

Examples of ratings of 3 or 4

- s/he lives with known offenders who are clearly involving or encouraging him/her in offending
- young person is living on the streets and is offending to survive
- the accommodation is stable, but s/he lives with someone they have previously offended against
- the living arrangements give him/her access to potential vulnerable victims e.g. younger siblings

Examples of ratings of 1 or 2

- the accommodation is unsuitable and lacks basic facilities, but there is no clear link between this and his/her offences which are mainly driving related
- his/her unhappiness with the living arrangements is one of several factors contributing to feelings of stress and frustration, which in turn may be linked to aggressive behaviour

2. Family and personal relationships

This section focuses on his/her personal relationships – with family, carers and other significant adults. It also covers relationships with a partner and, if applicable, issues concerning the care of his/her own children. It does not include issues about wider friendship and peer groups as these are addressed in section (5) ‘lifestyle’.

Status question

This question identifies the key relationships in a young person’s life and highlights situations where s/he may have lost contact with someone. It is not restricted to the people that s/he lives with – instead, it covers a range of relationships that have an impact on his/her life. You should therefore circle *all* the options that apply.

The phrase ‘in contact with’ needs to be understood in this context of relationships. It captures a variety of interactions (e.g. personal contact, letters, ‘phone calls) and includes both positive and negative interactions.

If the contact is part of a relationship that is ongoing and relevant to the young person then it should be included in this section. For example, a ‘phone call or letter from a parent who is in custody would count as contact if the relationship has some ongoing significance for the young person in his/her everyday life.

An example of contact that you may not consider relevant in this context might be where a young person meets a family member at a party, but there is no real relationship between them. A ‘phone call from an older brother who is never around at home and, according to the young person, doesn’t play any part in his/her life might be another example.

‘Other significant adults’ refers to people who play a significant role in the young person’s life – as a carer for example, or maybe just as someone the young person trusts and confides in. It is not meant to refer to neighbours who just happen to live near the young person if there is no sense of a personal relationship.

Factor questions

In most of the other sections of *Asset*, the factor questions only relate to the young person’s current and recent (past 6 months) situation. Some of the questions here, however, involve a longer time-scale and details are given in the guidance below.

2 b)i-iii) Family/carer criminal activity and substance abuse

These three questions all relate to people identified in the status question (a) as those with whom the young person has recently had meaningful contact. One would therefore not include under q.2b)i) a biological father who has an extensive criminal record if the young person is not in contact with him.

Only tick ‘yes’ if a problem is current or within the past 6 months. If there were significant problems before this period which are no longer current (e.g. parental drug abuse 2 or 3 years ago which has now ceased) you should tick ‘no’, although you may still wish to record some details in the evidence box.

2 b)iv) Lack of communication with or care/interest in young person

This can refer to people from (a) above that the young person has contact with, but who show little care or concern (e.g. a step-parent who is not really interested in him/her). It could also include an absent parent who fails to communicate with him/her.

2 b)vi-vii) Abuse and violence

For these two questions a longer time span needs to be considered. Tick 'yes' if you are aware of any experience of abuse or violence, regardless of when it occurred. Give details in the evidence box of the type of abuse and of how long ago it occurred. In some cases, this information will not be immediately available and may only be disclosed over time. It would be appropriate to use the 'don't know' response in such a situation and then to update the form if any new information became available later on.

2 b)viii) Bereavement or loss

This question is about the impact of loss on the young person rather than the event itself. A 'yes' response could be triggered by any incidence of bereavement or loss which continues to have a significant impact on his/her everyday life functioning, regardless of when the event actually occurred. A 'no' response could be given in cases where s/he has experienced loss, but the impact on his/her *current* life and situation is small.

2 b)ix) Difficulties with care of his/her own children

This includes anything which makes it difficult for the young person to provide appropriate care and support for his/her own child (e.g. limited financial resources, his/her own emotional immaturity, lack of support networks). This question will not be relevant for most young people – use the N/A option.

2 b)x) Other

This can include anything else about his/her current or recent personal relationships which you consider to be problematic. Some examples are given in the *Asset* profile. Others might include an acrimonious parental divorce, a younger sibling at home with demanding behavioural problems or carers just being too busy to spend time with him/her.

Rating

To what extent are the above issues associated with *offending* for this particular young person? Some specific examples for this section are given below. See also p. 8 for guidance on the 0-4 scale.

Examples of ratings of 3 or 4

- there is a close family member who is criminally active and is involving him/her in offending
- supervision is inconsistent and parents/carers do not know where the young person goes or who s/he is with
- young person is offending to obtain attention from carers who show no interest in him/her
- combinations of problems present at the same time e.g. one parent with a mental health problem and one who is criminally active

Examples of ratings of 1 or 2

- young person looks up to an older brother who is criminally active, but as yet there is no evidence of them offending together or of the brother trying to directly involve him/her in offending
- generally stable relationships, but occasional difficulties when s/he has contact with a particular member of the family

3. Education, training and employment

For young people of compulsory school age, information from sources such as the school, Local Authority or home tutor will be an important part of the assessment. If this is not available (for example, during the summer holiday period) you may need to mark a 'don't know' response and explain the reason in the evidence box. Where there is some ongoing intervention with the young person this section can be updated at a later point when more information becomes available.

Status questions

3 a) Engagement in education, training or employment

Is s/he of compulsory school age? If a young person reaches the age of 16 on or before 30th September they can leave school on 31st May of that year. If they are born between 1 October and 1 March they can be 'Christmas leavers' i.e. they can leave on the first day of the Christmas holidays - this will vary depending on the year and the local authority). Some young people will therefore be entitled to leave school before they reach the age of 16.

How many hours of ETE are arranged each week? e.g. number of hours of home tuition arranged, how many contracted hours of employment.

How many hours of ETE is s/he currently engaged in/receiving each week? In reality, this will often be less than the number of hours officially arranged (as above).

Is there evidence of non-attendance? This can include formal or informal exclusion, ill-health, carers deciding to keep him/her away from school, lack of transport/poor accessibility, bullying in the workplace.

You may wish to use the evidence box to record the name of his/her school, college or employer etc.

3 b) Educational attainment

Additional support needs identified? Tick 'yes' if there has been some formal identification of additional support need e.g. by an educational psychologist or other qualified practitioner. If there are concerns about possible additional needs, but no definite identification, you should tick 'no' although you may wish to give some details in the evidence box.

Does s/he have difficulties with literacy and numeracy?

Assessments should draw on a range of evidence, including:

- educational records such as test/exam results, educational plans (e.g. co-ordinated support plans), school/college reports, records of achievement/progress files;
- interviews/discussion with young people, their parents/carers and other professionals such as teachers/tutors;
- practitioner observation of the way in which a young person speaks, listens, reads, writes and approaches concepts related to number, time, directions etc.

3 c) Other factors relating to engagement in ETE

Bullied/bullies others Bullying behaviour can include:

- name-calling and teasing
- physical violence
- threats
- isolating individuals from group activities

Other problems This can include anything else about his/her experiences of ETE that you consider problematic e.g. education authority is having difficulties finding an appropriate placement for him/her, s/he is very bright and finds school boring/unchallenging, unable to access desired training course as a result of disability, lack of stable address makes it difficult to apply for jobs, does not have resources to buy necessary books, tools or equipment.

Rating

To what extent are the above issues associated with *offending* for this particular young person? Some specific examples for this section are given below. See also p. 8 for guidance on the 0-4 scale.

Examples of ratings of 3 or 4

- most of his/her offending occurs when s/he is not attending school
- s/he offends whilst on school premises and sees school as providing opportunities for offending
- s/he thinks that getting a job is a waste of time because it won't pay as much as s/he could get from crime
- regularly using work opportunities (e.g. access to certain people or resources) for offending
- s/he lacks training/work, is persistently bored and offends to fill up the time

Examples of ratings of 1 or 2

- offending may sometimes be linked to non-attendance, but not consistently
- indirect link with offending where under-achievement at school contributes to low self-esteem which, in turn, may contribute to criminal activity
- frustration at not being able to find work/training may contribute to occasional aggressive behaviour
- occasional minor offending at work/college

4. Neighbourhood

In this section you are asked to consider the neighbourhood in which the young person spends most of his/her time. For the majority of young people, this will be the area where they live. In some cases, however, it could be a different area e.g. if a young person is living in Local Authority accommodation, but spends most of their time with friends in a different neighbourhood.

Question 4a

In question 4(a) you could include specific information (e.g. name of the area or estate) and/or a general description of the neighbourhood e.g. rural area, largely occupied by young families or older people. This will help to set the context for the other questions in this section.

Factor questions

Where necessary, additional clarification and guidance for specific questions is provided below.

4 b)i) Obvious signs of drug dealing and/or usage

Police colleagues may be able to give details about areas known to have a high concentration of drug dealers or users. Other evidence includes equipment left in public places, houses/locations known to have frequent callers.

4 b)iii) Lack of age-appropriate facilities

As well as referring to an absence of facilities, this could also include a situation where there are some facilities available but most of the young people in the neighbourhood cannot access them e.g. they are mostly used by people coming in from different areas whilst local people cannot afford to use them.

4 b)v) Other

This can include anything else about the neighbourhood which you consider problematic e.g. easy opportunities for selling on stolen goods, red light district, significant tension between police and local community.

Rating

To what extent are the above issues associated with *offending* for this particular young person? Some specific examples for this section are given below. See also p. 8 for guidance on the 0-4 scale.

Examples of ratings of 3 or 4

- all of his/her offending occurs within the same neighbourhood
- many opportunities for offending in the area which seem attractive and profitable to him/her

Examples of ratings of 1 or 2

- neighbourhood has a lot of social difficulties, but this is not the main reason for his/her offending
- s/he commits offences in different areas, not just one particular neighbourhood

5. Lifestyle

This section looks at friends and associates, what the young person does in his/her spare time and money issues. It does not include reference to substance use as this is addressed in section (6).

Factor questions

5 a)i) Lack of age-appropriate friendships

This question is not asking about the number of friendships that s/he may have, but about whether s/he has any friends of his/her own age. Tick 'yes' if most of the young person's friends/associates are noticeably older or younger than him/her.

5 a)ii) Associating with predominantly pro-criminal peers

This is not just about whether s/he knows people who have committed offences, as this will apply to many young people. The focus here is on whether the majority of his/her friends are involved in criminal activity and/or whether s/he spends most of their time with pro-offending peers.

5 a)iii) Lack of non-criminal friends

Research suggests that having some non-criminal friends can be a significant factor in reducing offending, even where a young person may continue to associate with pro-criminal peers. An absence of non-criminal friends, therefore, is a significant cause for concern.

5 a)iv) Has nothing much to do in spare time

Does the young person complain of always being bored? Does s/he spend most of their time just 'hanging around' the local area with nothing constructive to do?

5 a)v) Participation in reckless activity

This refers to a broad range of activities, not just offending. It includes things which are done to get a 'buzz' or to impress friends, often placing the young person and/or others at risk of physical injury e.g. playing on railway lines, building sites or major roads, racing cars around residential areas.

5 a)vi) Inadequate legitimate personal income

This will depend on the age of the young person and the context in which they are living. For a young person in a family setting consider issues around pocket money/allowance e.g. are adults in the family able and/or willing to provide some allowance? Is this appropriate for his/her age? Is s/he treated the same as siblings? If the young person is accommodated by the Local Authority, what provision is made for him/her in this regard? For an older young person living independently, the issues will be more about employment or access to benefits.

5 a)vii) Other

This includes anything else about his/her lifestyle which you consider problematic e.g. gambling, use of scratch cards, fruit machines or arcade games, loneliness/isolation

Rating

To what extent are the above issues associated with *offending* for this particular young person? Some specific examples for this section are given below. See also p. 8 for guidance on the 0-4 scale.

Examples of ratings of 3 or 4

- all of his/her offending occurs with a particular group of friends
- a young person who is offending to obtain money for a gambling habit
- s/he is bored and sees offending as a necessary way of getting some excitement in life
- s/he is involving younger friends in offending

Examples of ratings of 1 or 2

- s/he is sometimes involved in reckless activity, but this does not usually involve offending
- s/he has pro-criminal friends, but tends to offend alone rather than with the group.

6. Substance use

When addressing the issues in this section it may be helpful to re-emphasise to the young person that the purpose of the assessment is to get a picture of his/her life, pastimes and problems in order to know how best to help him/her stop offending. It is important for him/her to understand that information about substance use will be used within this context and not for instigating new criminal proceedings.

Decisions about when and how to discuss substance use with the young person will depend on his/her age and willingness to engage. It is advised that issues about tobacco, alcohol and solvents should be raised before moving on to illegal drug use. Within such a dialogue, the young person may then be more ready to disclose information about frequency and context of illegal drug use.

It is recognised, however, that some of this information will not always be disclosed (particularly at a first interview) or that the young person does not use some, or any, of the substances; each question in the section has a 'not known to have used' option to reflect this. If new information comes to light later on (e.g. during the course of supervision) the form can be updated to take account of this. The evidence box should then be used to explain whether changes to this section reflect a real difference in his/her pattern of substance use or the disclosure of new information.

Status question

The table is designed to capture a range of information about the young person's past and current drug use.

'Ever' refers to any substance use in the past, including experimental or one-off use.

'Recent' refers to substance use which the young person regards as an ongoing aspect of his/her life. It is not necessarily referring to frequent use, but to something which is repeated on different occasions and which s/he remains amenable to doing again. A range of behaviour can therefore be included under this question e.g. daily alcohol use or taking ecstasy when at a particular club.

'Age of first use' is important because an early age of onset generally indicates a higher risk of problematic substance use and/or further offending.

The focus of this section is on the young person's own attitudes and choices about substance use. The details in the table, therefore, should normally relate to occasions when s/he has used substances independently or with friends/associates. It does not need to include certain instances of use within a family context e.g. moderate use of alcohol with meals at an appropriate age. If parents/carers are giving him/her *inappropriate* access to substances, however, this should be included e.g. his/her first use of illegal drugs was with family members, adults allowing excessive alcohol use at a young age.

Tobacco is included because of its impact on health and the financial implications of regular smoking for young people with a limited income.

Alcohol: please specify types of alcohol used in the evidence box.

Solvents: this includes glue, gas, and volatile substances e.g. petrol, lighter fuel.

Methadone: this includes methadone obtained legally or illegally (please specify which in the evidence box).

Other: please specify type of substance in the evidence box.

Factor questions

6 b)i) Practices which put him/her at particular risk

This question focuses on risks to his/her health. Issues identified here are likely to indicate a need for further medical and/or substance misuse assessment. Methods of substance use that place him/her at particular risk include injecting, sharing equipment and poly drug/alcohol use. Any occurrence of blackouts, an overdose or withdrawal symptoms will also be of significant concern.

6 b)ii) Sees substance misuse as positive/essential to life

This refers to a situation where the young person regards the 'benefits' of substance misuse as outweighing the risks and problems associated with it.

6 b)iii) Noticeably detrimental effect on education, relationships, daily functioning

Consider the effects of substance use on the following:

- education: attendance, concentration, attitudes/interest in school, goals/aims for the future
- relationships: with family, friends, teachers, staff/other professionals
- daily functioning: lifestyle, use of free time, health, finances e.g. a young person going without food in order to have money for cigarettes

6 b)iv) Offending to obtain money for substances

This refers to acquisitive offending with the specific intention of obtaining money to purchase substances.

6 b)v) Other link to offending

This can include:

- offending whilst under the influence of substances
- possession of illegal drugs
- supplying substances to others
- obtaining substances by deception e.g. falsifying prescriptions

Rating

To what extent are the above issues associated with *offending* for this particular young person? Some specific examples for this section are given below. See also p. 8 for guidance on the 0-4 scale.

Examples of ratings of 3 or 4

- a 'yes' response to question 6b)iv) about offending to obtain money for substances
- all his/her offending occurs whilst under the influence of substances
- his/her attitudes and willingness to experiment with substances increases the likelihood of him/her being found in possession of illegal drugs

Examples of ratings of 1 or 2

- infrequent and/or minor offending linked to occasional substance use

7. Physical health

A comprehensive assessment of the young person requires some consideration of his/her physical health and development. Health problems may have an adverse impact on many other aspects of his/her life, including educational and school experiences, peer group interactions, self-presentation and self-esteem.

This section looks at the impact of any health problems on the young person's daily life. The questions are also intended to highlight different factors that may be affecting his/her health. Some of these may be 'structural', such as poverty and the availability of health care services in the area where s/he lives. Others will be related to family and care arrangements e.g. if s/he has been moved around a number of different foster placements, some health needs may have been overlooked. The young person's own behaviour will also affect his/her health. Health needs will clearly vary according to age and gender and this needs to be borne in mind throughout the section. Consideration should also be given to any cultural or religious beliefs of the young person and his/her family which may affect health care.

Factor questions

7 a)i) Health condition which significantly affects everyday life functioning

This could include:

- ongoing conditions such as epilepsy or diabetes
- temporary conditions such as pregnancy, broken bones
- mobility, sensory or communication impairments

The emphasis here is not on the nature of a condition, but on the *impact* which it has on his/her everyday life. Tick 'yes' if you feel that this is significant.

7 a)ii) Physical immaturity/delayed development

Young people all develop at different rates, but this question refers to those whose physical development is *visibly* and *substantially* behind that of peers. During adolescence, appearance and physical characteristics contribute disproportionately to self-esteem and self-identity. Consequently, an awareness of looking very different from peers could cause great anxiety. Physical immaturity may also lead to other problems e.g. an increased risk of bullied.

7 a)iii - iv) Problems caused by not being registered with GP/lack of access to other services

Where this applies, please note the reasons in the evidence box

7 a)v) Health put at risk through own behaviour

This links with issues raised above in section (6) 'substance use', but also covers a broader range of behaviour. It could include behaviour caused by a lack of knowledge, a decision to ignore known consequences or 'thrill seeking' behaviour. Some examples are given on the form. Others might include refusing to take medication as prescribed or binge drinking.

7 a)vi) Other

This includes issues such as obesity, diet and smoking. Early physical maturation could be another example and might contribute to bullying behaviour by him/her.

Rating

To what extent are the above issues associated with *offending* for this particular young person? The links between physical health and offending behaviour will usually be indirect and consequently there will be a tendency towards lower ratings in this section. For example:

- a condition which leads to disruptive behaviour at school and possible exclusion
- an impairment which makes it more difficult for him/her to find suitable work or training
- his/her frustration with a health problem contributes to aggressive behaviour
- other negative effects e.g. poor school attendance, low self-esteem

8. Emotional and mental health

This section is based on a broad definition of emotional and mental health. It includes issues about mental illness but recognises that, for young people in particular, mental and emotional well being will be influenced by issues such as personal relationships and social environment as well as medical factors.

Different cultural groups will vary in their views about what constitutes emotional well being and this needs to be borne in mind. The following 3 factors, however, may provide a useful framework for understanding the young person's mental health needs within the context of his/her particular situation.

➤ events/circumstances

Events which are unpredictable and which the young person feels they have no control over are likely to be particularly stressful. The research literature also makes a helpful distinction between 'normative' events which all young people experience at some time (e.g. peer pressure, puberty, changing from primary to secondary education) and 'non-normative' events which affect particular individuals at specific times (e.g. family breakdown, illness, bereavement, abuse). A young person facing a cluster of these events is more likely to have difficulties in managing the resulting emotions.

➤ support networks

What help and support is available to the young person? This can include formal and informal support networks.

➤ coping abilities

The young person's age, gender and maturity will all affect the range and type of coping strategies used. Some common approaches include 'problem-focused coping' (e.g. trying to remove or reduce the cause of the stress), 'emotion-focused coping' (e.g. trying to change the emotions associated with a problem) and 'withdrawal' (e.g. denying the existence of a problem). Young people will vary in the way that they perceive stressful situations and those who have a realistic understanding of a difficult situation will be better placed to cope with any ongoing stress. Having some sense of control will also help the young person to feel that s/he can cope.

Focusing on the connections and interactions between these three factors helps to ensure that assessment of the young person's emotional and mental health is rooted in the context of his/her ongoing life experiences.

This section may raise some issues which cannot be fully assessed here e.g. issues about mental illness or suicide attempts. *Asset* should act as a 'trigger' to highlight areas where further specialist assessment may be required.

Factor questions

8 a) i - iii) Emotions/thoughts which significantly affect daily functioning

This section looks at the impact of different events on the young person's emotional well-being. It can include events affecting the young person directly and problems faced by family members, carers, or friends that have an impact on him/her. Some of the events will have been identified in earlier sections e.g. abuse, loss. The focus here is not on the events themselves, however, but on the way in which they currently affect his/her thoughts and emotions. Tick 'yes' if there are thoughts and feelings that have a persistent and powerful impact on his/her everyday life.

8 b)i) Diagnosed mental illness

If there is a 'yes' response here, it is essential to give as much information as possible in the evidence box. If there has been a formal diagnosis, please specify the nature of the illness, the particular symptoms that s/he experiences and details about any medication.

8 b)ii) Other contact with mental health services

If you are aware of any previous referral to mental health services, please indicate when this occurred and the reasons for it. If the information is unavailable, please indicate this in the evidence box.

NB Some conditions (such as ADHD) seem to overlap the definitions of physical health and mental health and it can be difficult to know where to record them on *Asset*. It is recommended that this section be used as the main place for noting such information (this is not to imply that a young person necessarily has a mental illness but is rather to recognise the role of mental health professionals in diagnosing and responding to such conditions). It may also be appropriate to analyse the consequences of ADHD for a particular young person in other sections of *Asset* as well e.g. it may have implications for analysis in the 'thinking and behaviour' section.

8 c)i-iii)

It is important to be clear about the wording of question (c). It is **not** asking whether the young person has definitely harmed him/herself or attempted suicide. Instead, the question asks *whether there are indications* of psychological difficulties, self-harm or suicide attempts. In order to tick 'yes', you must have some information to denote difficulties in one or more of these areas. This does not necessarily mean having full details - a comment made by the young person or their carer, information from a GP or from a case record could all be indications. The key point is that a 'yes' response must be based on something tangible.

A 'no' response does not necessarily mean that these issues are not relevant to him/her, but means that there is no evidence of them at the moment. If new information comes to light later on, the form can be updated to reflect this. The 'don't know' option might be appropriate in cases where you have an intuitive feeling that s/he has experienced difficulties in some of these areas, but where there are no other clear indications. It is a way of noting a concern which can be explored more fully later on.

8 c)i) Other emotional or psychological difficulties

This could include phobias, hypochondria, eating or sleep disorders and obsessive compulsive behaviour. Question 8c)iii) covers attempted suicide, but suicidal thoughts and feelings which s/he has not yet acted on should be recorded under this question.

8 c)ii - iii) Self-harm and suicide

If there are indications that s/he has self-harmed or attempted suicide it is essential to give details in the evidence box. Please say where the information has come from and how much weight you attach to it e.g. do you think s/he is quite likely to have attempted suicide or are you sure that this has happened?

Rating

To what extent are the above issues associated with *offending* for this particular young person? Some specific examples for this section are given below. See also p. 8 for guidance on the 0-4 scale.

Examples of ratings of 3 or 4

- a direct link with symptoms of mental illness e.g. offending due to hallucinations or delusions
- s/he struggling to cope with strong feelings of anger/hatred – likely to take this out on others
- offending at specific times e.g. when s/he fails to take medication or misses appointments with mental health services

Examples of ratings of 1 or 2

- s/he tends to deal with emotional difficulties 'internally' rather than turning to anti-social or offending behaviour

9. Perception of self and others

The focus of this section is on the young person's understanding of how they – and others – fit into the world around. It deals with concepts which can be difficult to define, but which are important for assessing how the young person views him/herself in relation to other people.

Factor questions

9 a)i) Difficulties with self-identity

Most young people in this age group will still be working out a sense of their own identity and this is a normal part of adolescence. The purpose of this question, however, is to highlight cases where a young person is experiencing particular difficulties in this regard.

Some of the common factors that may contribute to a poor or confused sense of self-identity are:

- a lack of knowledge of personal and family history e.g. a young person subject to a care order who has little knowledge about his/her birth family
- experience of discrimination
- a feeling of cultural/social isolation
- a very unstable or highly dysfunctional family background

9 a)ii) Inappropriate self-esteem

A young person's level of self-esteem may vary at different times and in different contexts. The question is not referring to this fairly typical situation, but is about identifying those young people who have a persistent and pervasive problem in this area.

His/her self-esteem may be inappropriate because it is too low or too high. Some of the common reasons for **low** self-esteem in young people are:

- social isolation/lack of social acceptance by peers
- a belief that nobody understands or respects them
- dissatisfaction with physical appearance
- a sense of failure about relationships or academic achievement

Indicators of self-esteem which is too **high** could include the following:

- a young person may over-estimate his/her abilities
- s/he may appear over-confident
- s/he may have an undue sense of their own importance and/or show little consideration for others

9 a)iii) General mistrust of others

This is about whether the young person finds it difficult to trust most of the people that s/he has contact with. It is not referring to those who have a problem with trusting one or two particular individuals. Rather, it is about a 'global' mistrust of a range of different people including peers and adults, family and professionals. S/he will tend to be suspicious of people's motives and inclined to believe the worst about others.

9 a)iv) Sees him/herself as victim of discrimination or unfair treatment

This could include experiences in a variety of contexts – home, school, community, prison.

9 a)v) Displays discriminatory attitudes towards others

This includes attitudes relating to race, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, class, disability or sexual orientation.

Assessing discriminatory attitudes can be particularly difficult with young people. If they make a racist remark, for example, it may not be immediately apparent whether they are expressing their own views or repeating something that they have heard at school but do not really understand. The clearest indicators will often be related to his/her actual and planned behaviour. Has his/her offending been targeted against certain groups? Has s/he been involved in any bullying at school that appears to be linked to discriminatory attitudes? Is s/he currently making threats against a member of a minority group or expressing intentions to target them?

9 a)vi) Perceives him/herself as having a criminal identity

This question is looking at the young person's mindset and how they perceive their future role in society. It is more than just admitting to having committed some offences – it is rather about seeing offending as an essential part of life. A young person with this perspective may see crime as their future 'career' and accept the risk of arrest and sentencing as a necessary part of this.

Rating

To what extent are the above issues associated with *offending* for this particular young person? General guidance on the 0-4 rating is given on p. 8 and some specific examples for this section are provided below.

Examples of ratings of 3 or 4

- discriminatory attitudes that provide a clear motive for his/her offending
- a young person who sees crime as his/her 'career' and thinks that s/he will always be involved in offending
- his/her self-esteem is dependent on the sense of achievement that s/he gets from offending

Examples of ratings of 1 or 2

- low self-esteem contributes to a feeling that s/he has nothing to lose by offending
- a lack of understanding for others which – although it may not lead directly into offending – suggests that s/he could be persuaded to take part in criminal activity more easily than someone with a greater ability to empathise

10. Thinking and behaviour

This section draws together information about the young person from all the other *Asset* sections in order to identify patterns of thinking and types of behaviour which cause difficulties for him/her. Evidence for your judgements in this section can be drawn from information about his/her behaviour at home, at school, with friends, in the neighbourhood, with staff and, of course, details of his/her offences.

Factor questions

10 a) Are the young person's actions **characterised** by any of the following?

Tick 'yes' for an item in this section if you are of the opinion that it is a *typical* or *recurring* feature of the young person's life and behaviour.

There may be occasions when there is some evidence of these types of thought patterns/behaviour, but where the appropriate question response should be 'no'. For example, you may believe that a particular incident was an isolated one-off event that is unlikely to occur again and was not typical of this young person.

10 a)i) Lack of understanding of consequences

This refers to the extent of the young person's insight into the consequences of their own and/or friends' behaviour. It includes consequences both for him/her and for other people.

It can be helpful to distinguish between different types of consequences:

- immediate and longer term consequences
- direct and indirect consequences e.g. a burglary will have a direct impact on the victim and an indirect impact on neighbours who may experience an increased fear of crime
- proximal and distal consequences e.g. consequences for the young person and those closest to him/her would be 'proximal' and consequences for people less personally involved with the young person (such as the victim or the local community) would be 'distal'

Those of a younger age may be expected to have some understanding of immediate, direct and proximal consequences. Older young people should be developing additional awareness of longer term, indirect and distal consequences. Consequently, when assessing whether the young person lacks understanding of consequences it is important to take account of his/her age and maturity e.g. one would not necessarily tick 'yes' if a 12 year old had limited awareness of long term consequences, but would choose this option if s/he had very little understanding of direct and immediate consequences.

10 a)ii) Impulsiveness

All young people are likely to be impulsive to some extent – the issue here is whether impulsiveness is a pervasive trait of his/her behaviour. Can s/he apply 'head-knowledge' about consequences to real life situations? Does s/he always rush into things without stopping to think? Does the young person often do things which s/he regrets soon afterwards?

10 a)iii) Need for excitement

This describes a young person who deliberately seeks excitement. It is not just that they are persuaded by friends to take part in some reckless activity, but that they actively pursue, initiate or participate in 'thrill seeking' activities. This can involve behaviour that may be legal or illegal.

10 a)iv) Giving in easily to pressure from others

The key point to consider here is how s/he relates to other young people *of a similar age*. One would not always expect a young person to be assertive with someone who was significantly older, but one would be concerned if s/he was easily pressured and manipulated by his/her contemporaries or younger peers. Consider the reasons for a lack of assertiveness e.g. fear of particular people, previous experiences of intimidation, lack of social support.

10 a)v) Poor control of temper

Is s/he easily provoked by minor incidents? Does the young person lose their temper frequently? Does s/he lash out suddenly and unexpectedly – at either people or objects?

10 a)vi) Inappropriate social and communication skills

Inappropriateness is defined in terms of his/her age, cultural background and situational context. Examples of inappropriate self-presentation could include:

- a young person who is overly or excessively friendly with someone they have never met before
- relating to staff or teachers in the same way as to friends
- sexually provocative postures/body language in a public place
- a 17 year old who presents as an 11 year old – in conversation, manner and body language (or vice versa)
- deliberately adopting a hard, threatening, over-bearing manner

10 b) Does the young person display any of the following types of behaviour?

These are behaviours which are likely to cause particular concern. The questions here are not just about offending behaviour – please consider all the available information about his/her behaviour in different settings.

10 b)i) Destruction of property

This refers to deliberate and planned behaviour. It includes any events of arson, situations where property or equipment has been put beyond use and any other behaviour causing extensive damage. It does not include minor criminal damage or events where property was accidentally damaged e.g. loss of control of stolen car.

10 b)ii) Aggression towards others

This includes physical and verbal aggression, violence and threats of violence. It may be directed towards peers, family, staff and people known to the young person or strangers. Consider the young person's behaviour in different contexts, including any institutional or secure settings that s/he may have experienced.

Aggressive behaviour will sometimes be related to poor temper control (question 9(a)(v) above). This is not always so, however, as some aggressive behaviour may be carefully planned and calculated.

10 b)iii) Sexually inappropriate behaviour

The Effective Practice Guidance in relation to 'Young People who Sexually Abuse' published by the Youth Justice Board (2002) states that: 'Sexual abuse by a young person can be defined as follows and can include a wide range of behaviours, in a variety of situations. A minor of any age who commits any sexual act with a person of any age:

- against the victim's will
- without consent
- in an aggressive/exploitative manner'

It would also be appropriate to include here other problematic behaviours e.g. inappropriate use of sexually explicit language by a young person.

10 b)iv) Attempts to manipulate/control others

This can refer to emotional manipulation e.g. the young person threatens to commit self-harm or suicide if s/he does not get their own way. It can also include types of threatening behaviour e.g. the young person threatens that, if a friend does not agree to do something, s/he will give details about the friend's drug use to parents or teachers.

Rating

To what extent are the above issues associated with *offending* for this particular young person? General guidance on the 0-4 rating is given on p. 8 and some specific examples for this section are provided below.

Examples of ratings of 3 or 4

- combination of impulsiveness, poor temper control and aggression means a high risk of violent behaviour
- his/her need for excitement frequently leads him/her into offending situations

Examples of ratings of 1 or 2

- his/her lack of assertiveness is relevant to offending, but only when s/he is with particular friends
- self-presentation is occasionally inappropriate and perceived by other people as deliberately provocative – may lead to aggressive situations

11. Attitudes to offending

For questions i) – v), the focus should be on his/her attitudes in regard to the offence/s which triggered this assessment. If there are issues about attitudes to past offences which you think are particularly significant, however, these can also be included. Give details in the evidence box.

Factor questions

11 a)i) Denial of the seriousness of his/her behaviour

This refers to the young person minimising the harm or damage caused by the offending behaviour.

11 a)ii) Reluctance to accept responsibility for involvement in most recent offences

This type of attitude would be seen in someone who wants to blame others for what happened. If the young person was involved in a group offence, for example, s/he may admit to having been present when the incident occurred, but deny taking any personal part in it.

11 a)iii -iv) Victims

Question (iii) is about how much the young person understands about the impact of his/her behaviour on others. Does s/he recognise that there is a victim or that there has been an adverse effect on the community? Question (iv) says that, given his/her level of understanding, how much does s/he actually care about the impact on others? Is there any sympathy for the victim or any regret about what has been done? A young person may have a good understanding of the impact of the offence but not feel any sense of remorse. S/he may actually feel pleased about it because they think the victim deserved it or feel that the incident has helped them achieve other goals e.g. status amongst peers.

11 a)v) Lack of understanding about impact of his/her behaviour on family/carers

This includes understanding of both the ‘emotional impact’ that his/her behaviour has had on family/carers and any ‘legal impact’ (such as his/her parents have been required to pay a fine).

Questions (vi) – (viii) look at more general attitudes towards offending

11 a)vi) A belief that certain types of offences are acceptable

For example, this could include beliefs such as:

- theft from shops doesn’t cause any harm because they can afford it and will claim on insurance
- driving offences are not ‘real offences’

11 a)vii) A belief that certain people/groups are acceptable ‘targets’ of offending behaviour

The ‘targets’ could be either individuals or groups and this could include beliefs such as:

- a racist attitude that allows him/her to justify violence against ethnic minorities
- a view that it is legitimate to take personal revenge against someone who has hurt him/her

11 a)viii) S/he thinks that further offending is inevitable

A ‘yes’ response here requires more than the young person just saying that they think further offending will occur. A ‘yes’ means that *you* believe s/he really does think offending is inevitable. This could be for a number of reasons: Perceives him/herself as having a criminal identity (question 9 a)vi) in section (9) ‘perception of self and others’); s/he cannot see any other choices or opportunities in life or s/he has some understanding of the causes of his/her offending behaviour and knows that, until things change, re-offending is always likely.

Rating

To what extent are the above issues associated with *offending* for this particular young person? Some specific examples for this section are given below. See also p. 8 for guidance on the 0-4 scale.

Examples of ratings of 3 or 4

- attitude that provides a direct motive for his/her offending
- his/her genuine belief that further offending is inevitable
- clusters of these attitudes

Examples of ratings of 1 or 2

- attitudes which make it unlikely s/he will refuse to participate in offending if friends suggest it

12. Motivation to change

Motivation will often be quite difficult to ascertain, particularly as it may often change – both over time and between different situations. The questions in this section look at various aspects of the young person’s understanding, attitudes and behaviour which all provide some evidence of his/her level of motivation.

Factor questions

In this section, unlike the preceding ones, a ‘yes’ response is a positive sign and a ‘no’ response indicates a problem. Where necessary, additional clarification and guidance for specific questions is provided below.

12 a)i) Has an appropriate understanding of the problematic aspects of his/her own behaviour

This can include offending behaviour and non-offending behaviour which nevertheless causes difficulties for the young person and others. Does s/he understand which particular aspects of his/her behaviour are problematic? Does s/he understand why they are problematic? Is this level of understanding appropriate for a young person of his/her age?

12 a)ii) Shows real evidence of wanting to deal with problems in his/her life

This follows on from question (i) above. If the young person understands the ways in which his/her behaviour might be problematic, is s/he willing to address some of these issues?

12 a)iii) Understands the consequences for him/herself of further offending

This includes both short-term consequences (such as arrest and sentence) and longer term consequences (for example, the difficulties of getting a job with a criminal record). Tick ‘yes’ if s/he has understanding appropriate to his/her age e.g. a 12 year old might be expected to understand immediate consequences, whereas a 17 year old should be developing awareness of the longer term issues.

12 a)iv) Has identified clear reasons or incentives for him/her to avoid offending

As with question (iii) above, this can include short-term incentives (e.g. s/he wants to avoid upsetting a parent) or longer term incentives (e.g. s/he is keen to get a particular job on leaving school). Those of a younger age may only be able to identify short-term incentives, but these are still significant and can be built on during a period of intervention.

12 a)v) Shows real evidence of wanting to stop offending

An example of evidence for this question could be if s/he has started to act on some of the incentives identified in question (iv) above. His/her motivation to stop offending is likely to fluctuate. It would be unrealistic to expect him/her to be completely motivated all of the time, but tick ‘yes’ if s/he shows evidence on some occasions of wanting to desist.

Rating

To what extent are the above issues associated with *offending* for this particular young person? Some specific examples for this section are given below. See also p. 8 for guidance on the 0-4 scale.

Examples of ratings of 3 or 4

- s/he has no understanding of the problematic aspects of his/her behaviour
- the young person cannot identify any incentives to stop offending
- there is no evidence from his/her behaviour of a desire to change

Examples of ratings of 1 or 2

- s/he is motivated to stop offending, but is unlikely to receive much support from family/carers
- s/he has a good understanding of the consequences for him/herself of further offending, but has less understanding of the impact of his/her offending behaviour on other people

Positive factors

As well as assessing problems, it is clearly important to identify the positive aspects of the young person's life. This is essential for building up a complete picture of him/her and will also help to identify factors that may be relevant to him/her stopping offending.

Please tick the relevant boxes to indicate the presence of positive factors. If, for any question, there do not seem to be any positives (or you are unsure) please leave that particular box blank. Use the evidence boxes to explain what impact the different factors may have on the likelihood of re-offending.

Sometimes there may be just one positive factor amidst a range of problems. A young person experiencing severe difficulties at school may have a good relationship with one particular teacher. Similarly, in a family setting there might be one relationship that has a stabilising influence on the young person. With an issue such as motivation, it may be that the young person is willing to deal with certain problems whilst refusing to acknowledge others.

In each case it is important to record these factors even if they appear to be quite small in comparison to his/her problems, as this highlights areas in which to encourage the young person during any intervention.

As with the rest of the *Asset* profile, this section is asking for *your* assessment of the positive factors in the young person's life. This may differ from his/her perception and you may wish to use the evidence boxes to elaborate on the reasons for this.

If you cannot identify *any* positive factors for this young person, it would be helpful to put a note of explanation in one of the evidence boxes. If a colleague then looks at the case, they will know that these issues have been considered.

The questions in this section cover a variety of factors. Some relate to the young person's own attitudes and behaviour, whilst some will depend on the actions of other people. It is important to focus on factors that are specifically relevant for this young person. There might be a range of good facilities and services available in the local neighbourhood, for example, but if these are not addressing his/her particular needs then it may not be appropriate to identify this as a positive factor for him/her. It is also helpful to think about different contexts in which a factor might be relevant e.g. 'resilience' could refer to coping with problematic family relationships or a serious health condition.

Indicators of vulnerability

a) Is there evidence that s/he is likely to be vulnerable to harm as a result of the behaviour of other people, events/circumstances or his/her own behaviour?

This question specifies a range of factors that might result in the young person suffering harm - some of them may already have been identified in earlier sections of *Asset*. The purpose of this particular question is to consider how these different factors link together, to assess his/her overall level of vulnerability and to look at whether these factors might contribute to a risk of self-harm or suicide.

Use the evidence box to give details of the nature of the harm that s/he is likely to experience, when this is likely to occur and who could be involved. Where there are combinations of factors, please explain how they relate to each other.

b) Are there indications that the young person is at risk of self-harm or suicide?

There are three key issues to consider in relation to this young person:

- i) Are there life events or circumstances which make him/her particularly vulnerable to self-harm or suicide?
- ii) What are the precipitating factors that might trigger this behaviour? In what circumstances would s/he be most likely to attempt suicide or engage in deliberate self-harm?
- iii) Is there evidence to indicate that self-harm or suicide is likely?

There will always be some uncertainty about assessment of risk in this area and it is not possible to predict exactly if and when a young person will attempt suicide or self-harm. It is possible, however, to build up a picture of the events and circumstances that might combine to make him/her particularly vulnerable in this regard. It is helpful to distinguish between long term underlying factors which may place him/her at greater risk and precipitating factors which may trigger the actual behaviour. An assessment therefore needs to take account of a broad range of issues, including personal characteristics, past and present social circumstances and any current stressors in his/her life. Where there is any concern about a possibility of self-harm or suicide, it is essential to give details in the evidence box. As far as possible, give details of the circumstances in which such behaviour is likely to occur, how serious it will be and how soon it may happen.

i) Life events or circumstances which make him/her particularly vulnerable¹

Research has highlighted some groups of young people who are more vulnerable to self-harm or suicide than others. These include victims of abuse, those living in poverty, young people in isolated rural areas, victims of discrimination, drug users, those on remand or in prison for the first time, young people subject to care orders who have a history of broken placements, those identified as having mental illness/mental health problems and young people with a family history of suicide.

The common themes which link these vulnerable groups are:

- isolation
- lack of support
- low self-esteem
- sense of powerlessness/helplessness
- uncertainty about the future

There are some important gender differences. Young men are three times more likely than young women to kill themselves, although deliberate self-harm remains more widespread amongst young women.

¹ Lyon, J. 'Teenage Suicide and Self harm: Assessing and Managing Risk', ch.14 in Kemshall & Pritchard 'Good Practice in Risk Assessment 2' (1997)

ii) *Precipitating factors*

If his/her personal or social circumstances indicate that s/he may be at risk, what are the particular events that may trigger an attempt at suicide or self-harm?

Common precipitating factors include: the experience of loss, a serious disagreement with parent/s (this is particularly significant for those under 16), physical or sexual abuse, rape, bullying or threats, poor physical or mental health, exam stress or failure, contact with the criminal justice system (e.g. the uncertainty of the court process, experience of being in custody).

iii) *Evidence of a likelihood of self-harm or suicide*

When considering whether there is a real possibility of the young person committing self-harm or suicide in the foreseeable future, evidence from the following will be particularly important.

➤ previous incidents of suicide or self-harm

Any such incidents in the past should have been identified in section (8) 'emotional and mental health'. These are particularly significant because young people who have harmed themselves in the past are at greater risk of attempting suicide in the future. Aspects of previous self-harm/suicide attempts likely to cause particular concern would include: others not present or nearby at the time, intervention from others unlikely, precautions taken against discovery, a suicide note, feelings of sadness for most of the time prior to the act of deliberate self-harm, use of alcohol or drugs, careful planning of the event.

➤ any comments by the young person about suicidal thoughts or feelings

There is an increased risk if ideas about suicide are familiar to the young person (particularly if s/he is thinking about particular methods for committing suicide).

➤ the self-assessment form ('What do YOU think?')

This addresses a number of issues about emotions and feelings. There is also a question which refers specifically to suicidal thoughts.

➤ information from other sources e.g. case records, concerns expressed by other people

For example, parents/carers or other colleagues who know the young person well may notice changes in his/her behaviour which cause them to be concerned.

c) **Are there any protective factors that may reduce his/her vulnerability?**

His/her vulnerability to harm in general, and more specifically to self-harm/suicide, will vary over time with changes in his/her circumstances, attitudes and coping skills. The presence of protective factors will also affect his/her level of vulnerability at any given time.

Examples of protective factors in this context could include particular people that s/he can talk to or a change in circumstances which removes the cause of his/her stress or despair. Some of these may already have been identified in the 'positive factors' section (p.28 above, p.11 of the core *Asset* profile). Please use the evidence box to explain how they can help to reduce his/her vulnerability and how they could be developed or strengthened during a period of intervention.

If there do not appear to be any protective factors, this also needs to be explained in the evidence box.

This section will need to link in with other local policies and procedures e.g. where there are issues relating to child protection. It is not intended to provide a full assessment of such issues, but to act as a trigger to highlight cases where further investigation is required.

Risk of serious harm

Introduction

The ‘indicators of serious harm’ section on page 12 of the core assessment profile and the additional ‘risk of serious harm: full assessment’ form are designed to help identify and assess those young people who may present a risk of serious harm *to others*.

Definition of serious harm

Serious harm means death *or* injury (either physical or psychological) which is life threatening and/or traumatic and from which recovery is expected to be difficult, incomplete or impossible.

This would include behaviour likely to result in a charge of murder, manslaughter, rape, wounding, kidnapping, serious robbery, arson, death by dangerous driving and any sexual offence against children or young people. Some incidents of aggravated burglary, aggravated vehicle taking and sexual offences against adults may also be included, depending on the circumstances of each particular case.

The question of which types of driving behaviour should be encompassed by this definition is a complex one. Where there is a risk of a young person causing death or serious injury by driving then this should be included, but a young person should not automatically be considered high risk just because they have been involved in motoring offences. Decisions will therefore need to be made on a case by case basis.

The Asset approach

The material in these two sections of *Asset* is specifically about risk of serious harm *to other people* and should not be confused with the ‘indicators of vulnerability section’ of the core profile which looks at the possibility of the young person being harmed. Whilst there may be some overlap between these two issues, they are separated within *Asset* because of their different implications for intervention and supervision.

It is important to consider the risk of serious harm in relation to all young people in order to try and identify the small proportion who may go on to commit grave crimes in future. *Asset* uses the ‘indicators of serious harm’ section of the core profile as a filter to identify cases where further in-depth risk assessment is required. This ensures that key questions about harm are considered in relation to all young people, whilst the time and resources required for the ‘risk of serious harm: full assessment’ are reserved for the minority of cases where this is a significant issue.

It is not necessarily appropriate to think in terms of the young person being ‘dangerous’ as it is unlikely that s/he will present a risk to other people all of the time or in every situation. It is often more helpful to think about particular *situations* in which s/he could present a risk and therefore about any action that could be taken to reduce the likelihood of these situations occurring.

There is no attempt to assign scores to any of the material on serious harm as statistical measures are of limited use for predicting very harmful behaviour. The approach taken here is rather to bring together information about the young person’s past and present behaviour and, by looking at this whole picture, to make a *professional judgement* about the potential for him/her to cause serious harm to others in future.

Indicators of serious harm

This is found on p.12 of the core profile and should be completed on all young people being assessed.

The questions in this section are designed to highlight any factors which might indicate a possibility of this young person causing harm to other people. **If there is a 'yes' response to any question, you should go on to complete the 'risk of serious harm: full assessment' form.** If there are no indicators from this section of a risk of harm, you do not need to make any additional assessment at this stage.

Answering 'yes' to a question in this section does not mean that you are labelling the young person as 'high risk'. It is simply saying that there are concerns about a possible risk of serious harm which need further consideration and analysis.

Some cases are not as straightforward as they initially seem. In a case where there is no history of serious harm, for example, there may be factors about his/her current situation which indicate that s/he could soon begin to engage in harmful behaviour. It is therefore important that the 'indicators of serious harm' section is completed for all young people, even where the current offences may appear to be quite minor.

Section (a)

This section is about evidence of actual behaviour by the young person. It includes both offending and non-offending behaviour, recent and past behaviour.

i) Behaviour by the young person which resulted in serious harm actually being caused to others

Do you have evidence of *any* behaviour by the young person which resulted in someone else actually suffering serious harm (as defined on page 31 above)?

ii) Behaviour which indicates that s/he was intending or preparing to cause serious harm to others

This refers to behaviour that did not actually result in serious harm, but which shows that s/he wanted to cause harm. It covers two main types of behaviour:

➤ Intentions

The young person may have intended to cause serious harm but – for some reason – did not carry this out. In such cases, it is important to consider the intention and the outcome separately and to identify the reasons for any differences between them. A similar distinction between intentions and actions is made in the earlier 'offending behaviour' section (p.2 of *Asset*, p. 6 of the guidance notes above).

➤ Preparations

This describes behaviour where the young person was actively taking steps to get into a position where s/he could cause harm. Examples may include acquiring weapons or checking out locations for possible offences.

iii) Other (e.g. reckless or unintentional) behaviour that was very likely to have caused serious harm

This question is included because it is recognised that some young people may get into a situation which results in them causing serious harm even though they did not set out with an intention to do so. It does not refer to every incident where there might be a slight possibility of harm, but is intended to highlight behaviour where there is a **high probability** of serious harm being unintentionally or carelessly caused.

It is important to remember that the emphasis is on the young person's own behaviour, not that of his/her friends or associates. Dangerous driving, for example, could be included here if the young person was the driver of a car being raced through a residential area where young children were playing, but would not necessarily need to be included if s/he was a passenger.

Section (b)

Whereas section (a) above focuses on definite past events of harm-related behaviour, this section covers other features of his/her attitudes, interests or behaviour which might indicate a possible risk of serious harm.

(i) Other features of his/her offending

Even though his/her offences may not have resulted in serious harm, there may be other aspects of his/her offending behaviour which indicate a possible risk of harm in future. Examples could include: increasingly aggressive behaviour, s/he is offending with peers or adults who have caused serious harm to others, methods of offending that are unduly sophisticated for his/her age, very unpredictable or erratic behaviour, a recent rapid increase in seriousness of offences or regular carrying of weapons.

(ii) His/her attitudes and motives

This question draws on information about his/her current attitudes from some of the other sections of the core assessment profile e.g. emotional and mental health (8), perception of self and others (9) and attitudes to offending (11). Do any of these attitudes provide a motive for causing serious harm? Are they strong enough to make him/her take action to cause harm? Tick 'yes' if you think that his/her attitudes or motives are likely to lead him/her towards harmful behaviour.

(iii) Current interests or activities

This can include interests/activities which s/he pursues alone or with other people. Some of these may already have been identified in section (5) 'lifestyle'. The same activity can have contrasting implications for different young people and it is important to consider each case individually e.g. a collection of military paraphernalia may reflect a legitimate interest in the armed forces or it may be a sign of a potentially dangerous preoccupation with weapons. Another example could be an interest in pornographic material involving young children.

Section (c)

This section tries to capture any other possible indicators of a risk of harm. Some of these may initially seem minor, but they can provide information that is important when considered alongside a range of other factors.

(i) Other disconcerting or disturbing behaviour

This question covers anything else about his/her behaviour that is disconcerting or disturbing and has not already been addressed in sections (a) and (b). Consider where s/he spends time, who s/he is with and what s/he does. This may link with issues identified in section (5) 'lifestyle' or section (10) 'thinking and behaviour'. Cruelty to animals is given as an example on the form. Another example might be if s/he spends a lot of time in unusual places e.g. graveyards.

(ii-iii) Concerns about possible harmful behaviour expressed by the young person or by other people

Question (ii) is about whether the young person has said that s/he might cause harm. If, for example, s/he is worried that they might harm someone, these concerns should be considered very carefully.

Question (iii) asks whether anybody else has expressed concerns about the possibility of the young person causing serious harm e.g. parents, carers or teachers who are apprehensive about aspects of his/her behaviour and think that this may indicate a possible risk to others.

(iv) Intuitive or ‘gut’ feelings about possible harmful behaviour

Very rarely, there may be cases where you have concerns about a possible risk to others but you cannot quite identify the reasons behind this. Question (iv) provides an opportunity to record this, even if there are few details available at this stage. It may be important at a later date for colleagues to know that you had some concerns at this stage. It will also be a useful reminder, when the assessment is reviewed or repeated, to consider whether there is any new information which will clarify these concerns.

This can trigger the full harm assessment, but cannot on its own lead to a young person being described as high risk. If no supporting evidence is found, s/he should not be classified as ‘high risk’ or ‘very high risk’.

Conclusion

This provides an easily accessible summary of the offending-related ratings from sections 1-12. The total score gives a general indication of the extent of the offending-related factors in the young person’s life. A higher total score indicates a greater likelihood of further offending. Further details on this can be found in the introduction on page 4.

The summary will also show clearly which sections have higher ratings and these are the issues which should be included in your intervention or action plan so that they can be addressed in future work with the young person.

What do YOU think?

‘What do YOU think?’ (WDYT) is a self-assessment form for completion by the young person. It can be used either in a paper format or electronically (for example, commercially available interactive software packages).

Purpose of the self-assessment form

‘What do YOU think?’ is intended to:

- give the young person a clear and explicit opportunity to state his/her views
- ensure that the assessment takes account of the young person’s views
- highlight issues that s/he is worried about which you may not yet be aware of
- facilitate a comparison between your assessment and the young person’s own perspective

Content and format

The form mirrors the order of the sections in the core profile. This will help you when comparing your assessment with the views expressed by the young person in WDYT.

Most of the questions are written in the third person (“some young people.....”) and s/he is asked to say how much the descriptions are like him/her. This format was chosen because, when dealing with sensitive personal issues, it is less threatening than asking the questions directly.

As well as these very specific questions, there are also some more ‘open’ questions where the young person can write in anything they choose.

How to use ‘What do YOU think?’

The ‘What do YOU think?’ form needs to be seen in the context of your relationship with the young person and the process of engaging with him/her. If used appropriately, it can assist in developing the relationship and can help the young person to see that you are genuinely interested in his/her views.

The self-assessment form can be used flexibly. It is recognised that it may not always be appropriate to use ‘What do YOU think?’ at the report stage and sometimes it could be used more effectively at the start of supervision. It will be for you to decide on the best time to use it in each individual case. This will depend on factors such as the young person’s age, literacy skills, the amount of time you have available, whether this is your first contact with him/her or whether you already know him/her quite well.

Some young people will find the form difficult to complete and will require some assistance. It is then particularly important to encourage the young person to express his/her own opinions and not just to say what s/he thinks you want to hear.

If the young person is in secure accommodation, please ask him/her to complete ‘What do YOU think?’ on the basis of his/her situation before going in to the institution.

The self-assessment can be repeated at any point and can show how the young person’s perception of his/her situation may have changed over time. Using ‘What do YOU think?’ at the end of an intervention would also provide a useful indicator of change.

Core assessment profile: summary of *Asset* headings

- **Offending behaviour**
- **Living arrangements**
- **Family and personal relationships**
- **Education, training and employment**
- **Neighbourhood**
- **Lifestyle**
- **Substance use**
- **Physical health**
- **Emotional and mental health**
- **Perception of self and others**
- **Thinking and behaviour**
- **Attitudes to offending**
- **Motivation to change**
- **Positive factors**
- **Indicators of vulnerability**
- **Indicators of serious harm to others**