



THE POLICE FOUNDATION

The UK's policing think tank

POLICING AND YOUNG ADULTS

Developing a
tailored approach

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About The Police Foundation

The Police Foundation is the only independent think tank focused exclusively on improving policing and developing knowledge and understanding of policing and crime reduction. Our mission is to generate evidence and develop ideas which deliver better policing and a safer society.

We do this by producing trusted, impartial research and by working with the police and their partners to create change.

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Young adults, defined as individuals aged 18 to 25, represent around 10 per cent of the UK population but account for a third of those sentenced to prison and 30-40 per cent of cases involving police time each year. There is a growing body of research which shows that many young adults have not yet reached the full maturity of adults, which can lead them to engage in risky behaviours.

This has led many to argue for a distinct approach to this age group that is carried across all agencies of the criminal justice system. This report describes the current approach in policing and argues that there is a case for taking a tailored approach to the 18 to 25 age group.

The report sets out what such an approach might look like and proposes to test these ideas in police forces in England and Wales.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report contributes to the on-going discussion around treating young adults as a distinct age group within the criminal justice system. It asks whether the police should develop a tailored approach to the 18 to 25 age group and describes what such an approach might look like, informed by examples of innovative approaches.

The report is divided into six sections. First it introduces the context surrounding young adults and the criminal justice system, before summarising the findings of a 2013 scoping study undertaken by the Police Foundation. It then identifies key policy developments since 2013 and assesses a number of innovative approaches to the policing of young adults that have emerged in that five year period. The report concludes by outlining the potential developments which could promote a tailored approach to young adults within policing. It offers a series of recommendations and outlines potential next steps for a programme of pilot-based research to be pursued in police forces in England and Wales.

The report's conclusions can be summarised as follows;

1. The current policing response to young adults is not suitable. The evidence that supports developing a distinct and tailored approach across the criminal justice system is applicable to the domain of policing.
2. There are at present pockets of good practice across the country that provide the foundation for a tailored approach towards the policing of young adults focused on diverting young adults away from the criminal justice system, on improving the relationship between the police and young adults through the adoption of procedural justice approaches and on increasing the engagement and participation of young adults in bodies informing police decision making.
3. The Police Foundation recommends that a number of pilot studies are undertaken in police forces in England and Wales to test the practicability and effectiveness of these approaches.

2. INTRODUCTION

There is an emerging body of evidence to support the development of a tailored and distinct approach towards young adults (aged 18 to 25) across all agencies of the criminal justice system. Research has demonstrated significant variations in the rate of social, psychological and neurological maturation among this age group¹, and it has been argued that these variations should be taken into account when developing a criminal justice response to young adults, when they break the law, when they are 'at risk' or when they become victims of crime.

The evidence supporting a more tailored approach has become more widely accepted² in recent years, yet policing arguably lags behind other parts of the criminal justice system. This report addresses the feasibility of developing a tailored approach within policing and considers a series of developments over recent years, which lend support to such an approach.

This report builds on a Police Foundation scoping study³, published in 2013, with funding from the Barrow Cadbury Trust⁴. The initial study contained a summary of current approaches to the policing of the young adult age group. It drew on a series of interviews with police staff, policy makers and groups of young adults which explored the situation at that time. The report focused on two areas of policing where officers were most likely to come into regular contact with young adults: the use of stop and search powers, and the policing of the night-time economy. Particular attention was paid to the adequacy of officers' training and guidance in equipping them to properly recognise and address the distinct needs of young adults.

This update extends the focus to other areas of policing, taking into consideration new policy guidelines, and assessing the impact that Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) have had since their introduction in 2012. It sets out the findings of a set of interviews carried out with PCCs (and their staff) from six areas of England and Wales (London, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire, South Wales, South Yorkshire and

Sussex). Based on this exercise the report provides an outline of current strategies relating to the policing of young adults at the local level, and explores their potential for wider adoption.

The report outlines what a more tailored approach towards the policing of young adults might look like in practice, and identifies key partners and stakeholders who have expressed an interest to take part in future pilot research. Our report forms only one part of a wider effort to improve outcomes for young adults in the criminal justice system and offers a contribution, from the perspective of policing, towards the progression of the wider Transition to Adulthood (T2A) agenda.

T2A Alliance (Barrow Cadbury Trust)

This report is part of a wider research programme encompassing all elements of the criminal justice system that affect young adults, from the point of arrest, through sentencing, to their eventual release back into the community and time spent on probation. The Barrow Cadbury Trust's Transition to Adulthood initiative (T2A) "aims to develop and promote evidence of effective policy and practice" for the young adult age group, focusing on 10 key points along the criminal justice pathway where alternative and distinct approaches can be pursued⁵. The research programme is based upon an emerging body of evidence that shows that many young adults do not reach full maturity until at least the age of 25, and thus their unique needs must be taken into account when developing criminal justice responses.

Young adults

Academic research demonstrates significant variation in the development of maturity among young adults aged 18 to 25. The evidence base rests primarily on research from three distinct disciplines; neurology, psychology and criminology. Neurological research has found that the parts of the brain involved in planning and impulse control (two areas that are often related to criminal behaviour) are some of the last to finish developing^{6,7}.

¹ <https://www.t2a.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Birmingham-University-Maturity-final-literature-review-report.pdf>

² <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmjust/169/169.pdf>

³ http://www.police-foundation.org.uk/2017/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/policing_young_adults.pdf

⁴ <https://www.barrowcadbury.org.uk/tag/t2a/>

⁵ <https://www.barrowcadbury.org.uk/tag/t2a/>

⁶ <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/justice-committee/young-adult-offenders/oral/24456.html>

⁷ Johnson, S. B., R. W. Blum, et al. (2009). "Adolescent Maturity and the Brain: The Promise and Pitfalls of Neuroscience Research in Adolescent Health Policy." *Journal of Adolescent Health* 45(3): 216-221.

As we gradually develop a more sophisticated understanding of the young adult brain and the different speeds at which full maturity is attained, the criminal justice system must consider how these disparities in development can affect behaviour, and recognise that the current cliff-edge of an 18th birthday is often an arbitrary date that bears little relation to the reality of young adult offenders' lives. In addition, psychological research shows that variation in levels of psychosocial maturity can be hugely significant and thus in some cases an individual aged 24 or 25 may in fact possess a similar psychological maturity to an individual ten years their junior⁸.

Criminological research has demonstrated that many young adults 'grow out' of crime as they near their mid-20s, as they gradually begin to realise that offending will not offer them a viable path in life, and might lead to serious injury or long term incarceration. As part of this process of desistance, a number of stability-inducing social factors (including marriage, parenthood, full-time employment and the opportunity to move into more stable independent accommodation) can help contribute to a gradual shift away from criminal behavior.

In recent years social constraints may have delayed this maturation process, impacting on the ability of young adults to become fully independent. In our 2013 scoping study we highlighted how young adults were "taking the brunt of the recession" and being held back from independence by a combination of poor job opportunities and a severe lack of affordable housing⁹. The most recent data from 2017 demonstrates that the proportion of young adults living with their parents has

grown since our 2013 report was published, and has now reached a record high of 26 per cent (of those aged 20-34)¹⁰. The figure is higher among young men (32 per cent), the demographic most likely to come into regular contact with the police. Without work and stable housing, the opportunities for young adults to move on from the life stages most closely associated with persistent offending are significantly curtailed.

Young adults and the police

It is increasingly recognised that the factors described above should be taken into consideration when deciding how to police young adults. A lack of understanding of the challenges facing this group, and how they may impact on their decision making and behaviour, could lead to a generation who enter adult life with both reduced life chances and negative perceptions of the police – both of which might have implications for future offending. It is vital that the police recognise that once key opportunities to encourage desistance are missed, and a young adult transitions into adulthood with a criminal record, the implications both for their life chances and for the workload placed on the police and wider criminal justice system are stark.

The contextual drivers outlined above are unlikely to change dramatically in the coming years, as widespread austerity and cuts to local authority budgets continue. Policing should consider how it can help to address the issue and what a distinct approach to individuals aged 18 to 25 might look like. This paper is intended to inform such efforts.

⁸ Steinberg, L. and E. Cauffman (1996). "Maturity of judgment in adolescence: Psychosocial factors in adolescent decision making." *Law and Human Behavior* 20(3): 249-272.

⁹ http://www.police-foundation.org.uk/2017/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/policing_young_adults.pdf

¹⁰ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/families/datasets/youngadultslivingwiththeirparents>

3. 2013 SCOPING STUDY

Our initial scoping study, published in 2013¹¹, provides the foundation for this report. Based upon a series of interviews with police staff and young adults, the report found that UK policing lagged behind other countries in properly recognising the distinct needs of the young adult age group. Its key conclusions can be summarised as follows;

- *Police and Crime Commissioners*

The introduction of Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) was seen as having potential to effect genuine change around the policing of young adults. Given their mandate to hold police to account, reflect local concerns in their crime plans and oversee the police budget, PCCs were said to ‘hold the key’ to any shifts in approach.

- *Police training*

The police were shown to lack the necessary training to deal with the distinct needs of the young adult age group. There was a disconnect observed between training and the actual day-to-day practice of frontline officers.

- *Stop and search*

The use of stop and search powers in relation to the young adult population was identified as a particular area of concern. The treatment of young adults in this context was shown to be in sharp contrast to the way in which they were dealt with as potentially vulnerable individuals in the night time economy, in need of police care and attention.

- *Negative perceptions of the police*

A tailored approach towards the policing of young adults must ensure that it consistently applies the core principles of procedural justice – treating all members of the public, regardless of their age, in an equally fair and just manner. In order for young adults’ attitudes towards the police to improve, the police themselves must ensure that they treat 18 to 25 year olds with as much respect as they would those in other more senior age groups.

¹¹ http://www.police-foundation.org.uk/2017/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/policing_young_adults.pdf

4. DEVELOPMENTS 2013-2018

Police and Crime Commissioners

“Police and Crime Commissioners are well-positioned strategically to champion and coordinate more effective approaches, including diversionary approaches, and have been able to leverage multi-agency resources, including funding for victims’ services and partnerships with local authorities and health services.”

House of Commons Justice Committee

In 2012 the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government introduced the role of Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) in 41 of the 43 forces across England and Wales (with a unique arrangement for the two London forces). Both coalition parties stated that the incoming PCCs would help improve local accountability and ensure that local issues and demands were better reflected in force priorities. It was hoped that PCCs would be able to cut across the youth and adult justice systems and assist local forces in constructing an approach that would deal with those transitioning into adulthood, to lessen the impact of the aforementioned ‘cliff-edge’.

In our 2013 scoping study we identified the introduction of the PCC role as having the *potential* to significantly “improve the policing of young adults” and offering a chance to “fundamentally alter the relationship between the police, the government and the public”.¹² One of the key aspects of the role was the introduction of a Police and Crime Plan for each of the 43 forces across England and Wales. These plans were intended to provide the public with a much clearer idea of how their taxes would be spent on policing over each four-year PCC term. The plans offer an insight into both force priorities and the prominence of explicit attention given to the vulnerabilities of young adults. Drawing on analysis¹³ conducted by the Revolving Doors Agency (a criminal justice charity and member of the Transition to Adulthood Alliance) we can see that there has been a considerable drop in the number of plans (between 2012 and 2016) that identify young adults as a local priority.

	POLICE AND CRIME PLAN 2012	POLICE AND CRIME PLAN 2016
PLANS THAT IDENTIFIED YOUNG ADULTS AS LOCAL VULNERABILITY	86%	65%

Figure 1: Summary of Revolving Doors Police and Crime Plan Review¹⁴

NPCC strategy on children and young people

Children and young people (aged 0 to 25) account for significant proportion of the national population (12 million of a total 60 million residents of England, Wales and Northern Ireland). Olivia Pinkney, Chief Constable of Hampshire Constabulary, currently acts as the national lead responsible for improving the police response to children and young people (CYP). As part of this role she is responsible for assessing current policing approaches for all individuals aged up to 25 and in 2016 her office launched the first ever NPCC Children and Young People (CYP) strategy¹⁵.

Within this strategy there is a distinction made between the three age groups that fall under the overall umbrella of children and young people; under 10, 10 to 17 (the group subject to the majority of existing legislation) and 18 to 25 (identified by the strategy as those individuals transitioning into adulthood). In previous police definitions of children and young people, young adults were not included and only under-18s were considered. This inclusion of 18 to 25 year olds suggests that there is a gradual shift emerging in the way the police think about, and approach, the young adult age group.

The CYP strategy explicitly recognises that young adults are “at a key stage of development” both in terms of their physical and mental maturity, but also in terms of the social decisions they make and how this can affect their likelihood of engaging in criminal activity. While the majority of the work of the CYP national lead and her team will likely focus on the two younger age groups,

¹² http://www.police-foundation.org.uk/2017/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/policing_young_adults.pdf

¹³ <http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/blog/under-spotlight-review-police-and-crime-plans>

¹⁴ <http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/blog/under-spotlight-review-police-and-crime-plans>

¹⁵ <http://www.npcc.police.uk/documents/edhr/2015/CYP%20Strategy%202015%202017%20August%202015.pdf>

there is at least now some acknowledgement of the impact that the police can have on the 18 to 25 age group as they transition to adulthood.

“It has been recognised that the 18 to 24 year age range is a key stage of development; the brain is still developing, independence is gained, socialising activity increases, and experimentation with drugs, alcohol and sexual relationships takes place. This coincides with a time when they are most likely to come into contact with the police”

NPCC CYP National Strategy

The CYP strategy outlines the four priority areas in which the police intend to concentrate their efforts over the coming years:

- 1. Stop and search policy**
- 2. Children in care**
- 3. Detention and custody of children and young people**
- 4. The relationship between young people and the police**

Below we explore how young adults specifically are impacted upon in the three of the priority areas that are relevant to them (excluding discussions around children in care). We do this with reference to our previous scoping report, the existing literature and recent developments in policy and practice.

Stop and search policy

Stop and search has been shown to most significantly affect those within the young adult age group, and negative experiences of being subject to regular stops can have a significant long term impact on young adult perceptions of their local police. Our 2013 scoping report identified the repeated (perceived) misuse of stop and search as the most common issue cited by young adults for the development of a negative perception of the police. The IPCC described the tactic as the “leading cause of tension”¹⁶ between young adults and the police, while the NPCC CYP strategy itself identified the stop and search moment as “highly emotive” and potentially “harmful to trust and confidence” among young adults¹⁷.

The behaviour of frontline officers in individual instances can indeed have a long lasting impact on citizen’s perceptions of the police. It can create hostility and mistrust among the local young adult population that can

often take years to rebuild. In recent years more attention has been paid to the circumstances in which stop and search is appropriate and there is an active on-going debate within policing, both senior and frontline, about the extent of its legitimacy as a tactic to disrupt criminality and the disproportionality in its use in relation to young adults, in particular those from black or minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds.

The Criminal Justice Alliance (CJA) carried out a series of interviews with BAME young adults that shed some light on their perspective of stop and search. While some of the respondents did accept there was a potential operational benefit to the tactic (eg taking knives off the streets) the majority thought it to be employed much too aggressively, and in many cases those that had regular experience of being stopped indicated that it had left them “feeling humiliated and victimised”¹⁸.

The key issue identified by the CJA report does not concern the effectiveness of stop and search as a crime reduction tactic. Their focus was instead on the considerable long term damage that the tactic can have on a young adult’s perception of the police and how this can often outweigh any operational benefits gained by the tactic’s use. Many of the respondents commented that the police could hide behind “the uniform and the badge” if any complaints were made around their conduct. Police legitimacy is of course notoriously difficult to quantify, particularly when public satisfaction surveys may struggle to reach the young adults who most commonly come into contact with the police.

“As a young adult, it’s still affecting me. I would never have anything on me but when I’m around them I would start moving mad like, I just move a bit crazy like, how I shouldn’t move cause I’m genuinely innocent.”

Criminal Justice Alliance interview participant

In the years since our 2013 scoping report was published police use of stop and search has decreased considerably across England and Wales. Home Office data shows that there has been a nationwide drop off in the use of the tactic starting in 2010 and accelerating from 2013 onwards.¹⁹ Further investigation and analysis of the reasoning and decision making behind this fall will feature in an upcoming Police Foundation report on the use of stop and search.

¹⁶ https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/14-02-06-Stop%20and%20search%20FINAL_1.pdf

¹⁷ <http://www.npcc.police.uk/documents/edhr/2015/CYP%20Strategy%202015%202017%20August%202015.pdf>

¹⁸ <http://criminaljusticealliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/No-Respect-290617-1.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-powers-and-procedures-england-and-wales-year-ending-31-march-2017>

Detention and custody of children and young people

In 2007 close to a quarter of a million children across England and Wales received a caution or conviction for an offence. Of this overall group of 225,000 just under half (106,000) were first time entrants into the criminal justice system. Over the past decade a concerted effort across policing and all other agencies of the criminal justice system has led to a significant reduction in this figure.

The number of children receiving a caution or conviction in 2015 was down to 47,000 (a 79 per cent reduction over an eight-year period). A similar fall (of 82 per cent) can be seen in terms of the numbers of under-18s entering the youth justice system. This fall reflects a growing recognition that the criminal justice system should treat young offenders, wherever possible, as potentially vulnerable individuals undergoing a likely short-lived phase of offending. Minor offences have been dealt with more leniently, with an increased focus on diversion, and a consistent aim of significantly reducing the numbers of under-18s entering the criminal justice system.

The recognition that an enforcement oriented approach is often not appropriate could also be applied to the 18 to 25 group. While this age group may not be afforded the same distinct set of legal rights as under-18s evidence and consensus is emerging that a tailored approach, that properly recognises their distinct needs and demands is long overdue. At present there is very little legislation that specifically addresses young adult offenders. The interviews conducted as part of this report have identified pockets of good practice across policing (outlined below); unfortunately in certain cases these local often small-scale examples suffer from a lack of support in policy and legislation at the national level.

The relationship between young people and the police

In our 2013 report we identified the significant negative impact that existing police procedures, in particular the misuse of police powers, can have on young adults' perceptions of the police. Approaches perceived to be

demeaning and patronising had led to a commonly held view that the police did not care about the needs of young adults, regardless of their status as either offenders or victims of crime. The majority of the young adults surveyed as part of our 2013 study considered the relationship between young people and the police to be fundamentally broken. They felt that there was misunderstanding, consistent age-based discrimination, and over stereotyping of those aged 18 to 25²⁰. Added to this sense of disconnect, a number of young adults also commented that they felt there were few avenues for dialogue with police officers and those in the age group.

Since the publication of our report a number of forces (such as Durham and Greater Manchester Police) have begun programmes of training around procedural justice, and it could be argued that such programmes should be expanded further. Policing approaches based upon procedural justice recognise the reasons why the public remain willing to cooperate with the police and adhere to the rule of law and emphasise the impact of police communication upon public perceptions of fairness and justice. While the principle of procedural justice would benefit all members of the public, it is potentially most valuable when applied to the policing of young adults aged 18 to 25, an age group which can sometimes have the most entrenched negative views of the police. In 2013 the College of Policing conducted a series of pilot studies across Greater Manchester (GMP) to assess the value of procedural justice training for frontline officers. Findings from a series of trials demonstrated that the interventions; "had a consistent and positive impact on officer attitudes, officer behaviour, and victim perceptions"²¹. One of the key recommendations of this research was the significant potential that such training possesses for areas of policing where levels of public satisfaction are currently low. This could include young adults, in particular with regard to repeat offenders and those who are regularly subject to stop and search. Due to the success of this pilot-based research across GMP a number of other forces (including West Midlands) are now considering a similar approach and there appears to be clear potential for procedural justice training to positively impact on the police relationship with young adults.

²⁰ http://www.police-foundation.org.uk/2017/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/policing_young_adults.pdf

²¹ <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/cfd9/fcf8e139e8e7371984b4858c33e4ea528f0a.pdf>

5. DEVELOPING A TAILORED APPROACH

The evidence outlined above demonstrates that there are ongoing problems with the current approach towards the policing of young adults. Added to this, current reoffending rates among the young adult age group (recent figures show that 75 per cent are reconvicted within two years of their release from prison)²² are considerably higher than other sections of the population.

In this section we will look at how a tailored approach towards young adults could be developed across policing. We will consider what key principles would be needed in order to move forward and also discuss the practical and operational feasibility of the new approaches identified. The key features of a distinct policing approach to this age group will be outlined and the paper will conclude with a list of next steps for developing a tailored approach to the policing of young adults.

Existing approaches

In the absence of a substantive secondary research literature on this topic, a series of interviews were conducted across the second half of 2017. Research respondents included academics, researchers, youth justice workers, a representative of the NPPC national lead for Children and Young People, two Police and Crime Commissioners and staff from four other Police and Crime Commissioners' offices. The respondents are all stakeholders in the policing of young adults and were thus able to offer insights into current policy and practice, and most importantly, offer a space for discussion surrounding the potential for further initiatives in this area.

Throughout the interview process we were made aware of a number of initiatives across the UK developing new approaches towards the policing of young adults. In this section, we will outline some of the most notable examples and discuss the possibility for adoption or rollout on a larger scale, as part of a further development of the T2A agenda. Outlined below are four examples of existing strategies directed towards the young adult age group. The overall intention of each of these strategies is to improve young adults' experience of police interaction (and thus in the long term, improve police legitimacy as these individuals transition into adulthood) and to reduce the likelihood that a young adult will reoffend in the future.

Alternative paths for young adults – Metropolitan Police Service Divert

Divert was established by an MPS police inspector in the London borough of Lambeth and has been run in conjunction with the Milestone Foundation in Brixton custody suite since 2015. Its primary aim is to offer young adult offenders an alternative path away from crime at the point of police detention, seeking to remove them from a potential cycle of reoffending and incarceration.

As part of the initiative, offenders are offered various programmes of support and practical guidance to find forms of employment that are sustainable alternatives to the illegal lifestyles they are currently pursuing. They are offered apprenticeships, and through developed relationships with local employers, are invited to job interviews and job fairs, with the ultimate goal being to demonstrate that there is always an alternative to a life of crime. The Divert scheme recognises one of the key findings of the T2A programme – that while young adults may be the largest group in terms of offenders, they equally represent a unique cohort in their potential for desistance. While the initiative is still in relative infancy and it has yet to be formally evaluated, its early results have shown significant promise and it offers a potential blueprint from which other forces can develop and adapt their own programmes, targeted and tailored toward the specific needs and demands of their own young adult population.

The initial Divert pilot engaged 116 young adult offenders, with 38 of that group now in employment and 76 undertaking some form of job training.

Notwithstanding the potentially huge savings this offers to the taxpayer it is also one of the best examples of a specifically police-led initiative that is offering young adults a significant opportunity to move away from a life of crime and instead pursue a more viable path into meaningful long-term employment and stability.

“I can't thank the [Milestone] Foundation enough; they have not just got me a placement, they have continued to mentor me and help me overcome many challenges along the way; without them I would most probably have reoffended.”

Divert pilot participant

²² Barrow Cadbury Trust / Transition to Adulthood (T2A) Alliance

Deferring prosecution – Durham Operation Checkpoint/West Midlands Turning Point

Operation Checkpoint in Durham works on a similar principle to Divert. It offers offenders a way out of a life of crime via a four-month fixed contract that involves interventions to address the root causes of criminal behaviour and decision making, and encourages offenders to explore alternative paths. Unlike Divert, Checkpoint is not tailored specifically to the young adult population, yet as it is designed to address offenders early in their offending, is particularly applicable and has in fact been applied to individuals aged 18 to 25.

Within the Checkpoint contract a number of other conditions are included; including a restorative justice element, periods of voluntary work, and constant GPS monitoring to ensure that the contract is honoured. Durham constabulary have stressed (as have the Metropolitan Police around Divert) that Checkpoint should not be seen as a soft option and that it will never be offered in cases of serious offences; such as rape, murder or domestic abuse. Rather it is an innovative approach directed towards less serious and non-violent offences, attempting to solve the current high rates of reoffending and in the long term save the taxpayer considerable sums, due to the significant costs of imprisonment.

Another programme that aims to divert offenders away from the traditional pathways of the criminal justice system, Operation Turning Point, was piloted across the West Midlands policing area from 2011 to 2014. The trial's aim was twofold; to improve effectiveness of the prosecution of low-harm/low-risk offenders and equally to reduce costs incurred by the police. Offenders deemed suitable (no previous convictions, non-violent offence, likelihood of desistance) were offered the option of signing a 'turning point contract', which would then result in their prosecution being deferred and a list of conditions to be agreed by police and offender.

Both Checkpoint and Turning Point have been subject to academic evaluation^{23 24} and deemed to offer a viable alternative to the current approach. Further, more rigorous, assessments are necessary before any wider, potentially nationwide, rollout can be considered.

Young adult engagement – Nottinghamshire Youth Commissions

A number of interview respondents referenced the importance of engaging young adults in forums to influence police decision making, such as youth

commissions, in establishing positive relationships with the youth and young adult population. While no force considered them to be a 'silver bullet' solution there was an acceptance that they can go some way in improving young adult's perceptions and experiences of their local police. The quotation below from a commission participant further illustrates the pressing need for dialogue between the police and young adults.

"I don't have any trust in the police. The police don't trust me. It's prejudice. I'm fed up with feeling like I've done something wrong when I'm just hanging about with my mates."

**Nottinghamshire Youth
Commission participant**

The commissions follow a similar process nationwide; key groups are identified and invited to take part, themes are then chosen by the participants and the views of all involved are collected and collated. Following the close of the initial commission, certain members of the commission are invited to take up a partnership role within their local force, helping to embed and further develop recommendations and offer their view on recruitment and training.

Interview respondents raised concerns as to how closely the commission's participants reflected the population who most urgently needed engaging – those young adults regularly coming into contact with the police. Due to these individuals often being from 'hard-to-reach' communities a number of interviewees suggested that commissions may in fact only reflect the views of those young adults who are *willing* to engage with the police voluntarily (and thus may not be representative of the wider population). Reservations were also expressed as to how significant an impact such commissions can actually have upon the day-to-day operations of frontline police. If young adults continue to report negative encounters with officers in forces where these commissions are active, then perhaps their effectiveness should be questioned.

Key to making sure these commissions have impact is to involve young adults in conversations with the important decision makers. For example, in Nottinghamshire as part of the interview process for the new chief constable position all applicants had to undergo an interview with a cross section of young people from previous commissions.

²³ <http://www.crim.cam.ac.uk/alumni/theses/Gillian%20Porter.pdf>

²⁴ http://www.crim.cam.ac.uk/events/conferences/ebp/2013/slides/Operation_turningpoint_ebp2013.pdf

Multi-agency collaboration for young adults – South Wales triage scheme

South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner Alun Michael has developed a number of initiatives that intend to extend youth justice principles from the under-18 age group to 18 to 25s. In interviews conducted as part of this research it was outlined how the continued success of youth offending teams and youth advisory boards should be scaled up to the next age group wherever possible. An example of one such initiative, a young adult triage scheme, has now passed the pilot stage and is planned to be rolled out across the South Wales policing region.

The triage scheme (as is the case with a number of other young adult-focused strategies) has a restorative focus, and takes place within the offender's community. The hope is that a combination of workshops, interaction with the victim, and group-work programmes can offer

an alternative to imprisonment, which in many cases, serves only to increase the likelihood that a young adult will continue to pursue crime beyond the age of 25.

The approach has two key areas of focus; first, a plan to extend out of court disposals to young adult offenders (combined with improved data collection to identify gaps in provision and develop a more evidence-based approach) and second, an increase in employment opportunities for young adult repeat offenders by offering to cover insurance and training costs.²⁵

It is vital that for any scheme of this type to succeed, there is buy-in from across local public sector agencies and agreement between across the local criminal justice system, healthcare and youth services, (commonly referred to as a 'whole-system approach'). A multi-agency approach of this type would not be viable without the full and engaged involvement of the local police force.

²⁵ https://www.barrowcadbury.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/T2A_PCC_Improving_responses_final4web.pdf

6. FEASIBILITY OF A TAILORED APPROACH

Key principles

In order to develop a tailored approach towards the policing of young adults a number of key principles must be maintained throughout the development process. These principles will help to ensure that the police consistently recognise the unique needs of the young adult age group.

1. Procedural justice should inform all police encounters with young adults (both victims and offenders) and include recognition of the unique needs and demands of individuals within the 18 to 25 age group.
2. The police must take the concerns of young adults into account and maintain a genuine engagement with this section of the population, incorporating these concerns into the development of policing responses.
3. In appropriate circumstances, the police should seek to divert young adults away from the criminal justice system (in a similar vein to the approach pursued towards under-18s over the past decade).

Potential obstacles

As part of our interview process, all respondents were asked to outline what, in their opinion, were the main obstacles to further adoption of distinct policing approaches to the young adult age group. These observations offer considerable insight into the current context and the various factors that need to be addressed if the wider Transition to Adulthood programme – which has begun to see some acceptance across other agencies of the criminal justice system – is to be taken up equally enthusiastically across policing.

Lack of sufficient data

In terms of current police data the primary distinction made regarding the age of offenders and victims is whether they are a child or an adult (whether they are under 18 or over). Due to this consistent focus on 18 as the cut-off point there is a lack of analysis that considers young adults as be a distinct group. Because of this it is difficult to understand the unique needs of the young adult population from the perspective of policing.

In order for a distinct agenda to be put into practice the police must identify young adults as a separate group

within their own data. Such a shift should be relatively straight forward as age data is routinely captured in crime and other police records.

Organisational culture

A number of respondents identified a reluctance among police officers to be seen as softening their approach to adult offenders, regardless of their neurological or psychosocial maturity. One recounted an officer stating that “adults are adults” and any crime committed by an adult should be met with the full force of the law, regardless of the offender’s psychological/neurological maturity or their current social situation. Such comments mirror the findings expressed in our 2013 report where officers interviewed expressed the belief that once an individual had reached the age of 18 they had had more than enough of a chance to desist from patterns of offending.

There is a wider question here about how best to influence police culture and inspire a shift in attitudes towards young adults, in a similar manner to the sea change in the police approach to under-18s. A better understanding, among frontline officers, of the distinct needs of the young adult age group, could help to shift opinion.

Leadership and organisational structure

Respondents identified that a common issue in relation to leadership and organisation was the lack of clarity as to who was best placed to drive change in the approach to policing young adults. Added to this was a general lack of appetite to volunteer to be at the forefront of any genuine change. This was argued to have a particularly negative impact on the expansion of current small-scale approaches, similar to those outlined above. Similarly there was identified a poor structure for the sharing of best practice from one region to the next. This lack of structure was said to be most significant among PCCs, where not enough space or time was allocated for them to meet and discuss properly the success they had experienced in their area surrounding the policing of young adults.

A significant disconnect was also identified between senior policing statements, official policing policy and the actual day-to-day practice of police officers. The young adults interviewed as part of our 2013 report identified

the difference between what they had heard from senior officers and official police statements and their lived reality of regular encounters with frontline officers.

Legal issues

Police are bound by UK, EU and international law to treat minors under the age of 18 in very specific ways. Interviews conducted with staff from the office of the NPCC CYP lead demonstrated that the much stronger international rulings that exist surrounding the protection of children provide police with a strong framework upon which to act. This particular set of legal provisions, often arising from concerns around child custody and child protection cannot be easily extended to those aged 18 to 25, and is unlikely to be extended at any point in the near future.

This lack of legal provision for the young adult age group means that potential pilot studies will have to take place within the current legal structure and it is vital that all forces involved properly understand the significance of this limitation. An additional constraint is that partner agencies, with whom the police must interact, primarily provide services for under-18s (eg young offender institutions, youth courts, social care services) and are equally unlikely to want to extend their remit to an entirely separate age group.

Key features

Based on our analysis above, we can identify the following key features of a distinct and tailored approach to the policing of young adults:

1. A renewed emphasis on the training that officers receive is likely to be essential. This training should focus on how best to manage young adults and

should take into consideration the expertise of more experienced senior officers within each force. Procedural justice training could be rolled out and could be particularly applied in the area of stop and search tactics.

2. Supervision and support which offers new recruits the option of a supervisor who can assist with their early encounters of young adults could be provided for officers in the first years of their operational service.
3. Existing engagement work with the young adult population (eg Nottinghamshire Youth Commission) could be extended in order to properly understand their needs. More work could be done to uncover disparities in the public's trust of the police among different age groups and genders (in particular the reluctance of young adult females to report crimes to the police).
4. Police forces could seek to divert young adult offenders away from the criminal justice system in appropriate circumstances. Initiatives such as Divert could be considered for rollout beyond their immediate locales and officers and staff could be encouraged to propose alternative approaches, along with professional bodies such as the College of Policing, to develop a tailored approach towards the policing of young adults.

7. NEXT STEPS TOWARDS DEVELOPING A TAILORED APPROACH

To take these ideas from theory and into practice the Police Foundation proposes a programme of pilot-based research in collaboration with police forces across England and Wales with the aim of enabling more effective interactions between police and young adults. The specific objectives of the next phase would be:

- An increased awareness of effective police interactions with young adults.
- Enhanced knowledge of how effective responses can be put in place.
- Improved perceptions of fairness among young adults.
- Increased options for responding to low-level young adult offending at point of arrest.
- Higher victim satisfaction with policing responses to young adults.

The next phase would focus on three key areas (identified as part of the interview process and literature review conducted for this report):

1. Improving the procedural fairness of key interactions between the police and young adults.
2. The use of appropriate point-of-arrest diversion schemes.
3. The use of formal engagement mechanisms between the police and young adults.

Research activity

1. Developing and supporting a network

A network should be formed through an open call to all 43 police force areas across England and Wales, inviting interested people to become involved with the work. It would consist of four separate groups of people: policy-makers and national leads; practitioners currently delivering effective approaches; representatives of the police areas keen to be involved in developing new approaches (see below); and a wider set of people with an interest in the work. The network would come together at least twice during the project's first year to advise on and support the development of practice case studies and host effective practice learning visits.

2. In-depth practice development work with six police areas

We propose to work in depth with six police force areas interested in trialling a new approach in one of the three key areas outlined above, helping them to convene relevant local stakeholders, assess their options, agree an approach and formulate an implementation plan to test the agreed approaches. Where possible and appropriate, we would support these police force areas to identify any necessary resources to implement their adapted processes. Specifically, we would:

- **Identify the key interactions between the police and young adults and assess existing police training around procedural fairness.** We would engage young people to identify the key interactions they have with police and we would supplement this qualitative research with analysis of existing surveys to identify the attitudes and perceptions of fairness among young adults and feed this into the initial stages of work with both the network and the practice improvement areas. We would then work in-depth in three police force areas to review existing training around procedural fairness and provide options for change which take account of the evidence on young adults.
- **Review and promote the use of point of arrest diversion for young adults.** Using peer researchers and other methods, we would review the practice of existing diversion schemes, including looking at data on racial and gender disparity. We would then work in-depth in three new police force areas which are operating existing youth diversion schemes to assess the desirability and feasibility of developing corresponding provision for 18 to 25 year olds.
- **Review and promote the use of effective formal engagement mechanisms between the police and young adults.** Review stakeholder perceptions of the efficacy of existing formal engagement mechanisms and highlight options for change in three new police areas.

3. Actionable summaries of the evidence and practice development

We would develop summaries of the research literature on effective practice across the three key areas above and present these to participating police areas, demonstrating the potential benefits (in terms of individual outcomes and cost savings) of developing tailored approaches towards young adults.

The final product of the project would be a report collating and presenting all that has been learnt on evidencing, developing and implementing more effective police interactions with young adults. We would also convene a seminar to discuss and disseminate the learning and stimulate others to consider changing their practice.

8. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This research paper has provided a summary of the current state of affairs surrounding the policing of young adults. It has shown that there is sufficient evidence, from researchers and practitioners, to support the case

that there should be a tailored approach to policing the 18 to 25 age group. It has offered a series of 'next steps' and a list of recommendations for police forces who wish to further develop such approaches.

ANNEX 1: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED

1.	Miranda Bevan	LSE Social Policy
2.	Natacha Skelton	Sussex OPCC
3.	Phil Bowen	Centre for Justice Innovation
4.	Rose Dowling	Leaders Unlocked
5.	Alan Billings	South Yorkshire PCC
6.	Paul Bullen	Northamptonshire OPCC
7.	Caroline Adams	Staff Officer for Olivia Pinkney
8.	Alun Michael	South Wales PCC
9.	Sangeeta Bhui	MOPAC (Restorative Justice)
10.	Daniel Howitt	Nottinghamshire OPCC

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