



***Why is the  
criminal  
justice  
system  
failing  
young  
adults?***

People aged 18–24 account for:

**1/10** of the UK population

**1/3** of those sentenced to prison each year

**1/3** of the probation service caseload

**1/3** of the total economic and social costs of crime

Yet **1/2** released from prison are reconvicted within 1 year

The current system is not working and is wasting the public's money

The Transition to Adulthood (T2A) Alliance, a coalition of 14 leading criminal justice, health and youth organisations, calls on all Parliamentarians to:

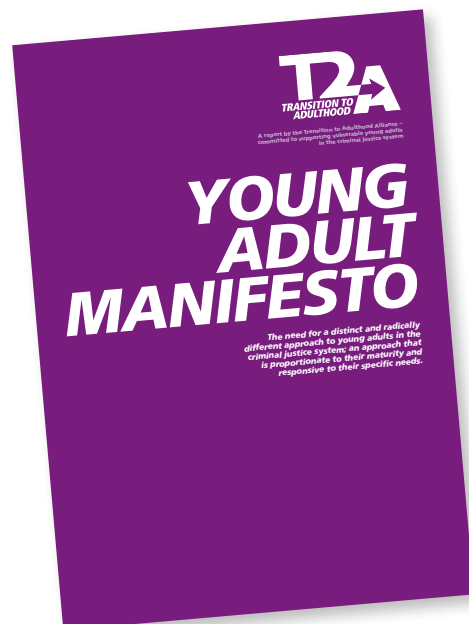
*'Support a distinct and radically different approach to young adults in the criminal justice system; an approach that is proportionate to their maturity and responsive to their specific needs'*

This would save money, reduce crime and improve lives.

It's in everyone's interest.

We ask you to support our **10 Manifesto recommendations**. Based on more than 5 years of collecting evidence, consulting on solutions, and piloting practical interventions, these emphasise the need to:

1. **Change**: All of the agencies that comprise the criminal justice system should recognise young adults (aged 18–24) as a distinct age group of people who are still developing and who experience specific social and economic challenges
2. **Divert**: Models of diversion, which seek to divert those who have committed minor, non-violent offences into mainstream services, should particularly focus on young adults with mental health problems, drug or alcohol misuse problems, and learning difficulties or disabilities
3. **Restore**: There should be an expansion of the use of Restorative Justice Conferencing to enable young adult offenders to hear about the impact of their crimes on victims and make appropriate reparation
4. **Mitigate**: The government should consider how the developing maturity of young adults can be taken into account by sentencers in the courts
5. **Replace**: Short sentences of less than six months should be replaced by intensive community alternatives for young adults convicted of non-violent offences



6. **Save**: Resources saved from a lower use of custodial sentences should be reinvested into community provision that addresses the specific needs of young adults and addresses the causes of their offending
7. **Communicate**: There should be improvements in the way 18-year-olds are transferred from being the responsibility of Youth Offending Teams to the Probation Service, and from juvenile to adult prison establishments
8. **Support**: Intensive support should be made available for every young adult on release from custody, using the expertise of former offenders where appropriate
9. **Educate**: Education, work or training should become a central focus of custodial regimes in all Young Offender Institutions and continue after release from prison
10. **Employ**: There should be a national employment initiative to improve the chances of employment for ex-offenders in this age group across the private, voluntary and public sectors

## Why young adults?

**Variable maturity**: People mature at different rates, and many young adults in the criminal justice system exhibit development levels more characteristic of far younger people. Brain development continues into the mid to late 20s, affecting reason, judgement and impulse control, and young people with the most troubled or traumatic childhoods often take a lot longer to mature.

**A critical age for getting it right**: The peak crime age is late teens – young adults are the most likely age group to desist and 'grow out of crime'. The wrong intervention at this time, such as a wasteful short prison sentence, can extend the time a young person might commit crime, and even trigger a criminal career. Between the ages of 18 and 24 the focus should be on encouraging desistance from crime and supporting the factors which reduce criminal behaviour: employment, housing and health.

**Society has changed**: The age at which someone becomes a fully independent adult in society is much later now than it was in earlier decades. The criminal justice system's approach to 18-24 year-olds is out of step with cultural and social norms of transitions to adulthood, and young people with no support are greatly disadvantaged.

**Young adults have complex needs**: Young adults in trouble with the law often have high levels of complex need and are from backgrounds of great disadvantage. Offenders frequently have few or no educational qualifications, and no experience of work. They also suffer from high levels of mental ill-health, and alcohol and drug misuse problems. These are often even more acute during someone's transition to adulthood, as child-focused support services – such as care services, child and adolescent mental health services, children's services and youth offending services – disappear at 18

**The criminal justice system is failing**: Young adults commit approximately a third of all crime, represent a third of all those sentenced to custody each year and take up a third of probation case load. The University of York estimated the cost of young adult crime at £20 billion per year, and 70% of young adults released from prison, often following very short sentences, in and out of prison with little support in the community, are unsurprisingly reconvicted within two years.

**Impact on the future**: A criminal record can be a major and long-standing barrier to employment, which will have a very scarring effect on young adults. The Sentencing Guidelines Council found that those under 18 should not be sentenced as harshly as adults because of the disproportionate impact this can have on their future life chances. Other countries do things differently, and have much better outcomes. In Germany, sentencing takes into account the immaturity of young adults, and they can be prosecuted as children.

**Other Departments are moving in the right direction**: The Home Office and Ministry of Justice, in treating young adults in transition the same as older people, are out of step with other government departments and other practice on the ground. The DWP has policies specifically aimed at young people aged 18-24, on account of their specific needs and life stage, recognising that there is a complex tangle of benefits, support and penalties throughout the transition to adulthood.

**Poor transitions to adulthood impact on the next generation**: At least a quarter of young men in prison are fathers and the majority of young women in prison are mothers. 65% of children who have parents in prison will offend later in life. The wrong interventions in young adults within the criminal justice system can hamper their ability to maintain relationships and family contact, which perpetuates crime. However, getting it right can help young people move away from crime and improve the life chances of their children.

# T2A Pilots

The Barrow Cadbury Trust has established three pilots, running from 2009-2012, which will test different approaches to improving services for young adults in the criminal justice system. The T2A pilots enable community interventions to be tailored to the needs of the individual, with the aim to reduce both the risk of reoffending and social exclusion.

## Birmingham



Delivered by the Staffordshire and West Midlands Probation Trust, this project focuses on 17-24 year olds with medium to low needs, specifically providing assistance with accommodation, employment, relationships and substance misuse. It includes advocacy, advice and mentoring both in custody and the community, as well as additional support to motivate the young adults to access appropriate interventions.

## Worcestershire



Delivered by YSS (Youth Support Services), this project offers a flexible, community based, one to one support and mentoring project using a mix of paid staff and local volunteers. The project embeds the principles of service user involvement and is clearly aligned to and supported by Probation, YOS, Youth Service, Connexions, Children's Services, Police, Prison and other agencies to promote new practice and to shape local policy.

## London



Hosted by the St Giles Trust's SOS project, this project identifies young offenders primarily in HMP YO1 Rochester, engaging with them well before release, and then supporting them upon release into Southwark and Croydon. The service is delivered by staff who are all qualified ex-offenders and comprises of mentoring, motivational work, attitudinal work, combined with competent practical support in areas such as housing, benefits and employment, training and education.

A formative evaluation of the T2A pilots is being conducted by Oxford University, and an outcomes evaluation by Catch 22.



is convened and funded by



## T2A ALLIANCE MEMBERS



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the Howard League for Penal Reform



PRISON  
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young people  
in focus

## To find out more or to get in touch

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Download all of the T2A Alliance publications  
(including reports, good practice guides,  
policy proposals, and cost-benefit analysis) at  
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