



HM Inspectorate  
of Probation

# **Transitional Safeguarding in youth justice and probation services: A scoping study**

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**HM Inspectorate of Probation**  
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HM Inspectorate of Probation is committed to reviewing, developing and promoting the evidence base for high-quality probation and youth justice services. Our *Research & Analysis Bulletins* are aimed at all those with an interest in the quality of these services, presenting key findings to assist with informed debate and help drive improvement where it is required. The findings are used within HM Inspectorate of Probation to develop our inspection programmes, guidance and position statements.

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## Executive summary

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### Context

Transitional Safeguarding is defined as: 'An approach to safeguarding adolescents and young adults fluidly across developmental stages which builds on the best available evidence, learns from both children's and adult safeguarding practice, and which prepares young people for their adult lives' (Holmes and Smale, 2018, p3).

This approach and the service transition from youth justice to probation are not one and the same. The transition from youth justice to probation is a process of moving or transferring between two systems at the age of 18, while the transition to adulthood is not a one-off discrete event but happens in different spaces and with different temporal boundaries according to the individual experience. Transitional Safeguarding is an approach that recognises the liminality and reality of the older adolescent/young adult period, namely safeguarding young people across the threshold of 18 years. The approach pays attention to the barriers and inequalities experienced at this stage of development (Cocker et al., 2024).

To date, there has been no research explicitly exploring how Transitional Safeguarding is understood and applied within the youth justice and probation service context to support young people aged between mid-teens to mid-twenties. Holmes and Smith (2022) authored the [Academic Insights paper 2022/03](#), providing suggestions on the potential application of Transitional Safeguarding within justice services. This study provides an overview of how youth justice and probation embed the six key principles of Transitional Safeguarding into their service design. These principles are that any Transitional Safeguarding approach must be:

- evidence-informed
- contextual/ecological
- transitional/developmental
- relational
- attentive to equity, equalities, diversity, inclusion (EEDI)
- participative.

### Approach

This research sought the views and experiences of professionals using a mixed methods approach to investigate how youth justice and probation work together (and separately) to provide services to young people (aged mid-teens to mid-twenties) that encompass the six key principles of Transitional Safeguarding. We used a literature review, survey, secondary analysis of HMI Probation data, interviews and focus groups as methods in the research. The survey and secondary data analysis encompassed all of England, whilst the interviews and focus groups focused on five study sites.

### Key findings and implications

#### ***Barriers to effective safeguarding during transitions from youth justice to probation***

There is impetus for a Transitional Safeguarding approach at practice and strategic levels. However, translation of this impetus into direct practice has not been fully evidenced or is not happening. Leaders and practitioners in youth justice and probation recognise the need for transitional arrangements to be different than they are now. The social policy framework exists, but the practice and system realities impact on how transitional support is offered to young people. Practice needs to be less reliant on rigid structures and offer more flexibility to work in a personalised way with young people.

Practitioners are reflective about the differences between probation and youth justice. They cite youth justice as being 'overprotective' (both probation and youth justice practitioners). Some practitioners (in both probation and youth justice) describe the probation system as 'too harsh'. Some responses suggest that some young people lack boundaries and necessary life skills for transition into adulthood.

There are issues with the language used by youth justice and probation when talking with and about young people. Binaries in language were noted, e.g. boy/man; child/adult, that emphasise the cut-off point between services rather than the young person's stage of development.

In the survey, youth justice responses showed they were better able to meet the six principles than probation, particularly three (transitional), four (relational), and six (participation). There are several reasons for this, including a culture in probation where the balance between 'public protection' and 'rehabilitation' is often focused on the former because of resourcing.

Most young people subject to youth justice and probation service supervision are male. This raises issues for service development for young females as a minority group, particularly as they have a different offence profile. The differences in data for ethnicity between youth justice and probation requires further investigation in terms of the impact it may have on how services are developed for minoritised individuals. Neurodiversity and speech and language difficulties (including pre-diagnosis) are cited as common themes related to EEDI, along with mental health difficulties, care experience, sex and gender, sexual orientation and race/ethnicity. Regional (e.g. Southern versus Northern English) and rural-urban differences affect available support infrastructures, particularly for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer (LGBTQ+) or Black and other Global Majority young people. There are also concerns about systemic adultification<sup>1</sup> affecting these young people in the youth and criminal justice systems.

### ***Transitional approaches and arrangements***

No routine data are collected on transitions between services; 'transition' is not mentioned in case-level inspection data of individual settings or other datapoints identified for movement between services. The focus of safeguarding in the adult data (routine inspections) is not about the specific circumstances and safeguarding needs of the adult on probation, but rather, mentions of safeguarding are focussed on community protection and risk to others, specifically children associated with the adult on probation.

Given current pressures on the probation system nationally, there are limited opportunities to innovate, although the current 'Our Future Probation Service Programme' is focused upon rebalancing demand and capacity to help deliver sustainable performance improvement. There are also issues about how much change can occur locally in specific probation sites, involving existing partners, or whether there is a need to wait for national guidance/published protocols. Any change to practice may require a move away from rigid structures in probation focusing on monitoring and bureaucracy and offer practitioners more flexibility in working in a personalised way with young people. This requires a whole systems response and culture change.

Building upon these findings, the following are set out as the key implications arising from the project:

1. Transitional Safeguarding should be embedded within the existing National Transitions protocol. This should address how the six key principles are applied at different levels of the professional system.
2. Principles of Transitional Safeguarding should be woven into relevant inspection frameworks, with accompanying support resources for service leaders.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Adultification' is a term for the phenomenon whereby Black children and young people are deemed to be older, more mature and so more responsible for the harms they face than their white peers (see Davis and Marsh, 2020).

3. Staff from both services should be trained together on transitions and Transitional Safeguarding policies and protocols so that they can deliver the changes needed in both organisations and understand the differences between transitions planning and Transitional Safeguarding.
4. Relational, developmentally-informed practice should be foregrounded in policy, training and inspection – and modelled by service leaders.
5. There should be specific emphasis on Transitional Safeguarding in policies, protocols and training so that staff understand the safeguarding risks for young people themselves as well as the risks they may present to others.
6. Youth justice and probation services should prioritise forging good (local) connections with education and employment routes, as this is essential to safeguarding young people within the justice system.
7. *The quality of services delivered to young adults in the Probation Service* report (HM Inspectorate of Probation 2024e) reviewed transition services for young adults in probation services. There are three recommendations that also apply to this work and should be delivered across both services. They are:
  - ensure access to services and support is equitable for all young adults with protected characteristics and make sure that addressing diversity, particularly in relation to race and ethnicity, is prioritised
  - continue to develop learning programmes that enable staff to assess maturity, adopt a disability and trauma-informed approach and discuss discrimination and its impact with young adults
  - ensure that any barriers to staff requesting or accessing information from partner agencies, including youth justice services, are addressed by senior managers.

Accompanying this report, three briefings – aimed at practitioners, senior managers, and policy leads – set out further reflection questions, considerations, and potential actions.

# 1. Introduction

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Transitional Safeguarding is defined as: 'An approach to safeguarding adolescents and young adults fluidly across developmental stages which builds on the best available evidence, learns from both children's and adult safeguarding practice, and which prepares young people for their adult lives' (Holmes and Smale, 2018, p3).

The approach pays attention to the barriers and inequalities experienced at this stage of development (Cocker et al., 2024). Becoming an adult is not a one-off event but happens at different times and in different ways, according to the individual experience. Transition and Transitional Safeguarding are not the same thing, although they are linked (Cocker et al., 2024). The social systems within our society (e.g. education, health, mental health, social care, justice) also differentiate how they provide services to adolescents and young adults. Many use the age of 18 as the transition point between children's and adults' services. This does not always meet the specific needs of young people or acknowledge that the process of maturation is far from linear. This can create situations where young people do not feel safe. Their needs will not have changed overnight, but the support around them has.

This study takes a Transitional Safeguarding lens to both the youth justice and probation practices in supporting young people, of which the process of transitioning between the two systems is a key aspect. It asks what happens during this developmental stage for adolescents and young adults and whether the principles of the approach are applied. If they are applied, where and in what way, where are the gaps in supporting the young people and what may be the barriers to good practice? This is a complex issue as most young people using youth justice services do not transition between services at 18. They see out their sentence in youth justice services and if they reoffend as adults, they move immediately into probation, most often with no handover and no information sharing between probation and youth justice workers.

The research aimed to:

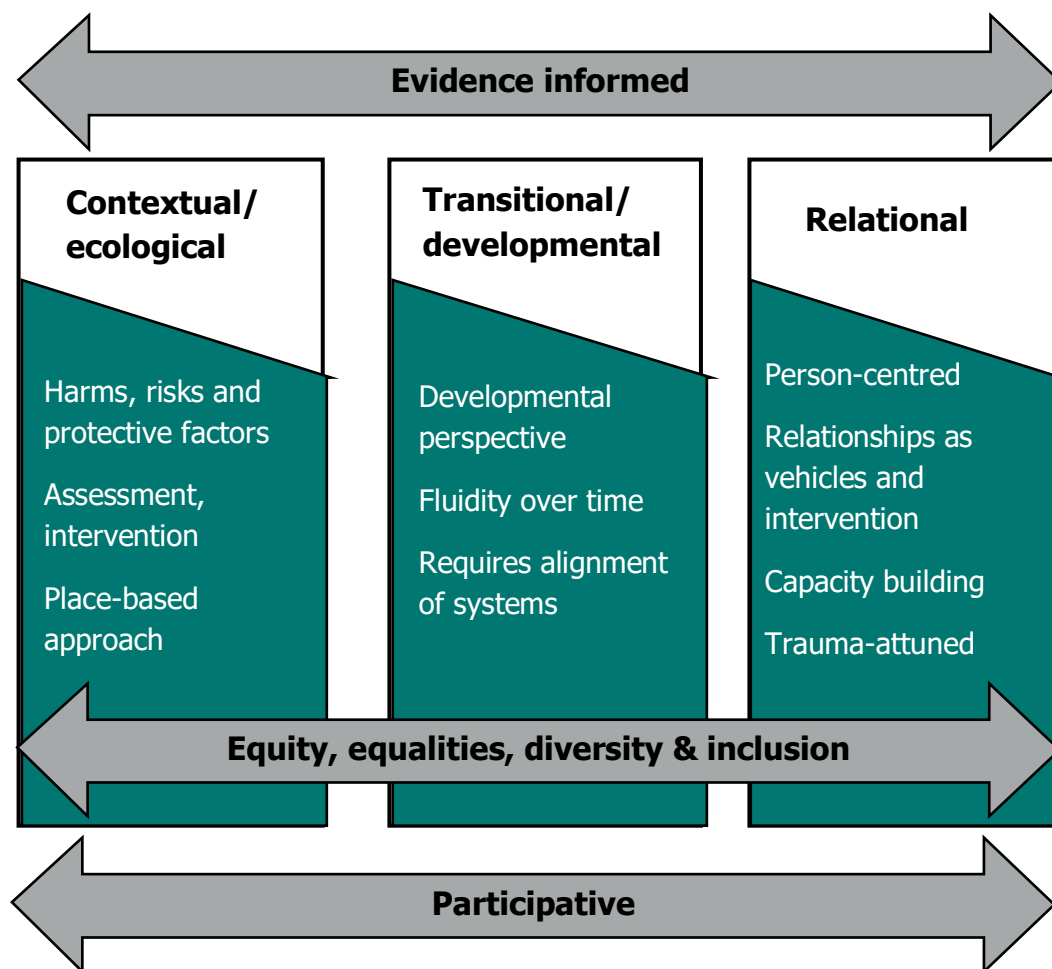
- understand how safeguarding and transition work within the youth justice and probation services for young people – how does it work, who does it work for, and what needs to happen for future sustainability
- identify key considerations for how local youth justice and probation services identify and address safeguarding issues for young people within transitions planning
- contribute to the small body of research around Transitional Safeguarding and youth justice/probation.

The objectives were to:

- capture developing Transitional Safeguarding practices in youth justice and probation through qualitative and quantitative data
- provide an understanding of how service providers work in supporting (or not) the six principles of Transitional Safeguarding
- document the experience of young people who move from youth justice to probation services
- provide insights into how relationships are developed and maintained for young people moving between youth justice and probation services.

The six principles of Transitional Safeguarding are set out in Figure 1 and then summarised in the subsequent text.

**Figure 1: The six key principles (Cocker et al., 2024, p.55)**



An **evidence-informed approach** highlights the challenges inherent within a focus on ‘what-works’ ideology, whilst also recognising that an individual experience is not representative of a cohort of people (Cocker et al., 2024). It points to a flexible, bespoke intervention delivered at the right time for the right young person, one in which all available evidence is considered within the local context. Using an evidence-informed approach requires a recognition that different sources bring different insights particularly when considering the multiplicity of different knowledges, e.g. professional expertise will be informed by experience and research.

Transitional Safeguarding is an approach that considers the whole person located within their community and environment (Cocker et al., 2024). The **contextual/ecological principle** draws on the learning from Bio-ecological Theory for Child Development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; 2005; Bronfenbrenner and Ceri 1994) and Contextual Safeguarding (Firmin, 2020). These champion an approach that is attuned to the young person and their different developmental, environmental and socio-political contexts (Holmes, 2022). By adopting a contextual/ecological approach, the expectation would be to understand that young people’s lives are shaped by the different places and spaces they spend time and are influenced by people around them as well as societal factors. It also requires understanding that experiences are not universal despite surface similarities in circumstances. The awareness of the contextual and ecological factors affecting each young person is a dynamic and person-centred process; change happens constantly and in different ways for each young person.



Using a **transitional/developmental** approach means understanding that each young person will develop differently; factors that increase vulnerability are not age defined and therefore responses from services should not be rigidly determined by age. This requires systems and practice to become more flexible and for historic practice divisions between adults and children's service provisions to be better aligned for a holistic and developmentally appropriate response to a young person's needs. A Transitional Safeguarding approach starts from the position that it is more helpful to consider the social, psychological and developmental changes that define the experiences of young people moving to adulthood rather than determine this solely by someone's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday (Cocker et al., 2024). Transition is a process, not a single event (Holmes, 2022), and there is evidence to suggest that adolescence is a messy, non-linear process of cognitive and emotional maturation that stretches from mid-teens to mid-twenties and may be further impacted by trauma or additional needs such as disability (Cocker et al., 2024; Arnett 2007; Sawyer et al., 2018). Therefore, any approach needs to be fluid and developmentally attuned to the young person and their circumstances (Cocker et al., 2024; Holmes and Smith, 2022).

The fourth key principle is **relational**. There is a significant body of evidence that details the importance of relationships in improved outcomes for children and young people across education, social skills, protection from harm, and so on. In their exploration of social-ecological approaches, Johns et al. (2017) emphasise that the basis of changes in behaviours and attitudes is a trusting relationship. Positive relationships build positive identities (Johns et al., 2017), and good relationships built on trust can help young people disclose abuse (Cossar et al., 2019) and thus minimise risks of harm. Young people consistently say that having stable and good quality relationships was important in keeping them safe (Cocker et al., 2024; HM Government, 2023). Furthermore, as evidenced within the ecological principle, young people recognise the importance of not just good relationships with professionals but with peers and others (Amemiya et al., 2017). Therefore, support becomes crucial to navigation of the system and to ensure the young person remains safe, with good relationships an essential part of supporting these transitions (Rome and Rasin, 2019; see also [Academic Insights paper 2025/01](#)).

Effective safeguarding needs an intersectional approach (Cocker et al., 2024) that recognises the multi-faceted and compounding nature of discrimination, particularly for Black women and girls (Crenshaw, 1991). This is why **equity, equalities diversity and inclusion** is one of the six key principles. The Alliance for Youth Justice (AYJ, 2024) details several areas of disparities and inequalities including racially minoritised young people facing greater vulnerability as they feel less supported, and that the probation workforce was not diverse or reflective of local communities. In addition, Black young people too often experience 'adultification', a process where they are victimised further by being treated more 'adult-like' than their counterparts with devastating effects on how they are safeguarded (Davis and Marsh, 2020; see also [Academic Insights paper 2022/06](#)).

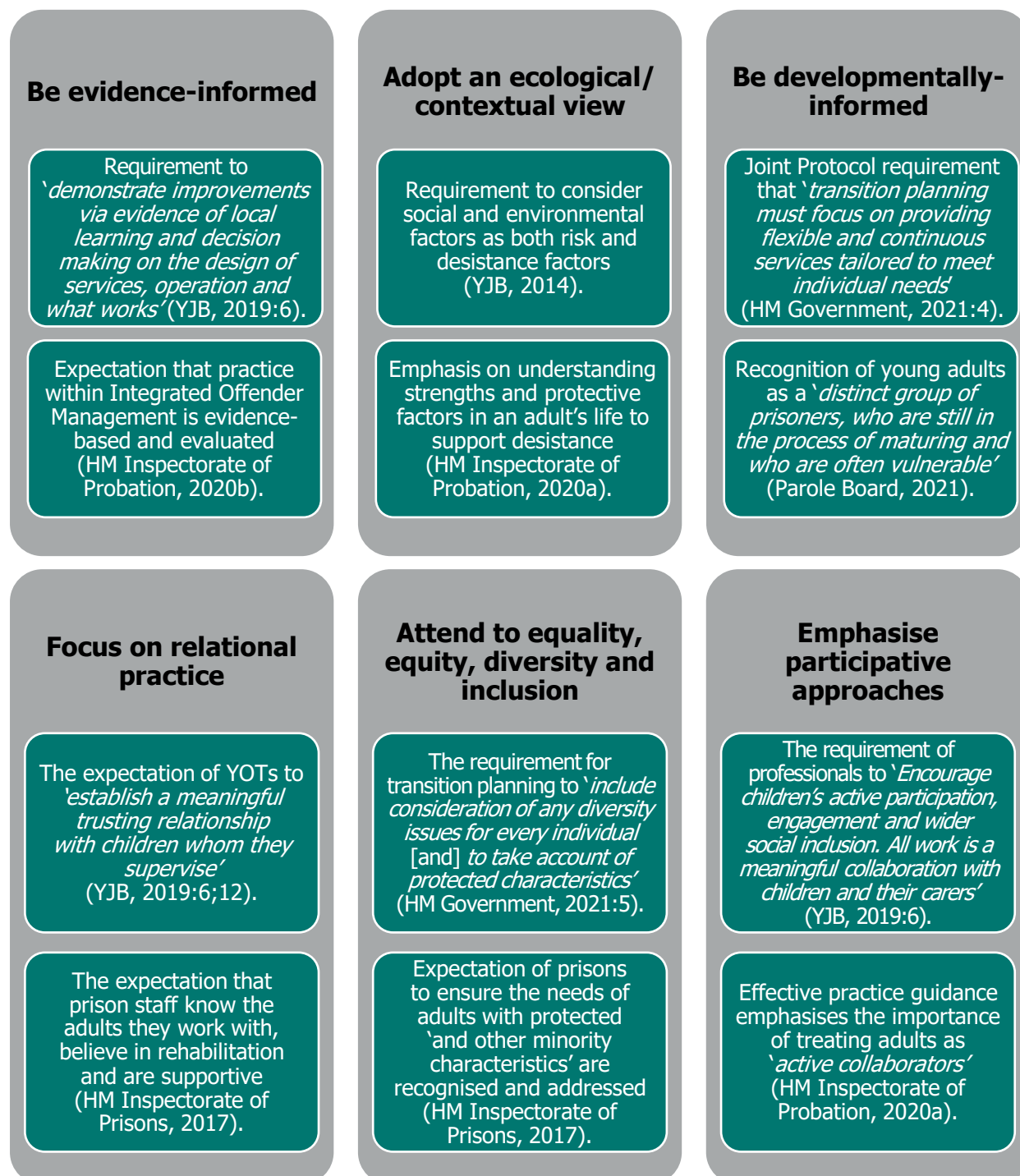
Finally, **participation** cuts across all the other principles; participation can address discrepancies between chronological age and development and attend to young people's rights to exercise choice and agency while also safeguarding and protecting them and others from harm (Huegler and Ruch, 2022). Young people have said they need support to feel safe but do not want to feel as though they are being continuously watched (Holmes, 2022). Penner et al. (2014) suggest that a sense of procedural justice is linked to reoffending rates, in that if a young person feels they have been heard and listened to, they are more likely to view the system as fair and over time they are less likely to reoffend. However, for a young person to want to talk, this has to be facilitated by positive relationships as it is the connection that opens



up being heard (Bernstein-Yamashiro and Noam, 2013). Research in areas such as youth work demonstrate that a dialectical relationship is important for change to happen (Jeffs and Smith, 2010; Ord 2012) and it is the trust built that allows young people to feel they are involved in the decision-making that impacts them (Bell, 2002).

As set out in Figure 2, Holmes and Smith (2022) summarised the interplay of probation and youth justice policies with the six Transitional Safeguarding key principles.

**Figure 2: Transitional Safeguarding and Justice (Holmes and Smith, 2022)**



## 2. Findings

This section of the report presents the findings from the study. The research took place between February and December 2024, using a mixed methods approach encompassing a literature review, survey (max n=144), secondary analysis of HM Inspectorate of Probation data (probation n=291 cases; youth n=617 cases), leadership/management interviews (n=8) and practitioner focus groups (n=8). The quantitative component encompassed all of England, while the qualitative component was focused on five 'study sites'. Additionally, these sites provided details about a specific (anonymised) young person who had moved from youth justice services to probation to highlight young people's experiences. Young people's opinions and voices were also collected via a workshop where initial findings were shared and their feedback obtained (see Annex A for further details about the methodology).

The results are presented below using the six core principles of Transitional Safeguarding.

### 2.1 Evidence informed

Whilst recognising the impact of short- to medium-term funding restrictions in youth justice and probation, an evidence-informed approach also considers the longer-term implications of this for both the young person and society. If young people do not receive the right support at this transitional stage there is increased likelihood of poorer outcomes during young adulthood and beyond, e.g. homelessness, risk of violence, poverty (AYJ, 2023), thus causing both increased vulnerabilities for the young person to navigate and increased costs to society.

It is recognised that youth justice provision is working to embed the 'Child First' framework and that probation services have undergone extensive change over the last twelve years. As such, research conducted from 2014 onwards reflects changing organisational structures, as do many of the thematic inspection reports.

The analysis of policy and guidance documents indicated that both probation and youth justice services recognise the importance of being evidence informed, with a range of sources used to describe expectations and frameworks of practice. There were examples of:

- learning from practice reviews, e.g. secure estate policy framework for safeguarding and child protection
- using research, e.g. consideration of maturation and development in what works for young adults in the *Probation Service Management of Young Adults Policy Framework* and the HMI Prisons *Safeguarding and Protection of Children Policy* (revised in 2023)
- using statistics and quantitative data, e.g. in the HM Prison & Probation Service (HMPPS) *Child Safeguarding Policy Framework*.

Implementing an evidence-informed stance is complex because of how people understand different types of evidence and how each young person, whilst having similarity with others, will always face circumstances relevant and unique to them. This complexity means outcomes are not always easy to determine (Barad, 2007) and this can be difficult to reconcile when managing risk, both in terms of safeguarding and the prevention of future offending. A crucial step in changing cultures and practices entails the changes required being included within policies and guidance.

Both probation and youth justice survey respondents reported their own practice as being evidence informed, either sometimes or very often. Probation respondents had a higher

response of 'very often', compared to youth justice respondents whose highest response was 'sometimes'. Most of the probation and youth justice respondents said they considered that their organisation's approach links to Principle 1 'very often' (see Annex C for high-level survey outputs).

In relation to evidence-informed working during transition to adulthood, in the focus groups probation practitioners and leaders cited the evidence base of tools, assessments and protocols, particularly the Choices and Changes toolkit, the maturity assessment, and the transitions protocol. They also referred to the evidence base of a range of approaches and models they use with offenders of all ages (e.g. Maps for Change, the Good Lives Model, bio-psycho-social and strengths-based approaches, and the offender personality disorder pathway) as well as research related to EEDI, particularly on neurodiversity. Some indicated that tools for individual and group work might lack contextualisation for young people (e.g. considering that trauma and abuse in families may be a very recent experience involving young people as victims rather than perpetrators).

Some probation practitioners considered that the focus of their work had shifted from evidence-based working to monitoring and administrative bureaucracy. Probation leaders gave examples of commissioned research across a region (e.g. on pilot approaches or specific themes) and reported using data from local tracker systems as well as thematic inspection reports for strategic planning purposes.

In youth justice, practitioners and leaders emphasised the Child First framework as a key evidence base, alongside attachment theory, labelling theory, learning theories, neurodevelopmental research, relationship-based working, research related to EEDI (such as research on neurodiversity and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), on adultification, or related to disproportionality factors in young people's exposure to the criminal justice and care systems). Mention was given to the evidence base of specific interventions or pathways, e.g. activities that support desistance (Youth Justice Resource Hub, Youth Endowment Fund outputs). Research is used by practitioners to make a case for transition handovers to be staggered or delayed. Practitioners also described a move away from narrowly constructed offence-focused work to one of contextual, relational, strengths-based and trauma-informed approaches (including through Contextual Safeguarding and a focus on peer groups and extra-familial harm). References were given to multi-agency professional panels considering contextual evidence affecting work with individual young people. Youth justice leaders referred to using local data (e.g. key performance indicators, inspection reports) that includes information on young people's needs, service links and protected characteristics to inform service design, delivery and training.

In comparing answers across probation and youth justice, youth justice practitioners tended to reference and cite more specific pieces of research and theory used in their work with young people than probation practitioners, who tended to reference tools and protocols. Probation practitioners also raised issues around the applicability and suitability of some tools and approaches to the specific cohort of young adults. In turn, some youth justice practitioners considered their local probation colleagues to be less well-informed about (or interested in) youth-specific issues (e.g. the dynamics of criminal exploitation, impact of childhood trauma and developmental maturity on behaviour, or ways to engage young people) than they had expected. One youth justice practitioner spoke about her experience of providing some informal training on methods of engaging with young people:

*"Honestly, I was quite shocked at the, sort of, lack of understanding from those officers in respect of working with young people, young adults. [...] It was very much like, 'That's children's services, and we don't really work with children, so therefore we don't really know [...] I think they just weren't aware of what a process a young person goes through, even in respect of children's services, up to youth justice, before they've landed on the doors at probation, which I was really shocked about."*  
[Practitioner, Youth Justice]

## 2.2 Contextual/ecological

The research and thematic reviews highlight the need for a contextual and ecological approach to welfare and it was reassuring to see these messages taken up in policies and guidance within both youth justice and probation services. The importance of the setting supporting the transition between youth and adult services was highlighted across a number of documents. Key messages included ensuring 'the environment that children live in is rehabilitative and safe' (MoJ and YJB, 2019, p.14) and that a social-ecological model is important for assessing children at risk (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2024a). There was also recognition that a secure setting may not be the most appropriate way to keep a child/young person safe (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2024b). The context was extended to reflect the role of technology with a young person's activities; lives are lived online as well as offline (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2024c). The reference to contextual and ecological factors suggests that leadership is critical in ensuring this principle is progressed given current institutional contexts, existing societal pressures, and availability of resources.

Addressing ecological factors is an equity issue needed for effective safeguarding, namely the provision of stable income, housing and access to opportunities that will support desistance from crime. Consideration of contextual and ecological factors needs to happen both within the community and within the secure estate. Environmental factors offer a pathway into and out of criminal activity, for example data from a Scottish longitudinal child cohort study demonstrated offending behaviour is linked to experiencing poverty at the household and neighbourhood level (Jahanshahi et al., 2022). Relatedly, Thompson (2019) interviewed young people who were involved with drug running and they highlighted the ease in making money from drugs where there were no real alternatives. This finding is supported in other research in which young people have expressed difficulties in making money with little academic achievement and few opportunities for consistent incomes (Robinson, 2019; Mason, 2020). The link between school exclusion and vulnerability to being criminally exploited has been highlighted by Ofsted (2018), in a report recommending that schools consider safeguarding risks when exclusions are being considered. Brierley et al. (2024) concluded there needs to be closer alignment between the Higher Education (HE) and the justice system as this helps with pro-social identity formation and the safeguarding of young people.

The effects of poverty are intensified by precarious housing. There has been a steep climb in private renting and less access to social housing for the 16–25-year-old age group (Bailey, 2020), creating further problems for young people within the justice system, particularly where they have no stable family or are transitioning from care. Access to secure housing is a key preventative measure to safeguarding children set out in *Working Together* (HM Government, 2023). However, an HM Inspectorate of Probation (2016) inspection report of 16- and 17-year-olds who were homeless and known to their local youth justice services found that one in three young people were in unsafe or unsuitable accommodation. The lack of suitable

accommodation was also identified in the Criminal Justice Joint Inspection (2019) thematic review of youth resettlement in the community. Poverty and housing are not easy problems to address, and probation and youth justice practitioners can be advocates at the individual, multi-agency and government levels to ensure adequate safeguarding for young people.

The influence of peers and geography in offending were raised in a thematic review looking at the experiences of black and mixed heritage boys in the youth justice system (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2021). Young people identified that environmental factors such as peer networks and place of residence can influence involvement in crime and so increase vulnerability.

However, just as an environment can affect 'doing' crime, it can also affect desistance from crime. Johns et al. (2017) used a social-ecological lens to demonstrate how a positive approach to justice interventions supports the development and maintenance of positive identities and pro-social behaviours and so mitigates against circumstances that increase vulnerability. Young people, seeking to prevent their own offending behaviour, actively looked to change their environment, e.g. structuring their time differently, making an effort to distance themselves from peers (Amemiya et al., 2017), a finding that was also reflected in the framework for safeguarding young people in the secure estate (HMPPS and YCS, 2023).

Whilst giving a stable residence for a young person, the secure estate gives other safeguarding challenges both on arrival and when transitioning within the system. For young people moving between different institutions, e.g. a secure children's home (SCH) to a young offender institution (YOI), these spaces will look, feel, and sound different and therefore the impact of these changes need to be considered using a Transitional Safeguarding lens. The challenge is how to navigate different physical environments and regimes to ensure effective safeguarding. For instance, the thematic review into the experiences of girls in custody found that when the girls were transferred from a SCH to a YOI, they spent far less time out of their rooms and had less engagement in education or recreational activities. This had a significant impact on their relationships with others and subsequently their mental health (HMI Prisons, 2022). The review also found that the girls had increased likelihood of self-harm and were more likely to experience restraint than boys with similar behaviours (HMI Prisons, 2022). This link between environmental and organisational structures and poor mental health in prisons is not new (see Nurse et al., 2003), and research indicates that self-harm in populations of young people offending are high (Borschmann et al., 2014). The challenge is to align the flexibility of provision needed against a backdrop of rigid building environments and inflexible regimes.

While not equivalent questions across the two datasets, both youth justice and probation inspections provide data of relevance to the context in which individuals are living (see Annex B for a high-level summary of relevant inspection questions). For instance, regarding the ecosystem component, youth justice inspections outline datapoints on the key individuals in the person's life and whether they are engaged. Probation inspections similarly report on the person's wider familial and social context, and how these are incorporated into practitioners' assessment, planning, implementation and delivery, and review of their work. One similarity between the datasets is their inclusion of information about the services that have been engaged in the wider service provision for the individual.

When asked to name the kinds of ecological and contextual factors which they consider in their practice, both youth justice and probation respondents reported an even spread of types of factors. The factors named the most by youth justice respondents were family background, individual harms experienced, and peer groups and influence. While these factors were also mentioned by almost half of probation respondents, the top two factors mentioned by them were individual harms experienced and impact of personal/contextual circumstances on offending.



In the interviews and focus groups undertaken in the study sites, participants from both sectors reported taking contextual factors into account in their work with young people and making adaptations to practice to better meet young people's needs, including: housing or home contexts; mental health; education; employment; and substance misuse. Key differences include the extent to which parents and other family members are involved in contextual work and whether the work is focused on safeguarding young people from harm at home or in contexts outside the home (youth justice) or on public protection and risk management (probation).

Youth practitioners reported using flexible and adaptive approaches and settings, such as gym visits, walks, outdoor activities, or increased contact frequency during custodial sentences, but expressed concerns that such adaptations and offers may not be available after young people transition to probation. These concerns may lead to youth justice practitioners seeking to delay transitions:

*"... some of the young people, as well, we've got, who have autism. We know that they struggle with change, and that can be quite an unsettling time for those individuals. So, I think, as well, that there's probably been more of a conscious decision to retain those young people on our books."* [Practitioner, Focus Group, Youth Justice]

Leaders and practitioners from both sectors pointed out that working contextually is more constrained in probation, because of tighter parameters around enforcement, risk assessments, as well as time and resource constraints. Probation practitioners have less flexibility to offer meeting locations outside of their offices, and home visits are rarer due to the considerable time this involves. Practitioners described how this impacts their work:

*"I'm not sure probation offices are always the best kind of environment. Probation officers are. They adapt their approach to someone, depending on who's coming in – male, female, old, young, whatever. They will adapt their approach and their communication. But we can't adapt the office. We can't adapt where it is. We've got what we've got."* [Practitioner, Focus Group, Probation]

These constraints were seen as potential barriers to engagement with young people, based on young people lacking confidence to travel to areas where offices are located or not feeling safe to do so (e.g. because of risks of harm in peer and community contexts). Barriers were also reported for young people with neurodiversity needs. Some probation practitioners described efforts to mitigate this by offering more flexible timings and scheduling (e.g. around work, education or sleep patterns).

In both youth justice and probation, access to community services were constrained by significant resourcing issues across settings, particularly for mental health support. However, these access issues were described in more acute terms by probation staff, who described that identified needs are often unmet:

*"We can make referrals, we can bang on doors, but it's not often there, the resource that we need."* [Practitioner, Focus Group, Probation]

Thus, the resource and time constraints in probation itself are exacerbated by a lack of access for young adults to community support services, especially for housing and mental health needs. For those living in rural areas, a shortage of services to meet specific needs can be felt more acutely than in urban areas. In these contexts, poor public transport options can affect the ability of young people to attend appointments both with probation and with other

agencies. Access to services for young people deemed to be 'less risky' can also be particularly affected by resourcing issues, if their coping strategies appear less 'maladaptive' and are considered lower priority as a result. This may affect young people whose behaviour is more self-destructive than aggressive or those who do manage to stay in employment but spend their free time consuming alcohol in excess (rather than taking drugs).

Further barriers to accessing support (youth justice, probation and community services) may arise from different geographic boundaries of service responsibility. For example, service boundaries of youth justice may not overlap with those of probation; care-experienced young people may be moved between placements and thus cross into different service areas; while other young people may have experienced homelessness or frequent moves with their families. Similarly, court locations, custodial sentence placements and housing upon release may involve further shifts and disruptions to support services and personal support networks.

## 2.3 Transitional/developmental

Despite the limits of the current system, there is some recognition of the need for flexibility in thinking around age across youth justice and probation (AYJ, 2023). The two systems are based on different ideological and operational approaches; there is both a change in ethos and a change in processes when moving from one system to the other (Price, 2020; AYJ, 2023). For instance, the assessments in youth justice recognise the duality of a young person being both an offender and of being at risk of harm from others whereas the protection of society is the initial premise for probation (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2014).

The differing ethos of the two systems means that there are different practice frameworks and statutory requirements. The expectations around contact with the young person are usually more frequent within youth justice, with requirements for assessment and sentence planning reducing within probation (Price, 2020). This reduction in contact means there are less opportunities to build relationships and understand the maturity and development needs of the young person. These changes are driven by statutory requirements rather than the needs of the young person, and with resources at capacity, the ability to effectively employ this Transitional Safeguarding principle (of being transitional/developmentally informed) is particularly restricted. That said, the imperative to recognise maturational and developmental stages rather than ages are found within the institutional practice and literature, e.g. the HM Inspectorate of Probation website (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2024d) which emphasises the importance of recognising maturation when assessing transitions. Similarly, the *HMPPS Child Safeguarding Policy Framework* (MoJ and HMPPS, 2022a) guides staff to consider the maturity of the young person and the possible impact of previous trauma, whilst giving caution to not absolve the young person of responsibility.

This learning is informing approaches such as the pilot youth to adult transition hub in Newham (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2024e). However, implementation is not without its issues as local context and levels of understanding can influence provision, giving variability to the service received by the young person (Case et al., 2024). This is exacerbated by processes which can appear or even be inflexible. A 2023 AYJ evidence review highlights the unfairness of delays in the system, as even though a young person committed a crime when they were aged under 18, once they reach 18, they will be tried as an adult with all its implications for their future prospects. Interviews also indicated examples of significant sentencing delays, especially for young people who have committed sexual offences. If this is the case, then contexts of maturity, abuse, trauma or exploitation may not be taken into account sufficiently, and



previous involvement with other services (such as child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) or even, in some cases, youth justice) may not be brought to the court's attention. Therefore, whilst organisational guides may advocate for a Transitional Safeguarding approach that accounts for developmental stages, how effectively this can be achieved within the current system is not clear.

The youth justice inspection dataset has a relevant question for the developmentally-attuned principle; it asks about whether the practitioner has given sufficient attention to understanding the person's level of maturity (this being asked both in relation to their assessment and case planning). While it is acknowledged that probation covers a much wider age bracket where this particular framing of a question may not be appropriate, it remains an area where data of potential interest are not collected. Splitting age/maturity into its own question might be useful here. This identified gap would be potentially helpful to record for people under 30 years old or for teams working with young people under 25 years.

There was a marked difference between youth justice and probation respondents in the survey when describing the extent to which their own practice was developmentally attuned. The majority of youth justice respondents said this was 'very often' or 'always' the case (17 out of 29 respondents), while most of the probation respondents said this only happened 'sometimes' (12 out of 24 respondents). A similar trend of responses was reported for the extent to which respondents said they considered that their organisation's approach links to this principle.

A key enabling factor for support during transition identified by those participating in the site visits was a mutual understanding of the need for approaches and practices across youth justice and probation, and across services more widely. Conversely, siloed working and a lack of curiosity acts as a barrier to effective support. Changing this was seen by practitioners as critical for cultural shifts in practice within and between youth justice and probation services that could potentially meet the developmental needs of young people rather than services just being based on age.

There is also a need to develop specific programmes and interventions which acknowledge the developmental ages and stages of young people. Youth justice leaders and practitioners cited the Child First framework as key in transitional work. Youth justice workers use maturity evidence to advocate for staggering or delaying transitions for young people facing particular vulnerabilities. Where young people have care leaver status, workers with specific roles (e.g. for clinical work or exploitation support) may continue pieces of work beyond young people's transitions to probation services in some areas. Overall, youth justice leaders and practitioners described the cohort of young people transitioning to probation as a minority among their overall caseloads, due to an increased use of out-of-court disposals. However, this means that young people who do transition to probation often have particularly complex and intersecting needs which may involve a multitude of service and professional connections, all of which may change or break away at the same time.

Currently most probation interventions are geared to adults, with no age distinction. Probation leaders reported difficulties filling seconded roles in youth justice services, linked to overall recruitment difficulties and capacity issues. Some areas have concentrators or specific teams dealing with young adults. All probation workers are expected to be able to work with young people over 18 and some practitioners favour working with young people as a personal preference. Some experienced practitioners expressed regret that restructurings in probation services, driven at the national level, had reduced opportunities for specialised practice, including (but not limited to) working with young adults. Several probation practitioners indicated that they lacked specific training or knowledge about working with young people,

with these cases forming a small minority in an overall complex and large caseload. Probation workers described relying particularly on their relational working skills to engage young people as individuals, alongside the use of maturity assessments.

## 2.4 Relational

The different approaches and positioning of youth justice and probation impact the quality of relationships. In a critique of the 'what works' agenda, Creaney (2014) highlights that in adhering to the mechanics of intervention programmes rather than the building of relationships, the importance of relationships had receded. The programmes deny staff flexibility and creativity even whilst recognising that the success of interventions is impacted by the interpersonal nature of delivery (Creaney, 2014). The AYJ report (2023) highlights how in the transition from youth justice to probation services, important relationships disappear, and information can be lost in the transfer process. When information is missing, probation staff are unable to understand who or what is important to the young person, and they have to do more work to build that relationship in less time. This is also an issue for young people who have both youth and adult involvement but have no transition. In addition, young people have reflected that probation staff do not show as much care towards them as evidenced by doing the bare minimum for contact (Price, 2020). The capacity and resources in the system do not allow the probation practitioner the time needed to build a relationship in which the young person can observe the care.

One of the key areas for resource building would be to upskill staff in the ability to forge relations (AYJ, 2024; Price, 2020) and to provide capacity for other agencies to build relationships. Building new relationships is particularly challenging when safeguarding within an environment built on risk management, as it requires professionals/organisations to manage their anxieties of risk (Huegler and Ruch, 2022). The secure estate is a good example of where this can be problematic. The thematic review into behaviour in the secure estate (HMI Prisons, 2018) concluded that rapport was important in managing behaviour, but a significant minority (45 per cent) of young people reported the lack of respect they experienced from staff. The thematic review into peer support in prisons (HMI Prisons, 2016) found that young adults were less likely to have access to Listeners or Samaritans than other prisoners. A later review of separation of children in YOIs (HMI Prisons, 2020) reported that relationships were hindered by 'unlock arrangements' which meant other agencies were not able to visit. In one example, children were out of their cells for less than 15 minutes a day, blocking opportunities to build relationships. These findings would suggest that work is needed for embedding this principle within the secure estate.

However, there is recognition within the youth justice and probation documentation that relationships need to be nurtured and that the transition between services is a vulnerable point. For example, the HM Inspectorate of Probation website safeguarding pages mention having a relational approach and that 'transitions risk breaking up supportive and trusting relationships' (see also [Evidence base – relationship-centred services](#)). The value of relationships to practice is emphasised within the *Standards for children in the youth justice system* (2019) and prominence is given to relationship building within the *Probation Service Management of Young Adults Policy Framework* (MOJ and HMPPS, 2022b) and the Probation Professional Standards (HMPPS, 2023). Therefore, as with other principles, there is leadership being shown on applying Transitional Safeguarding principles but how this is being applied in practice is less clear.

In examining HM Inspectorate Probation's inspection data, the primary datapoint of relevance to the relational principle relates to whether, in the judgement of the inspector, the practitioner had given sufficient focus to maintaining an effective working relationship with the young person. The results show that there is a far greater positive assessment of this for youth justice (over 90 per cent) compared with probation (less than 70 per cent), likely reflecting the significantly higher 'caseload' held by probation practitioners (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2021a). This suggests that more work should be done strategically to enable practitioners to maintain effective working relationships with the young person.

The survey also supports this result: both probation and youth justice respondents most commonly reported their own practice as being 'very often' in line with the relational principle. However, overall, youth justice respondents were more positive on this question as many more participants reported their practice as 'always' or 'very often' being in line with this principle; 23 out of 28 respondents, compared to 12 out of 23 probation respondents. The contrast was similar for the related question of whether the respondent's organisation was linked to the relational principle – youth justice respondents peaked at 'always' for this question, while probation respondents peaked at 'sometimes'.

There is a real wish to improve relational working across youth justice and probation services. Practitioners from both sectors described their roles as 'bridgers', connectors and advocates for young people, particularly in relation to accessing services and having their specific and individual needs met. However, probation workers indicated some constraints through time and resource limits, both within their own agencies and among other services. As a result of the latter, the relationship with a probation worker may be a key (or even single) professional connection for some young adults, despite the fact that it starts from an involuntary basis.

In comparison, youth justice workers reported closer links with colleagues in services for children and young people, as well as with young people's families. As part of a team of professionals working with a young person, youth justice workers may have a different relationship with a young person than their social worker or a police officer, which can support relational working. At the same time, youth justice practitioners also referred to professional resources and networks (e.g. in-house mental health clinicians, specialised services for exploitation or gang involvement, extra-familial risk panels). Youth justice leadership may be embedded and intertwined with local children's social care services structures. Youth justice workers also work extensively with families, considering relationship dynamics, and routinely and frequently see young people in their home environments or accompany them to appointments.

Probation practitioners expressed a commitment to relational working that is constrained through the more formal settings of their work (e.g. expectation of office appointments, emphasis on public protection, risk management, and enforcement). As outlined under contextual working, practitioners' capacity for undertaking home visits is constrained by time and caseloads, although participants in this study referred to trying to prioritise this for young people where possible. Similarly, involving family members is less common. While probation services may, especially at regional levels, have access to a wide range of services and resources, these may not always be attuned to young people's developmental needs and specific circumstances, particularly outside of the more intensively resourced Integrated Offender Management (IOM) or multi-agency public protection arrangement (MAPPA) structures.

Resource and capacity constraints of local community services (e.g. health, mental health, neurodiversity) have a significant impact on probation work. Particular barriers exist for young

people in rural areas and/or those who are successfully engaged in employment, because this limits their ability to access professional help during work hours. As a result, some probation practitioners support young people with a range of complex needs through creative and relational working but lack a wider professional support network.

### Promising practice: Relationship-based practice

A commitment to relationship-based practice was emphasised by practitioners across the interviews and focus groups.

#### Youth justice

A youth justice practitioner described how this could extend into young adulthood, especially in cases that did not involve a transition to probation:

*"I would never not answer the phone to my young adults. I would direct them [...] If they haven't got – if I'm their only trusted adult, if I'm the only person that they can rely on, then I'm not going to turn my back on them. I think it'd be a bit different if they started at 35, and still ringing me [...] But these, I've only closed some of these young people and young adults in the last couple of months".*

While this meant going 'above and beyond' expected practice, several practitioners saw this as a safety net that ensured the carefully established trust in a relationship could build bridges to appropriate services and agencies, including supporting young people in their contact with the police in cases of reoffending.

#### Probation

Despite their more constrained time and working contexts, probation practitioners also expressed their strong commitment to relationship-based practice:

*"To me, I think one of the most important parts of my role is the relationships that I build up with my cases. To me, that's the single most important thing – how they relate to me and how they get on. Because once you have that connection, then they are going to try and attend on time, or at least phone you when they're running late".*

Thus, practitioners viewed time spent building relationships as an investment with likely returns for achieving objectives of their work. One probation practitioner reflected on their use of conversational skills that might seem 'a casual chat' but in fact involved tier-1 interventions in relation to alcohol use. Several probation practitioners expressed concerns that staff training and recruitment had become less focused on skills for relationship-based practice in recent years.

## 2.5 Equalities orientated

This principle is multi-faceted; it is essential to recognise the compounding nature of discrimination and inequality for young people, particularly those from minoritised communities. For example, within the population of female offenders, those who started offending in adolescence have higher increased anxiety and major depression than males who offended (Walker et al., 2019), and females within the forensic secure mental health estate are more likely to be diagnosed with emerging personality disorder (Hill et al., 2014 cited in Livanou et

al., 2017). A thematic review into outcomes for girls in custody (HMI Prisons, 2022) found that girls were six times more likely than boys to be restrained within the secure estate, and that this was typically for self-harm. The report concluded that this was increasing their trauma rather than safeguarding them.

There is increasing awareness of the overrepresentation of young people with neurodevelopmental disorders, mental health issues and trauma within the justice system (Hughes et al., 2020). In a study conducted in New Zealand, it was found that over 50 per cent of young adults with ADHD had experienced contact with the criminal justice system by the time they were 25 years old (Anns et al., 2023). Research suggests that young people with cognitive and language development or deficit issues have a higher risk of offending and particularly suffer within the justice system as they are unable to understand and therefore engage constructively in the process, further penalising them (Hughes, 2015; Anderson et al., 2022). Contact with the legal system is particularly prevalent for children who have neuro-developmental disabilities and are also involved with the child welfare system (Baidawi and Piquero, 2020) which further demonstrates the need to consider transitional safeguarding principles for young people with overlapping experiences of disability and trauma.

Understanding how intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) affects black young women, for example, is critical to then consider how to address such issues throughout all justice services. Both youth justice and probation inspectors record numerous datapoints of relevance to EEDI. For example, they collect data on some (but not all) protected characteristics. Strategic managers also discussed collecting EEDI data. However, how these data are then used is the issue. The documentation within the justice sector indicates that whilst there is awareness of EEDI issues, the links to safeguarding are less clear. For example, the framework for transitioning young people from the children's secure estate to adult custody states that young people must be treated fairly, be inclusive and respect differences (MoJ and HMPPS, 2022c). However, the thematic review into good behaviour (HMI Prisons, 2018) found that young people from minoritised communities, particularly Muslim young adults, felt they were treated more unfairly than their counterparts. Similarly, the secure estate policy framework for safeguarding (HMPPS and YCS, 2023) highlighted that young people from minoritised communities were more likely to be verbally abused or threatened by staff. The dedicated thematic review into the experiences of Black and mixed heritage boys (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2021) identified that this cohort had unmet needs, with evidence in disparity of treatment by the police. There is also a disparity in information about the experiences of young Black females compared with young Black males. These findings suggest that young people experience further harm within the justice system rather than consistently experiencing being protected by it. From a Transitional Safeguarding perspective, there is more work needed at all levels to embed change into policy and practice; whilst there is awareness of EEDI issues within justice sector policy, the links to both safeguarding and practice more generally are less clear.

There are also specific gaps in evidence-based research and knowledge around LGBTQ+ young people in justice services and in justice transitions in England. Most of the literature on this topic is US based and relates to youth justice (Matarese et al., 2023; Rodriguez et al., 2024). The literature about LGBTQ+ adults receiving probation services is sparse (Byrne, 2016). There are other resources that discuss LGBTQ+ people's experience of justice services, including as victims of hate crimes, their experiences of criminalisation because of their sexuality, and experiences of incarceration (Peterson and Panfil, 2014; Knight and Wilson, 2016).

When considering whether practitioners sufficiently address diversity issues of young people, inspectors found that (as is the case for many other areas) youth justice practitioners did this



to a much higher level. This was consistent across both practitioners' assessment of young people's diversity issues (75 per cent compared to 56 per cent of cases) and in the way their planning then addressed these issues (71 per cent compared to 55 per cent of cases). Turning to the survey findings, more probation respondents than youth justice respondents selected 'always' for the question on the extent to which their own practice was able to emulate the principle of being equalities-oriented, but over double the number of youth justice participants selected 'very often' for this question. Overall, 21 out of 28 youth justice respondents selected 'very often' or 'always', compared to 13 out of 22 probation respondents.

Participants from the specific sites across both sectors referred to ways in which practice is adapted to better meet needs related to EEDI. Neurodiversity and speech and language difficulties (including pre-diagnosis) were cited as common themes related to EEDI, along with mental health difficulties, care experience, gender, sexual orientation and race/ethnicity. Some themes and issues varied across areas (e.g. experiences in relation to ethnicity/race in rural versus urban areas such as Black and Global Majority young men being disproportionately affected by school exclusions or criminalisation), while others (particularly neurodiversity and learning needs) were cited across areas and case examples. There were also concerns about systemic adultification and about support for young women, especially in custodial settings.

Youth justice leaders and practitioners referred to adapting work to meet a range of (sometimes intersecting) needs linked to EEDI, citing the Child First framework as guiding approaches. Participants referred to examples of identity and inclusion-focused work involving young people, families and communities. Turning to probation services, data is collected on protected characteristics and there is awareness that needs among people on probation are complex and intersecting across all ages. However, data collection or service commissions in some areas do not specifically focus on young people. In addition, there is limited awareness and knowledge of young people's neurodiversity and autism, and it does not appear to be captured in the administrative data collected. Probation practitioners are considered skilled at individual assessment and adaptations of how sessions are conducted, but reported having less flexibility in relation to meeting locations or in their enforcement duties.

## 2.6 Participative

This principle cuts across all the other principles; participation can address discrepancies between chronological age and development and attend to young people's rights to exercise choice and agency while also safeguarding and protecting them and others from harm (Huegler and Ruch, 2022). Young people have said they need support to feel safe but do not want to feel as though they are being continuously watched (Holmes, 2022). The HM Inspectorate of Probation annual report 2022/2023 (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2023) emphasises the need for probation practitioners to balance a positive and supportive approach with the ability to challenge behaviour. However, current parameters of participation often require young people to be proactive at saying what they need when on probation, as staff do not always listen (AYJ, 2023). Similarly, Livanou et al. (2017) found that late planning and preparation are preventing young people from having a voice in what happens to them.

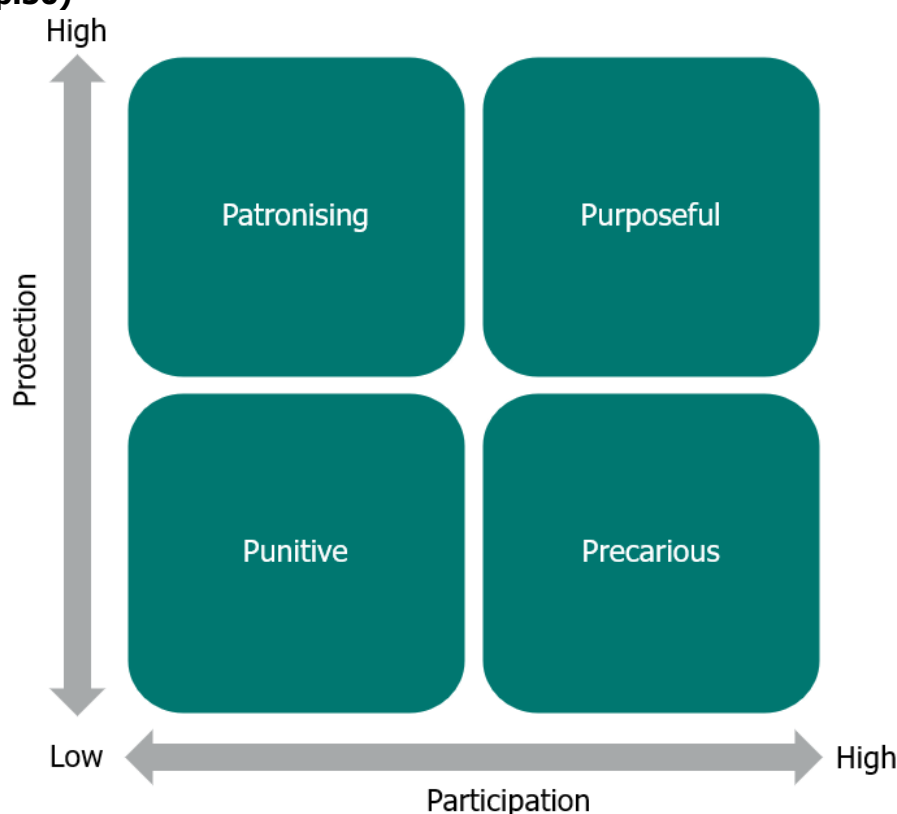
The Child First framework states that young people must be involved in all aspects of the service including assessment, planning and review, and in understanding their experiences of court and transitions between settings (MoJ and YJB, 2019). There may be issues with how participation is viewed, as although policies on transition involve young people in the planning, child engagement tends to be informing rather than seeking input (HMPPS, NPS, YJB, 2021).

To address the discrepancy between what young people want and what may be happening, Cocker et al. (2024) provide a useful matrix in considering the balance between protection and participation and the resulting outcomes (see Figure 3):

- low participation and protection is found in punitive practice
- high participation with low protection is precarious practice for the young person
- high protection with low participation is patronising
- high protection and participation is found in purposeful practice.

For effective Transitional Safeguarding, purposeful practice is more likely to be found where there are positive relationships.

**Figure 3: Balancing protective and participative safeguarding practices (Cocker et al., 2024, p.50)**



In both the inspection data and in our survey data, youth justice practitioners were more meaningfully involving the young person in all aspects of work than probation practitioners. In the five sites, participants from both sectors reported using different methods and approaches to consult with and involve young people in service design and delivery, despite operating under conditions where engagement may at the outset not be voluntary on young people's part. Youth justice and probation have different parameters in which they can respond to young people's 'voices' and 'choices', which link with different opportunities, challenges and constraints.

Youth justice leaders and practitioners referred both to specific consultations involving young people and their families and to taking young people's voices into account across practice interventions as part of the Child First framework. Examples include young people being involved in recruitment or consulted on specific service offers. A key challenge and dilemma cited by youth justice professionals is dealing with situations where young people's views of



their own situation differ from professional judgements around harmful or exploitative contexts, which may result in young people declining support offers. When this happens close to transition to adulthood, professionals reported feeling conflicted that decisions may reflect young people lacking maturity but still have lasting consequences (e.g. a decision to decline care under 18 may lead to young people not having any social care support beyond 18). Youth justice practitioners also expressed concerns that after young people turn 18, services treat non-engagement (such as missed appointments) as a straightforward sign that young people are refusing services outright, without exploring underlying reasons.

Probation leaders cited specific consultations, e.g. Engaging People on Probation or Reducing Reoffending Boards, with some areas reporting arrangements aimed at encouraging the participation of young adults (e.g. through peer mentors or wellbeing hubs). Practitioners referred to integrating young people's voices and choices into sentence planning and setting goals and priorities for each session, alongside the more constrained parameters that involve limited choice (e.g. non-participation leading to breach/recall). Challenges cited include barriers to involving people with lived experiences of probation services in service delivery due to employment constraints affecting convicted offenders; there thus remains much work to do under this principle.

## 2.7 Young people's reflections on systems transitions

Including the views and experiences of young people who have experience of youth justice and/or probation services is essential given that participation is a key principle of Transitional Safeguarding. There were two ways in which we gathered information about young people's perspectives and experiences as a reflective lens to critique the core findings:

- i. journey interviews that explored the specific experiences of young people involved in either justice service
- ii. a focus group comprised of young adults who had used probation services.

### **Cross-cutting themes from journey interviews about young people's experiences**

Each of the five sites chose one young person to include in this section of the study. All young people discussed in the journey interviews (six in total, five interviews) were male. One young person was Black Caribbean; all others were white British. Neurodiversity and mental health were strong themes (with and without diagnoses), along with loss of parental figures during childhood (through death (suicide or murder) or separation). This diversity in experience and identity links to the importance of the equality's principle.

All the youth justice sites in our sample were dealing with serious safeguarding risks involving peers and/or criminal exploitation, including organised crime. At a systems level, there was a lack of curiosity reported by participants around young adults also being victims. There was a context of safeguarding risks involving peers and/or criminal exploitation in all youth justice site interviews (n=3). In one probation site interview, child sexual exploitation featured in the young person's background history and was potentially linked to their offending behaviour. However, their victim status and how their experiences intersected with the offence (committed as a teenager, but with conviction as an adult) seemed to remain underexplored at a systemic level, indicating a potential lack of curiosity about safeguarding risks and harm perpetuated by older exploiting adults. This links to the contextual/ecological principle and the importance of understanding the young person in the context of their life.

Interviews also indicated the complexity of practitioners seeking to balance their understanding of young people's vulnerability and developing maturity with their services' public protection duties to address and prevent offending behaviour and its detrimental impacts. In some instances, there were indications that concerns related to public protection could invite the use of labels or hypotheses in relation to young people's behaviours that emphasised their potential risk to others, without concurrently exploring risks experienced by young people themselves. For example, in one interview, a young person's involvement with CAMHS prior to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and court conviction date was described as noted on file, along with references to suicide attempts and ongoing harmful substance use, but the details of this service history and any potential links to their offending behaviour remained underexplored.

An emphasis on young people as 'a risk to others' rather than also 'at risk from others' was a stronger feature in practitioner interviews in probation sites. Practitioners from both sectors related this to a change in service focus and duties, along with probation workers' responsibilities for caseloads that were equally high in numbers as they were in risk, meaning that, in comparison, some young people's cases might be considered to involve less risk or complexity. However, authors of this report concur with the recently published thematic report on the quality of probation services delivered to young adults (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2024e) regarding the importance of 'risk' being framed and explored more comprehensively, including a focus on young people's potential 'victim' or 'at risk' status, and seeking information from agencies involved prior to a young person's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. This links to the transitional/developmental and relational principles, and the importance of these in guiding practice.

Some young people experienced 'adultification' by the system, with such cases linked to sexual orientation, gender and class/family status alongside race and ethnicity. One example of systemic adultification concerned orphaned young people who had left (possibly having been trafficked) and then returned to the UK as unaccompanied minor UK citizens. The young people faced homelessness and a lack of care but had no children's social care services involvement (despite previous brief contacts with social care and youth justice services and courts in other areas), until their youth justice practitioner (allocated just months before their 18th birthdays) tried to explore with them their options of accessing care. In two of the youth justice site interviews, practitioners were concerned that young people considered 'adult prison' experience as a status symbol based on their own experience or popular media perceptions. Again, the relational principle identifies the need to be trauma-attuned, whilst the transitional/developmental principle requires an alignment of systems, recognising the potential problems and difficulties for young people regarding continuity of service experience.

A further cross-cutting theme was that the lack of continuity and of transitional services outside of youth justice and probation had a significant and cumulative impact as young people may experience the change or ending of several professional relationships at the same time or face difficulties in accessing a range of services for intersecting needs (e.g. housing, mental health, benefits). Youth justice workers spoke of their role in undertaking work that perhaps a social worker or personal advisor could be undertaking, while practitioners from both sectors referred to working as advocates and bridging between services. Young people in rural areas faced particular barriers to accessing suitable services, specifically in terms of EEDI-related needs, such as advice and support for LGBTQ+ young people.

### **Young people's views**

The organisation 'Revolving Doors' supported this piece of the study. Two members of the research team met with several young people in December 2024. The focus of the session was

to ask young people for general comments about the findings and whether they aligned with their experiences.

All the young people had experiences of probation services. A key view expressed by young people during the session was that, *"the current system doesn't work because it is based on punishment and is setting us up to fail"*. One young person said that the study's findings were *"the complete opposite of the support I received"*. Young People stated that they had the opposite experience of what is described in the Transitional Safeguarding six key principles.

In terms of young people's participation in relation to decisions made about them, young people spoke about their experiences consisting of a lot of multi-agency meetings that were 'tick box':

*"Decisions were being made for me and the decisions were just to move me which were counterproductive. They never really listened to me; they never really offered me support for the trauma I had been through as a child that led into services."*

With regard to an emphasis on relational practice, some young people are left without support by services, particularly those who move around a lot – their key relationships and support are disrupted. In this regard, young people spoke about the importance of a personalised approach: *"you need to ask the person what works for them and what like, how can we support you like you need"*.

In terms of the importance of practitioners embracing a developmental perspective to their work, another young person talked about the blame he experienced from adults as a child:

*"I was always classed as the naughty child or the reason to blame when I was a child. Whereas when I was older, 23, and getting support from charities, I realised that I wasn't the one to blame. And I was exploited and I was groomed and the people that were meant to be looking after me as a child didn't do their job. So I literally spent my years of childhood of social services, (and then) probation telling me I needed to make better choices. That was the way it was looked at as when I was a child. I was making the wrong choices. And that was the reason I was in the situation I was facing."*

This emphasises the importance of understanding the context that young people are living in and the harms, risks and protective factors that they experience.

When we asked young people how it might be possible to change this punitive approach, their comment was: *"The system is not for the benefit of the individual; it's for the benefit of the public"*. One young person suggested:

*"Why don't you focus ... the resources around building up their creativity, so they do not need to transition from one service to another service? I think it's more about looking into these people's background and what they want to do and building their character up. So that they can be something and not be part of the revolving door that keeps them circling their life."*

One young person gave a clear example of why a relational approach matters and how one person can make a difference to their life:

*"I was lucky enough to be seen by a CID, or a lady CID, who came. And she was lucky enough to recognise and came to me and said, "I don't think you're a bad person. I don't think the choices, or the things you're going through is your fault."*

*And I would like to get you to some sort of support.” And my life changed from that moment. Two weeks later I found out I was pregnant, so, yeah, the support came at such an amazing time. But it took for that one police officer to have a positive holistic trauma-informed approach to get me the support I needed. Whereas everyone else in my life had looked at me as a burden, the naughty one, the problem. And all it took is for that one person to come along with a mindset of, “I don’t think this little girl is the problem. I think she’s been failed and I think no one has supported her.” So, yeah.”*

These are clear messages for practitioners and senior leaders in both youth justice and probation services to take forward in their work with young people.

### 3. Conclusions and implications

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This project sought to explore the appetite for and understanding of Transitional Safeguarding within the justice sector. We found that there is impetus for a Transitional Safeguarding approach at practice and strategic levels; however, how this is being translated at the frontline has not been fully evidenced or is not happening at all. There are acknowledged shortcomings in the support available to young people around their mental health, addictions, particular safeguarding harms relating to criminal and sexual exploitation, and managing other harms that affect a young person in addition to their offending.

#### **Barriers to effective safeguarding during transitions from youth justice to probation**

Despite the existing policy and protocol requirements, Harris and Edwards (2023, p3) note that 'young people turning 18 while in contact with the youth justice system face a steep cliff edge, leaving them at risk of harm and continued contact with the criminal justice system.' Leaders and practitioners generally recognised the need for transitional arrangements to be different than they are now. Their view is that the social policy framework supports transitions work in principle, but the practice and system realities impact hugely on how transitional support is offered to young people.

Practitioners and leaders were reflective about the differences between probation and youth justice. Such differences arise both in relation to service expectations of young people and regarding practice approaches and contexts of working. For example, youth justice practitioners described how their work with young people attends to specific needs (e.g. arising from neurodiversity, trauma or family dynamics). Home visits or meetings in a variety of settings that allow practitioners to bond with young people (cafes, gyms, outside walks) are common. In comparison, probation appointments are expected/required to take place in probation offices at specified times, which may pose barriers due to their location and facilities and based on young people's ability to travel there.

There were references (by both probation and youth justice practitioners) to youth justice perhaps being overprotective of young people, described through terms such as a *'bubble'*, a *'softly-softly'*, *'gentle'*, *'kid gloves'* or *'cosy'* approach. Equally, practitioners from both sectors described the system young people transition into as *'too harsh'*. Some practitioners in youth justice wondered whether their more flexible approaches to supporting young people could be *'setting them up to fail'* when they transitioned to probation services.

There were also responses which convey a view that young people are lacking boundaries and necessary life skills for transition, suggesting that more flexibility may not always be helpful:

*"I've seen some people kind of like, young people then slip when they get to adult probation when suddenly how everything's changed and how they respond to that. Because they come with the kind of sense of not understanding boundaries or expectations or consequences."* [Practitioner, Focus Group, Probation]

Probation practitioners also work in contexts of increased scrutiny and so adopting more flexible approaches in their work with young people may carry risks, including for their own professional positions, due to the criticisms they would face if a person then went on to reoffend.

*"...I think that can cause a tension for some practitioners because it would make them feel vulnerable for the event of the person [...], if they were then to go on and*

*do something horrendous, that they would come into scrutiny.” [Operational lead, Probation]*

A strategic lead in a probation site suggested that at the ‘people’ level of practice, many probation practitioners were prepared to be more flexible, recognising that maturation is a process and not an event. However, the policy level of legislation and court systems left little scope for flexibility:

*“[at] the people level, there’s a recognition the maturation is not as simple as, you become an adult, and off you go. That’s within our working practices. That’s within trauma-informed practice. The policy level is, there is an absolutely cut-off at 17 years and 364 days, in going into an adult court as opposed to going into a youth court. [...] ... that structure is not reflective of maturation. We try and put processes in place around that, which work with that young person, but it’s not going to change that very stark legislative point.” [Strategic lead, Probation]*

There are also issues with the language used by youth justice and probation when talking with and about young people. Binaries in language were noted in the two services, e.g. boy/man; child/adult.

*“... I remember one case he was 18 at the time and I went to go and see him and the POM was referring to him as ‘boy, boy, boy’. I was like, ‘You’re an adult now. You’re a man. And I want to refer to you as such.’” [Practitioner, Focus Group, Probation]*

Practitioners acknowledged that such binary categorisations are not helpful over this period of transition and reflects the starkness of the different approaches used by youth justice and probation toward young people.

### **Promising practice: Moving beyond the child-adult binary**

Transition to adulthood is a complex process where neuro-physical development and psycho-social maturity may not match chronological age. Service transitions between youth justice and probation need to take account of this, but practitioners also face dilemmas in navigating complex legal, policy and practice contexts. Binary categorisations of childhood or adulthood influence young people’s experiences of service transitions if this leads to drastically changed expectations at 18. One strategic lead in a youth justice site argued that the emphasis should be on treating young people in the youth justice system as ‘*our*’ children – shifting the focus onto issues of belonging, identity and societal responsibility to set the conditions that enable rehabilitation:

*“I think, no, we’re not doing too much. These are our children. They belong to us, they’re our responsibility, and I think we all understand, in the youth justice arena, that those children, they’re your next cohort of doctors. They’re the next people that are going to cure cancer, so we’ve got to treat them well. We’ve got to engage them, and we have to change the path that they’re on.” [Strategic lead, Youth Justice]*

This perspective is less concerned with whether a young person is categorised as ‘a’ child or ‘an’ adult but instead focuses on relationship-based working and on young people as maturing citizens whose aspirations and potential to make contributions to society are central to the socialisation and rehabilitation work of youth justice and probation alike.



## Transitional approaches and arrangements

It is important to separate out transitions work from Transitional Safeguarding. There are connections between the two as poor transitions planning can create or worsen risks for young people (Cocker et al., 2024, p143). They were often used interchangeably by participants. In separating these terms, leaders and practitioners in youth justice and probation recognised the need for transitional arrangements to be different than they are now. This is also recognised in inspection reports, such as the thematic inspection on the quality of services delivered to young adults in the Probation Service (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2024e). The social policy framework is there, as are strategies and protocols across probation and youth justice, such as the National Protocol for managing transitions for young people moving from youth justice to the Probation Service (HMPPS et al., 2021) and in broader policy documents such as *the independent review of children's social care* (MacAlister 2022), but the practice and system realities impact on how transitional support is offered to young people. The reasons that these changes are not evident in practice may relate to the financial and resource issues experienced by probation services (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2025a). However, in addition to a focus on finance, any change to practice may require a move away from rigid structures in probation focusing on monitoring and bureaucracy and offer practitioners more flexibility in working in a personalised way with young people. This requires a whole systems response and culture change.

Relatively few adolescents using youth justice services will transition directly to probation. Those that do have often committed serious offences. Based on a general recognition of young adulthood as a time of ongoing development and maturation, leaders and practitioners emphasised the need for transitional arrangements between youth justice and probation to be considered and implemented more systematically than they are at present. Study participants pointed to the absence, and need for, a transitional 'middle ground' for young people and young adults between 18-21 or 18-25 years:

*"...it should be three-tier and not two. Rather than youth justice and then probation, I think there should be the middle – there should be a sandwich between."*  
[Practitioner, Focus Group, Probation]

Seconded roles for probation officers in youth justice service teams were seen as an effective way of bringing together experience and expertise from both sectors and bridging between different services and their frameworks during transition to adulthood, with benefits both for services and individual young people:

*"... where you have a seconded probation officer within the YOT [youth offending team], and then obviously they are more aware of how YOT works. [...] [they] may be in the office maybe once or twice a week. They would keep an eye on all the cases, of those that are approaching 18, and those that are eligible to be transferred over to the Probation Service. That's always been helpful, because then obviously you can get a young person prepared for that transfer or transition."*  
[Practitioner, Focus Group, Youth Justice]

However, in practice, the benefit of seconded probation officers is not universally available. Out of the three youth justice sites included in this study, only in one area was the local secondment arrangement described as 'pretty solid', while the two other sites did not have a seconded probation officer in post at the time of the research. In the two probation sites, which covered areas with several different local youth justice service areas, there was variable access



to seconded probation officers. Even where a seconded officer was in post, probation leaders noted differences in local approaches:

*"I think each local authority will use them quite differently. So, there's not necessarily consistency. In my experience they're not always the ones that are holding the transition cases which makes no sense to me."* [Operational lead, Probation]

Leaders and practitioners from both sectors described negative impacts on practice in areas where the seconded probation officer expertise is lacking:

*"I think there's about half of services in [region] that don't have a seconded probation officer, and the money – so, probation give you back the money if they can't give you a human, but that's useless. We don't want the money. We want the experience, the knowledge, and access to the systems"* [Strategic lead, Youth Justice]

However, recruiting seconded officers was described as challenging, particularly in the context of an overall recruitment and retention crisis in probation (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2025b), with a strategic lead describing the seconded role as having lost its attractiveness over the past 20 years. A 'change to the type of offences that people will manage' [Strategic lead, Probation] was seen as one factor in this. A youth justice practitioner who had previously worked in probation services reflected on a possible reluctance among probation staff to work with young people due to higher reoffending rates, behaviours that were seen as more challenging, and struggles to devote enough time to supporting young people, particularly when officers have caseloads exceeding 100.

In one probation site, young adults are, whenever possible, allocated to specific teams of young adult 'concentrators' with specific training, including in trauma-informed practice. However, resource constraints mean this is not always possible. Where probation practitioners work with smaller numbers of young adults as part of a large and complex all-ages caseload, prioritising their developmental needs was described as potentially challenging:

*".....you can have the best intentions walking into a room with somebody, but if you've just taken a call from a 37-year-old who has just committed a heinous further offence, you're not necessarily then going to be able to switch straight away to your 19-year-old that's in front of you, and dealing with the maturity. They've arrived 15 minutes late because they're neurodivergent. So, I think with the best will in the world, we would have a resource picture that would allow us to say, 'Right, you have small caseloads with young adults'. That has always been proven to be the best. You have co-located services. That's what we used to deliver in [region], but we don't deliver it now."* [Strategic lead, Probation]

Some probation practitioners described a lack of specific training and practice resources adapted to the needs of young adults. This means that they may rely strongly on their all-ages relational working skills and 'practice wisdom' in working with young people but often do so without dedicated systemic support (including from wider community-based services, e.g. mental health or adult social care).

## Promising practice: Partnership working between youth justice and probation during transition

Leaders and practitioners in our study sites provided various examples of joint and partnership working involving youth justice and probation, aimed at breaking down inter-agency barriers and providing better and safer transitional experiences for young people:

### 18-25 specialised teams and local transition protocols

- A practitioner in a youth justice focus group highlighted a new service structure for probation, youth justice and other services in her local area:  
*“In probation they’ve actually split it now into different pods. So, I’m also based in the 18 to 25 pod, so in that pod we’re working on at the moment creating a hub, because we acknowledge that actually youth justice and probation are worlds apart. So it’s trying to merge them...there is still the processes that you have to follow in probation, but it’s trying to actually make it as engaging and accessible as possible, and acknowledging there is differences.”*
- In this locality, the specialised team also extends to co-located services with other agencies. Youth justice, probation, and partner agencies use this as an opportunity for joint appointments with young people, as well as for joint agency meetings. The setting facilitates the involvement of probation practitioners focusing on work with 18–25-year-olds in ‘Child First’ training sessions.
- In one probation site, structured learning sessions are run regularly for practitioners working with 18–25-year-olds to share best practice on working with young adults, including practical ideas for how materials used in probation work can be adapted in ways that considers maturity and development.
- In the other probation site, leaders described how a local transitions protocol has helped to adapt and contextualise national level policy to the local area, developed through collaboration between youth justice, probation and other local services. This facilitated exchange and enabled practitioners from the different agencies to better understand each other’s roles.

### Professional expertise and partnership working with individual young people

- Individual youth justice practitioners in several sites referred to having professional experience in probation, which helped them understand the different contexts and conditions of this work, enabling them to share their knowledge with colleagues. These practitioners were also able to better support young people’s service transitions to probation by explaining likely changes, answering questions and preparing young people, from a position of direct experience.
- In all three youth justice sites, practitioners described planned periods of joint working with probation during transition, which in some instances were extended beyond young people’s 18th birthdays, based on maturity, developmental and relationship-based factors. In one site, care-experienced young people whose supervision transferred to probation continued to have access to support from a link clinician based in the youth justice service, providing both an ongoing relationship link for the young person and the opportunity for ongoing partnership work with probation.

## Key implications

The people we interviewed for this study were thoughtful, reflective and careful about how they worded their concerns about their practice realities, including their experiences of other services. Staff expressed their frustrations with systems, structures and processes they had to work with that did not meet the needs of young people. There was a clear wish to 'do the right thing' for young people that would make a difference to the risks and harms they experienced in their lives, particularly given the complexity of problems that these young people were facing; the solutions were not straightforward.

Given current pressures on the probation system nationally, there are limited opportunities to innovate, although the current 'Our Future Probation Service Programme' is focused upon rebalancing demand and capacity to help deliver sustainable performance improvement. There are also issues about how much change can occur locally in specific probation sites, involving existing partners, or whether there is a need to wait for national guidance/published protocols to introduce changes to working practices with young people.

Building upon the project's findings, the following are set out as the key implications:

1. Transitional Safeguarding should be embedded within the existing National Transitions protocol. This should address how the six key principles are applied at all levels of the professional system.
2. Principles of Transitional Safeguarding should be woven into relevant inspection frameworks, with accompanying support resources for service managers.
3. Staff from both services should be trained together on Transitions and Transitional Safeguarding policies and protocols so that they can deliver the changes needed in both organisations and understand the differences between transitions planning and Transitional Safeguarding.
4. Relational, developmentally-informed practice should be foregrounded in inspection, policy, and training – and modelled by service leaders.
5. There should be specific emphasis on Transitional Safeguarding in policy, protocol and training so that staff understand the safeguarding risks for young people themselves as well as the risks they may present to others.
6. Youth justice and probation services should prioritise forging good (local) connections with education and employment routes, as this is essential to safeguarding young people within the justice system.
7. *The quality of services delivered to young adults in the Probation Service* report (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2024e) reviewed transition services for young adults in probation services. There are three recommendations that also apply to this work and should be delivered across both services. They are:
  - ensure access to services and support is equitable for all young adults with protected characteristics and make sure that addressing diversity, particularly in relation to race and ethnicity, is prioritised
  - continue to develop learning programmes that enable staff to assess maturity, adopt a disability and trauma-informed approach and discuss discrimination and its impact with young adults

- ensure that any barriers to staff requesting or accessing information from partner agencies, including youth justice services are addressed by senior managers.

Accompanying this report, three briefings – aimed at practitioners, senior managers, and policy leads – set out further reflection questions, considerations, and potential actions.

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# Annex A: Methodology

HM Inspectorate of Probation commissioned the research team at the University of East Anglia to provide an overview of how youth justice and probation embed the six key principles of Transitional Safeguarding into their service design. The research took place between February and December 2024 and aimed to:

- understand how safeguarding and transition work within the youth justice and probation services for young people – how does it work, who does it work for and what needs to happen for future sustainability
- capture developing Transitional Safeguarding practices in youth justice and probation through qualitative and quantitative data
- provide an understanding of how service provider members work in supporting (or not) the six principles of Transitional Safeguarding across the network
- document the experience of young people who move from youth justice to probation services
- identify key considerations for local youth justice and probation services in how they identify and address safeguarding issues for young people within transitions planning
- contribute to the small body of research around Transitional Safeguarding and youth justice/probation.

The specific research questions were as follows:

Research questions	
1.	How does Transitional Safeguarding work within youth justice and probation, who does it work for, and what needs to happen for future sustainability?
2.	How evident are the Transitional Safeguarding key principles in youth justice and probation services?
3.	Variation in Transitional Safeguarding practice: To what extent are the Transitional Safeguarding key principles evident in high-performing youth justice and probation services? How could their application at practice and policy level support the delivery of high-quality support to young adults?
4.	What do these findings suggest for those seeking to embed a Transitional Safeguarding approach in justice services for young people?

To explore the six key principles of Transitional Safeguarding, this research ascertained the views and experiences of professionals using a mixed methods approach to investigate how youth justice and probation work together (and separately) to provide services to young people. We used a survey, interviews, focus groups and secondary analysis of HMI Probation data as methods in the research. The quantitative component encompassed all of England, while the qualitative component was focused on five 'study sites'.

The methods were comprised in four interlinked workstreams. Workstream 1 was a literature review of relevant research and social policy documents. The quantitative component, comprising workstream 2, was two pronged. Its first part was an analysis of secondary data collected by HMI Probation, namely case-level assessments of the quality of delivery across youth justice and probation service inspections. Its second part was a survey of frontline practitioners in both youth justice services and probation services. The qualitative component was primarily a set of interviews and focus groups carried out in the five study sites

(workstream 3). This was supplemented by a literature review (workstream 1) and sense-checking workshops (workstream 4).

The four workstreams were designed in a bespoke manner, to ensure a tailored approach to answering the four research questions.

**Table A1: How the four workstreams map onto the four research questions**

Research question	Workstream 1: Literature review	Workstream 2: Quantitative analysis (survey and secondary data)	Workstream 3: Study sites (interviews and focus groups)	Workstream 4: Virtual Workshops with professionals and young people
RQ1	x	x	x	
RQ2	x	x	x	x
RQ3			x	x
RQ4				x

In addition, a Steering Group, comprising representatives from wider community organisations, the HMI Probation project team, alongside the research team leads, helped guide the researchers with the work.

In terms of our approach to working with young people, service user opinions and voices were collected via a workshop undertaken with young people, where initial findings were shared with them and their feedback obtained.

Additionally, each of the two probation service sites and the three youth justice service sites (n=5) provided details about a specific (anonymised) young person who had moved from youth justice services to probation to highlight young people's experiences.

Brief details on the four workstreams are set out below.

### **Workstream 1: Literature review**

The study commenced with a literature review examining academic research and key policy literature. The literature and procedural documentation were analysed in a desktop review using a spreadsheet that focuses on understanding the existing evidence base on a number of aspects of the safeguarding and transitions arrangements between youth justice and probation services.

### **Workstream 2: Quantitative analysis**

This workstream was focused on quantitative data, and comprised two components.

#### ***HM Inspectorate of Probation inspections***

The study had access to secondary data identified as relevant for a general understanding of the needs of young people in the two services, as well as for most of the Transitional Safeguarding principles. These secondary data were HM Inspectorate of Probation's inspection datasets. The two datasets comprised aggregated quantitative data from inspections of individual cases, for probation and youth justice.<sup>2</sup> They covered the period 2021-2023 for probation and 2021-2024 for youth justice. Their geographic cover was England and Wales.

<sup>2</sup> The youth justice dataset comprising 95 per cent non-custodial cases.



While not covering all areas in England and Wales,<sup>3</sup> the data were considered representative of the wider areas. For both datasets, only age groups within the study scope were included, namely 16-19-year-olds for the youth justice data (n=617 cases) and 18–25-year-olds for the probation data (n=291 cases).

The two datasets had a similar structure, with both primarily comprised of sections on assessment, planning, implementation and delivery, and reviewing. HM Inspectorate of Probation produced descriptive statistics of the relevant datapoints (see Annex B), as requested by the study team. Where possible, equivalent datapoints for the same variable but from the different services were shown side-by-side.

### ***Survey***

The study team developed and distributed a survey to youth justice and probation services across England. This comprised 117 youth justice services in England, and 10 probation regions in England (two of the 12 probation regions in England had earlier explained they were not able to take part due to capacity challenges). The survey was targeted at both frontline practitioners and managers. This dual perspective gathering helped with understanding the extent to which there was consistent understanding and alignment with the Transitional Safeguarding principles across different levels in each service.

Survey recruitment followed a three-staged approach. First, the study team identified and approached the respective heads of regions for both youth justice and probation services, and asked them to circulate the survey in their respective regions. Most of the region heads responded positively, in some cases following reminders, and this was considered to have generated a reasonable level of engagement. Second, the study team identified local managers for both services via respective online open-access government sources,<sup>4</sup> and contacted them directly asking if they would complete the survey. This stage was not considered to be rigorous, as particularly for probation, email addresses were not consistently provided, and for both services, HM Inspectorate of Probation raised concerns regarding the extent to which information was kept up to date. Third, HM Inspectorate of Probation liaised with national contacts, who agreed to include a note in internal communications and a countrywide newsletter with circulation comprising all probation service frontline practitioners and managers.

The survey was open from July to September 2024, and 144 responses were received from all over England, with n=49 respondents identifying as youth justice and n=95 as probation. However, these numbers were not maintained across the survey, falling to below n=100 for the questions on the Transitional Safeguarding principles (see Annex C).

### **Workstream 3: Study sites – qualitative interviews and focus groups**

To gain a more in-depth understanding of current delivery and relevant issues, the study team conducted 'online visits' to five sites (the study sites), across both youth justice and probation services.

#### ***Sampling of study sites***

The study team purposively sampled three youth justice services and two probation services, guided by three criteria. The first criterion was being a site that had demonstrated good or promising practice in terms of its approach to safeguarding. This was assessed by reference to having at least 80 per cent positive responses to the relevant questions in HM Inspectorate of

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<sup>3</sup> Proportion for probation: 36 of 109 Probation Delivery Units (PDUs) = 33 per cent; proportion for youth justice: 72 of 155 youth justice services = 46 per cent.

<sup>4</sup> For probation – Probation Finder (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/probation-finder>); and for youth justice – contact details webpage (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/youth-offending-team-contact-details>). Webpages were accessed in June-August 2024.

Probation's inspection data.<sup>5</sup> The second criterion was having enough participants. This was assessed by reference to the same datasets, with the specific inclusion criterion for participants to have at least ten cases in the relevant age brackets covered by the study in each study site. The third criterion was to have a mix of sites in urban and rural areas.

A list of ten services that met the first two criteria were identified and contact points at each were engaged via email. Seven responded positively and eventually the following five sites were selected due to practical preferences (e.g. time availability in the study window), and meeting the third criterion:

- Probation services: Derbyshire (included within East Midlands) and Greater Manchester
- Youth justice services: Devon, Hammersmith, and Sunderland.<sup>6</sup>

## **Methods**

Three methods of data collection were employed in each study site, except Sunderland. First, two semi-structured interviews were undertaken with different levels of the study site's management – one from the category of area leadership<sup>7</sup> and one from the category of local office management.<sup>8</sup> Second, two focus groups with frontline practitioners were undertaken in each study site.<sup>9</sup> Third, one interview with a frontline practitioner was undertaken about a previously selected service user's journey (this included Sunderland). This was focused on data shared beforehand<sup>10</sup> about the service user's offending history and information of relevance to the six principles of Transitional Safeguarding.

Qualitative data were analysed using nVivo software, with a synthesis of findings first within study sites, and then with the other workstream findings.

## **Workstream 4: Virtual workshops**

Following the completion of work in the first three workstreams, two online workshops were held with professionals in the case study services (one workshop for frontline staff and another for managers). The initial findings were presented, and the workshop sessions were used to enable discussion and receive feedback from professionals.

The organisation 'Revolving Doors' supported a further session with several young people in December 2024. The focus of the session was to ask young people for general comments about the findings and whether they aligned with their experiences.

## **Ethics**

Ethics approval for the project was provided by the School of Social Work Ethics Committee, UEA, with further approval through the MoJ/HMPPS National Research Committee.

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<sup>5</sup> For example, for youth justice services, the questions of relevance were identified as being:

- Does assessment sufficiently analyse how to keep the child safe?
- Does planning focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?
- Does service delivery effectively support the safety of the child?
- Does reviewing focus sufficiently on keeping the child safe?

<sup>6</sup> Sunderland contributed a young person's journey to our study. Unfortunately because of operational reasons they were not able to contribute to the qualitative interviews and focus groups.

<sup>7</sup> Area leadership was defined as follows: For probation – Regional Probation Director / Area Executive Director / Head of Operations; for youth justice – Youth Justice Bureau Head of Oversight.

<sup>8</sup> Local office management was defined as follows: For probation – Probation Officer / Trainee Probation Officer / Probation Service Officer (working directly with service users, without a recognised Probation Officer qualification); for youth justice – Youth Justice/ Offending Officer and Youth Justice / Offending Team Officer.

<sup>9</sup> Frontline Practitioners were defined as follows: For probation – Probation Officer / Trainee Probation Officer / Probation Service Officer (working directly with service users, without a recognised Probation Officer qualification); for youth justice – Youth Justice/ Offending Officer and Youth Justice / Offending Team Officer

<sup>10</sup> This was provided in a two-page template, completed by the frontline practitioner two days before the interview.

## Annex B: Inspection data outputs

**Table B1: Youth justice inspection data – inspector judgements on questions linked to Transitional Safeguarding principles**

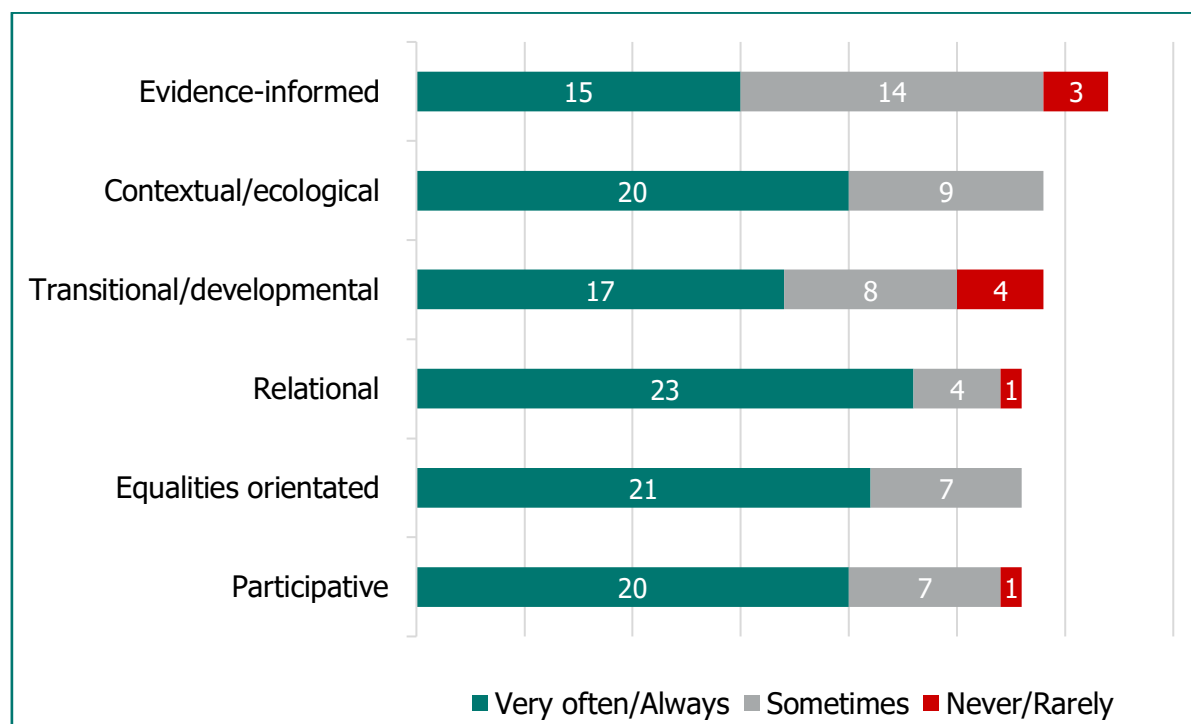
	N	Positive judgements	
		n	%
Is the child meaningfully involved in their assessment?	619	601	97.1%
Is the child meaningfully involved in planning?	617	533	86.4%
Does assessment sufficiently analyse diversity issues?	619	462	74.6%
Does planning sufficiently address diversity issues?	617	439	71.2%
Is sufficient focus given to developing and maintaining an effective working relationship with the child?	616	558	90.6%
Does service delivery reflect the wider familial and social context of the child, involving the parents, carers or significant others?	616	542	88.0%

**Table B2: Probation inspection data – inspector judgements on questions linked to Transitional Safeguarding principles**

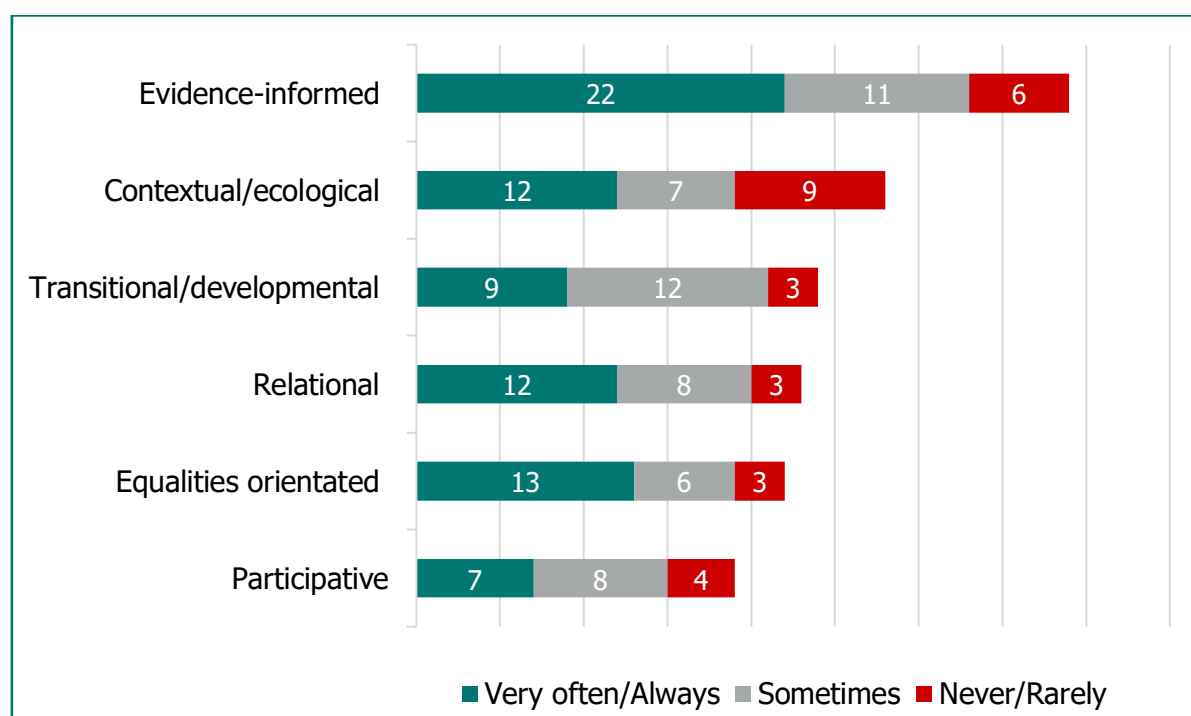
	N	Positive judgements	
		n	%
Is the person on probation involved meaningfully in their assessment?	292	195	66.8%
Is the person on probation meaningfully involved in planning?	292	181	62.0%
Does assessment analyse the protected characteristics of the individual and consider the impact of these on their ability to comply and engage?	292	163	55.8%
Does planning take sufficient account of the diversity factors of the individual which may affect engagement and compliance?	292	159	54.5%
Is sufficient focus given to maintaining an effective working relationship with the person on probation?	293	201	68.6%
Are key individuals in the person on probation's life engaged where appropriate to support their desistance?	257	146	56.8%

## Annex C: Survey outputs

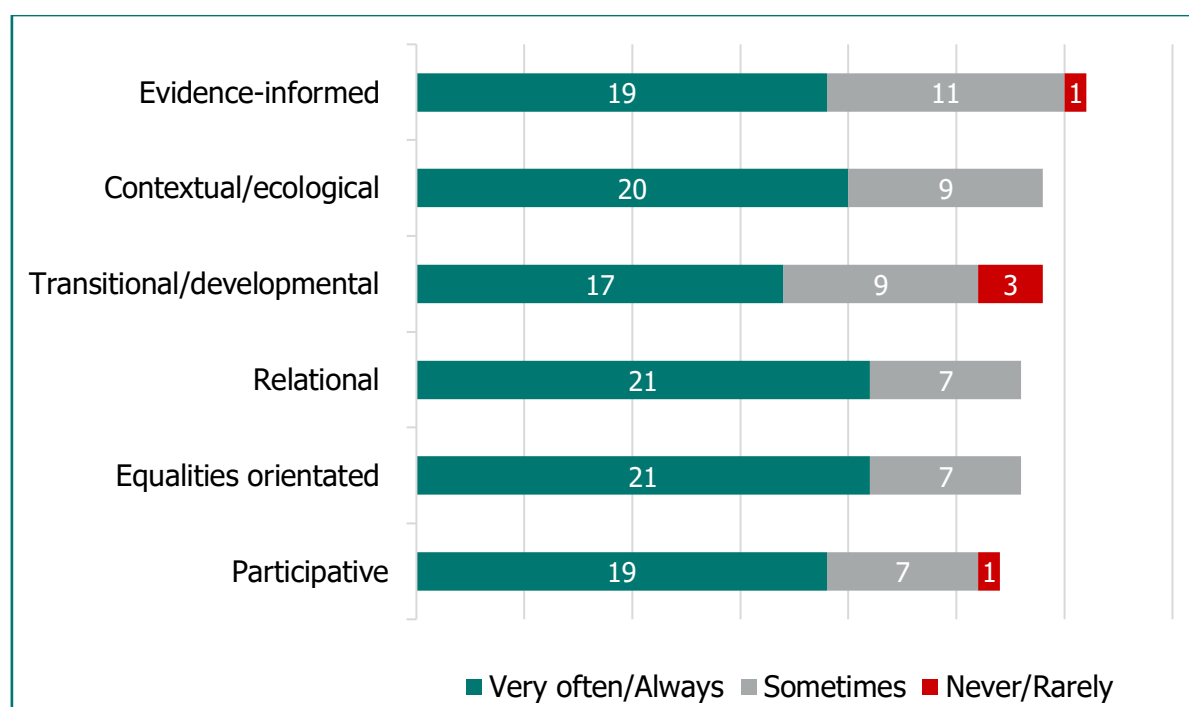
**Figure C1: Extent of individual practice emulating Transitional Safeguarding principles – youth justice respondents**



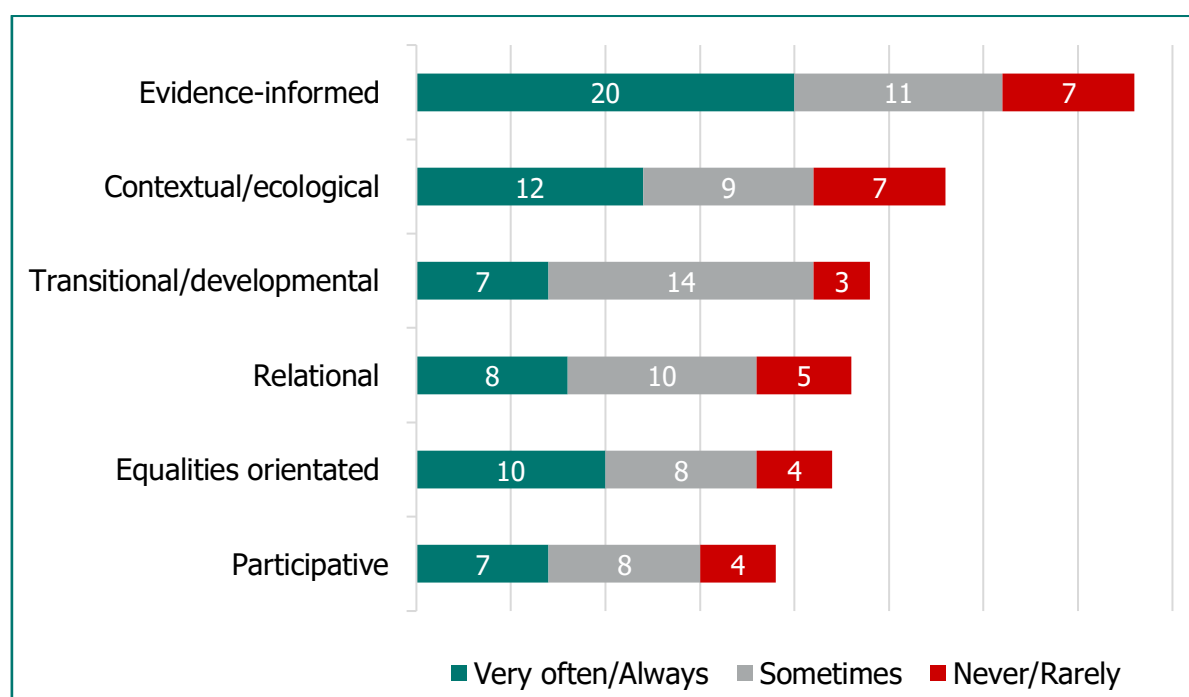
**Figure C2: Extent of individual practice emulating Transitional Safeguarding principles – probation respondents**



**Figure C3: Extent of organisational approach linking to Transitional Safeguarding principles – youth justice respondents**



**Figure C4: Extent of organisational approach linking to Transitional Safeguarding principles – probation respondents**



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