

Child First Prevention Pathfinder – Gathering children’s views on prevention services



Dr Kathy Hampson

November 2021



Cyngor Sir
CEREDIGION
County Council

Gathering children's views on prevention services

1. Introduction

The Youth Justice Blueprint for Wales, published in 2018, sets out a vision for the youth justice system in Wales. The Blueprint contains a series of recommendations for YOT targeted prevention work, which included exploring options for:

- Developing effective monitoring of prevention activity to demonstrate impact
- Developing a national approach for targeted YOT prevention activity and ensure it is embedded in a joint framework model for Wales.

The YJB commissioned Ceredigion YOT, working in partnership with Aberystwyth University, to be a pathfinder project to research, develop, and evaluate prevention approaches to inform the development of these recommendations and to look. This included producing recommendations on the development of a methodology to gather the child's views on prevention services, prepared by Aberystwyth University.

This paper seeks to identify how best to gather feedback from children involved with voluntary YOT prevention projects using a question-based feedback tool. It has taken relevant literature into consideration (making use of evidence-based academic opinion) when identifying what would be important to include in such a feedback tool. This is key to both gaining useful and honest feedback from children and ensuring that opinions regarding the most appropriate 'markers for success' (London et al., 2003) are sought. The structure of this paper will provide background for the questions question areas (general quality indicators) identified as important so it can be seen from where in the literature each aspect has been drawn and pointers for how this could effectively be developed into a tool which is most appropriate for children.

This paper is structured into five further sections – Section 2 will identify the rationale for the way this has been approached, with background discussion on the importance of gathering feedback from children; it will then identify the methodology used for this report and tool construction. Section 3 will identify (from the literature) aspects of questionnaire design for children which impact on reliability and validity of responses and elements which need to be included in a feedback tool for it to be useful, child-friendly/appropriate and relevant. Section 4 will look at examples of feedback tools/methods from both Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) and a range of voluntary agencies involved with providing prevention services, identifying further aspects which would be useful for inclusion, but also identifying where these tools have *not* included what is known from the research about good practice in this area and where they have included aspects which are less desirable. Section 5 gives an indicative list of recommendations for use when developing a tool. Section 6 then begins to explore how this might be developed into a tool which is truly reflective of both good practice (content) and child-friendly/appropriate (delivery). The bibliography at the end of this paper, detailing the literature which has been consulted for this paper (or which might be useful when considering collecting feedback), may provide extra information, context and guidance.

2. Rationale, background and methodology

In 2018, the Youth Justice Board (YJB) adopted 'Child First' (CF) as its 'strategic approach and central guiding principle', a central tenet of which is children's participation and 'meaningful collaboration' (YJB, 2021: 11), making the child's voice paramount for the delivery of youth justice services. Gathering

feedback from children involved with prevention services also enables them to have a voice in services which are provided *for* them (a right according to Article 12 of the UNCRC and identified as important through the YJB's participation strategy; YJB, 2016) but viewed by children themselves as an 'under-developed source of information' (Clifton, 2014: 1). For services to be effective (and for children to engage with something which is voluntary, so therefore they could effectively vote with their feet by not attending/engaging), children need to view them as personally relevant and as answering their own perceived needs; therefore, feedback needs to allow them to express this without influence or restriction, and should be entirely voluntary (children should feel able to refuse). Feedback could also reflect the purposes which the agency identified as goals for the programme, but these should be framed positively (which might also assist prevention-providing agencies with identifying purely positive aims for their programmes, despite the negative connotations of 'prevention' as being *stopping* something), and child-appropriately, looking for pro-social personal development rather than seeking to address perceived or assessed deficits (cf CF approach; Case and Browning, 2021). Whilst the gathering of feedback is crucial, this needs to be done within a '*listening culture*' (Clifton, 2014: 3), which agencies could facilitate through the development of a charter (co-produced with children), which would go some way to assuring children that their views are inherently important and will be taken into account (see, for example the 'Hear By Right' campaign's standards, NYA, 2018: 15). To try to gather feedback on a project in isolation without a wider culture which places great importance on the voice of the child (and reflects this in practice development) opens the risk of tokenism, which is more likely to damage than build trust.

Effectively gathering children's views is difficult, requiring any tool to be carefully designed, taking developmental issues into account, rather than just chronological age (Borgers et al., 2000; Arthur et al., 2017). Any method for gathering feedback from children should be child friendly and accessible in design (both in content and collection methodology), to ensure that it gains a good level of response from children and to facilitate them to complete it in a way which truly reflects their thoughts, feelings, attitudes and opinions (consistent with CF). For this paper, recommended content for a tool to gather children's views has been drawn from research conducted with children, but this should then be submitted to scrutiny by children and altered to reflect their level of understanding and preferred terminology (Save the Children, 2014; Case et al, 2020). Therefore, the recommendations for this feedback tool, which has been constructed with reference to the relevant research (see Section 3), should be further developed *with* children to ensure that it is child-friendly and child appropriate in content (Wood, 2015). It is also proposed that *delivery* methodology be developed with a view to creating an App which could be completed on a tablet independently (without adult input), allowing the child complete freedom of expression (see Section 6). Question styles have been discussed (see Sections 3 and 5) – but children should trial and be able to input into what they find most appropriate in wording, question/answer styles, design and methods of completion (for example using voice recording in places rather than requiring long typed responses), with the facility also to make their own suggestions. Therefore, it is not within the scope of this paper to provide suggestions for exact wording/draft questions, but rather *principles* for an effective, evidence-based tool which can then be developed with children's active input.

Children have found online surveys/questionnaires of 'limited use' (Clifton, 2014: 3), preferring a method which would allow more creative expressions of thought and which would provide data along more qualitative than quantitative lines; the development of an App could potentially facilitate this, so these considerations should be part of the technological development process (see Section 6). It should be stressed that it is more important to design a feedback tool with data quality in mind, rather than merely having a goal of ease of analysis (by using too many closed questions with not enough opportunity for children to truly express their opinion – which again risks being tokenistic box-ticking).

Thought should also be given to potentially involving children in the analysis of results, so they can also input into the *interpretation* of the data. Consideration should also be made about who should facilitate the child to use the feedback tool (a demonstration might be needed), as there could be reluctance (to complete or to be honest) if this were someone who had been involved with the programme/intervention (Wood, 2015); assurances should be given regarding anonymity and access to given feedback, as children might be worried about repercussions should their opinions be negative (Wood, 2015).

To develop the feedback tool principles, firstly a search of relevant literature was conducted looking at: participation, child's voice, feedback/evaluation with children, involving children in research and indicators of 'desistance'. Aspects important for both content and delivery processes were noted and drawn together into the principles set out in Section 5. Added to this, contact was made with every YOT in England and Wales (n=154), asking them three questions:

1. Do you use any means (apart from the 'What do you think' AssetPlus¹ questionnaire) to gauge children's opinion on their experiences/the benefits of YOT-run prevention activities?
2. If yes, it would be very helpful if you could attach to this reply an example copy of whatever means you use – if you are prepared to do this, please do so
3. If there are any other agencies which run prevention services with children (either for you, or ones you know about) could you please list them?

Additionally, external agencies identified by the YOTs as answers to question 3 above were subsequently contacted to ascertain what processes they have set up to gain feedback on interventions from child participants and to share any forms used for this purpose. These were then used to further inform the content of the principles for a feedback tool, but also used to identify perhaps where YOTs/agencies were missing some aspects identified as important through research. This was also a good way to see what delivery *methods* were currently being used to gain this kind of feedback from children.

3. Important feedback tool construction considerations and critical enquiry areas

Tool construction considerations

It is important to embed the content of any feedback tool in the relevant literature so that it incorporates what is currently known about good practice in this area, which may also lead to a more participatory role for children (and their feedback) in the design and development of prevention services. Prevention-providing agencies² should identify processes whereby children's feedback is incorporated into future iterations of interventions offered, so they constantly evolve according to children's views, if possible, giving feedback to the children regarding how their views have contributed (Atkinson et al., 2015). This two-way communication appears to be an important motivational factor in achieving good feedback from children (Clifton, 2014; Wood, 2015), so it might be important to be clear with children throughout a programme/intervention where aspects have been developed through the feedback given by previous participants.

¹ AssetPlus is the standard assessment tool used by all YOTs in England and Wales; the 'what do you think' section specifically asks children to give their opinion on a range of different questions.

² Pre-emptive and targeted prevention activity often involves, especially in the first instance, signposting children and their families to mainstream services and helping them to engage; this paper has concentrated on programmes and interventions, rather than other more bespoke and individualised prevention activity.

Further aspects of survey design, particularly relevant to adolescents, should be understood in the construction of any tool. For example, to avoid surface-level answering which does not tap into children's real opinions ('satisficing'; Krosnick, 1991: 214), questions need to stimulate them to all four stages of a 'comprehension, recall, judgement and response' process (Omrani et al., 2019: 330). Any feedback tool should not be too lengthy as to become exasperating or boring, which would impact negatively on completion rates and quality reducing both reliability and validity (optimum length would be best explored with a group of children to gauge their perceptions – Omrani et al. (2019) expressed this in terms of completion time, with the optimum for adolescents being less than 10 minutes, rather than numbers of questions). Question format is also key to gaining children's real opinions – open questions requiring more detail may give extra freedom, but risk being missed out or prompting 'don't know' responses, whereas closed questions increase the likelihood of gaining responses but which do not fully reflect children's views, (for example a scaling question for which a response can be selected from a range an acceptable response may be selected, without being the product of a real comprehension-recall-judgement-response process. Research has shown that young adolescents are more likely to respond well to closed, forced answer questions rather than open questions (Arthur et al., 2017), however this needs to be balanced with the need to gain good quality *qualitative* responses from children which can effectively feed into a process of intervention evaluation and development for future iterations (additionally multiple choice questions are commonly used in school tests so may induce negative emotions, impacting response engagement; Omrani et al., 2017).

Tool content enquiry areas

The relevant literature in this area (see Section 2 for search methodology; see the bibliography for sources consulted in the construction of these items) seems to indicate that a number of over-arching general quality indicators (HMIE, 2007) should be included in any feedback exercise, identified in this context as: Child-identified indicators of success, the experience of the programme/intervention, the effects of the programme/intervention and future development of the programme/intervention – all to be captured from the child's point of view (and against which the currently used feedback tools received as part of the project from YOTs and other agencies providing prevention services will be measured – see Section 4).

1. *Child-identified indicators of success* - this needs to begin *before* commencement of the programme/intervention to ascertain what the child's own indicators of success might be, as it is important that these are identified and measured for any conclusions on effectiveness to be made (which increases legitimacy), giving the child a starting point for their feedback (Clifton, 2014). Therefore, initial conversations with the child should clearly identify what is important to them in a programme/intervention (what they might want to get out of it), what they want to achieve through a programme/intervention (their indicators of success), what kinds of activities interest them, and what they perceive their strengths and skills to be. Strengths-based positive working with children foregrounds their *own* interests, skills, perceptions, goals and aspirations, so it is vital that these are identified (and incorporated in the programme/intervention as far as possible) and then returned to when evaluatory feedback is being sought. This will mean that the first part of the feedback needs to be able to check in with the child on these aspects (which might need some flexibility in design, if an App is to be developed, which is one option for obtaining feedback), as this will be what the child has been given to expect. This will also show the child that they have been listened to and their opinions, thoughts and feelings taken into consideration in both the delivered reality of the programme/intervention and the future development of such programmes, making the process more participatory. At this point, the feedback tool could also

enquire as to progress (from the child's point of view) on the identified (positive) organisational goals of the programme, and additionally enquire of the child whether they think anything about themselves (or their wider situation) has changed. Equally these latter two aspects could be included towards the end of the feedback tool, before any enquiry about recommendations for change or development.

2. *The experience of programme/intervention* - this could cover a number of different areas depending on the identified optimum length of the tool, including asking about how they would describe the programme (using their own words, rather than tick-boxes), what the environment was like (initial impressions, space, decoration, accessibility, drawbacks, limitations), what the activities were like (interesting, fun, boring, predictable, creative, messy, etc), and what they particularly liked and/or disliked.
3. *The effects of the programme/intervention* - this should cover a range of different aspects as they affected the child (which have been found in research to build 'desistance'³/pro-social positive development; cf Klingele, 2018; Evans et al., 2020), given that the child themselves is most likely to know (feel) what has made a difference to them, and therefore whether it is reasonable to ascribe success to something. This could therefore cover such issues as whether they feel they have been able to express themselves and been listened to through the programme/intervention, how valued or respected they felt, whether there was a recognition (and development) of their strengths and skills, and what they would like to do next (and whether this has changed during the programme). A key part of this section however must look at relationships within the group – both between the child and the other participants, but perhaps more crucially, between themselves and the workers involved. Relationship has been identified as transformational in terms of children's pro-social positive development (and therefore 'desistance'; Johns et al., 2017), with research identifying that children value trust and genuineness (sincerity), reliability, investment of time, and being able to feel comfortable in the adults' company (Cross, 2020).
4. *Future development of the programme/intervention* - this is important when thinking about trying to make all contact with children positive, child friendly and child appropriate, as it allows a child-centric view on what has been delivered, rather than privileging an adult-centric view on what children *might* appreciate and respond to. CF youth justice (to which the youth justice system has now been committed by the YJB; YJB, 2021) identifies the need to '*encourage children's active participation, engagement and wider social inclusion*' to make sure that '*all work is a meaningful collaboration*' (Case and Browning, 2021: 5). For the work to be truly collaborative, it needs to be significantly shaped by the child participants, therefore feedback tools needs to demonstrate to children that their input *will* have an impact (by also sharing with children throughout a programme/intervention where other children's voices have made changes) by allowing them a constructive voice in future development – showing them that they are viewed as assets rather than problems (Creaney, 2020), or just passive participants; in other words, what needs to be changed or developed?

A feedback tool covering these four areas would robustly identify, from the child's points of view, aspects which have been felt to be successful and aspect which could be developed to be better in the

³ Desistance being a limited term in this context, given that these children are not yet formally within the youth justice system, but applied to behaviours which might have initially brought them to the attention of the YOT, but which must not be the focus of a prevention programme as this is likely to introduce a negative, deficit-facing skew, incompatible with CF youth justice (cf Case and Browning, 2020).

future), by allowing the children to identify what they valued about their activity and what they felt was less important, or actively off-putting. A more general question could also be added to gain an overall impression of the whole experience (for example, ‘what message would you give to a friend if you were texting them about the group?’), but collaborating on this with children to find out what *they* think it is important for the YOT to ask is more likely to create a legitimate-to-children tool.

4. Observations from existing YOT/agency feedback tools

As described in the methodology (see Section 2 of this paper), all YOTs in England and Wales were contacted regarding how (and if) they gather feedback from children accessing YOT prevention programmes; subsequently, the additional agencies identified from the YOT responses were contacted for their feedback methodology (see question 3 in Section 2; page 3 of this paper). There are 154 YOTs across England and Wales (137 in England and 17 in Wales). Whilst the response to this brief enquiry was not strong from English YOTs, there was at least one response from each of the seven YOT regions, making it reasonably representative. Overall, 32 YOTs responded (24 from England representing 18% of the total contacted, and eight in Wales representing 47% of the total contacted). These responses identified a further 11 support agencies used for prevention services, which were also then contacted to identify any feedback tools used by them with children on prevention programmes. Unfortunately, only three of these support agencies responded (and these generally commented that they used ‘informal’ methods to gather feedback, with examples of forms sent being more focused on outcomes from the programme than feedback inputting into practice/programme development), which did not appreciably add useful to data to the YOT responses.

Analysis of responses showed that some YOTs had no means of gathering children’s opinions (it should be noted that some YOTs responded that they did not run prevention programmes (n=4), with some providing details of feedback tools for their *statutory* programmes, which have been included in this analysis because they appear to have been used across the whole range of service provision, including prevention). Feedback tools used by YOTs tended to fall into one of several categories:

- Written by the YOT (n=21)
- Identified as the ‘what do you think’ Asset (which is not a *feedback tool* for interventions - although it does include some useful content on aspirations – perhaps showing a generalised misunderstanding of collaboration/child’s voice/participation?) (n=3)
- A bespoke bought-in tool (mainly either Outcome Stars (also not generally useful for gaining feedback on services, as they tend to focus on outcomes; please see www.outcomesstar.org.uk) or Viewpoint (please see www.vpthub.com/)) (n=3)

The feedback forms provided by the YOTs (n=21) were examined through the lens of the four quality indicators identified in Section 3 above (child-identified indicators of success, the experience of the programme/intervention, the effects of the programme/intervention and future development of the programme/intervention) identifying questions which fit into these four areas⁴, and in terms of their construction (for example number of questions) and delivery methods (for example, written or online). It was not generally made clear on the forms for the child respondents what the purpose of

⁴ For example, questions identified as relating to the experience of the intervention included those enquiring about practicalities of getting there and taking part and what they might have enjoyed most; questions identified as relating to effects were those which looked at how they felt whilst on the intervention, whether they felt listened to and respected; questions relating to future development included those which asked what could have been done better.

the form was, how (or if) the information given would be used or who would see the contents – all these aspects need to be made very clear to a child to gain their cooperation (although it is acknowledged that this could be being explained verbally to the child before they take part). If they feel that it is part of a ‘box-ticking’ exercise or that the questions are repetitive or irrelevant (as some were), they are less likely to respond well, and it seems likely that the attempt to gain their input may not come (or appear to come, from the child’s point of view) from a genuine wish to collaborate on programme design and development.

Regarding format, a really good range of different question ‘types’ were utilised in the YOT-designed feedback forms (with some clearly aiming to be child-friendly, using pictures and colours throughout, whilst others were monochrome and more resembling a standard formal form format – presentation styles should be developed in collaboration with children, utilising their ideas, which may well result in different form styles for different age groups, to ensure that what was produced was truly what children are likely to engage with, rather than what *adults assume* children will engage with). Question styles tended to be a mixture of the following: closed yes/no, scaling questions (with a 1-5 scale), selecting the most appropriate answer/s from a list, choose three words to describe..., free-text narrative options. However, since all of the tools shared were static in nature (ie a form to be completed, whether written or online), this limits more creative methodologies which developing an App would allow (for example free use of emojis or drawing in response to questions). Again, the actual composition of question-types should be developed in collaboration with children to gauge which they tend to respond to and understand most easily.

The feedback forms varied enormously in length, from six questions to a hefty 27; some forms included a lot of demographics (age, gender etc), which significantly increases completion time (see earlier research on ideal completion times on p3; Omrani et al., 2019) but not necessarily adding real value (why is this information being requested?). The median form length was nine questions, which seems a reasonable benchmark, but as mentioned earlier, length should be checked out with children’s input on tool design (including what demographic questions should be included) and may be better related to time taken to complete, rather than simply the number of questions. It was interesting to see that a minority of the forms (n=7), where this could be ascertained, asked for the child’s name (with 11 not requiring this identifying information). This could affect completion as there is no anonymity, and so should be avoided if possible (and is not necessary if there is sufficient differentiation between a feedback tool and an end assessment). It was interesting to note that over half of the examples provided seemed generally to be delivered in a written paper format, although there were also a good number of online-only forms, and some YOTs working with Viewpoint to develop a feedback App. This should also be part of the design consultation stage of tool development to see to which type of delivery method children are most likely to respond; but it seems likely that an App is the way forward and something with which most children are now very familiar (see Section 6).

It could be seen from the construction of some of the forms that there was a conflation of assessment and feedback, which are not quite the same (it is important to gain children’s feedback *into* their end assessment, but this should not be the forum for it, which is why the ‘what do you think’ AssetPlus is not the right tool for *feedback*). Over half of the forms appeared to be covering both statutory and prevention programmes/interventions, which led to several of them including offence-related questions, which are not appropriate for children who may not have offended at all, and who need an entirely positive focus to any assessments, interventions and feedback tools. A few of those which had clearly been designed specifically for prevention programmes used the word ‘prevention’, which is essentially a negative word and also not a term to which the child is likely to relate (or understand –

prevention of what? 'Prevention' programmes should focus on building positive strengths rather than referencing what they are trying to avoid). The best examples only used positive questions and language, and described the programmes/interventions as 'activities' (or similar) – utilising *positive* words reasonably well understood by children. Some forms identified the 'YOT' (or YOS or 'Youth Justice Service') on the form, and therefore presumably the child was aware that they were working with essentially a *criminal* agency. For prevention work, it would be better if the child was not explicitly linked to this, so language identifying this on any prevention intervention materials should be avoided (again some really good examples made no reference to any criminal justice-related terminology).

It was clear when considering the four quality indicator areas, very few of the forms covered all four, with the vast majority not including any *child-identified* indicators of success – this possibly shows that the feedback form was not part of a process which began before programme/intervention delivery whereby the child could identify what *they* want to achieve through it (which is then revisited through the feedback tool). The forms which did include some aspect of this generally limited the question to a selection of options, rather than allowing the child freedom to really discuss their own aims and personal goals (which are likely to be linked to personal issues or skill-set development).

YOTs were generally good at covering both the *experience* and the *effects* of the programme/intervention, with questions enquiring as to ease of access, enjoyment, what was good/bad, whether they felt respected, understood and listened to, how well they got on with the workers and whether they could talk to them, and (crucially) whether they felt that they had had an input into decisions made about what happened to them or what they were doing. There were some particularly interesting questions, like 'what makes a good YOT worker' and 'What would you say to someone who was unsure about working with the service?'. Some examples asked about what improvements the child felt they had made, with some of these potentially being very helpful (eg 'How has the programme helped you and your family').

The final quality indicator, looking at how programmes could be developed and what should change (from the child's point of view) is an extremely important part of embedding *collaboration* as a principle of working, with feedback tools explicit on how views will be used in shaping future provision. Two thirds of the examples shared included items looking at improvements or suggestions for change, but a third did not, missing valuable opportunities to allow children to shape services. Many of the questions relevant to this aspect seemed rather vague in nature (the most common being along the theme of 'how could we improve the service'). Better examples, possibly more likely to invite a response, were 'what 3 things could improve [the service]' and 'what do you wish could have done but didn't?'. Helpfully some examples shared also gave children an open opportunity to share their thoughts more generally (for example 'Is there anything else you want to tell us about our service(s) or our staff?').

Clearly gaining feedback from a tool is just part of the process of truly collaborating with children in the shaping of services. Both YOTs and support agencies indicated some promising further practice in involving children in this process, with some having specific staff ('participation and engagement workers', independent 'children's engagement officer', 'participation officer') not linked to those actually delivering the programmes. Some mentioned more in-depth collaboration processes, '*we have focused sessions with all our group work YP – they help design each 6-week programme and evaluate it at the end*', which shows commitment to the coproduction of services. Others indicated that feedback results are used in staff training and development, supervision, and in reports to the Management Board. Gaining feedback from all participants should therefore be seen as one step within a more transparent and collaborative process, which openly invites children to take a meaningful part in service development (little was said about having representative groups of child

volunteers looking at feedback and discussing experiences so that a child's viewpoint on any feedback gained is privileged over adult-centric interpretations).

5. Summary of elements for inclusion in an effective feedback tool

This summary list draws together all elements discussed in more detail earlier and which should be borne in mind when creating a feedback tool for children (but all aspects should be developed in conjunction with children working with the YOT to ensure a truly child-centric tool; see Section 6 for more on this):

- Ensure that the tool begins with a clear information-giving introduction, being very clear about purpose, anonymity and confidentiality, for example:

Your opinion is very important to us – please tell us about your experiences on this activity group. We want to develop our activities using your opinions, because you know what has been helpful and what hasn't. This survey is confidential – no one involved with the activity will know what you have said, so you can be really honest.
- The tool should address all areas identified earlier (see Section 3) through a variety of different style questions look at:
 - ✓ Recapping the child's self-identified indicators of success (in a general sense, without actually identifying what these were, which risks identifying the child) and to what extent they feel these might have been met (children should have been asked prior to their participation in any programme/intervention what they hope to achieve through the programme)
 - ✓ Their experience of programme/intervention
 - ✓ Their perception of the effects of the programme/intervention
 - ✓ Their thoughts and opinions on future development of the programme/intervention.
- The tool should end with a short thank you message, indicating the usefulness of their responses.
- The following should be given careful consideration when drafting a tool for development with children (ensuring that children lead in how these points should be approached):
 - ✓ Length of tool (either in number of questions or time to complete)
 - ✓ Utilisation of a range of child-friendly question types
 - ✓ Incorporation of a range of response options through the development of a dynamic tool (rather than static questionnaire)
 - ✓ Creating something with the look of a video game, using attractive images throughout
 - ✓ Using child-appropriate language which entirely avoids youth justice jargon
 - ✓ Using positive phrasing throughout
 - ✓ How to be clear on purpose, effect on services and rights regarding anonymity and confidentiality.

6. Development notes

As has been made clear throughout, any feedback tool for use with children should be coproduced with them, once the basic important focus and components have been identified (see Section 5 above), which would ensure that such aspects as wording/language/clarity, presentation/aesthetics (although this will also be developed through the mode of delivery – see below), question-types, tool length and mode of delivery are entirely appropriate and child-friendly (and which also, as previously

suggested, might result in different tools for different children depending on cognitive/psychological development and communication needs).

Given developments in technology in recent years, it seems most logical that a feedback tool should be developed as an App (which also appears to be in process by Viewpoint, but the content of this is unclear, so it is not known what aspects it will cover). This would have several benefits:

- It could easily be updated, as required, with updated versions being made available online
- It could encompass a wider range of input-types than merely written words (see below for more discussion on this)
- It could be designed to look more like the games platforms that children enjoy and many are used to using, and completed on the type of device with which most children are now very comfortable (although issues of digital poverty should be borne in mind, so extra assistance might be needed by some children with poorer access to such devices)
- Data from it would be easily gathered into analysable formats and on a regular basis
- It could easily be completed by a child on their own with minimal instruction on a YOT-owned tablet (reducing the need for adult interference or ownership of appropriate hardware, but not forgetting issues which digital poverty might bring, see above).

As was identified in Section 2 of this paper, children are somewhat ambivalent about the use of static written or online questionnaires, and in truth sticking to such a format reduces the flexibility which other ways of gathering feedback might offer, whilst also requiring children to have a level of literacy which might be unreasonable (and which might therefore effectively exclude those unable to access such a mode of delivery, or severely inhibit their ability to share their real opinions). A way to mitigate these issues would be to design the App so that it has the facility to:

- Read out the questions automatically to the respondent
- Allow qualitative answers to be audio-recorded in the answer space (instead of just typed)
- Allow for free use of emojis to record emotions
- Allow space for drawings in the qualitative answer spaces (with utilisation of a device-activated stylus pen), as well as type and audio-recording.

The development of an App would have to be done through collaboration of those with understanding of the CF-related principles outlined in this paper, with those possessing the technological skills to design an App programme, alongside justice-involved children who would ultimately decide what was most appropriate, in terms of what they would be presented with on this platform.

It is clearly very important, both in terms of complying with children's rights policies and emerging CF practice, that YOTs work in collaboration with children as far as possible at all stages of youth justice involvement. Coproduced working is much more likely to result in effective engagement from children, feeling *empowered* rather than *disempowered* by the process. This paper has attempted to identify from research good practice in gaining feedback from, co-production and collaboration with children, then compared this to actual practice to identify where changes are needed and how this can be achieved.

YOTs should ensure that anything used *with* children is entirely developed in collaboration *with* them. However, the principles in this paper for what should be included and what language to include/avoid have been drawn from research, work with children and so based on what children themselves seem to value. Therefore, as they are also designed to be instructive for service development, it is highly recommended that any feedback tool follows the pattern and principles summarised in Section 5.

In a youth justice system moving towards developing CF practice, language used with children needs to be appropriate, child-friendly, legitimate to children, positive in nature and looking forwards, based on CF principles of helping children to positive pro-social personal development.

Feedback analysis needs to be carefully considered so as not to inadvertently apply an adult-centric lens; therefore it is the recommendation here that all *analysis* of feedback should be done in collaboration with children (a volunteer representative group of current and previous participants perhaps), as some YOTs indicated was already part of their practice, which would also underline the truly collaborative nature of the work; ideally this should also apply to feedback and subsequent service development for children involved statutorily.

[Author: Dr Kathy Hampson, Aberystwyth University, 2021]

Bibliography

Arthur A.M., Smith M.H., White A.S., Hawley L., and Koziol N.A. (2017) 'Age-sensitive instrument design for youth: A developmental approach'. *The Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools*. Available online at <http://cyfs.unl.edu/resources/downloads/working-papers/MAP-working-paper-2017-1.pdf>

Atkinson M., Binns M., Featherstone B., Franklin A., Godar R., Hay J., Stanley T., Thomas N., Wright A. (2015) *Voice of the Child: Evidence Review*. Totnes: Research in Practice

Borgers N., de Leeuw E., and Hox J. (2000) 'Children as respondents in survey research: cognitive development and response quality', *Bulletin de Methodologie Sociologique*, Vol. 66(1): 60-75

Cahill H. and Dadvand B. (2018) 'Re-conceptualising youth participation: A framework to inform action', *Children and Youth Services Review*, Vol. 95: 243-253

Case S. and Browning A. (2021) *Child First Justice: the research evidence-base [Full report]*. Loughborough University. Available online at <https://hdl.handle.net/2134/14152040.v1>

Case, S., Creaney, S., Coleman, N., Haines, K., Little, R., & Worrall, V. (2020) 'Trusting children to enhance youth justice policy: The importance and value of children's voices', *Youth Voice Journal*. Available online at www.rj4allpublications.com/product/trusting-children-to-enhance-youth-justice-policy-the-importance-and-value-of-childrens-voices/

Clifton J. (2014) *Children and young people giving feedback on services for children in need: ideas from a participation programme*. Children's Commissioner (England). Available online at https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/22111/1/Feedback_on_services_for_children_and_young_people_FINAL.pdf

Creaney S. (2020) 'Children's Voices—are we Listening? Progressing Peer Mentoring in the Youth Justice System', *Childcare in Practice*, Vol. 26(1): 22-37

Cross, Z. (2020) 'The working relationship and desistance: What constitutes a 'good quality' working relationship?' *Salus Journal*, Vol. 8(2): 77-99

Evans, J. Kennedy, D. Skuse, T. and Matthew, J. (2020) 'Trauma-Informed Practice and Desistance Theories: Competing or Complementary Approaches to Working with Children in Conflict with the Law?' *Salus Journal*, Vol. 8(2): 55-76

HMIE (Scotland) (2007) *A guide to evaluating services for children and young people using quality indicators*. Available online at <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/6481/1/evaluating%20services.pdf.pdf>

Johns D.F., Williams K., and Haines K. (2017) 'Ecological Youth Justice: Understanding the Social Ecology of Young People's Prolific Offending', *Youth Justice*, Vol. 17(1): 3-21

Kenton O. and Moore R. (2018) *The voices of young people under supervision (findings from the HMI Probation eSurvey)*. HMIP Research & Analysis Bulletin. Available online at www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2018/11/eSurvey-Bulletin-Nov-18-final.pdf

Klinge C.M. (2018) 'Measuring Change: From Rates of Recidivism to Markers of Desistance', *109 Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 769, University of Wisconsin Legal Studies Research Paper No. 1441

Krosnick J.A. (1991) 'Response strategies for coping with the cognitive demands of attitude measures in surveys', *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, Vol. 5(3): 213–236

Law D. and Wolpert M. (Eds) (2014) *Guide to Using Outcomes and Feedback Tools with Children, Young People and Families*. Child Outcomes Research Consortium. Available online at [www.corc.uk.net/media/2112/201404guide to using outcomes measures and feedback tools- updated.pdf](http://www.corc.uk.net/media/2112/201404guide%20to%20using%20outcomes%20measures%20and%20feedback%20tools%20updated.pdf)

London J.K., Zimmerman K. and Erbsstein N. (2003) 'Youth-Led Research and Evaluation: Tools for Youth, Organizational, and Community Development', *New Directions for Evaluation*, Vol. 2003, Issue 98: 33-45 (NB: this comes from a special issue on Youth Participatory Evaluation, other articles from which may also be of interest)

Mainey A. (2008) *Evaluating Participation Work: The Toolkit*. London: Participation Works. Available online at <https://eypagnet.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Participation-Works- evaluating-participation-toolkit.pdf>

NYA (2018) *Hear by Right: Developing best practice in young people's participation*. Leicester: NYA. Available online at <https://nya.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Hear-by-Right-.pdf>

Omran A., Wakefield-Scurr J., Smith J. and Brown N. (2019) 'Survey Development for Adolescents Aged 11–16 Years: A Developmental Science Based Guide', *Adolescent Research Review*, 4: 329–340

Save the Children (2014) *A Toolkit for Monitoring and Evaluating Children's Participation; Booklet 6: Children and young people's experiences, advice and recommendations*. London: Save the Children.

Smithson H. and Jones A. (2021) 'Co-creating youth justice practice with young people: Tackling power dynamics and enabling transformative action', *Children and Society*. Online first at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/chso.12441?af=R>

Wood A. (2015) *Interagency Study on Child-Friendly Feedback and Complaint Mechanisms within NGO programmes*. Educo, Plan International, Save the Children UK, War Child UK and World Vision International. Available online at <https://pseataaskforce.org/uploads/tools/1441719051.pdf>

YJB (2016) *Participation strategy. Giving young people a voice in youth justice*. Available online at <https://yjresourcehub.uk/component/jifile/download/YzgxZWVlYzNiMzE1ZTAyNWl2N2VjY2NhYzk4MzcxNGQ=/yjb-participation-strategy-final-novz16-pdf.html>

YJB (2021) *Strategic Plan 2021 – 2024*. Available online at [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/966200/YJB Strategic Plan 2021 - 2024.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/966200/YJB_Strategic_Plan_2021_-_2024.pdf)