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Evaluation of Peer Assessments in Youth Justice

Context

- Use of Peer Review in other sectors.
- Evidence highlighting its advantages e.g. greater responsiveness to feedback from 'critical friend', potential for shared learning.
- Some potential concerns in the literature e.g. is the process sufficiently critical or is it too 'cosy'?, lack of accountability and/or pressure to take action.
- Development of the process in YJ with strong engagement from some areas but less interest from others.
- Questions of how to improve and shape the process for the future.

Methods

- **Literature review**
- **Review of documentation** from completed Peer Reviews.
- **On-line survey** (30 responses were received in total, 18 from reviewers and 12 from staff in reviewed YOTs).
- **Qualitative interviews** (10 Peer Reviewers and 14 YOT staff) conducted between October to December 2018.

Findings: People

- 'The Peer Review Team were motivated and energised by youth justice.....it was important knowing that they wanted to be here.'
(Senior Practitioner)



Findings: People

- The **skills and experience of the YJPR teams** were valued by host YOTs.
- Peer Review Teams generally achieved an **appropriate balance between being rigorous and challenging whilst also being informal and supportive** (i.e. they were successful in the role of 'critical friend').
- The **benefits YJPR offers to Peer Reviewers** are a **significant strength** of the process.



Findings: Process



'even though I didn't agree with everything they identified, there was no "side" to that.....and it doesn't take away from the fact it was a genuine piece of work and a constructive process' (Operational Manager)

Findings: Process



- Critical role of the **YJPR coordinator**
- Some differences of opinion on the balance of strategic and operational issues
- Some **practical challenges** of timetabling and organisation.
- The '**non-shaming**' approach of YJPR creates a receptiveness to feedback and facilitates open discussion.
- Potential to **better capture and share good practice**.

Findings: Impact

- 'We caused all this work for ourselves, but the results outweighed that...it's a good learning experience for everybody' (YOT manager)



Findings: Impact

- All of the participating YOTs identified some **specific ways in which YJPR had made a difference** – to their governance, organisation, practice or morale
- YJPR has a **wider impact** through promoting networks and shared learning
- Examples of **impact being lost** due to organisational restructuring or staff absence
- The **lack of a clear follow-up procedure** was identified as a concern by host YOTs and reviewers



Key Recommendations

1. Peer Review in Youth Justice **should continue to be a sector-led approach**, with consideration given to resources.
2. Develop a **communications strategy** designed to encourage greater engagement.
3. **Revisit and refresh the training and guidance.**
4. Reflect on suggestions for incorporating some **minor adjustments** to the process.
5. More **firmly embed evaluation tools** within the process.
6. Consider ways to promote **wider dissemination of the good practice and impact stories.**