Executive Summary

Key findings

- There was clear consensus amongst practitioners, trainers and senior managers that the course meets a gap in training provision
- Practitioners shared a wide and varied range of examples illustrating the ways in which they had changed their practice after completing the course
- Senior managers reported on improvements in practice amongst their staff who had completed the course
- The impact of these changes is significant as attendees supervise large numbers of staff
- There was a strong consistency between practitioners, trainers and senior managers in their views on the value and the benefits of the course
- There were advantages and disadvantages to both face to face and online delivery
- Factors such as lack of time and organisational restructuring were noted by some participants as barriers for practitioners in transferring learning into practice
- Where participants were less positive in their feedback this was more to do with attendee expectations rather than issues with the course itself e.g., the practitioners were already very experienced managers
- There is scope to extend and develop the course further, especially in relation to the distance learning element of the course.

Recommendations

1. Continue to develop and promote the course in light of the positive findings which show that it has been well received and is making a beneficial impact on practice
2. Refresh recruitment materials and communications so it is clear who is most likely to benefit from the course and how the content fits with other courses
3. Review the distance learning material and consider options to include more varied and active learning options e.g., short videos, podcasts, images.
4. Reflect on the elements of the content relating to conflict management as this seemed to be the least well received component of the course
5. Review the course content in light of the YJB's 'child first' agenda and inspection criteria whilst maintaining a balance with the focus on operational tasks and core professional skills
6. Consider ways in which the course could act as a foundation for other training opportunities e.g., the Aspiring Future Youth Justice Leaders Programme
7. If the course is likely to continue being delivered online, consider ways of encouraging managers/regional networks to maintain momentum and facilitate local support
8. In the longer term, subject to available resources, explore options for course accreditation

1. Introduction

Youth justice services operate in a complex and contested setting in which there are tensions between different approaches to practice, notably the risk paradigm, child-first approaches and desistance theories, and also between the centralising influence of the Youth Justice Board (YJB) and the increasing emphasis on localism which can result in 'multiple iterations of how best to 'do' youth justice in different local authorities' (Day, 2022: 5). Within this challenging context, operational managers provide the first line of oversight of youth justice practice and therefore carry a significant responsibility for ensuring that services provide good outcomes for young people, help to protect the public and meet regulatory expectations.

The Operational Managers training course is part of a broader programme of sector-led youth justice service improvement delivered through the Youth Justice Sector Improvement Programme (YJSIP). YJSIP is a tripartite partnership between the YJB which funds the programme, the Association of YOT Managers (AYM) which administers the programme, and senior leaders in the youth justice sector who deliver the programme. The AYM commissioned this evaluation to look at the delivery and impact of the training so far and to consider how it could be developed further in future.

2. The Operational Managers Training Programme

The course was developed in response to a gap in training provision - identified by the YJB and HM Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) - for operational managers. It is aimed at staff who have responsibility for overseeing the quality of assessment and planning, including the management of risk in community-based youth justice services, and whose roles typically involve activities such as signing off AssetPlus assessments, supervision and quality assurance. The course is built around a reflective approach to practice and supervision and seeks to encourage the continuous development of high-quality professional practice. It is sector-led with the training being designed and delivered by experienced practitioners from youth justice services across England and Wales.

The training course aims to:
- Develop and implement a programme of nationally consistent training in management oversight of risk and quality assurance of AssetPlus within a reflective practice framework
- Broaden the scope of sector-led improvement activity and provide additional opportunities for staff within the youth justice sector to participate in the delivery of improvement within a national framework of oversight and governance

Identified key outcomes from the programme are:
- Reflective approaches to supervision and management that will be disseminated across the sector leading to enhanced competence in their application nationally.
- Further development of sector improvement initiatives in accordance with YJSIP ethos of improving practice through sector collaboration, value for money and sustainability.

Since the training started in 2019, twelve cohorts have completed the course. Due to COVID-19, it was necessary to move those parts of the course ordinarily delivered face-to-face to delivery using an on-line video conferencing platform (i.e., Teams). As a result, most of the twelve cohorts attended the course virtually. The course did not comprise any e-learning components involving learning or training using digital resources.

The course consists of two one-day group training sessions, separated by a 12-week period. During this time, participants are expected to complete self-directed distance learning. This is considered an essential element of the course. It requires participants to complete a series of activities intended to build on the work covered in Day One of the course. It also provides delegates with a framework to explore ideas and practice techniques that will develop skills as a reflective supervisor/manager.

3. Purpose of the Evaluation and Methods

The AYM commissioned this evaluation to help understand the impact and effectiveness of the Operational Managers Training Course, to identify what managers had learned from the training (including improvements to knowledge and skills) and the relevance of the course content.

The overall aim of the evaluation was to understand how the training programme has been received by the sector and to assess its impact on managers' practice. The evaluation involved two key areas of enquiry.

1. Conducting an overall assessment of the training programme designed to answer questions, such as: did the training meet attendees' expectations, is the training fit for purpose, relevant and useful, has the learning been incorporated into practice, how well was the programme implemented, how confident attendees were in putting into practice what they had learnt on the course.
2. Identifying actionable recommendations on how, if at all, the training programme may be improved.

The evaluation adopted a realist approach. This means it explored the *mechanism* underpinning the training course (for example, why might this programme be expected to succeed in changing YOT practice and performance?) and the *context* (situational factors relating to both the experience of the training programme and the settings in which participants apply their learning) to understand the *outcomes* (such as changes in trainee participants' knowledge and confidence and practice).

Mixed methods were employed to capture quantitative and qualitative data. Methods included a review of relevant literature; an on-line survey of operational managers (33 responses) who had attended the training course; and interviews with trainers (8), senior managers (7), and operational managers who had attended the course (5).

4. Training effectiveness and evaluation – a brief literature review

It may seem obvious to explain what training is but a definition such as 'Training is the process of helping individuals develop skills and knowledge *for the purpose of improving or changing their performance*' (Swinney, 2007:6) is helpful because it draws attention to the goal of improving practice. Aik and Tway provide another useful introductory perspective with the idea that training has three core elements, 'the work, the worker and the workplace' (2006:28), which implies that an assessment of training effectiveness also needs to take account of these different factors.

Training design and delivery

A meta-analysis of leadership/managerial training programmes by Lacarenza et al (2017) highlights a range of factors about programme *design* which help to promote training effectiveness, such as:

- Training programme is based on a thorough needs analysis
- Voluntary attendance (likely to be associated with higher motivation)
- Spacing – multiple training sessions with space in between to practice skills
- Attendees with less experience of leadership show room for greater improvement.

Lacarenza et al (2017) also highlight factors relevant to effective training delivery, such as:

- Programmes which incorporate practice-based methods have greater impact than those which only include demonstration or information delivery methods.
- Training which provides feedback to participants has a greater impact than programmes which do not include this. Suggested reasons include that feedback accelerates learning because participants gain insights into their current ability and can focus on addressing problem areas; feedback may increase learners' perception of the usefulness of the course thereby increasing

positive reactions; feedback assists transfer of knowledge to practice by enabling participants to engage in metacognitive activities such as planning, monitoring and revising behaviour.

- Swinney (2007) also refers to the 'do-evaluate-feedback' cycle, arguing that it is critical to build in as much time for practice and feedback as possible.
- Interpersonal interaction is important, particularly to allow trainers to adjust the learning process in response to the needs of participants.

Much of the literature on the use of technology in training focuses on e-learning which is not the same as the process used with the Operational Managers course of delivering live training online. However, there are some relevant areas of overlap, particularly the need for trainers to engage proactively with participants. In addition, Towler and Mitchell highlight the importance of 'trainers' attitudes toward technology and control over the technology' and state that 'research has shown that when trainers maintain positive attitudes towards the technology, learners are more likely to experience positive learning outcomes' (2020: 175).

Transferring learning to practice

What are the factors which influence how much of the learning gained from a training course is actually applied to practice? Huang et al (2015) distinguish between the ability to transfer knowledge and skills (what learners 'can do') with the motivation to transfer (what learners 'will do'). In their meta-analysis of research on learning transfer, they identified different factors which correlate with each of these elements. As shown in figure 1 below, they suggest that knowledge and skills are good predictors of what people 'can do' but that motivational factors, particularly 'each individual's volition to apply one's ability in work tasks over time' (p.3), are stronger predictors of what people will actually do in real-life practice.

Figure 1: Learning Outcomes
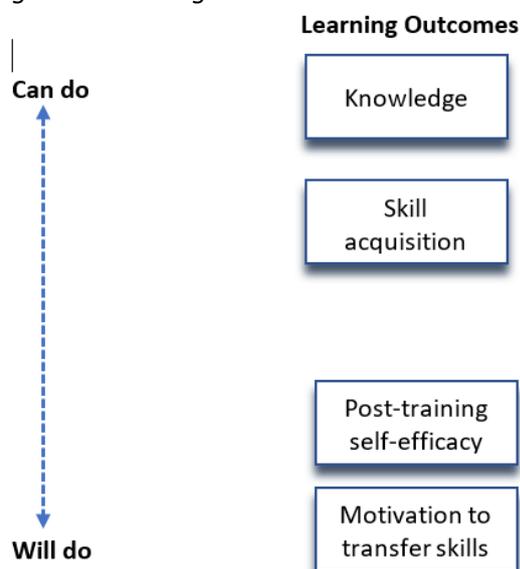
A training course obviously needs to provide knowledge and skills as part of its core purpose, but this research also raises questions about how to promote and maintain motivation over time. This then links to the wider context in which people work and the factors which either inhibit or help facilitate the transfer of learning into a real-world setting. Holton et al (2000) proposed the concept of a learning transfer system which is defined as 'all factors in the person, training and organization that influence transfer of learning to job performance' (Wang and Wilcox 2006:534). This includes, for example, personal characteristics, training design, the organisational setting and learning climate, peer and managerial support, levels of motivation and the opportunity to use and apply new skills. All of these

need to be considered when assessing the impact of a training programme and understanding why it has/hasn't made a difference to practice. For example, the opportunity to apply skills is important because 'The training impact is temporary – if new knowledge or a new skill is not used it will atrophy. This lack of use is a major reason that a lot of the time and money spent on training is wasted…' (Swinney, 2007:7).

Evaluating training outcomes

One of the challenges of evaluating a training course is that the 'multiple subsystems coexisting and intertwining with each other in any organisation' (Wang and Wilcox, 2006: 535) make it difficult to identify the impact of any one particular programme. However, there are a range of models for evaluation that can be used to try to assess impact (Passmore and Velez, 2020).

One extensively used model is Kirkpatrick's Training Evaluation Model which identifies four levels of evaluation that each build on the previous level (Bradley and Connors, 2013):
Level 1 = Reaction: the extent to which participants liked a training programme
Level 2 = Knowledge or learning: participant's changes in attitudes, improvement in knowledge of increases in skills
Level 3 = Behaviour change: changes in an individual's job performance which can be attributed to the learning acquired through training
Level 4 = Impact: the effect of the individual's behaviour on the wider organisation/work context

It is important to note that progression between the levels is not automatic (Passmore and Velez, 2020) as there are numerous factors, including organisational issues such as restructuring or lack of resources, which could hinder the application of learning to practice. This is shown in figure 2 below by the dotted line indicating that the link between short-term and long-term outcomes may vary in different circumstances or different points in time. Nevertheless, the framework can provide a helpful way of looking at the various results of a training programme, providing due consideration is given to the different elements of a learning transfer system noted above which may affect the progression between levels.

Figure 2: Short-Term and Long-Term Outcomes
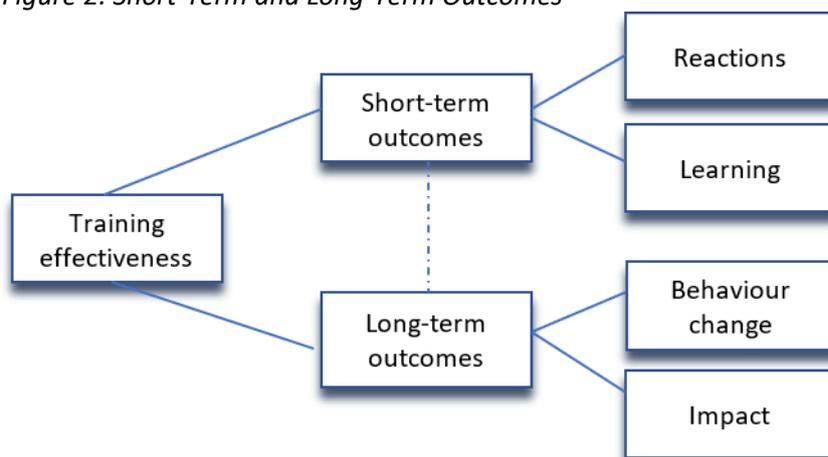
In thinking about the wider context in which learning is applied to practice, Wang and Wilcox argue that it is not enough to assess the impact of particular programmes but also that 'what is needed is evaluation of how well organisations use training' (2006: 536). This is beyond the scope of this project but would be an interesting area for YOTs, Local Authorities, YJSIP and HMIP to consider.

5. Findings: Online Survey of Operational Managers

The on-line survey was launched on 6th December 2021. It remained open until 1st March 2022. The invitation to take part in the survey was sent via email to managers who had attended the course, that is 183 participants across 12 cohorts[1]. Emails inviting managers to participate in the survey did not reach their intended recipients in thirteen instances (out-of-office replies indicating the recipient had moved on from their post or the email address not recognised) leaving a sample size of 170. Three reminders were sent to encourage responses. In the end, 33 managers responded to the survey, resulting in a response rate at 19%. This is not a representative sample and there may be a bias in that those who found the course most useful may have been more likely to respond.

There was at least one response from each of the ten YOT regions. East Midlands (7; 21%), Wales (6; 18%), and Yorkshire/Humber (6;18%) returned the highest numbers of responses. London, South-West, and North-East regions returned only one response each.

Table 1: Survey responses by YOT Region

YOT Region	Survey Response (Number)	Survey Response (Percentage)
East Midlands	7	21%
Wales	6	18%
Yorkshire/Humber	6	18%
West Midlands	4	12%
South-East	3	9%
East	2	6%
North -West	2	6%
London	1	3%
South-West	1	3%
North-East	1	3%
Total	**33**	**100%**

5.1 How managers heard about the course

Respondents were asked how they first heard about the Operational Managers course. Of those who responded[2], three-quarters (24; 75%) indicated that their manager brought it to their attention. Other respondents learnt about the course via the Youth Justice Board Newsletter (3; 9%); on the Youth Justice Sector Improvement Partnership website (2; 6%); word-of-mouth (1; 3%); an email from the Association of Youth Offending Team Managers (1; 3%); and on social media (1; 3%).

5.2 Motivations for signing up

The survey invited respondents to comment on what attracted them to the Training Course. Nearly all respondents provided at least one answer and some more than one.

Unsurprisingly the most common response was to reference the **opportunity to learn, acquire new knowledge or expand existing knowledge**. For example, one Practice Supervisor mentioned the *'opportunity to develop skills further or refresh skills.'* Another Manager talked about the appeal of *'learning something new'*. Career development was a motivating factor too. As one Practice Supervisor commented: *'Continuing Professional Development and training for progression'.*

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[1] YJSIP shared with the evaluation team the email addresses for all those YOT managers who had attended the course up to the start of December 2021.

[2] One manager did not provide an answer.

Respondents were also attracted to the Course as it offered the opportunity **to connect, network, or learn from colleagues** who worked in other YOT areas/regions**.** As one Practice Manager said: '*[t]he desire to share experiences, ideas. and guidance with other managers, to look at assessment from others perspective'.* Similarly, an Operational Manager noted that '*knowing [the training] would be attended by a range of professionals from different areas in the region and as YOTS/YJS can do these things very differently I was keen to hear [from others] on a range of topics…'*

Responses to this question supported the need for the Training Course in that it appears to be **filling a gap in current provision.** For example, one Team Manager talked about how '*opportunities for Ops Manager training are increasingly rare.* Other similar comments included: '*I had never received formal training for this role'* (Team Manager) and '*I was not aware of other training available in my local authority'* (Assistant Team Manager). Respondents also welcomed the role-specific nature of the training, i.e. that it was *'developed for Youth Justice Managers'* (a Senior Early Help Worker).

The **course content, especially the focus on management**, also appealed to those who signed up for the course. As one Deputy Team Manager explained: '*I was interested because the course focused on the daily duties of management within criminal justice'*. Other respondents noted how the course met a desire to develop their *'management skills'* and more *'effective management oversight'*.

5.3 Respondents' Management/Supervisory Responsibilities

Respondents were asked to indicate how many people they supervised or managed at the time of completing the survey. All respondents, bar one (a Youth Justice Development Manager who did not have any management responsibilities), indicated they supervised or managed two or more staff. Respondents most commonly managed or supervised a team of six. Seven respondents supervised or managed a team comprising of ten or more staff members.

Figure 3: Number of staff supervised or managed by respondents
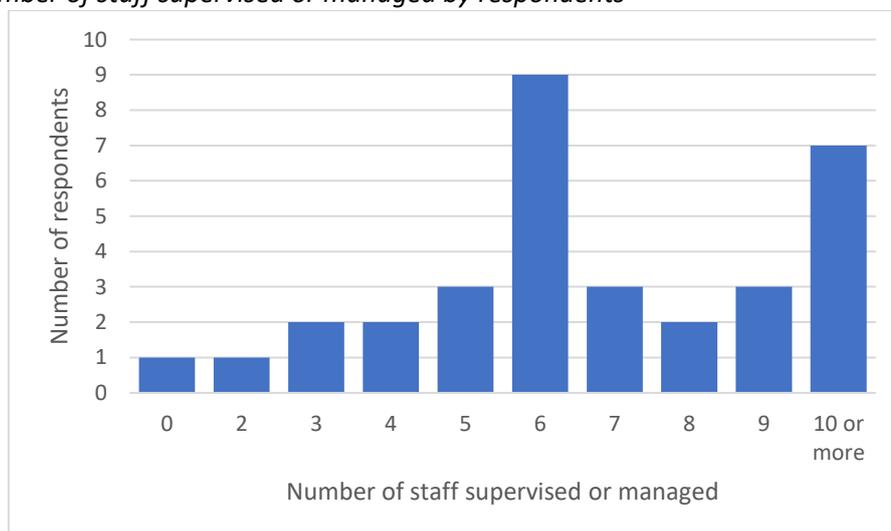
At least[3] 219 staff were managed or supervised by respondents who had completed, or were in the process of completing, the Operational Managers Training Course. The average[4] number of staff managed or supervised by respondents was 7. This means, assuming all survey respondents made improvements to their practice further to attending the course, at least 1,533 staff have potentially benefited from their manager's learning.

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[3] Those respondents who indicated they supervised or managed ten or more for the purposes of this calculation were deemed to supervise or manage ten staff.
[4] Again, for this calculation those respondents who indicated they supervised or managed ten or more were deemed to supervise or manage ten staff.

5.4 Course Attendance and Workbook Engagement

Twenty-seven (82%) of respondents indicated they had attended Day 1 and Day 2 of the Training Course. Six respondents indicated that they had only attended Day 1 of the course at the time of completing the survey. Five of these respondents explained that their training was in progress (in other words they were between the two scheduled training dates). It was unclear why the final respondent had only attended Day 1 of the course.

Respondents were asked how they fared with the Distance Learning Workbook (i.e., the self-directed learning to be completed after Day 1 and before Day 2). All 27 respondents who completed Day 1 and Day 2 of the course engaged with the Workbook to some degree. Seven (26%) indicated they had completed it in its entirety, that is all 12 weeks. The remainder (20; 74%) indicated that they completed some parts of the Workbook.

5.5 Assessing Change Post-Training

A central part of the survey questionnaire invited respondents to read ten different statements. Each statement corresponded to a key concept or model covered as part of the Operational Managers Training Course. Respondents were asked to indicate on a scale their agreement with each statement from strongly agree to strongly disagree. All statements were phrased in a positive tone, e.g. I feel more confident in x, y, z, I am more adept at this, I have a better understanding of that etc. Respondents were encouraged to reflect on how they felt *now*, that is after having completed the training. The findings from this part of the survey are set out in the next section.
Note: analysis is based on *only* those respondents who had attended Day 1 *and* Day 2 of the Training Course (27).

The most common response (12; 44%) was for respondents to agree with the statement ***I am a more reflective supervisor or manager since completing the* course.** Seven (26%) respondents neither agreed nor disagreed. Just over one-fifth (6; 22%) strongly agreed. Two (7%) disagreed with the statement and none strongly disagreed.

Of the two respondents who disagreed with the statement, one was a very experienced Operational Manager with more than 14 years managing staff. The remaining respondent, who disagreed with the statement, explained that they came to their role with prior training as a counsellor which meant they were *'already adept at reflecting for myself and supporting others to reflect'*.

Figure 4: I am a more reflective supervisor or manager since completing the course
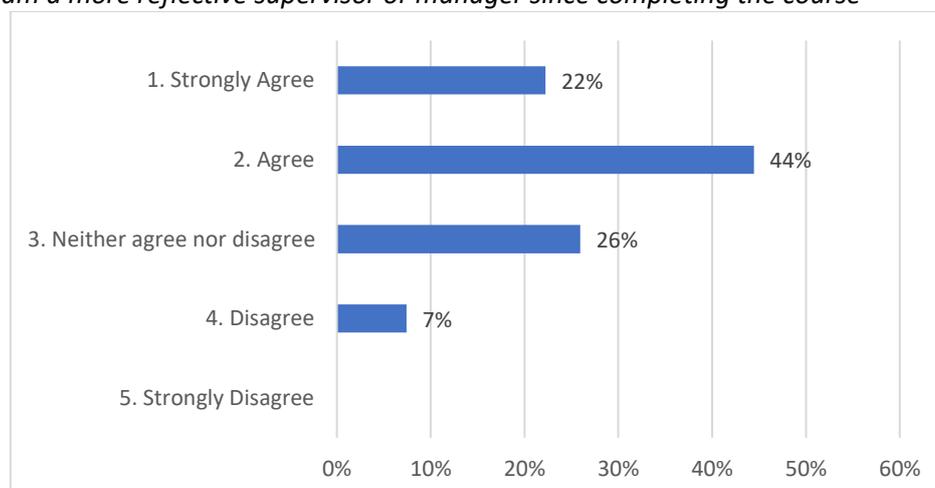
Again, the most common response was for respondents to agree (12; 44%) with the statement '*I am more confident in making defensible decisions*. One third (9; 33%) respondents neither agreed nor disagreed. Nearly one-fifth strongly agreed (5;19%). Only one (4%) respondent disagreed, and none strongly disagreed with the statement. There was no clear reason or explanation as to why this one respondent disagreed with the statement.

*Figure 5: I am more confident in making defensible decisions*
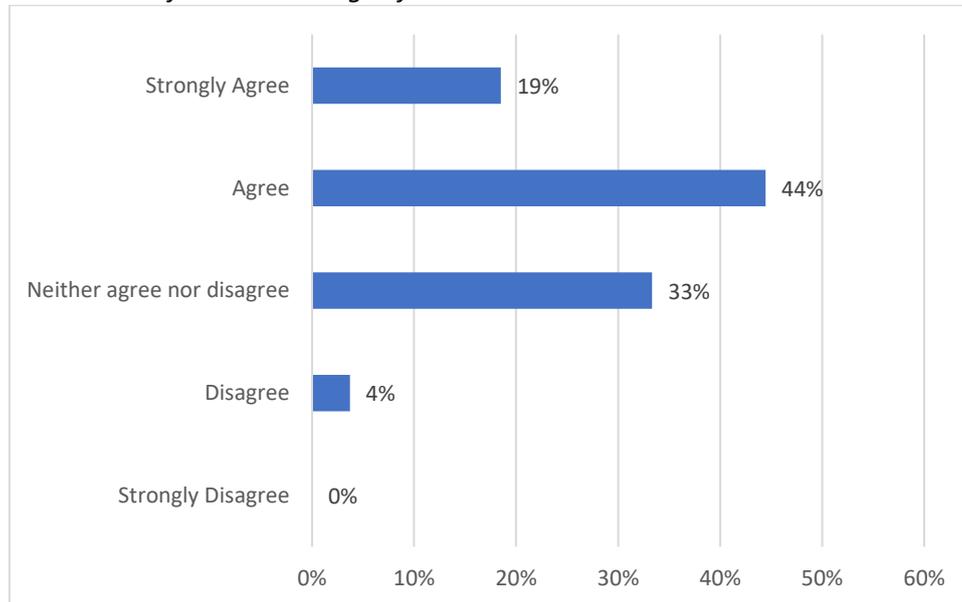
Respondents were asked to think about the extent to which they were *more comfortable in [their] use of professional discretion* after having completed the Training Course. As with the two statements already considered, the most common response was to agree with the statement (12; 44%). Ten (37%) respondents neither agreed nor disagreed. Four (15%) respondents strongly agreed. One (4%) respondent disagreed with the statement. Again, there was no clear reason or explanation as to why this one respondent disagreed with the statement, although it was the same respondent who also disagreed with the statement above in relation to defensible decisions. No respondents strongly disagreed with the statement '*I am now more comfortable in my use of professional discretion*'.

*Figure 6: I am now more comfortable in my use of professional discretion*
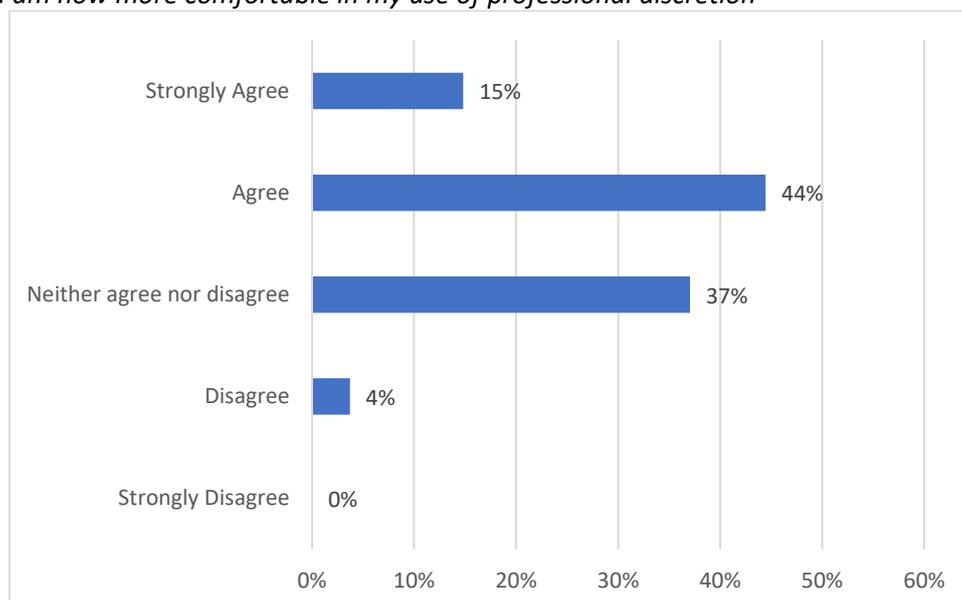
Respondents were asked to consider the statement *I have a better understanding of applying QA processes in analysis of assessments and plans.* Respondents were most likely (16; 59%) to agree with this statement. One third (9; 33%) neither agreed not disagreed, and two respondents (7%) strongly agreed. No respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

Figure 7: I have a better understanding of applying QA processes in analysis of assessments and plans
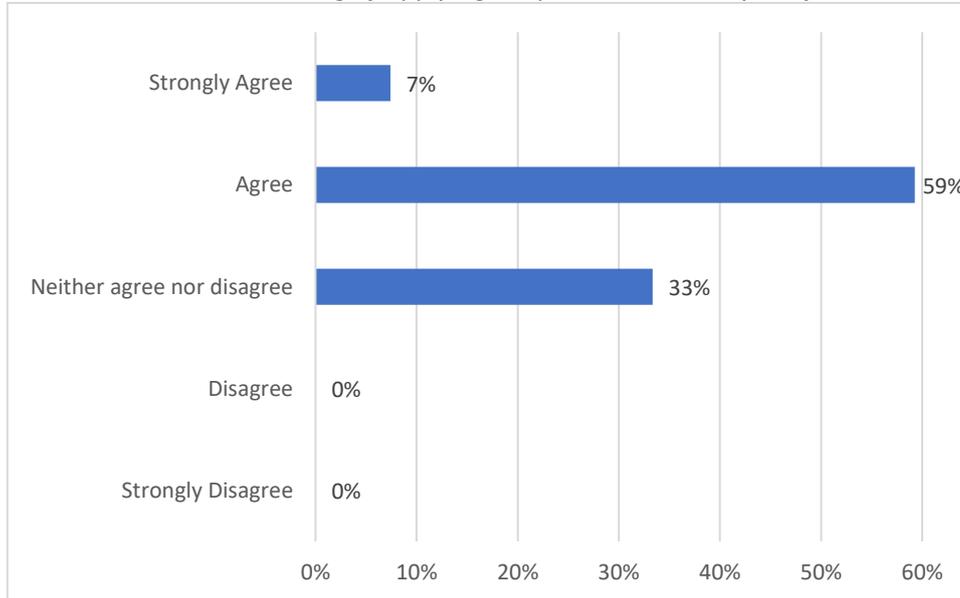
Nearly half (13; 48%) of respondents agreed with the statement *I am better at assessing the risk involved in relying on information gathered and presented by others.* The next most common response was to neither agree nor disagree (10; 37%) with the statement. Two respondents (7%) strongly agreed with the statement and a further two (7%) strongly disagreed. There was no clear reason or explanation in the responses to the survey as to why these two respondents disagreed with the statement.

Figure 8: I am better at assessing the risk involved in relying on information gathered and presented by others
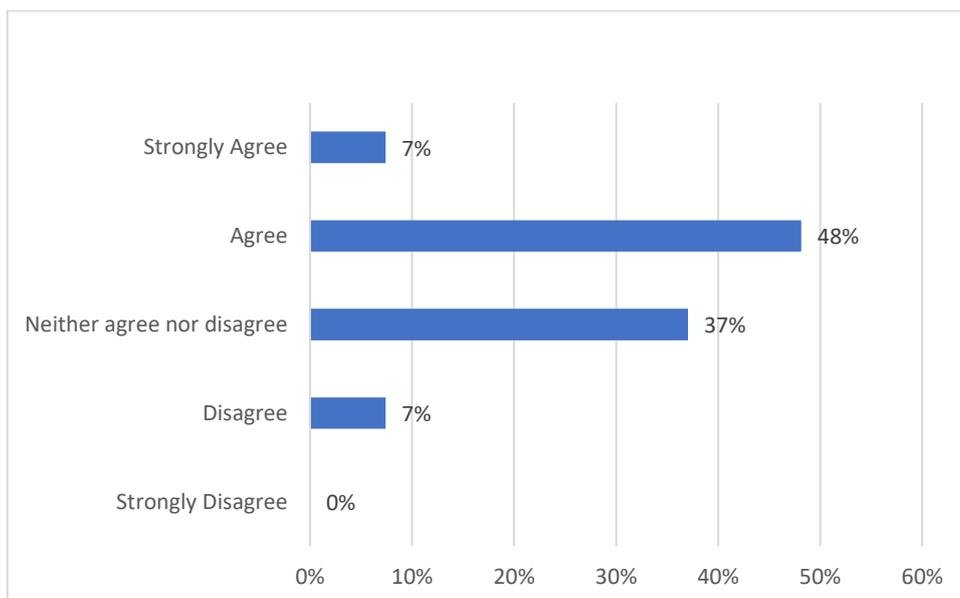
Again, in response to the next statement *I feel empowered to initiate reflective discussions with my team on an individual and in a team setting,* the most common response was to agree with the statement (12; 44%). Just under a third (8; 30%) of respondents neither agreed or disagreed, nearly a fifth strongly agreed (5; 19%), and two (7%) respondents disagreed. One of the two respondents disagreed was the manager mentioned above who came to their role with prior training which meant they were *'already adept at reflecting for myself and supporting others to reflect'*. There was no clear reason or explanation as to why the second respondent disagreed with this statement, although the same individual had disagreed with the earlier statement about risk assessment. No respondents strongly disagreed with the statement *'I feel empowered to initiate reflective discussions with my team on an individual and in a team setting'*.

Figure 9: I feel empowered to initiate reflective discussions with my team on an individual and in a team setting
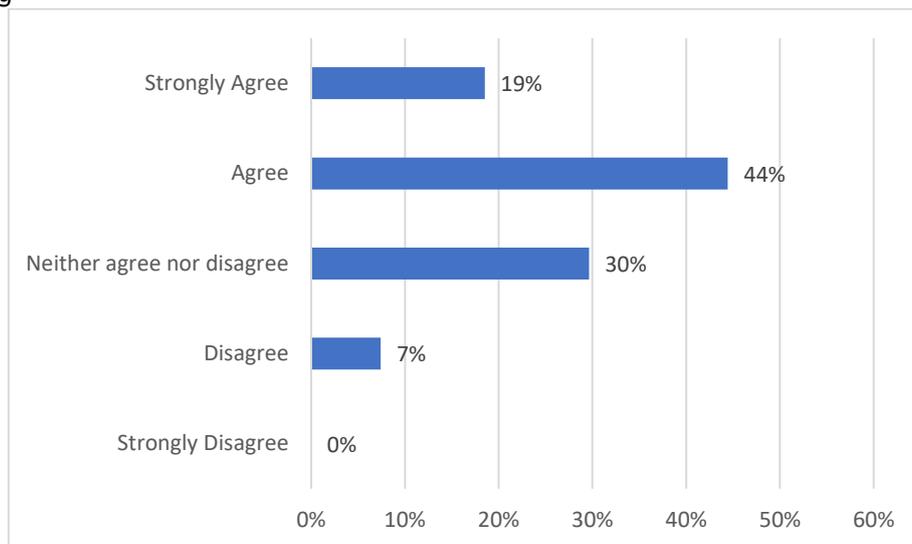
In contrast to earlier statements, respondents invited to consider the statement *I am more adept at dealing with conflict in the workplace* most commonly indicated they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement (12; 44%). Slightly fewer respondents agreed with the statement (11; 41%). Equal numbers strongly agree (2; 7%) and disagreed (2; 7%) with this statement. The same two respondents who disagreed with the statement in about reflective discussions (above) disagreed with this statement. No respondents strongly disagreed.

Figure 10: I am more adept at dealing with conflict in the workplace
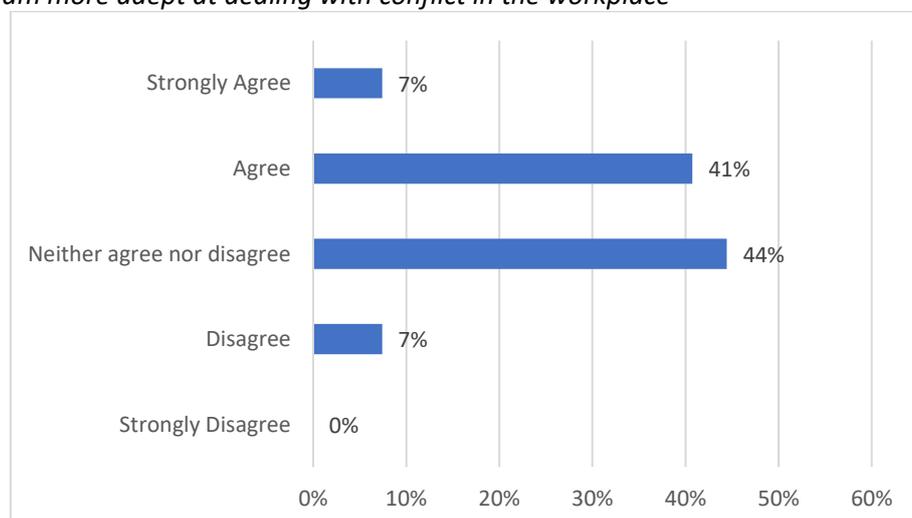
When asked to assess how **confident they felt after the training in applying a critical lens approach to when reviewing cases**, respondents were equally likely to agree with the statement or neither agree nor disagree (11; 41%). The remaining respondents (5; 19%) strongly agreed with the statement. No respondents disagree or strongly disagree with the statement.

Figure 11: I feel more confident in applying a critical lens approach when reviewing cases
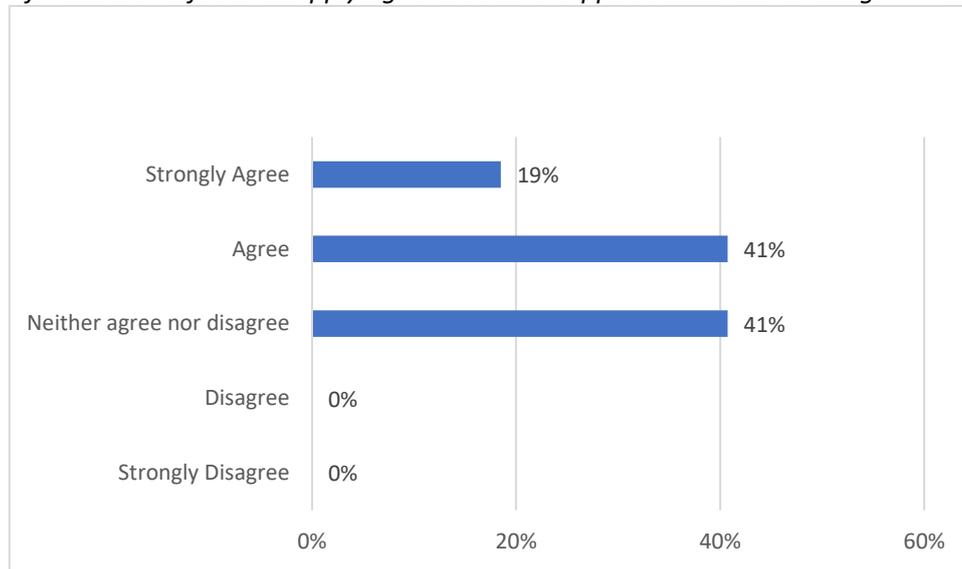
Just over half (14; 52%) of respondents agreed with the statement *I am more confident in my ability to apply a 'good enough' approach when countersigning in Assetplus*. A quarter (7; 26%) neither agreed nor disagreed. Five (19%) respondents strongly agreed. Only one (4%) respondent disagreed with the statement (again the manager with prior training). No respondents strongly disagreed with the statement.

Figure 12: I am more confident in my ability to apply a 'good enough' approach when countersigning in Assetplus
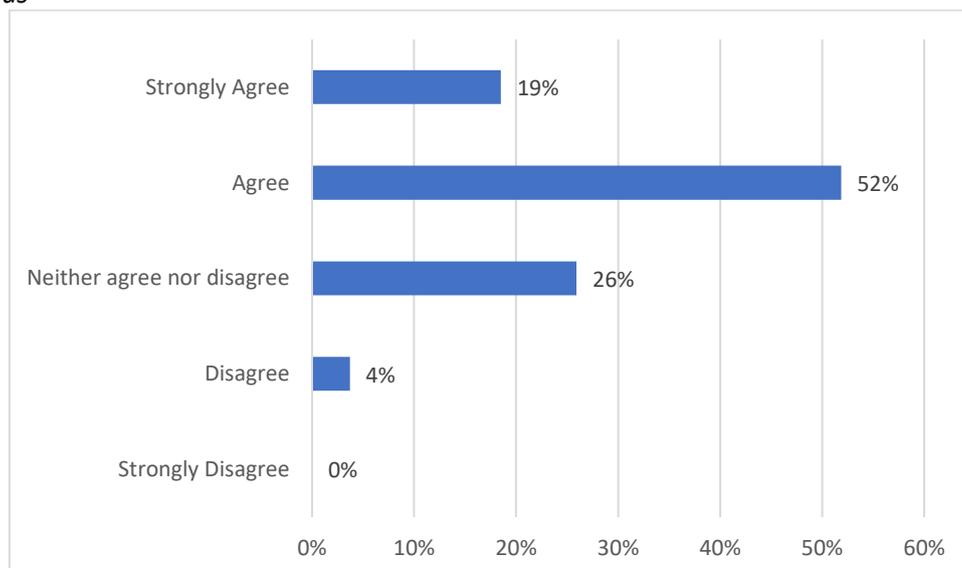
Similar to the above, just over half (14; 52%) of respondents agreed with the statement *I know how to evidence that I have exercised appropriate management oversight*. Equal numbers (5; 19%) strongly agreed and neither agreed nor disagreed. Three (11%) respondents disagreed (again the manager with prior training; the respondent who disagreed with earlier three statements, and one

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other respondent who disagreed with only this statement out of the ten and no further explanation for this answer was available). As with the other nine statements, no respondents strongly disagreed with the statement: I know how to evidence that I have exercised appropriate management oversight.

Figure 13: I know how to evidence that I have exercised appropriate management oversight
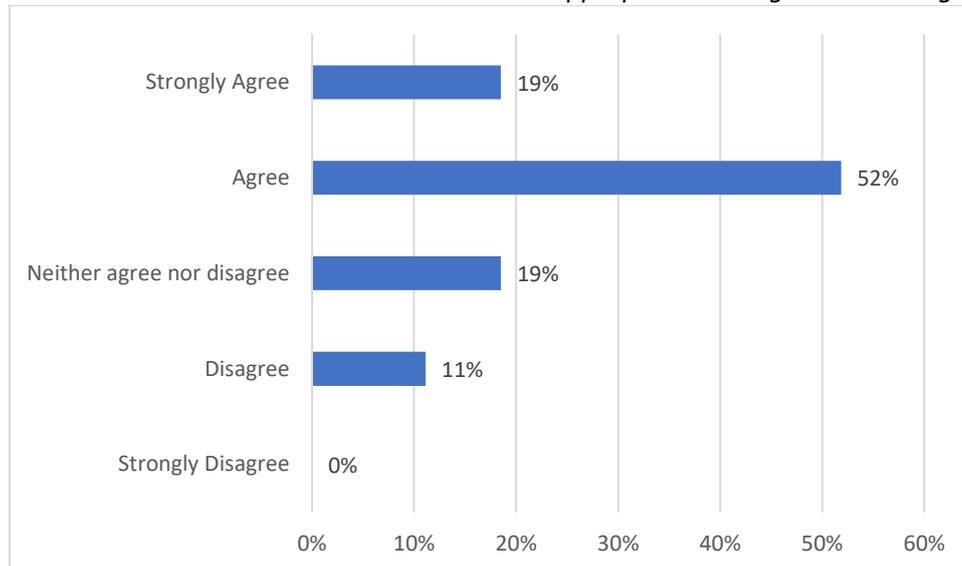
Overview

For each statement, bar one notable exception, over half of respondents indicated they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Two statements attracting the highest percentage in terms of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing were 'I know how to evidence that I have exercised appropriate management oversight' (71%) and 'I am more confident in my ability to apply a 'good enough' approach when countersigning in Assetplus' (71%) closely followed by 'I am a more reflective supervisor or manager since completing the course' (66%). The exception was the statement 'I am more adept at dealing with conflict in the workplace'. Here, in contrast to the other statements, less than half (48%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement respondents. See Annex A (Figure 15) for breakdown in responses across all ten statements.

5.6 Changes to Practice

Respondents were asked if they had made any changes to their practice since completing the course. Three quarters (25; 76%) indicated they had made changes. Three respondents indicated they had not made any changes. No explanation was provided in two of these cases. The remaining respondent indicated that much of what was covered in the course was already familiar to them. The remaining five respondents had only attended Day 1 of the course and did not answer this question.

Respondents were then asked to specify what changes in their practice they had made since completing the Operational Managers course and to explain the outcome of the change. Space was provided to share up to three examples maximum. Where respondents could identify *more* than three examples, then they were encouraged to describe those instances that, in their view, had been the most beneficial. Respondents were encouraged to have their workbook to hand in answering these questions.

Respondents shared a range of examples of the changes implemented. Many mentioned changes relating to Quality Assurance (e.g. *more thorough signing off of assessment)*; introduction of more reflective practice (e.g. *more reflective practice with staff I supervise and team as a whole; incorporated critical reflection sessions into our practice; introducing model of reflection for individual*

cases); or mentioned an increase in confidence *(e.g. more confident in supervisions; more confident in using assetplus as reviews).*

When asked about outcomes flowing from their changes in practice, respondents shared a range of examples, from the very tangible *(e.g. update to risk management policy; recreated new QA forms; Achieved a more detailed look at those YPs that have committed serious further offences)* to the more subtle changes in approach (e.g. *Increased case manager ownership of these cases; increased confidence in our judgements and delivery of work*).

Some specific examples from respondents are outlined below.

Training Influencing Practice: Critical Reflection	
Practice Changed:	*Changed to incorporated critical reflection sessions into our practice.*
Outcome:	*Case managers use the space to reflect on positive practice or that which has resulted in a dilemma or barrier to engagement.*

Training Influencing Practice: Centring Young Person/Carers	
Practice Changed:	*Ensured that young people and carers voice is captured throughout the assessment and that the YP self-assessment is thorough.*
Outcome:	*More Assets are returned without signature to undergo changes, but interventions are Young Person and family led, as a result interventions are more systemic.*
Practice Changed:	*When checking assessments/reports consider what the child/family would think reading those words*
Outcome:	*Assessments/reports are informed and enhanced by the views of the child/family being prominent throughout.*

Training Influencing Practice: Policy and Procedure	
Practice:	*Learning on the course to help review policy and procedure for the YJS leadership team.*
Outcome:	*Risk management policy updated*

Training Influencing Practice: Decision Making	
Practice:	Use of decision trees (Munroe) in supervision and my own practice
Outcome:	*Defensible decision making is clearly reflected and recorded; decisions are fully considered.*

Respondents were asked to indicate for each of their identified examples who, in their view, stood to benefit from the change in practice. Respondents could specify more than one beneficiary for each example (or examples). The figure below shows the extent to which changes in practice were according to respondents' assessments almost equally beneficial to themselves as managers, their team (i.e., colleagues they supervise or manage); the YOT, and the Child/Young Person.

Figure 14: Percentage of total number of examples of change in practice by respondents' assessment of who benefited
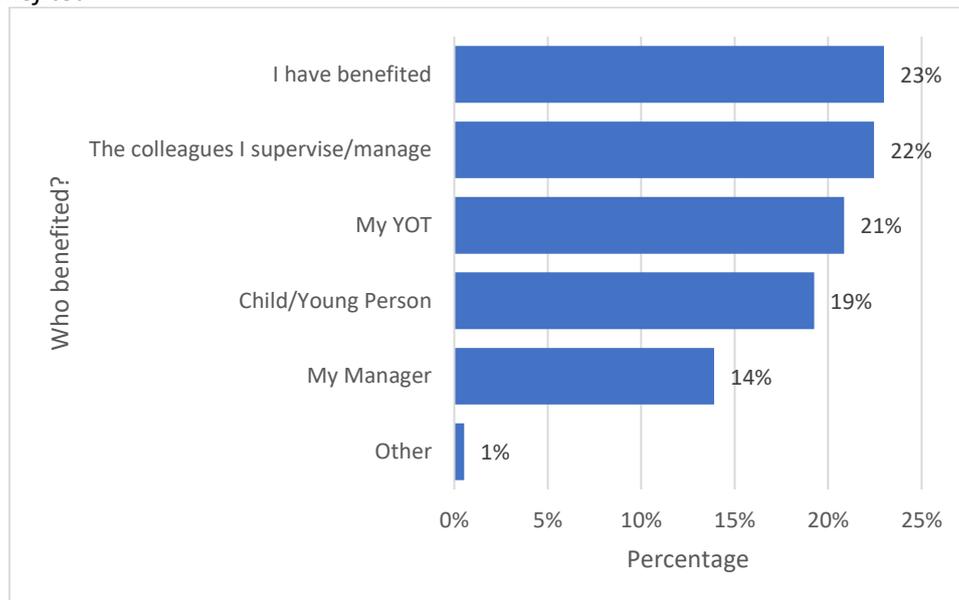
5.7 Barriers

Respondents were asked what barriers, if any, they had encountered in making changes to their practice following completion of the course. Seven (out of the 33) respondents identified barriers. The dominant theme here was challenges around carving out time to make the changes. As one respondent commented '*Time as always'* (YOS Coordinator) Another respondent explained '*Always competing priorities and demands - often crisis management which detracts from time out to reflect and plan'* (Practice Supervisor). Similarly, one respondent also identified time as a barrier not just for themselves, but also their staff's time '*Barriers include my time to consider/reflect [and] asking staff to take time to do the same'* (Operations Manager).

6. Findings: Practitioner Interviews

Feedback from interviews broadly reflected the survey findings in a number of areas but also provided some more detailed information.

6.1 Different perspectives of new managers and more experienced staff

Participants who were relatively new in their roles found the course particularly helpful, for example:

'Everything for me was almost like a learning curve, just because of the position I was in at the time. I was sort of the only manager in a small team and my supervision – my management style – was very much about day-to-day problems, killing fires, make sure there's somebody to cover court etc. I hadn't had time to come up to speed on things like reflective supervision and quality assurance etc...so **everything was sort of really new for me**'

'I've only been in post since the end of May last year and with the COVID, Armageddon and everything, you know what it's been like sort of, you know, trying to learn a new job in isolation when you don't have those watercooler conversations, overhear conversations and see the managers in practice….on the whole, I found it really useful, but that may well be a reflection of **where I am in my journey**. You know, you may have another attendee who's been around for 30 years who thought, 'Well, I know all this' but from my point of view it was good.'

One more experienced participant also commented on how the course is particularly good for new managers: 'I just wish it had come sooner for me, really. You know, it would have been an absolutely fantastic course to kind of go on kind of at the start of being an ops manager. And I think, you know, certainly we will be promoting it with any kind of **aspirant managers** that we might have.'

Other experienced practitioners had mixed views and suggested that they may not have learnt much that was new although there were still benefits in being reminded of good practice and being reassured that they were already doing a good job.
 'I've been in post quite a while and didn't take much from it I'm afraid as our service is already doing all the things that were suggested and a lot more also. Although I didn't learn anything new it did at least **reinforce for me that we're doing a good job** here'

'So this is like this is come like really late for me, to be quite honest. But what I found it was a really, **really good refresher**, looking at those kind of principles of quality assurance, looking at kind of that analysis, looking at kind of a kind of defensible decision making as well, which was really good.'

6.2 Networking and sharing practice
As with responses to the survey, interview participants emphasised how much they valued the opportunity to discuss practice with colleagues from outside their own team or service.
'Not only did I receive the new learning, but I also did the **networking** with other YOT managers from around the country. And I'm not alone, you know? In fact it was kind of a reunion of YOT managers who were sharing difficulties'

One practitioner from the North West noted the benefits of contact with colleagues from other parts of the country in an online course: 'But I think the biggest thing for me that I really enjoyed was actually having the opportunity to mix with colleagues. And I think, you know, although there's cons to kind of doing things online, what was good was that **I met with people who I would probably never meet with before**, like Nottingham and you know, Enfield, and it's reaffirming really just to know that other youth justice services in other areas are experiencing the same issues.'

In addition to learning from others, participants also welcomed the opportunity to be able to share their own good practice with others also: 'it was really nice following our successful inspection to be able to go **and impart some of the really good stuff that we've got going on as well**. So that was brilliant to be able to go and do that.'

6.3 Distance learning
The workbook was seen as useful but often challenging to complete.

Reminders and check-ins
Fitting the distance learning in around existing work commitments was difficult for all interviewees, but weekly email reminders were seen as helpful.
'But I think it was handy to keep people on track to have the administrator who sent **regular emails** around, a sort of a countdown to the next session, reminding people what week we were on, reminding people where in theory they should be up to… if people are anything like me in a busy week,

it can easily go off your radar but with a non-invasive email like that you can sort of come back to where it is. So that was a good feature.'

The opportunity to have check-in days with the trainers was also appreciated, even if people were not able to attend. 'I like the check ins that were offered as well that the trainers kind of put in place… there were just sometimes I never managed to actually get to one, but **I knew it was there if I needed it** and that was good to know.'

Style and content
There were suggestions for changing the style of the distance learning, for example:
'So I don't know if there is something about making the distance learning **more online or streamlined**? You kind of look at it and go, 'Oh, it's a workbook', so can they still get the same message across more succinctly, you know, less wordy, **something more visual and online**, you know, that kind of thing? Or like podcasts - you can then get on and listen to it in the car, on the way home, and reflect on it then.'

Others were happy with the workbook style and felt there were enough other materials such as videos or links to websites.
'I like the workbook. I like that and I **thought the materials were good** as well. And you know, when I sat down and did it I really enjoyed it and kind of kicked myself for not protecting the time and kind of doing it all the way through.'

'within the workbook, there was **lots of website addresses and places to go for further information**. And I did that. I mean, I guess it's always nice if you can break up the day, you know, with the YouTube video or sites, that it's not just about reading, but I wouldn't go over the top in criticizing that really.'

6.4 Examples of impact on practice
Some participants were frustrated that they had not been able to put their learning in to practice, typically because of changes in organisational structures or personnel within their service. 'I am in a place where in my head I want to move it forward, I want to apply it, I want to develop not only me, but the people in my team, people outside my team. It's just I haven't had the opportunity to do it.'

For those who had felt able to apply their learning, participants gave a range of examples of how the course had influenced their day-to-day practice.

- Quality assurance

'you can get a bit complacent about things and I think having those discussions kind of reawakens it a bit, really gives you a new appetite for it and helps you kind of have a look at it and just think, actually, I maybe need to approach it from a different way. And some of the things that I really liked about that were some of the exercises that we did, particularly the one on **perspective taking** if you like, where we were doing the assessment and we have the assessment interview and we were looking at kind of what the child would say, what the teacher would say and what the health would say. And **I have applied some of that really into looking at the quality assurance of assessments**.

- Reflective supervision

'And **reflective supervision** in the wider scheme of reflective practice? Obviously, we always encourage everyone in the team to, you know, to engage in reflective practice and be a little bit analytical about what's working different approaches we can take. But in terms of **my style and my sort of person management skills, I think that they improved as a result**. And I think that I perhaps had a tendency to not ask closed questions but not be consciously keeping an open question. And I think that's something that's really important when you work it in practice, in stressful practice, when

you're dealing with trauma and adverse childhood experiences and the impact that stress can have on staff.'

- Confidence

'It gave me real **confidence** to kind of go on and **put myself forward for the train the trainer course** because I…I kind of thought, you know, I've got loads to offer, like lots of experience here, you know, So it's pushing me as I have put my name forward for the next cohort. And certainly I'll push for the peer review as well because I'm interested in, you know, in that kind of visiting other places, speaking to people. That's what really drives me…so it's been it's been good to kind of think it's probably now's the time to kind of get out there a little bit.'

- New ideas

'But you know, like the matter of the personality test, I just thought that was a bit airy fairy between you and me. But then when I got the results, it was shockingly accurate so you know, it was **some new stuff there for me to learn** and I'm attempting - I don't think my team would agree with me - but **I'm attempting to put it into practice** and, you know, make me a better manager.'

Recognition of different types of change

One participant noted that she didn't have any influence over changing processes (such as QA tools) because a more senior manager took this over, but she could still change other aspects of her own practice for example 'my own practice I've changed a bit with regard to supervision'.

6.5 Suggestions for possible amendments to the course

Several suggestions were made for possible improvements to the course.

Follow-up

Participants suggested that having some follow-up after the course would be an incentive to work on applying the learning in practice and would reinforce the benefits of the networking that takes place on the course.

'if one of the facilitators asked me now how I had got on I would feel embarrassed as I hadn't really implemented anything but if I knew someone was coming to ask about it then I would have had an incentive to do something, even if only a small change.'

'And you know, potentially like a group session would be good. You know, I think people would really buy into it, our group seemed to gel really quite well. I think people took different things away from each other. We have that kind of check out at the end, you know, about what people had got from the course and it would be good to follow up on that.'

Other topics to cover

One participant suggested there would be a benefit in including more focus on broader leadership skills in addition to the more specific youth-justice related content.

'It is very much kind of based on the process and the youth justice process. And I think there wasn't as much as I think in around some of those softer skills about what it takes to be a leader and a manager, you know? But I appreciate this is the youth justice thing, and it might be that local authorities have those courses available anyway, but it might be quite good to factor things around like a bit of emotional intelligence and motivation and pack types, that kind of thing working out kind of, you know who your staff are. And we did it for ourselves, but we didn't necessarily do it like, you know, for our teams. And so maybe things that we could have done with our teams that weren't particularly focused on youth justice.'

7. Findings: Feedback from Senior Managers

Interviews with Senior Managers were carried out to obtain feedback on what changes they had seen in the practice of staff from their teams who had attended the training. Seven Senior Managers provided feedback so the sample is limited but between them they supervise ten operational managers who completed the course and they came from different regions around the country i.e. North West: 2; North East: 1; London:1; East: 1; East Midlands: 1; Yorkshire & Humber: 1.

7.1 Evidence used to identify the impact of the OM course

One of the ways that Senior Managers noticed the impact of the course on their staff was through *discussing* it with them.

'The experience of the course was **discussed with the attendee during supervision** and helped us to have a healthy discussion about their learning'

'So, **in supervision we talked about the training** and what was learned and what has changed'

There were also examples of Senior Managers *observing* changes in behaviour and practice.

'It has been a very busy time for our service and **I have observed** that the attendee is considering this in terms of her own self-management and self-care'

'It enabled him to be more confident in relation to youth justice risk management and this has been **demonstrated and observed** in risk management panels he co-chairs'.

7.2 Impact of the course for new and experienced staff

Senior managers recognised that the impact of the course varied according to participants' level of experience and professional development.

Benefits for staff who are new to the Operational Manager role

Senior Managers who had staff who were relatively new in their posts commented that the course was particularly helpful for them.

'he found it particularly useful **at this stage of his career** in recognising where he wants to develop'.

'The attendee is a **new manager** and is starting to see how good quality assurance can contribute to the evidence of practice and they will be supported to extend their learning in this area.'

Reaffirming existing good practice and strengths

For both new and experienced staff, the course has presented opportunities for staff to recognise where they are doing things well and to be affirmed in this.

'The member of staff who attended the training was extremely experienced and had been working for some months in an acting up role which included management responsibilities. The course has helped to **reaffirm** for her that she has adopted **good working practices**'

'His openness and being approachable are the main attributes that he brought with him to the post and I recollect him saying this was covered as an important quality to hold as an operational manager, so this is something **I have been able to reaffirm with him**'

The OM course as one of a range of measures for improving practice

Senior Managers suggested that the course fits alongside other development opportunities for staff, but this can also then make it difficult to assess how much of the observed change in practice is a result of the course and how much is linked to other measures.

'The manager who attended is relatively new to the Ops Manager role (10 months) and so this programme has been part of **a package of learning opportunities** provided to them'.

'Difficult to say exactly what was due to the training and what is due to the fact that they have been on an improvement pathway since a poor inspection and have put in place **lots of other measures** as a response to that also'.

7.3 Examples of impact on Operational Managers' practice

Senior Managers noted that the course prompted staff to be more reflective about their work.

'the OM course enabled her to **reflect** on her oversight activity and found the content and suggestions of others very helpful.'

'he **reflected** that it was helpful as an overall exercise to **consider** where his strengths are and other areas that he feels he needs to develop'

The quotes below show examples of Senior Managers noticing changes in practice relating to a range of key aims of the course and subjects covered.

'Another difference we talked about is around **defensible decision making**. We're reviewing our out of court disposal panel process so it was perfect timing really and we've been reflecting back on what defensible decision making looks like for us in our panel. He coordinates that and is trying to get that balance between consistency across different cases whilst also having flexibility for individual circumstances – is it a defensible decision to have different outcomes? He's applied that thinking about decision making in terms of our panel'

'She has become increasingly **confident** in overseeing the decision-making of others throughout the assessment process. She has also developed a **better understanding** of approach to management tasks and responsibilities overall.'

'We spoke about **quality assurance and developing the tools we use** and he was saying that the training profoundly made him think about how we do that with our staff and what we are trying to achieve. Is it that we want to be able to say we have an oversight and do spot checks or is it that we want to say we're trying to develop the learning and understanding within the wider team?'

7.4 Wider impact on others

Senior Managers identified a range of people who also benefited from the changes in staff practice after attending the course. For example:

- Partner organisations
  'She contributes more in multi-agency meetings with **partners** because she has more confidence in what she's doing'
- Senior Managers themselves
  'We talked about reflective practice, ...and I realised that I don't really do reflective practice in supervision with him so that's something I've been thinking about and there's been that **learning upwards**'
- Supervisees
  'Simultaneously she is supporting others to take more responsibility, access their own strengths and considering this in regard to development for **those she supervises**. This is a positive because it is not their natural style of management'

7.5 Other feedback on course delivery and content

Senior Managers made suggestions for further development of the course, as described below.

Distance Learning Workbook

There were similarities with the feedback from participants regarding the value of the distance learning but also the difficulty of fitting in around day-to-day work.

'Time & capacity is always a challenge and at times it was tough for her fitting in time for the workbook. This is particularly relevant as we are holding a vacancy in the management team. Nonetheless, the

workbook did mean that momentum was continued in between the 2 course dates and encourages the continued application of learning'

'..she completed the exercises in the Learning Handbook as requested in preparation for day 2 but was disappointed that it was not looked at on the second day of training as planned and that she received no feedback/comments re this'

Networking

As with the feedback from participants, Senior Managers noted the benefits of the course in terms of networking but noted that online training sometimes hindered this.

'She really benefited from the networking opportunity and hearing what other people were doing helped her see that she was doing a good job'

'They felt that the networking with other YJ managers was hindered by the virtual platform and the general conversations you would normally have outside of the presentations etc could not occur'

Refresher training

One Senior Manager who had several staff attending the training noted that they would appreciate a follow-up day. 'All felt it would be beneficial for a day in the future for them to come together for a 'refresher' but for this to be face to face.'

8. Findings: Interviews with Trainers

All of the trainers who were interviewed spoke passionately about their commitment to improving practice and wanting to use their own professional experience to help others. The value of having trainers from within the sector was also emphasised and there was a strong sense that the course was filling a much-needed gap in provision.

'I like delivering training…and really if we do it better than it's **better for the children** so that's where it comes from, this motivation, it always stems from you know 'this isn't good enough for the children'.'

'You know if you pick up a training manual, most people can do it and that type of thing. But for me, having had that added value of it actually being **somebody who does the job** and knows how difficult it is sometimes and the pressures and the barriers…it's much better than someone from outside who wouldn't get the nuances right.'

8.1 The primary focus on reflective practice

All the trainers who were interviewed stated that enabling and promoting reflective practice was central to the course. One reason given for this was that the pressures of work make it difficult for people to find time for reflection:

'You never have that time to reflect, and I think this is the course that enables them to do that, to step back and reflect'

'I think on the day-to-day stuff you make decisions quite quickly, you might not have a lot of time to reflect on it and it's just good revisiting those sort of mainstays really of what we should be doing as managers'

The differences between services and the settings that people work in was also highlighted as a reason for focusing on reflection. 'I would say that around the time kind of management of being a leader, how do they manage their time better? Why do they do the things that they do? Because what's a priority for us in the course and me in my job is not a priority for someone else so we try and spend a lot of time with them around what are the actual priorities for you? You personally and for you and your service….so I think just allowing them time to actually **reflect on their own practice**, I think it's one of the biggest parts that are in there'

Another trainer highlighted how reflection can help managers to understand more of the wider impact of their work: 'reflect more, think about their decision making…their work really **impacts on the young person and the organisation** and if they do a good supervision, that isn't just for the practitioners. That is for the young person, it's for the organisation. It's for other agencies and stuff like that and really see how you know, sort of them taking time to reflect and think about what they're doing, the impact that they have, and I think sometimes as managers we forget that.'

To summarise, there was a clear sense from the trainers that reflective practice is at the heart of being a good manager and other specific knowledge/skills then supplement that.
'Specific skills are important but the most important thing is to be reflecting on practice, why you do what you do and how it could be better'
'the most important thing about the course is about being the best person you can be and reflecting on your own practice. Then all the specific issues/skills fit around that like a halo'

8.2 Experience of delivering the course
As with a lot of training in the youth justice world, participants come from a range of professional backgrounds and with different types of knowledge and skills. One trainer, for example, noted that managers on the course from a probation background tend to be more familiar with the concept of defensible decision-making and those from a social work background tend to be more familiar with models of reflective supervision. Participants also vary in their own specific interests and what other training is available to them in their own service. Consequently, delivery of the course has to be flexible and cover a wide range of topics:
'we have skills ranging right across the board and specialism across the board. Some people might be really, really interested in data collection and in doing audits, and we talk about that and that may be really capture their imagination and they want to read more about it. And we have staff that are really, really interested in reflective supervision and managing staff, and they'll go away and do that. So we try and kind of will touch on it. We'll kind of bring up the conversation and kind of whet your appetite. We'll give you the basics. It's then for you to go away and find this to go and research some more'

Engagement with operational issues
Trainers noted that participants engaged most enthusiastically with elements of the course focused on operational issues, particularly defensible decision-making, QA, and supervision. For example:
'Some of the things that obviously prompt a lot of conversations are things like, different aspects of management, of risk quality assurance – like do you sign off everything or only high-risk cases?'
'Models of supervision is another element that always prompts discussions about how do people interweave things like reflective practice and the types of supervision that they do - these sort of **operational elements** always seem to prompt quite a lot of discussion.'

One trainer suggested that some of the perhaps more abstract concepts could helpfully be discussed in ways that participants could relate to their practice. 'Something like being an inspiring manager, I think it's really important to think about those things but I don't know if we give it enough time or do it in the right way. We all want to be inspirational to some people but what does that mean in practice? What are we doing on the ground? How is that shown in supervision? How has that changed in how we communicate with the team and what things have we done in the past that have fallen flat? I think there's more there around some of those conversations…it's making it a little less aspirational and **more operational** I suppose.'

Facilitating conversations about practice
Just as participants highlighted networking as one of the key benefits of the course, trainers also focused on the importance of enabling practice-based discussions to take place.
'Main role is to **facilitate discussion** and let people share knowledge'

'They like working in the break out rooms, they like working together, they like **hearing about each other's practices** and you know what each other brings to the table'

8.3 Participants' expectations can be a problem

Trainers noted that there can be difficulties if participants attend with unrealistic expectations of what the course will provide. For example, 'sometimes people want definitive answers on 'how to do' something and that can be difficult to manage' or 'particularly with QA, some people come expecting to be given ready-made tools which is not what happens'. Similarly, another trainer noted that 'in our last cohort we had someone say 'after day one I was like I'm not sure this if for me', I can't remember the exact words he used but it was something like 'I thought I was coming to this to get a tool and to be told what to do so I left day one feeling a bit disheartened and it's only when I started doing the distance learning that I though, wait a minute, this is relevant'.'

8.4 Impact – early signs of application of learning

Trainers were asked what evidence they saw of participants putting their learning into practice.

Evidence from check-in meetings – encouraging signs

For recent cohorts, trainers have offered the opportunity for 'check-in meetings' during the distance learning phase of the course which provided an opportunity to see how participants were progressing: 'the last round of training we delivered, we booked in monthly meetings so we were able to speak to the participants as to where they were at with their workbooks. Some were struggling because of work commitments but we found that they were trying to implement things they had been learning. They talked about action plans, one talked about an Assetplus checklist, there was more reference to reflection in supervision sessions, so **you did get a good sense that people were trying the best to implement what they had learned**'

Evidence from day 2 – mixed picture of engagement

All the trainers noted that there were significant differences between participants in the extent to which they had engaged with the distance learning and started to apply changes to their practice.
'real **mixed bag**, some of them might have dipped into it, some of them have done it all in one go'
'some people come back and they've done nothing and other people come back and they've done it all and it's been like a light bulb moment for them'.

It was suggested that those who had recently taken up a management role showed more evidence of implementing their learning than those who were more established in post. 'I tend to get a sense that **those that are new into management tend to make the biggest changes**. Whereas those that have been there for a long time, I think sometimes day one is almost like seen as a break for some of them. It's great for to sit back and discuss everything. But I think that sometimes they're so into the old ways or the kinds of the way that they do things are so ingrained that maybe one day is just not enough to kind of unpick what's gone before. It's like…if you take a young person, for example, they've had 15 years of absolute chaos, one session or eight hours with a YOT is not going to change anything. It's like pouring a kettle of hot water in the sea and expecting it to get warm. It's just not going to happen'.

Evidence from day 2 - different types of impact

When asked for examples of how practitioners were implementing learning, the most common responses from trainers were about the more practical, operational aspects of their work e.g. 'when people share their action plans it's usually stuff around **supervision and QA**'.

However, one trainer suggested that although there may be evidence of people making changes to some processes, that didn't necessarily mean that they were doing the deeper thinking about their

practice: 'I'm not sure how much people had done the distance learning but they could definitely give examples of specific tangible things there were doing differently (such as using a new QA tool). However, **I'm not sure how much reflective thinking was going** e.g. use of learning logs'.

As also noted in one of the participant interviews (page 18), it may sometimes be easier for participants to change their own personal practice than to influence wider service systems and procedures: 'I think a lot of people want to and I think some people will do with their own personal practice – like thinking about what does reflective supervision look like? – people will do that for developing their own practice. But I think structurally within services and processes, the **management oversight can be a bit more difficult to change or streamline**'.

8.5 Impact – longer term goals
Part of the rationale for developing the OM course was to address problems identified during inspections. As one trainer noted, 'a few years back, in a lot of inspections it came out that our management oversight was not good enough and we as a group of professionals were saying what's this all about and why is it so inconsistent'. Consequently, trainers identified that one of the longer-term goals of the course was to see a change in inspection results:
'I'm hoping we'll start to see an increase in HMIP saying that the management oversight is good'
'if inspections say there has been improvement in management oversight then the course has done what it set out to do'.

8.6 Perspectives on being a trainer
Feedback indicates that trainers enjoy delivering the course and benefit from it themselves.[5]
- Administrative support from the centre has generally been good although it is still time-consuming and it sometimes feels as if there are heavy demands on a small core group.
- Delivering the training with the same co-worker appears to be an approach that people like e.g. reduces preparation time as each person can deliver the same parts of the course
- Trainers find that they also benefit from the opportunity to reflect on their own practice, 'One of the key things is reflection for me because I think that's what I take away from it each time. Doing the course, I always think about myself and my own YOT. A lot of the time I happen to be reactive to situations or people…and, you know, I just think it's the pause and reflection for me that I always come back to from the day'.

8.7 Future development of the course
Trainers were asked to identify ways in which the course could be developed or improved in future.

Course content
Trainers were generally happy with the content of the course and didn't have many suggestions to make about this but the following possible changes were identified:
- Align the course more closely with inspection criteria
- Include more focus on management oversight of risk of harm to others
- 'the SWOT analysis…for me, that could be done as part of the distance learning part of it because it's about them individually and their individual teams. I think we can do the work around why it's important and how to prioritize and everything. It might be something that they would think better if they were doing it on their own because I've seen it where they've been in tables, there's been a dominant person on the table who's got everyone to do their SWOT analysis for their service and the others haven't had a chance to do theirs'

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[5] This section provides only a brief summary of responses as trainers are able to provide ongoing feedback at regular team meetings.

Buy-in from Senior Managers and Local Authorities

Several trainers suggested a need for Senior Managers to develop more understanding of the course so that they could support their Ops Managers more effectively. For example, 'I think service leads almost need to be bought into it a bit more. So it's great that service leads, they know about it and they say, Yeah, go on it, it would be great for you. But do they really know what's involved in it and what the impact is going to be for their service? So I suppose that's something that could improve. Another trainer noted that 'there might need to be a course for the manager who's managing the manager if that makes sense. So they know what the course is about so they can talk the same language, so they can, you know, ask what about reflecting on this? What about doing a decision tree here? You know what about the golden thread and that type of thing so it keeps the practice alive'.

There was a concern about the feasibility of returning to face-to-face training given the additional cost involved compared to online provision and whether senior managers valued the course sufficiently to be willing to pay travel costs for staff to attend in person: 'how do you prompt those extra resources into it, that extra investment?'.

Accreditation

Making the course accredited was seen as one possible way to build up more of that buy-in from service leads or Local Authorities: 'I'd like to see the course potentially becoming accredited somewhere, so that'll give it more kind of gravity, more kind of influence with those kind of higher seats of power to kind of put some more into it'.

Broadening the offer

Trainers recognised that the 'market' for the course could become saturated given the limited number of operational managers and relatively low turnover of staff in those roles. Some suggestions for further development of the course included:

'It's not looking strategically at anything and it's about personal development rather than you as a cog in the wheel of the service. It doesn't really lend itself to management team or **strategic** service. I don't know whether there's some scope to expand it…so you're looking at how you can apply it within your teams, within your service, how you can influence people around you.'

'We've only got one offer, I suppose, I think there needs to be a **diverse offer** that maybe looks at some of those other areas in more detail, you know for example managing difficult or challenging people. And then thinking about going even further – how does an operational manager make that leap to a strategic manager? There's not loads of opportunities to provide someone with that foundational sort of knowledge.'

9. Discussion

Operational managers provide a critical first line of oversight in youth justice services and have a key role in promoting high quality practice. However, many operational managers don't receive specific training when they start in that role. As one respondent stated 'most people go from being case managers to front line managers. There's no real training, there's no real support other than what you get from your own team or your own service. If you were doing it wrong as a case manager, then potentially you could be doing it wrong as a team manager if there's no one there to explain that this is why you do it or this is the reason, this is the underpinning knowledge for it.' These concerns were reinforced by trainers who highlighted criticism from HMIP about the quality of management oversight. The Operational Managers course therefore has the potential to contribute to significant improvements in practice by filling a current gap in training provision and tackling identified areas of weakness. In addition, as noted from the survey findings, participants supervised an average of 7 people, meaning that any impact from this course could affect a large number of other staff.

The discussion below summarises the findings in three main areas: i) experiences of those attending and delivering the course; ii) the impact of the course on participants' knowledge and skills (the 'can do'); iii) the longer-term impact of the course on practice (what people 'will do' / 'are doing').

9.1 Experiences of the course

The course reflects many of the principles of good training design identified in the wider literature (e.g. being based on a needs analysis, having spaces between sessions, incorporating time for reflection) and feedback from respondents indicates that there is a good match between the aims of the course, the priorities of the trainers and the reasons participants sign up for the course. A very broad summary of the data would be that trainers enjoy delivering the course and most participants feel they have benefited from it.

The topics which seemed to prompt the most engagement were those focused on operational issues rather than the more aspirational elements. Newer operational managers clearly found the course very helpful and relevant for their stage of professional development. There were different opinions amongst those who were more experienced with some finding it to be a useful refresher but others feeling they had not gained much. The distance learning element is a key area of focus in that it can be both the means through which participants really begin to understand and apply concepts more deeply, but also a source of stress and frustration trying to fit it in around existing work commitments.

Inevitably, the need to move to online training during the pandemic has had a significant impact on the experience of both trainers and participants. A number of the issues raised are already known to AYM through the participant feedback forms and regular trainers' meetings (e.g. some activities such as the Golden Thread are more difficult to deliver online and technical problems can be stressful for trainers to deal with). However, one issue which merits further exploration is how online training affects opportunities for sharing practice and networking. On the one hand, a benefit of online training is that it can draw together people from different parts of the country who might not normally meet together for face-to-face training and this provides opportunities to learn from colleagues from a wider range of services. On the other hand, there was a recognition that, although online break out rooms do provide a useful way for participants to share practice, these discussions and interactions – which are one of the key reasons people want to sign up for the course – are often not as good as they would be in real life. In addition, networking – in the sense of making connections with colleagues which continue *after* the course has finished – may be more difficult in the online setting than in face-to-face training where participants from within a region are more likely to have ongoing contact.

9.2 Impact on knowledge and skills

This section summarises the findings on what participants 'can do' which can include changes in attitudes or approach, and improvements in knowledge of skills. The majority of survey respondents agreed that their confidence/knowledge/skills had improved in relation to the following areas:

Reflective supervision	Assessing information gathered and presented by others
Defensible decision-making	Applying a critical lens approach to case reviews
Using professional discretion	*Applying a 'good enough' approach to countersigning AssetPlus*
Applying QA processes	*Evidencing appropriate management oversight*

The items in italics were the ones attracting the highest percentage of agree/strongly agree responses in the survey. In comparison, the feedback from practitioner interviews and from senior managers tended to put more emphasis on increased skills and confidence in the areas of defensible decision-making and applying QA processes, as well as in reflective supervision. Survey respondents were less

likely to say that they felt 'more adept at dealing with conflict in the workplace' and this topic was not mentioned at all in the interviews, suggesting that this element of the course may need review.

9.3 Impact on practice

To what extent are participants applying this new confidence and/or knowledge to their everyday work? The different groups of respondents – participants, senior managers and trainers – all identified a range of examples of positive changes to practice and it was clear from the data that the majority of participants wanted to, and were trying to, apply their learning to practice.

An interesting distinction emerges from the data between changes in what might be called 'personal practice' and in what could be described as 'operational or procedural practice'. For example:
i) Changes in operational practice (e.g. using a new QA process) are easier to observe than changes in personal practice (e.g. whether someone has really spent time reflecting on their learning).
ii) Changes in personal practice (e.g. approaches to reflective supervision) may be easier to implement than changes to operations or procedures (e.g. AssetPlus signoff requirements) as these may require approval from others and are more likely to involve some organisational 'hassle'.

The balance between implementing changes in personal and operational practice is likely to vary for each participant depending on their role, responsibilities and personality.

In terms of the broader impact of these changes in practice, the data presented in sections 5-8 above show examples of positive outcomes for different groups of people:
- Supervisees and other colleagues
- Partner agencies
- Young people
- Line managers
- Participants themselves

It was also clear that participants encountered a range of barriers to implementing their learning which included time pressures, organisational restructuring and sometimes a lack of opportunities for trying out new ideas. This fits with the concept of the 'learning transfer system' described in section 4 above, and whilst some elements of this will be outside of either YJSIP or practitioner control, there may be scope for looking at whether anything else could be done to increase the chances of practitioners returning to an environment which helps them to apply their learning to practice.

10. Conclusion and recommendations

Although the sample for this study was not fully representative of all the course participants, the information provided is strong enough to draw some conclusions given that i) respondents came from different regions and different course cohorts and ii) there were clear similarities and recurring themes in the feedback from the participants, senior managers and trainers. The course is successfully filling a gap in training provision and is generally well received. The majority of respondents found the course useful and senior managers have seen benefits for their staff of attending the course. The evidence from practitioners, trainers and senior managers is that beneficial changes to practice are being made but, unsurprisingly, good intentions are sometimes difficult to apply in real world settings. Some areas for further consideration to develop and strengthen the course in future are given below.

Course recruitment and preparation
- Provide greater clarity over who the course is aimed at/who is most likely to benefit

- Include signposting to the Aspiring Future Youth Justice Leaders (a AYM course already in existence that is designed for those who wish to develop more strategic level management skills) in recruitment material.
- Manage expectations e.g. so that people are not expecting to be given tools/answers
- Consider whether the structure of the course could be made clearer e.g. day 1 is focused on exploring issues and day 2 is more about application to practice which might help to avoid situations where people feel they have not got what they were expecting after day 1

Course content
- Consider options to include more visual and interactive elements in the distance learning (more online, podcasts etc)
- Consider options for enabling more discussion about the distance learning e.g. at the start of day 2 or through networking between participants during the 12 week period, including the need to incorporate a brief presentation from each attendee on Day 2 sharing key elements/findings from using the workbook
- Consider ways to help participants think through the differences between changes in 'personal practice' and 'operational practice' e.g. through the action planning activity
- Strengthen the message around the benefits of reflective practice, especially in relation to the time saved if a more reflective practice is embraced

Sustaining impact over time
- Consider options for follow-up contact around 6 months after day 2. This could help participants and also give YJSIP more data on impact to strengthen the evidence base for the course.
- Consider options for encouraging senior managers to follow-up on the training e.g. include an element within the participation agreement for line managers to give feedback during appraisal/supervision and/or give feedback to YJSIP about the changes in practice they have observed since the staff member completed the training
- Consider other ways to strengthen networking between participants after the course e.g. within local areas where there is a more realistic chance of ongoing contact.

Organisational effectiveness
- Consider providing brief guidance/checklist for senior managers on ways to support staff members in applying their learning from the course
- Look at links with the Peer Review process and how this could help teams/services review how well they use training and how they may be able to improve their learning transfer culture.

Longer-term course development and sustainability
- Explore options for using trainers' positive experiences of delivering the course (e.g. being able to reflect more on their own practice) to 'sell' the training more strongly
- Consider the advantages/disadvantages of hybrid courses e.g. having a mixture of face-to-face and online training to balance the cost advantages of online provision with the networking benefits of face-to-face contact.

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Annex 1

Figure 15 Percentage of respondents who strongly agreed/agreed with each of the ten statements

Statement	Percentage (%)
a. I am a more reflective supervisor or manager since completing the course	66
b. I am more confident in making defensible decisions	63
c. I am now more comfortable in my use of professional discretion	59
d. I have a better understanding of applying QA processes in analysis of assessments and plans	61
e. I am better at assessing the risk involved in relying on information gathered and presented by others	57
f. I feel empowered to initiate reflective discussions with my team on an individual and in a team setting	63
g. I am more adept at dealing with conflict in the workplace	48
h. I feel more confident in applying a critical lens approach when reviewing cases8	60
l. I am more confident in my ability to apply a 'good enough' approach when countersigning in Assetplus.	71
m. I know how to evidence that I have exercised appropriate management oversight	71