



# Recidivism Study for the Evaluation of the *Scratch* Programme for the Improvement of Basic Skills of Young Offenders in Leicestershire

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## 1. The Programme

The *Scratch* programme sought to engage young offenders in education with a view to improving their basic skills, namely literacy and numeracy. The impetus to devise and run this specialist programme emerged from the Leicestershire Youth Offending Service (YOS) which is working towards specific targets for improving basic skills of young offenders. This was in accordance with its Public Service Agreement (PSA) adopted in July 2002.

The programme started in 2003 and was piloted until 2006. *Scratch* has continued to run since the pilot was completed. Young people were predominantly referred to the programme via the Youth Offending Service, but sometimes through other agencies such as Connexions. They were assessed by tutors for their readiness to engage in a basic skills programme. If suitable and ready, the young person and tutor established an individual learning programme or contract and the tutor tailored a learning schedule for the young person. These tended to take the shape of one-to-one learning or themed group work programmes, or a combination of these. During the intervention, tutors worked closely with parents and other agencies to get their students back into mainstream education, training and/or employment.

Although Leicestershire YOS's *Scratch* project was not steered by targets associated with reducing offending, the overarching ethos and remit of the YOS to reduce re-offending is important to recognise. Therefore this section of the evaluation can begin to highlight the impact basic skills intervention might have on recidivism. As a result the Leicestershire YOS commissioned the Community and Criminal Justice Division to examine the extent of recidivism by comparing a sample of young people who had basic skills intervention with a group that did not.

## 2. Review of Literature

A recidivist is 'a criminal who continues to commit crimes even after they have been punished.' *Cambridge Online Dictionary*

Re-offending and reconviction are different. For the purposes of this study the measure of recidivism was any reconviction during the year after intervention. The reconviction information collated for this study only reflects the offences detected and dealt with by the courts. The reconviction rates are the only indication about re-offending the research team has access to. The actual re-offending rates are not represented in this study as some offences committed may never come to the attention of the criminal justice system, however reconviction can be an important indication of recidivism.

### Recidivism studies with young people

It is not surprising that the criminal justice system seeks evaluation and research, particularly about the impact of interventions with young people and offending behaviour, in an attempt to find out 'what works'. Recently there has been much debate about the value of such studies (Goldson and Muncie, 2006; Smith, 2005), particularly highlighting the methodological problems with measuring effectiveness of juvenile justice. This is because studies on recidivism are limited due to the nature in which information about individuals is collated, recorded and selected for analysis. As a result evidence from such research is informative but needs to be carefully located in the intervention context. This is because interventions and management of offenders can vary across the criminal justice system. These differences are sometimes driven by a number of factors such as location, types and needs of offenders and also resources.

### Learning from recidivism studies

Lösel (1995) carried out a large scale analysis of more than 500 evaluations (meta-analysis), concluding that overall there was a 5 per cent reduction in re-offending as a result of intervention programmes for young people. Lloyd et al's (1994) critical analysis of a comparative study of reconviction rates for adults suggests that intervention is not a variable that affects offending behaviour. Their study outlines that 'past offending was one of the best predictors of reconviction,' (p1) and this was not necessarily linked to their type of intervention, community or prison sentences. However, the seriousness of re-offending did vary according to intervention. Offenders that were convicted of serious offences, tended to re-

offend less seriously. Those who offended less seriously tended to remain the same, in both frequency and level of seriousness. These changes in offending behaviour are difficult to locate in specific forms of intervention because so many factors can shape, influence and compound a number of inter-related areas. As Lloyd et al (1994) warn 'there has always been a variation in the quality of work with offenders' (p5).

However Smith (2005) draws attention to the fact that 'these effects are small compared for example with the effects of psychotherapy for adults' (p187). The types of intervention that were found to be most successful were programmes that addressed behavioural issues, particularly social learning approaches and education related to social and life skills (Smith 2005:188). Lipsey and Wilson (1998) found programmes that were unsuccessful were wilderness challenges, early release, deterrence and vocational training. In addition Andrews et al (1990a, 1990b) found that programmes that were selective and appropriate for young people, such as tailored learning styles had a better impact on recidivism. Smith (2005: 188) also argued that programmes with young offenders in the community were more successful than those compared to interventions in institutions, such as prisons and secure units. However some research has warned that improvements in behaviour are due to 'other' factors such as young people growing out of criminal activity as they get older (Bottoms et al 1990). Therefore as Smith (2005) warns 'improvements cannot be attributed to a programme on the basis of pre- and post-measurements alone' (p 186). Smith also stresses that 'evaluation of flagship programmes is a poor guide to the effects of the system because the system does not deliver the flagship programmes to most young offenders most of the time' (p 192).

**Basic skills intervention**

There is strong evidence to indicate that 50% of young people who commit crime and receive a custodial sentence are below the national average in literacy and numeracy (YJB 2001). Other factors for disengagement from education are also identified for example;

'failure to address educational problems such as disruptive behaviour and persistent truancy which may constitute an important element in the development of continuing criminal careers' (Ball and Connolly, 2000).

Young people's attitudes and behaviours in educational settings can explain their disengagement from education and subsequently falling behind in educational attainment. However, educational engagement cannot be considered the sole reason for explaining

offending behaviour as there are other factors involved, such as past offending, socio-economic background and substance misuse.

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 partly seeks to bring these factors together. As a result agencies that traditionally worked separately before the Act were 'joining-up' i.e. education and health agencies for the first time.

Another push in this direction comes from the *National Specification for Learning and Skills* (2002) which shapes the service delivery for young people who have direct contact with the criminal justice system. This has emphasis on improving learning and skills. This is said to be based on core principles of inclusion and citizenship rather than exclusion,

'There are a number of high profile mainstream initiatives designed to improve the literacy and numeracy levels of society and to promote lifelong learning which young people in the criminal justice system are entitled to benefit from.'(p40)

As this specification stipulates,

'There is a growing body of evidence that disconnection from mainstream education and training is an extremely important risk factor for offending and re-offending.' (p4)

Consequently young offenders may have education provided through a variety of routes such as Pupil Referral Units, one to one home tuition, or they may attend alternative educational initiatives.

**How do these studies inform the analysis of recidivism for the basic skills pilot programme *Scratch?***

Locating the causes of recidivism is difficult and the impact of interventions on recidivism is problematic. What is important is that criminal justice interventions (including those with an educational focus) are expected to have some impact on recidivism and thus reduce re-offending and reconvictions. There are also issues of managing offenders to punish them for their crimes committed, as well as protecting the public.

The *Scratch* programme did not have a stipulated target for reducing offending behaviour. However Leicestershire YOS recognised some of the benefits that a basic skills programme might have in assisting young people improve their literacy and numeracy and opportunities to reintegrate with mainstream education, training or employment. A significant benefit would be to bring about a reduction in re-offending. Leicestershire YOS identified that

a significant number of young offenders had basic skills needs and many were disengaged from mainstream education, training or employment. With this in mind, by improving educational achievements and trying to facilitate some reintegration it might be expected that young people who engage with the *Scratch* intervention reduce or desist from offending. As a result of intervention from *Scratch* the offender's journey might be imagined as follows:

➔ Detection of offending, conviction and sentencing
➔ Intervention of YOS and basic skills programme
➔ Reduction or desistance from offending

It might also be anticipated that those on the basic skills programme as opposed to those young offenders who are not would have lower levels of re-offending and a reduction in the seriousness of offences.

The studies outlined above are important in terms of possible outcomes that can be looked for in a recidivism study of young people who have been on the Scratch programme. These include:

- Positive outcomes for young people with intervention as opposed to those who do not have basic skills intervention.
- A reduction in re-offending as per Lösel's (1995) analysis.
- Individuals who are persistent offenders with large offending histories are more likely to offend in the future irrespective of intervention compared to offenders with small/er offending histories (Lloyd et al, 1994).
- Offenders who are convicted of crimes of a higher gravity (very serious) are more likely to commit crimes of a lower gravity (less serious) in the future. For those offenders who are initially convicted of crimes of a medium or low gravity score they are more likely to commit offences at the same level in the future.
- Some improvement in 'behaviour' which includes offending behaviour is expected through educational intervention.

## 3. Methodology

Leicestershire Youth Offending Service (YOS) commissioned the Community and Criminal Justice Division at De Montfort University to carry out an evaluation of a pilot basic skills programme for young offenders across Leicestershire in 2003. The evaluation was completed in 2006 and a final evaluation report was forwarded to the Leicestershire YOS. Data was provided for the comparison cohort using a random selection of 100 young people from the October to December 2003 cohort. The comparison group was

tracked back 12 months and tracked forward for 24 months. This was then compared to the Basic Skills cohort of 100 young people who were selected from April 2003 to March 2004, and who were also tracked back for 12 months and tracked forward for 24 months. However it would not have been feasible to collect data that covers offending after intervention until now. Since the pilot is now complete the Youth Offending Service were able to provide the research team with data relating to reconvictions and seriousness of convictions for those that had basic skills intervention and those that did not (comparison group).

The Leicestershire YOS chose the sample and sent the Division anonymised details of 200 young people. 100 cases were of young people who engaged with the basic skills programme and a further 100 cases were young people who had not been on the *Scratch* programme.[1] These were selected at random from the 2003 and 2004 existing Youth Offending Service cohorts (50 from each year), to compare with the 100 Scratch cases over the same period. All of the 200 cases had some contact with the Youth Offending Service, but this varied depending on individual circumstances. The young people in the *Scratch* group engaged in a programme of learning, however the extent of the intervention is not known as each individual would have received intervention tailored specifically to their needs. Some may have had basic skills intervention for a whole 12 weeks and others may not. Furthermore, the success and achievements of the individuals on the programme (i.e. qualifications) cannot be tracked in this way either. The individuals in the comparison group did not have any basic skills intervention from the *Scratch* programme, but it is unknown if they had any intervention from elsewhere, such as school, college or work. The YOS identified the two groups and provided the following information on all of the cases:

- Reference and client numbers
- Ethnicity
- Date of Birth
- Age for each year; before during and after intervention period
- Gender
- Outcome Description (of sentence) of each sentence during the three year period
- Sentence Date
- Category Description (of crime)
- Offence Description

[1] For the purposes of this report the basic skills cohort will be referred to as *Scratch* group and the cohort who did not have any basic skills intervention will be referred to as the *comparison* group

- Gravity Factor (seriousness score of crime)[2]
- Age at Offence
- Offence Date

The research team used this data to prepare a database to enable a series of quantitative tests to be carried out, using the electronic software SPSS. The data was made available from the YOS in an Excel document and since the offences were listed for each person the research team had to re-enter the data so that individuals were represented rather than for each offence. In order to examine individuals rather than each offence, the research team modified the data as follows:

- Client number- for reference and indicator
- Ethnicity- the research team had to use the YOS's categories and not the 16+1 scale census.
- Age- the youngest age during year of intervention
- Gender
- Year- to identify the different cohorts basic skills and comparison groups; denoted as before, during and after intervention

The following was also recorded for each year before, during and after intervention

- Gravity score - the highest if more than one offence
- Number of offences (not sentences)
- Average gravity score

**Notes about interpretation:**
There are some limitations to analysing quantitative data of this nature in this way, since there are some issues that might affect the treatment of the young people by the criminal justice system as a result. Here are some of the research team's concerns:

- Over the three year period the research team are examining, the age of the young people increases (they get older). This is one factor that might affect conviction and sentencing and the impact of basic skills intervention.
- Reconviction information is not enough to give an accurate depiction of re-offending on its own.
- Patterns of offending behaviour may also be affected by other factors like going into custody, health issues, intervention outside the criminal justice system e.g. formal education, training or employment. This information is not routinely

[2] Gravity scores are scores graded by seriousness from 1-8. 1 denotes the lowest and 8 being the highest. Gravity 1-2 is 1st tier penalties, 4-5 are mainly community penalties, 7-8 receive mainly custody and 3 and 6 are transitional bands.

available to the YOS as it involves other agencies. As a consequence this is not available in this study.

- Recorded offences may take time to come to sentencing and consequently might be withdrawn or suspended. In addition, some orders might be revoked and therefore might be not counted as a conviction.
- This information does not include self-reported offending, which could provide a more accurate account of offending behaviour.
- The *Scratch* intervention typically occurred over a 12 week period and consequently does not mean that the young people were engaged or had intensive contact for the whole 12 month period. As a result 40 weeks of the year 'during' intervention meant that they would have had only typical contact with the YOS like the comparison group.
- Number of offences and convictions may not necessarily fit into the 12 month time frame in which intervention occurred or not.

The comparison of two groups (*Scratch* vs. comparison) also brings problems of analysis and explanations. As some research evidence suggests (Kendall et al 2003), educational intervention can have a positive impact on offending behaviour, especially during intervention. Referrals to *Scratch* came predominantly through the YOS and it is likely that individuals in the comparison group may have been referred to the programme but were not ready for that type of intervention, or were not welcomed onto the programme for other reasons. The comparison group may also include those that were not referred because they did not have a need for basic skills intervention, for example they could be engaged with education and training elsewhere. These individuals may not have an identified need for basic skills either. However the data received does not include this information. It is therefore important to bear in mind that an individual's level of basic skills is not the only social factor to impact on re-offending.

Most studies on re-offending and reconviction indicate problems with data routinely collected by criminal justice stakeholders. Although not concerned with young people, May's (1999) examination of the impact of social factors on reconviction for adults indicates that information about an individual's circumstances could help to explain reconviction rates. He advises 'social variables should be collected both at the start of an order and at its termination to improve prediction and to help determine the effect of supervision' (p xi). This information is available via start ASSET and end ASSET. In addition the quality of the evaluations of interventions with offenders and recidivism can also be called into

question (Goldson and Muncie, 2006). Positive evaluations tend to come to the surface in the public domain and as a consequence evaluations that reveal intervention might increase rather than decrease offending behaviour rarely appear in publicly accessible literature.

**What we did**

The data was analysed using the computer programme Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Gravity scores and number of offences were compared for the *Scratch* and comparison groups for the year before, the year of intervention and the year after in order to have measures of the amount and seriousness of a young person's offending. This information is important as it will outline the journey of offending captured by the Youth Offending Service. It is important to note that this data does not include self-reported offences, only those offences that were detected by criminal justice agencies.

**How we did it**

Descriptive statistics and simple statistical tests such as independent T-Test were carried out in order to compare the *Scratch* and comparison groups to see how similar they were in terms of the make-up of the groups and their levels of offending. This test also produced mean (average) figures for the different variables examined in this study. These tests produced a value to indicate significance.

To ensure that the two groups were suitable for comparison, each of the data sets were tested to see if the two groups were matched like for like. This was done using standard deviation (the extent that the figures deviated away from the mean). It was discovered that the two groups were closely matched and no large differences were apparent.

The findings are presented in the next section, where the results are presented as table and charts. In particular the charts provide a visual statement about the kinds of offending journeys the young people encountered during this three year period of study.

## 4. Findings

This section will examine firstly the periods of analysis; before, during and after and will then go on to compare the variables

according to number of offences, gravity score and average gravity. The standard deviations were all fairly similar indicating that responses were clustered around the mean, apart from the number of offences in the year before and the year after intervention where there was wider variation.

During the year of intervention the mean age of young people on the *Scratch* project was 15.25 years old, and the mean age of the comparison group was 15.39 years old so the groups were fairly matched in terms of their ages.[3] The largest proportion of young people were male (151) compared to 49 females in the total sample. Again the T-Test shows that the *Scratch* group and comparison group were similar in terms of gender proportions.

## Year Before Intervention[4]

**Table 1**

| **Year Before Intervention** | **Comparison** | ***Scratch*** |
|---|---|---|
| Number of Offences | 3.4 | 1.5 |
| Highest Gravity Score | 2.7 | 2.0 |
| Average Gravity Score | 2.1 | 1.8 |

The table (1) above presents the mean for each of the variables analysed for the year before intervention occurred. For the participants of the *Scratch* programme, these young people committed far fewer offences than those young people who did not engage with *Scratch* (comparison group). In addition, the comparison group had a slightly higher average gravity score of 2.1 compared to 1.8 Therefore the *Scratch* group committed fewer offences that were on average less serious than the comparison group. The *Scratch* group are predominantly first time offenders.

A total of 39% of the entire sample represented in this study were not convicted of an offence during this period. Therefore a total of 61% of the whole sample committed at least one offence. The comparison group committed a total of 342 offences (69% of total)

[3] Although data was presented relating to the young people's ethnicity the research team has decided to not include this information for analysis. This is because the ways in which ethnicity was presented does not adhere to the categories as outlined by the 16+1 scale (Census 2001) and would therefore not be valuable for analysis purposes. In addition the small numbers of minority ethnic individuals make up only 1% of the entire group and it is therefore not possible to carry out statistical assessments with such small groups. This group also has variation in terms of their ethnicity.

[4] All of the figures show an average (mean) number throughout these sections and they are rounded to one decimal place.

whereas the *Scratch* sample committed 154 offences (31% of total) in the period before intervention.

**Year of Intervention**

**Table 2**

| **Year of Intervention** | **Comparison** | ***Scratch*** |
|---|---|---|
| Number of Offences | 3.7 | 2.6 |
| Highest Gravity Score | 4.0 | 4.0 |
| Average Gravity Score | 3.2 | 3.5 |

The table (2) above presents the mean figures for the year of intervention; the period when young people engaged with the *Scratch* programme. The young people on the *Scratch* programme committed fewer offences but the gravity score was higher than the comparison group for both the highest and average gravity score.

During the year of intervention all (100%) of the entire sample were convicted of at least one offence. The *Scratch* cohort committed a total of 257 (41% of total) offences in this period, whereas the comparison group committed 369 (59% of total) offences.

**Year After Intervention**

**Table 3**

| **Year After Intervention** | **Comparison** | ***Scratch*** |
|---|---|---|
| Number of Offences | 4.1 | 2.0 |
| Highest Gravity Score | 2.9 | 2.0 |
| Average Gravity Score | 2.2 | 1.6 |

The table (3) above presents the mean figures for the year after intervention. The young people who engaged with the *Scratch* programme committed far fewer offences than the comparison group. Furthermore, their highest and average gravity scores were less serious than those in the comparison group.

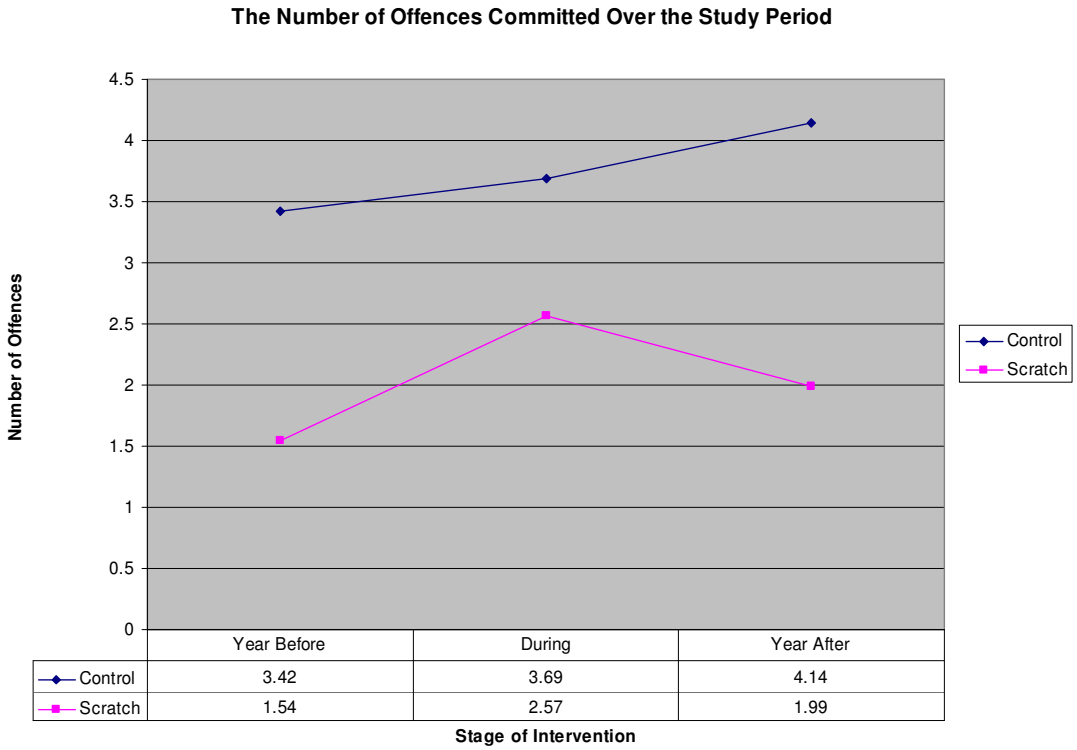
For the year after intervention 63% of the entire sample were reconvicted of an offence/s, 37% did not receive a conviction. Of this proportion the *Scratch* cohort committed 199 offences (32% of total offences) and the comparison group committed 414 (68% of total offences).

## Comparisons of Data

The purpose of this section is to map offenders' journeys of offending behaviour and the seriousness of offences committed throughout the periods before, during and after intervention. The *Scratch* and comparison groups will be compared throughout. Furthermore this allows for identification of the extent of recidivism during these periods.

## Number of Offences

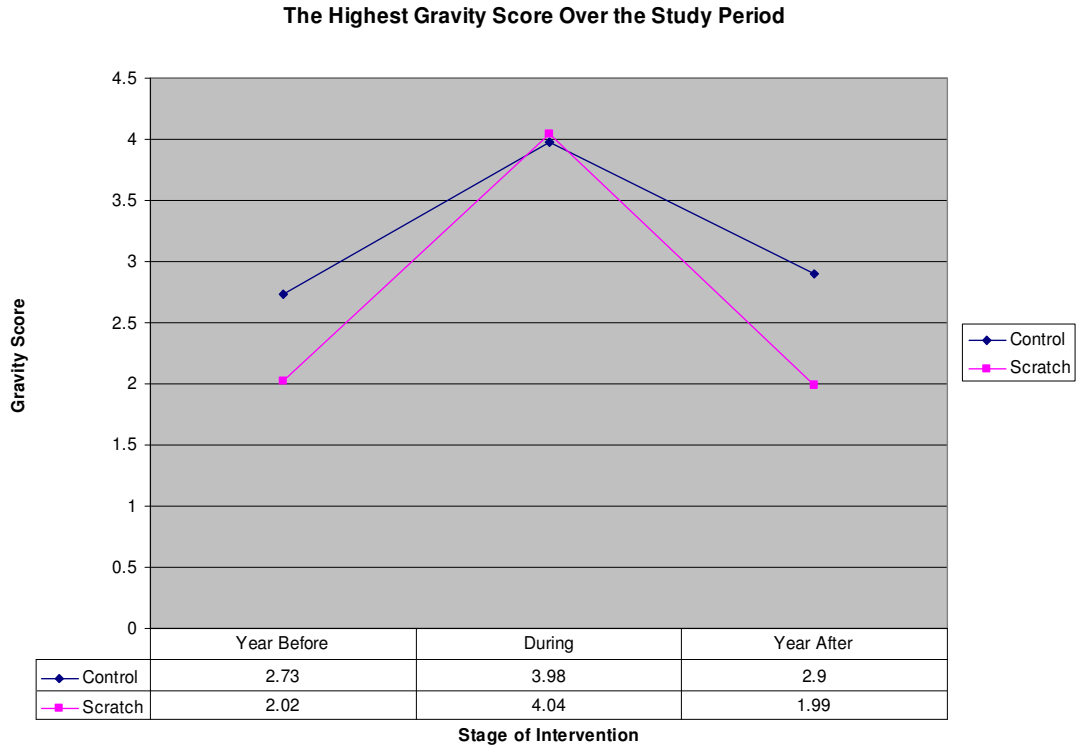
## Chart 1




Overall the comparison group committed far more offences than the offenders on the *Scratch* programme. For the comparison group, their offending steadily increased during the three year period captured in this study. For the year of intervention the Scratch group's offending increases, by committing on average 1 more offence (from 1.5 to 2.6) than the year before. In the year after intervention the offending reduced to 2.0 for the *Scratch* group. This is a slight increase from the year before intervention occurred.

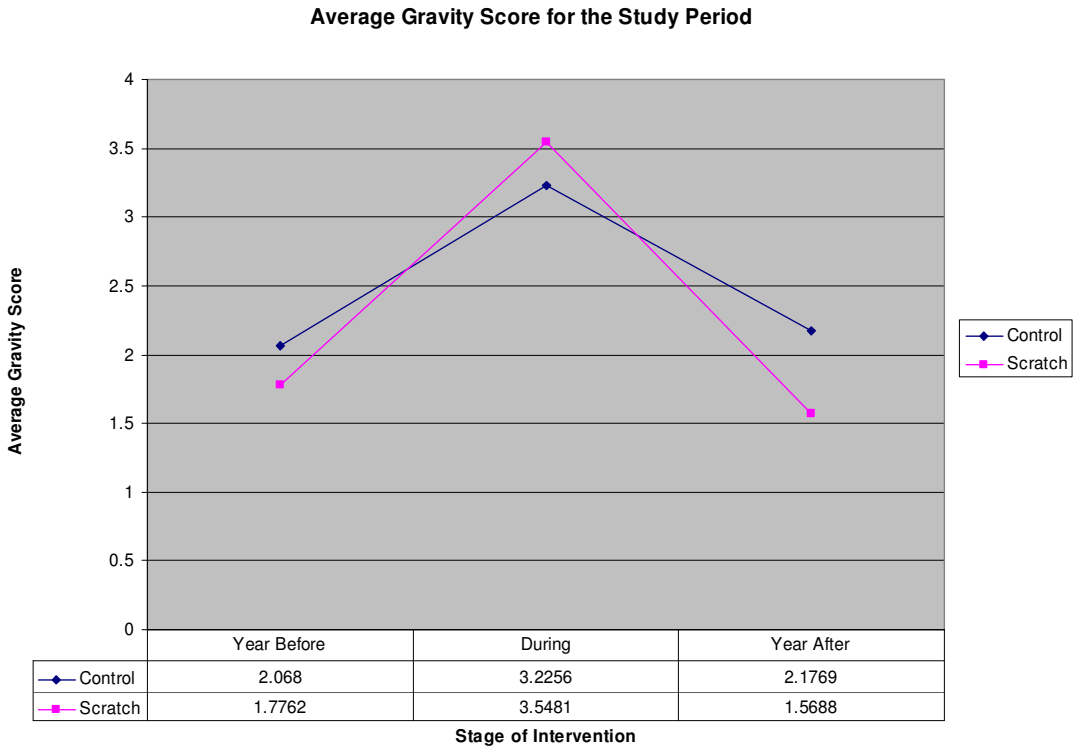
## Highest Gravity Score

## Chart 2




The impact of intervention on the highest gravity score indicates that during the actual period of intervention the *Scratch* cohort's highest gravity score increased from 2.0 to 4.0, almost doubling from the year before. However, for the *Scratch* cohort this is reduced by half again for the year after intervention to 2.0, which is slightly less than the highest gravity score for the year before *Scratch* intervention. The comparison group also follow a similar pattern throughout the period but at a slightly higher gravity score.

## Average Gravity Score
## Chart 3




For both groups the average gravity score increases for the period of intervention by at least 1 score on the gravity scale. For the comparison group, the year before shows the lowest average gravity score at 2.1, increasing during intervention and decreasing for the year after to 2.2. However for the *Scratch* cohort, the average gravity score reduces slightly from the year before to the year after intervention. For the year of intervention the *Scratch* group show the greatest increase in average gravity score. Overall, the *Scratch* cohort shows the highest average gravity score (3.5) during intervention out of the entire study period. This increase occurs in average gravity because the number of offences for both groups also increases, which would increase the gravity score.

## Significance of the data analysed

The data was tested for significance. The object of the study is to identify if the *Scratch* intervention had any impact on recidivism. It is therefore necessary to examine if *Scratch* had a systematic influence on these young people's offending behaviour and confirm that any differences were not due to chance[5].

[5] Significance of any data is a figure less than 0.05 (>0.05 = p value).

It was found that the *Scratch* cohort had a lower average gravity score before the intervention started, this difference was significant (p value = 0.003). There was also a significant difference when the average gravity for the year after intervention was compared, with the *Scratch* group having a significantly lower average gravity score the year after intervention (p value = 0.02). This suggests that *Scratch* had reduced the average seriousness of the offences young people committed subsequently.

The *Scratch* cohort committed significantly fewer offences during the year of intervention than the comparison group. This is because they are a lower risk group, some committing their first offence during the year of intervention. The comparison group are of a higher risk and more young people in this group committed crimes subsequently. It was relevant that the period after intervention showed that the number of offences committed by the Scratch cohort was lower than the comparison group (p value = 0.00). As a result when considering the impact that *Scratch* had on the number of offences committed the findings show that it reduced the number of offences committed.

Wilcoxon signed ranks tests were carried out in order to compare the average gravity for individuals within each group for the year of intervention and the year after. For both groups average gravity significantly decreased in the year after intervention (p value = 0.007). The gravity score of the most serious offence also decreased for both groups (p value = 0.003).

The *Scratch* group saw a significant decrease in the number of offences being committed (p value = 0.00).

**Summary of Findings**

- The *Scratch* cohort committed fewer offences overall compared to the comparison group across the three year study period.
- During the intervention year more offences are committed by the Scratch group than the year before. In addition their number of offences is slightly up for the year after intervention compared to the year before the *Scratch* intervention. The tests for significance show that this is significant as a result of intervention.
- The comparison group shows a steady increase in the number of committed offences throughout the whole three year period of the study.
- The tests on statistical significance highlight that the decrease in average gravity scores for the *Scratch* cohort is significant.

- The seriousness of offences committed is reduced significantly as a result of the impact of the *Scratch* programme. However, it is also significant that the comparison group also had a reduction in average gravity score in the period after intervention.

## 5. Conclusions and discussion

The research team are cautious to recommend that these findings on their own are sufficient to draw any firm conclusions. This is because the data has its limitations, as described earlier in this report.

This study has begun to highlight some of the problems of identifying offending behaviour (conviction, actual offending rates and sentencing) and the impact of educational intervention. Not all young people are alike in terms of their behaviour and what they do in their everyday lives. Therefore, there will undoubtedly be a number of variables that could influence offending related behaviour. It is also not feasible for the YOS to record all such information and make sense of this either. However, the analysis of the data has highlighted some similarities and also differences in re-offending rates of young people in other studies (see section 2).

Both of the groups studied were recidivist during the three year period. The offenders' journeys for the *Scratch* group shows a rapid increase during the year of intervention, but falls slightly the year after intervention. The comparison group steadily rises during the three year study and are more recidivistic. Kendall et al's (2003) evaluation of Alternative Education Indicatives (AEI) concluded that AEI allow opportunities for success. Young people commented that their behaviour had also improved as a result of the AEI. Police records showed that fewer young people were responsible for crimes committed during this period. Kendall et al (2003) noted that educational initiatives are not wholly directed by the intended reduction in youth offending. However evidence does suggest that this is a by-product of educational interventions with young people. Kendall et al (2003) also discovered that offending 'slowed down' (p12) during intervention. In addition, in periods after intervention where support had decreased, offending increased (p15). The study of *Scratch* does not corroborate with these findings entirely, since reductions in recidivism for the basic skills group follows the year after intervention and not during.

Bottoms et al (1990) asserted that, as young people increase in age, their offending slows down and reduces. For the year of intervention of basic skills (*during* stage) the young people were typically aged 15 years old. As twelve months progressed to the

year after intervention these young people will have matured by 1 year. The re-offending rates for both groups show an increase rather than decrease. For the *Scratch* study the period of analysis is perhaps too short a period to consider, it is possible reductions in recidivism would emerge later. Smith (2005) indicates a reduction in rates of re-offending are more apparent in adult offenders rather than young people.

The results in this study of the *Scratch* programme of basic skills intervention could be compared to Berridge et al's (2001) observations. They suggest that referral to AEI and other educational provisions such as Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and home tuition 'could be as long as a year' (pvii). Consequently periods of non-engagement with education can heighten 'boredom, depression and a sense of disorientation' (p vii) as well as compounding the effects of social exclusion. Timely and early educational inventions help to minimise educational problems (Sherman 1997). However, evidence from Berridge (2001) and Parsons (2000) suggests that few young people return to mainstream education once they have engaged with alternative routes. These conclusions are important in beginning to understand why the comparison group in this study may be offending more than the *Scratch* group. Despite the limited time the *Scratch* programme takes (maximum of 12 weeks) people do become engaged with a programme of learning, and this may lead on to further education, training and employment. Results from the earlier evaluation (Knight et al 2006) suggest that 71% of all the young people who engaged with *Scratch* were reintegrated; however 29% of these young people were described as unemployed. It might be suggested that the young people in the comparison group may be less engaged in learning or training activity, which may explain why reconviction is more likely.

This study also indicates that the *Scratch* cohort was committing fewer offences of a less serious nature than the comparison group in the period before intervention and throughout. This may have been a determining factor in the *Scratch* programme's ability to manage and engage with these young people. Therefore lower offending rates and lower gravity scores could be characteristic of the type of young offender who would benefit most from this type of intervention. Offenders with higher offending rates and higher gravity scores could be less likely to be picked up by this kind of intervention. This might be because they are less willing to commit to a programme that requires cooperation and compliance. It could be suggested that there is a critical point in a young offender's offending journey when intervention is most likely to succeed. This is probably earlier on when offending is at a lower rate and is less serious, rather than when offending increases in frequency and

progresses to a more serious nature. Therefore detection of crimes requires speedy interventions as suggested by Smith (2005) and also Sherman (1997), this means quicker input by criminal justice agencies.

The evaluation of the *Scratch* programme, (Knight et al 2006) does suggest that young people did benefit from its input into their lives. In particular, achieving qualifications was an important element of the *Scratch* programme, as was increasing their entry levels to literacy and numeracy. Tarling et al (2001) found in their evaluation of a programme which supported and mentored young people at risk of exclusion from school that it led to some improvement in behaviour and attitudes towards learning. Equally a Home Office report (2004) reiterated that AEIs manage to achieve 75% success in terms of improvements in behaviour and 50% of the participants were awarded some type of qualification.

Desistance from crime is perhaps too large an expectation for young people that receive interventions and this study demonstrates that intervention can impact 'behaviour' but not as powerfully as we would like to imagine. Offending rates and seriousness of offences does decrease but does not cease altogether. The acquisition of qualifications and also life skills through engagement with a programme like *Scratch* can bring about improvements (see also Tarling, 2001), but not necessarily concerning offending behaviour. An extended longitudinal study would be needed to identify this.

The results show that the average young offender on the *Scratch* programme committed on average 50% fewer offences than the comparison group all the way through the three year period. However the average gravity scores for both groups remained very close throughout the same period. For the year after intervention the *Scratch* group committed less serious offences than before and during intervention, thereby suggesting offence seriousness may have been impacted more by intervention than the rate of re-offending and ultimately re-conviction. The Audit Commission report, *Youth Justice 2004* which reflects on the previous report *Misspent Youth* (1996), confirms that the new youth justice reforms have been making a positive impact on young offenders since 1996. There has been a reduction in reconviction rates, fewer young people are likely to re-offend whilst on bail or on an order, however there has been no evidence to suggest this may be as a result of educational intervention. It was noted that there has been little improvement in the educational provisions for young offenders, either part time or alternative measures. The Audit Commission recommends that an extensive survey is carried out to measure the

numbers of children actually out of education, since they suggest that;

'the level of offending by young people in a local area has been shown to be strongly associated with the size of the total out-of school population' (p 67).

Information from the *Scratch* project and other YOS initiated educational programmes could contribute to a wider study to explore this correlation between crime and disengagement from school and learning.

Overall, complete desistance is not likely to be achieved as a result of one direct intervention. It is perhaps unrealistic to suggest that it might be achieved. However, partial desistance could be expected based on the analysis of these two groups. Offenders (from both groups) in this study do continue to re-offend both during and after intervention. However the group receiving interventions are more likely to do this less frequently and be less serious in nature. There are other features of the *Scratch* programme that could contribute to a broader and deeper understanding of the project's impact. The attention to individualised learning (as identified in the evaluation see Knight et al 2006), that *Scratch* facilitates might be an important variable. The one-to-one learning and support tutors offer the *Scratch* students in terms of reintegration to mainstream education, training and employment and other (social) aspects of their lives are probably important to its success. Newburn and Shiner (2006) demonstrated that within the 'Mentoring Plus' projects 'fairly substantial reductions in offending were evident in the lifetime of the programme.' (p36) Although not carried out with young people Stewart's (2005) evaluation of basic skills training for prisoners showed that the impact of basic skills intervention on adult prisoners was inconclusive. As Stewart highlights other factors may have influenced outcomes and cannot be conclusively attributed to the basic skills intervention the cohort received. Stewart writes, 'Collectively, these results suggest that improving prisoners' basic skills alone is unlikely to have a major impact on their prospects for resettlement' (2005:4). For Parsons (2002) however there is a significant link between criminal behaviour and poor literacy and numeracy (p6). For Parsons, detection and arrest were strongly linked to poor literacy, particularly in men (p6).

The study of the *Scratch* programme alongside other studies demonstrates the difficulty in pinpointing factors associated with recidivism and reductions in offending behaviour. The basic skills intervention has shown some benefits in reducing offending behaviour, or at least those detected and resulting in conviction. However, the levels of significance are small when compared to a

group that did not receive basic skills intervention of this kind. The research team are keen to stress this study is limited and the young people who feature in this sample all experience very different lives and thus it is difficult to control for these measures in this kind of statistical study.

In terms of assessing and comparing two groups in this way the research team would like to recommend the collation of additional data. This is however time consuming and resource intensive. A baseline entry level of basic skills for all members of the sample is needed at the point at which a study is begun. This will allow for a closer analysis of any correlation between offending behaviour and levels of basic skills (see Parsons 2002). In addition, other educational information about school/ education attendance and any learning difficulties and disabilities might also be important to recognise and record. Information about the young people's educational, training and employment activity is also important to collect during this period as well as the periods when this occurs. As suggested earlier, actual re-offending rates (through self-reporting) might also be more representative. We are aware however that this may have methodological and ethical implications for the YOS. However it can be recommended that this information feeds into a broader survey of young people in (or out) of education. This might attempt to draw together different components of young people's lives, such as crime and education along with other factors that impact on them.

The research team hopes this study informs Leicestershire YOS with important information about their innovative basic skills programme. Intervening with young people as early as possible is important. For those young people with higher risk offending behaviour (rate and seriousness) early intervention may also be needed, as this study is beginning to suggest that slowing down offending and reducing the seriousness of crime is successful when young people are at a lower risk. Whether this is basic skills intervention or some other type of intervention, such as mentoring, the earlier an assessment is made the more success it is likely to have and thus reduce recidivistic behaviour.

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