

SHARING KNOWLEDGE
Needs and risk assessment tools in the UK:
development, research and evaluation

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PERU Policy Evaluation
& Research Unit

Overview



What we will cover

Drawing on experience in the UK:

- An overview of risk and needs assessment in the UK
- Examples of tools used
- Detailed focus on OASys the most widely used tool for adults
- Processes in the UK for ensuring that the tools work as intended

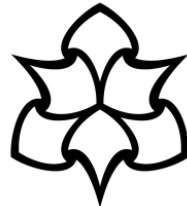
Overview

Needs and risk assessment tools can help corrections staff make structured, defensible judgments about an individual's risk of reoffending and risk of serious harm

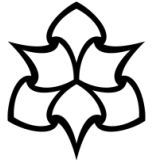
However, they need to be underpinned by a programme of research, evaluation and development

Policy Evaluation and Research Unit (PERU)

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What do we do?



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The Policy Evaluation and Research Unit at Manchester Metropolitan University is a multi-disciplinary team of evaluators, economists, sociologists and criminologists

- Criminal Justice
- Social Innovation
- Education childhood and youth
- Incomes work and poverty
- Housing and homelessness

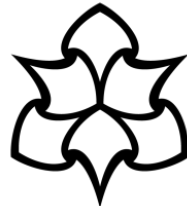
Our aim is to make a real-world difference to policy-making by conducting research using innovative methods, co-produced with policy-makers, services and service users.

We make a range of resources available to support policy-makers and practitioners. These help people to establish what works, disseminate findings on specific policies and share our insights on innovative methods

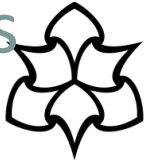
MSc Evaluation and Policy Analysis
MPA Masters in Public Administration

Risk and needs assessment in the UK

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Why do we use risk and needs assessment tools in the UK?

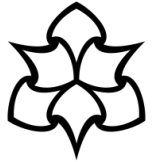


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- Structured assessment tools produce more accurate predictions of reoffending than unstructured professional judgement.
- A rounded assessment needs to pay attention to an individual's risks, needs and strengths.
- To build a rounded view of the individual, a range of sources of information should be utilised. Wherever possible, the service user should be meaningfully involved in their assessment.
- Engaging the service user in the process of assessment helps to build one-to-one trusting personal relationships which can be a powerful vehicle for change.

(HMIP 2020)

A brief history of probation assessment in the UK



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- **First generation (1900 – 1970s)** assessment based upon unstructured practitioner judgement, relatively poor predictive value, subject to biases and inconsistency.
- **Second generation (1970s – 1990s)** assessment uses actuarial scales. This is data driven and can perform well in terms of predictive validity. However, do not indicate nature, severity, imminence of reoffending or risk after treatment
- **Third generation (1990s – 2000s)** tools incorporate dynamic risk assessment. Factors amenable to change are considered, provide a more holistic, personalised and analytical approach to assessment, alongside actuarial predictors, helps with sentence planning and selecting interventions
- **Fourth generation (current) assessment tools** - more systematic and comprehensive. Founded upon the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) principles, they integrate case management, such as intervention planning and implementation along with monitoring and review.

(HMIP 2020)

Three groups of risk factors



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Static risk factors

Static

Attributes, such as age, gender and number of convictions, which are not amenable to change.

Dynamic risk factors

Stable dynamic

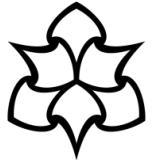
Attributes which tend to change over a long period, e.g. problem-solving ability, temper control.

Acute dynamic

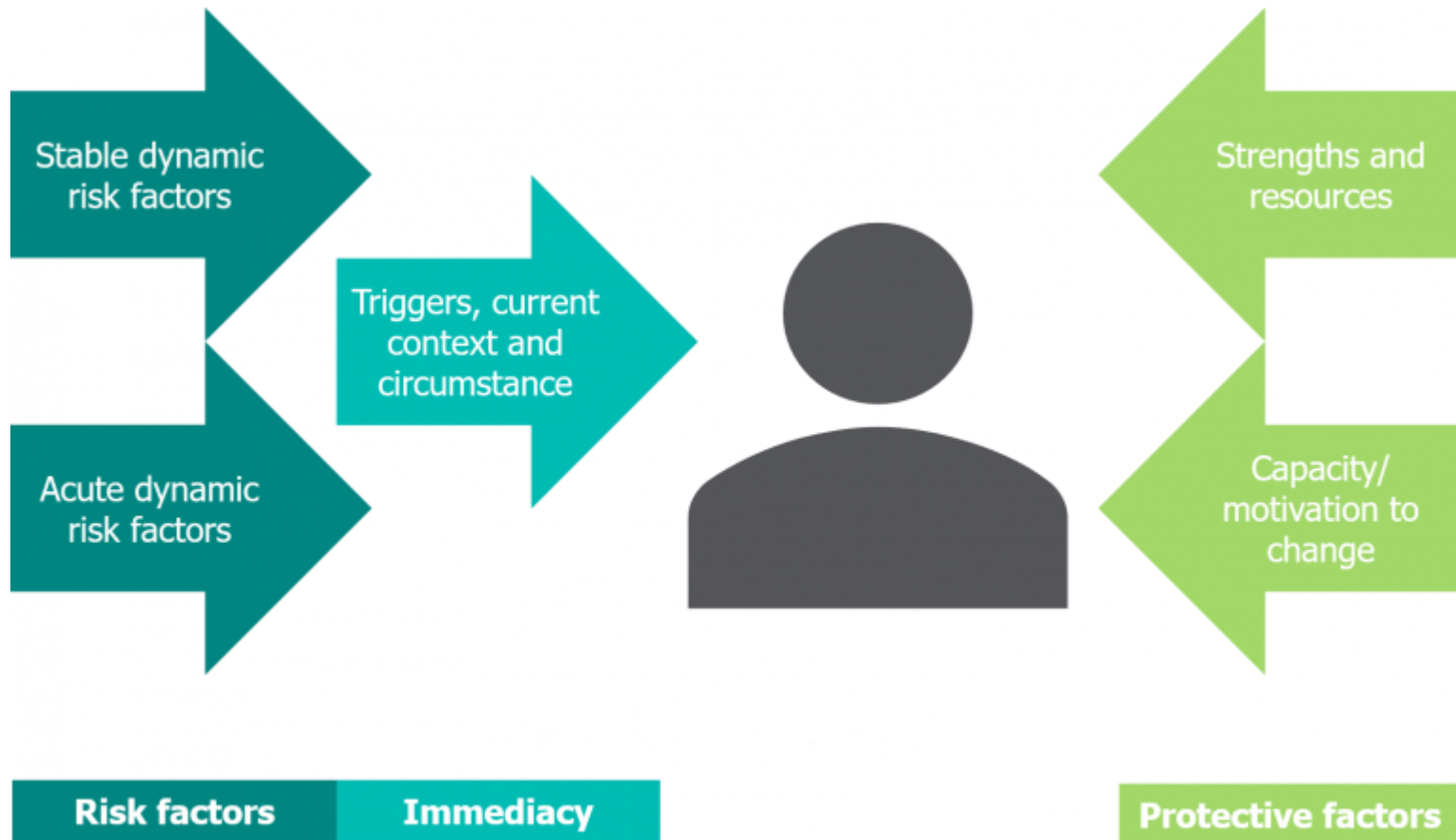
Factors which can change rapidly, often due to specific triggers.

(HMIP 2020)

What rounded assessment looks like

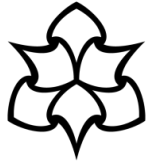


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(HMIP 2020)

Examples of tools used in the UK



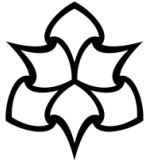
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- OASys for adults (aged 18 and over) – a general tool that assesses risk of reoffending and risk of serious harm (ROSH), used by probation officers
- AssetPlus for young people (aged under 18) – a general tool that also assesses risk of reoffending and risk of serious harm, used by youth justice workers

There are also specialist tools such as:

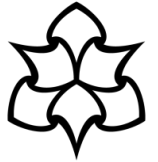
- ARMS (Active Risk Management System) – used by probation officers, but principally by police officers to manage and monitor the risk of people convicted of sexual offences
- And tools for domestic violence perpetrators and extremists as well as general psychological assessment tools used for people with convictions

A focus on OASys (Offender Assessment System)



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- This is the most widely used tool in England and Wales
- It is the main tool used by probation
- Initially developed in 2001 based on the ‘What works evidence base’
- OASys provides a standardised assessment of the needs and risks of service users which are used to develop and deliver sentence plans.
- OASys and proven reoffending data has been used to produce separate predictors of general, violent and sexual reoffending.

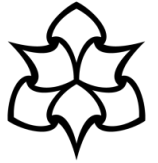


The three core RNR principles ((Bonta and Andrews 2017) are :

- **risk** is about whom to target, based upon an individual's likelihood of reoffending. This is important because interventions should match the likelihood of reoffending – rehabilitative interventions should be offered to moderate and high-risk cases, with low-risk cases receiving minimal intervention
- **need** is about what should be done – identified criminogenic needs should be the focus of targeted interventions, rather than other needs which are not related to offending behaviour
- **responsivity** is about how the work should be delivered, covering both general and specific responsivity. While general responsivity promotes the use of cognitive social learning methods to influence behaviour, specific responsivity provides that interventions should be tailored to, amongst other things, the strengths of the individual. Supervision skills are an aspect of responsivity.

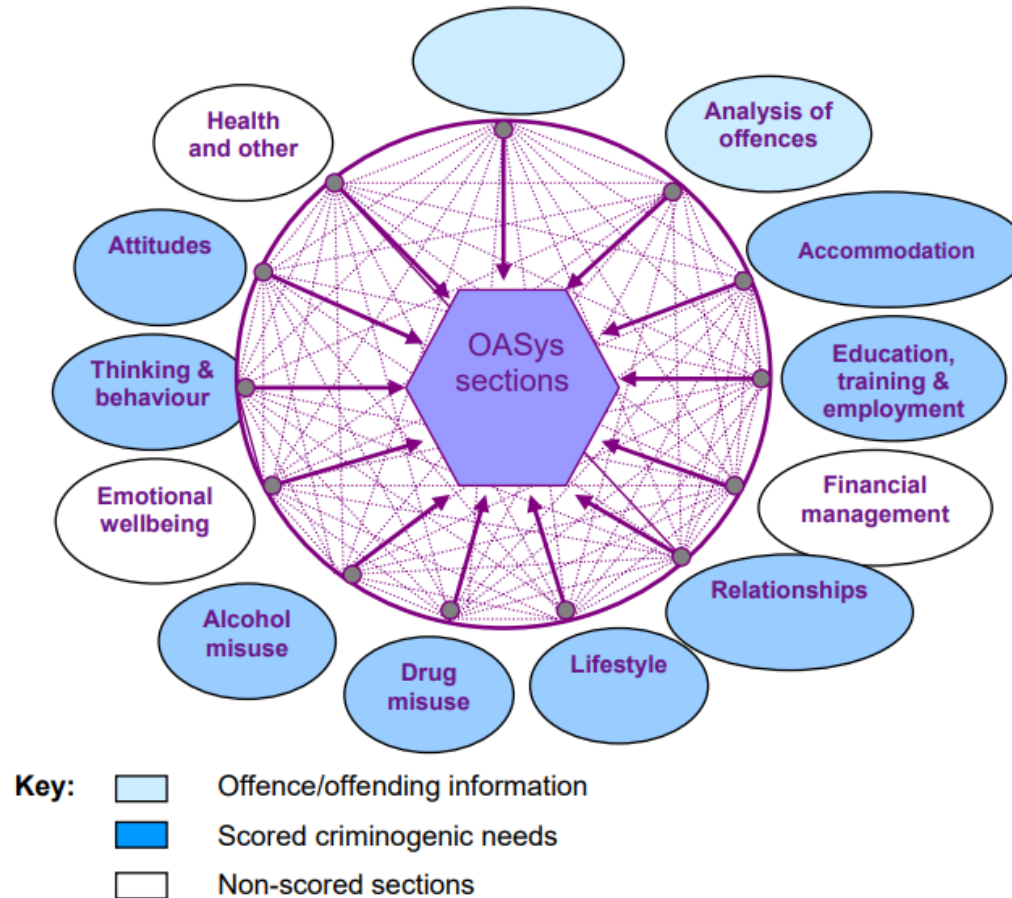
<https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/research/the-evidence-base-probation/models-and-principles/the-rnr-model/>

OASys and criminogenic needs



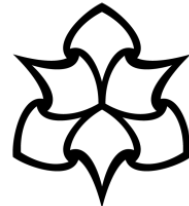
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Figure 1.1: Construction of the core OASys assessment

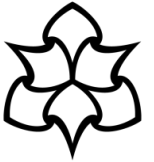


How do we know that tools work as intended?

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Technical requirements of tools



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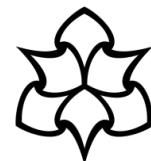
Tools need to be:

- reliable (consistent between assessors),
- valid (identifying the most relevant risks and needs),
- sensitive (to change), and
- predictive (of future reoffending).

They should also from a practitioner perspective, have:

- Face validity - it is clear why each item is included;
- A simple scoring system;
- Evidence boxes;
- Enable service user input,
- Capable of being completed within limited time constraints

Tools are accredited by CSAAP



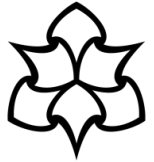
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CSAAP (Correctional Services Accreditation and Advice Panel) brings together academics and expert practitioners to assess risk assessment tools and programmes before they can be approved for use.

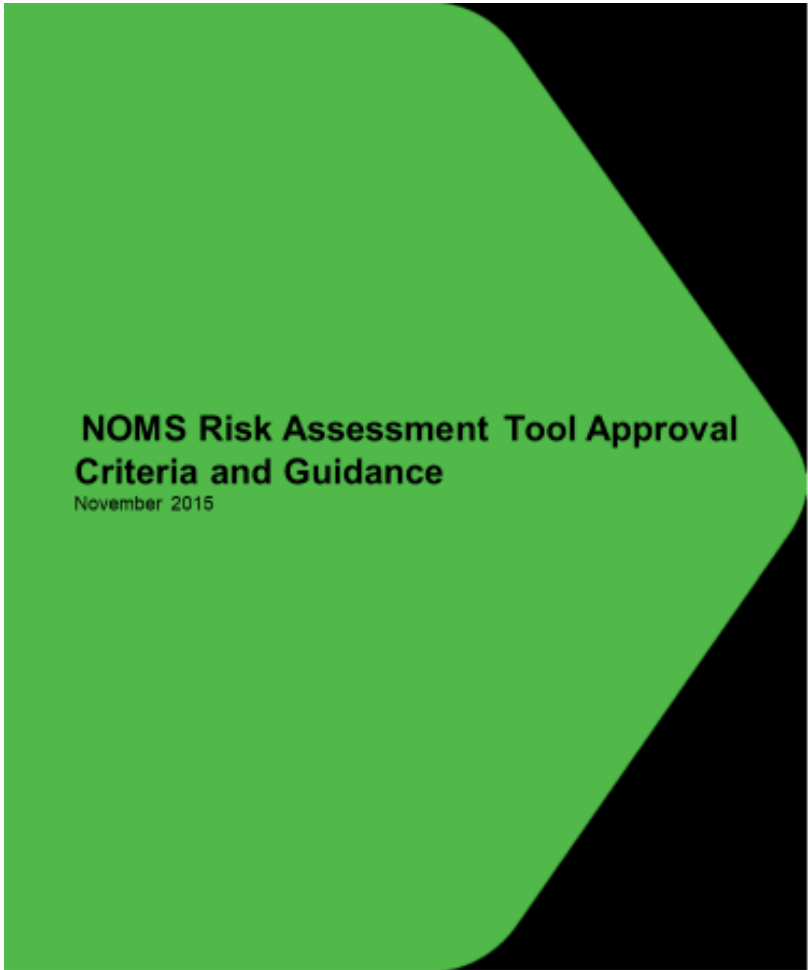
They work closely with developers throughout the design and implementation of tools and programmes, including advice on quality of delivery.

They make recommendations to the HMPPS Accredited Programmes and Interventions Delivery & Strategy Board (APIDSB) on accreditation.

Ministry of Justice criteria for approving risk assessment tools



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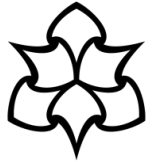
NOMS Risk Assessment Tool Approval Criteria and Guidance

November 2015

Risk Assessment Approval Criteria

1. There is a clear description of the specific tool(s) and how it fits with the overall approach to assessment
2. The tool has a sound theoretical underpinning and credible rationale
3. There is evidence that the assessment tool does what it aims to do
4. There is a commitment to ongoing research and validation to ensure the tool remains fit for purpose
5. People who administer the tool (assessors) are competent in its use
6. The tool meets the ICT Approval and Security Accreditation requirements
7. There is a sound implementation plan to support use of the tool as intended

Tools undergo a programme of research, evaluation and development



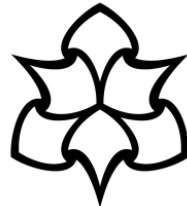
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A compendium of research and analysis on the Offender Assessment System (OASys) 2009–2013 details the following research:

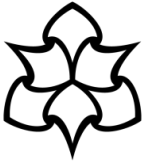
- Prison and probation assessors' views and experience;
- Predicting reoffending by age, gender and ethnicity;
- Measuring changes in likelihood of reoffending;
- Predicting reoffending for rare and harmful offences;
- Positive, promotive and protective factors;
- Reliability of risk of serious harm ratings;
- Development of new sexual offending predictor;
- Criminogenic needs measurement;
- Systematic review of factors related to general and violent offending;
- OGRS4 the revised offender group reconviction scale;
- OGP2 and OVP2 the revised OASys predictors.

Conclusion

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Conclusion



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- Needs and risk assessment tools can help corrections staff make structured, defensible judgments about an individual's risk of reoffending and risk of serious harm.
- However, they need to be underpinned by a programme of research, evaluation and development to ensure that the tools are fit for purpose and are based on the latest evidence.
- Importantly, needs identified through assessment need to be addressed by adequate and appropriate services.