

Justice Data Lab - frequently asked questions

This document provides answers to key questions that organisations may have when considering whether to submit data to the Justice Data Lab. The questions in this document have been collated by Clinks and the answers provided by the Ministry of Justice.

MoJ guidance for the initiative can be found at: <http://www.justice.gov.uk/justice-data-lab>.

A briefing on the Data Lab prepared by Clinks and NPC as part of the Improving your Evidence project can be found at:

<http://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/MoJDataLabbriefing.pdf>

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What can the Justice Data Lab tell me?

As standard the Justice Data Lab will compare aggregate one-year proven re-offending rates for a cohort of service users with a matched control group of similar offenders.¹

The re-offending rates for the organisation's cohort of service users and the matched control group will be compared using statistical testing to assess the impact of the organisation's work on reducing re-offending and the likelihood that any difference between the two rates is not simply a matter of chance. The results will then be returned to the organisation in a clear and easy to understand format, with explanations of the key metrics, and any caveats and limitations necessary for interpretation of the results.

Further information about what is included in the final report, can be found on page 26 of the Justice Data Lab "User Journey" document which is available at <http://www.justice.gov.uk/justice-data-lab>. For further information about how the matching is carried out, please refer to the methodology paper which can be found at the same link.

What can't the Justice Data Lab tell me?

The Justice Data Lab will not be able to help with speculative requests about the re-offending behaviour of individuals or information on outcomes other than re-offending, such as motivation.

In addition, there are also practical considerations in performing analysis on certain cohorts of individuals:

- Persons who have committed terrorist offences. This is not possible due to the highly complex nature of this type of offence, and the small number of persons who have committed this type of offence.
- Offenders under the age of 14. Due to the very small number of persons under the age of 14 who commit recordable offences, we are not able to produce robust analysis of interventions for persons younger than 14 through the Justice Data Lab.
- Vulnerable young people or adults, including individuals with mental health issues or learning difficulties.

¹ The **one year proven re-offending rate** is defined as the proportion of offenders in a cohort who commit an offence in a one year follow-up period which proven through a court conviction, caution, reprimand or warning during the one year follow-up or in a further six month waiting period. The one year follow-up period begins when offenders leave custody or start their probation sentence.

- Offenders who have mental health issues, including those being treated through the Personality Disorder Programme.
- Services or interventions that are targeted at persons with specific needs, including those relating to drugs or alcohol. At present, these requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- Requests based on services or interventions targeted at persons who have committed sexual offences, or domestic violence offences. Individuals who commit domestic violence and sexual offences have very different patterns of re-offending which are currently not sufficiently well understood to offer analysis through the Justice Data Lab service. The Justice Data Lab is looking to expand on this service over time, and will release further guidance when this analysis could be performed with confidence.

The administrative data currently available to the initiative is not sufficiently robust enough to allow a high quality matched control group analysis to be performed for the groups above. The Justice Data Lab team are looking to add to the underlying data over the course of the pilot year, so that an increased range of analyses can be performed in the future. Further guidance on this will be released in due course.

How much does it cost to submit to the Justice Data Lab?

This service will be free during the pilot year (April 2013 to April 2014)

Why do I need to provide so much information about the people attending my service / intervention?

Analysis through the Justice Data Lab relies on being able to match an organisation's cohort to administrative datasets. For this matching to be successful, as a minimum there must be key pieces of information supplied about the individuals, including:

- Name
- Date of birth
- Gender
- Start or end date of intervention

Without these key pieces of information about each individual, it is not possible for any analysis on the individuals to be performed.

In addition, there must be a minimum of 60 persons in the cohort, as any sample smaller than this will be very unlikely to produce a statistically significant result. This means there would be a low likelihood of concluding with an acceptable level of confidence that any difference in re-offending between the treatment and control groups was real rather than the result of chance.

What if I don't have complete data for the cohort?

If in doubt, this should be discussed on a case by case basis with the Justice Data Lab team. In many cases, an incomplete cohort should not present too much of a problem. If the data is

incomplete because individuals have been excluded for a systematic reason (e.g. they are known to have re-offended, or to have any other particular characteristic) then this may present problems in the analysis which should be alerted to the Justice Data Lab team.

If the cohort does not meet the minimum requirement for having at least 60 individuals, then the Justice Data lab will not be able to service this request. If you are worried about being able to meet this threshold, it may be best to contact a member of the Justice Data Lab team on the contact details below. Actions you may wish to take to boost your sample include: including all offenders you have registered, using a cohort which stretches over several years, or looking to include cohorts over several delivery sites if this is applicable.

Is there anything we could be doing in our current work to prepare to submit information at a later date?

Ensuring that you are able to submit robust information on individuals (as specified above) will be the best preparation for a future submission.

Do we need to obtain permission from our service users before submitting their data?

Projects which involve any sharing of sensitive personal data, as defined by the Data Protection Act 1998, need to be lawful, fair, justified and proportionate in order to comply with that Act and Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The information being shared from an organisation to the Justice Data Lab is considered to be sensitive personal data. Organisations working with offenders are the Data Controllers for the data they hold on those persons attending their programmes or services, and must comply with their responsibilities under the Data Protection Act.

The first data protection principle provides that personal data and sensitive personal data will not be processed unless one of the conditions in Schedule 2 (personal data) and Schedule 3 (sensitive personal data) are met. Obtaining the express consent from offenders who have received services from an organisation to the sharing and analysis of their sensitive personal data can satisfy one of the conditions in Schedule 2 and 3.

However, if express consent has not been collected, condition 5(c) of Schedule 2 and condition 7(1)(c) of Schedule 3) of the Act allows the processing of personal data if it is necessary for the exercise of any functions of a government department. Organisations may consider that the disclosure of the data to the Ministry of Justice is necessary for the exercise of the Ministry of Justice's functions. This reflects the fact that the purpose of the Justice Data Lab is to generate reliable data about the effectiveness of offender interventions.

This will clearly be of benefit to organisations providing offender services but the data is also necessary for Ministry of Justice to build an evidence base about various interventions, and to inform decisions about policy development and service delivery. The Ministry could not achieve these purposes through other means because it has no other way of accessing the data.

Can you tell whether the control group has received interventions?

At present, the Justice Data Lab is able to look for attendance at accredited interventions. Attendance at non-accredited interventions is not centrally recorded, so it is not possible to examine attendance at these.

Which offender characteristics are you able to match in the control group (and which aren't you)?

This information is detailed on page 27 of the methodology paper (<http://www.justice.gov.uk/downloads/justice-data-lab/justice-data-lab-methodology.pdf>).

In summary, individuals are matched on key variables, including: demographic information, offence information, attendance at accredited interventions, criminal history, and employment and benefit information.

We only work with small numbers of offenders, is it worth submitting this data to the Justice Data Lab?

The Justice Data Lab can only take requests where information on a minimum number of individuals – currently 60 - has been submitted.. For organisations that work with only a small number of individuals, it is worth considering whether combining several years of data would produce a cohort of at least 60 in size. If in any doubt, then contact a member of the Justice Data Lab team.

Are we able to submit data with other organisations delivering a similar intervention to increase the numbers?

Requests must cover the activities of a single service or intervention, given by a single organisation. It is not possible for the Justice Data Lab to analyse the effect of two or more services or interventions in a single request, even if the services or interventions appear to be similar. This is because we could not then be clear that the comparison between the organisations' group and the matched control group was a like for like comparison, and that other factors had not affected the results. Contact details for the team are below if you wish to discuss this in more detail.

Speculative requests about other organisations' impact on re-offending are not permitted.

Why is the data only available up until 2010?

The re-offending data available through the Justice Data Lab are bespoke breakdowns of the annual series of re-offending statistics (for more information on this series, please see the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/proven-re-offending--2>)

2011 re-offending data will become available later in this calendar year, at which point it will be included in the Justice Data Lab underlying data, and further guidance about the service will be released.

When will we be able to submit more recent data?

We are hoping that re-offending data pertaining to individuals who received a non-custodial sentence during 2011, or who were released from custody during 2011 will be available later in this calendar year. Further guidance will be put out when this information is available.

Do the results of the information we submit have to be made public?

The Justice Data Lab is currently publicly funded, it is therefore important that the Official Statistics produced by the initiative are available publicly to improve the evidence on reducing re-offending.

Can I add explanatory/contextual information to the public version of the data report?

Each report is an Official Statistic. It is important that the report accurately reflects the information provided by organisations concerning the nature of the service or intervention. Organisations will not be able to add commentary to the public version of the report. Organisations can, however, add such information on their web pages when referring to or publicising the report.

What if the results show that we have failed to reduce re-offending?

The Justice Data Lab was launched after a period of engagement with organisations in the public, private, and voluntary and community sector. This engagement, and the report “Unlocking Offending Data” by New Philanthropy Capital confirmed that this initiative is key for organisations wanting to assess their specific impact on reducing re-offending. The research conducted by New Philanthropy Capital showed that if an organisation did not get a positive result, then this would be helpful in enabling them to assess and develop their services in future.

In many cases, a statistically significant reduction in re-offending will not be observed because the size of the cohort will be too small to aid detection of a real change in re-offending behaviour. In this instance, it would be advisable to consider another request to the Justice Data Lab at a later date when additional years of data are available.

How will the results of submissions to the Justice Data Lab be used?

The final report will be returned to the organisation to use for their purposes. The organisation must publish the final report on their own website within 4 months of the

Ministry of Justice publishing it. The idea of publication is to be open and transparent about the activities of the Justice Data Lab. It is not intended to be a tool to rank or benchmark organisations. However, these published findings may be used as a basis for further research by the Ministry of Justice.

Will submitting data increase the possibility of my organisation being able to deliver services under the Transforming Rehabilitation reforms?

Evidence generated through the Justice Data Lab will not constitute a stamp of approval, or an assurance by the Ministry of Justice that the organisation should win a Payment by Results contract because of their impact on reducing re-offending – there will be many other issues to consider.

Providing evidence of an organisation's historic impact on re-offending through the Justice Data Lab will allow an organisation to have a deeper understanding of their effectiveness. This could support an organisation in readiness to make a bid for future competitions. Additionally, this evidence may support groups of organisations to understand how they could, in future, work in partnership together.

The Justice Data Lab focuses only on the historic evidence of an organisation's specific impact on re-offending. The Justice Data Lab will be able to support evidence on "what works" historically, but organisations will also need scope to innovate on the basis of this evidence.

Will there be a way to compare the results with statutory (or more mainstream) interventions?

The re-offending rates included in the final report for an organisation **should not** be compared to the national average, nor any other reports or publications which include re-offending rates – including those assessing the impact of other interventions. The re-offending rates included in these reports are specific to the characteristics of the people attending that intervention, and any other comparison would not be comparing like for like.

What support is available from MOJ on submitting data to the Justice Data Lab?

The Justice Data Lab team can be contacted regarding any queries on submitting data. The contact details are:

Justice Data Lab team
Justice Statistics Analytical Services
7th Floor, 102 Petty France, London SW1H 9AJ
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