

## Ministry of Justice Data Lab

### What is the Justice Data Lab?

The Justice Data Lab has been set up by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) to help organisations working with offenders access re-offending data. It is intended for Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations working with offenders who want to get a better understanding of their impact.

To use it you will need to provide details of a group of offenders you have worked with. In return you will receive a report of the re-offending rate for that group compared to a matched control group of offenders with similar characteristics. The difference between the two rates will therefore represent the impact of your service on the group's re-offending rate, which is far more powerful than re-offending rates without a robust comparison.

This is a unique service. It's the first time anything like it has been attempted across government and it is your best opportunity to prove the impact you have had with service users. The Data Lab has been launched as a one year pilot from April 2013, during this time it is a free service. The Data Lab will be evaluated during the pilot period to assess how it might be provided in the future.

This briefing provides a summary of how to use the Justice Data Lab and some of the issues you will need to consider. If you want to know more, we suggest looking at the MoJ's 'User Journey' document and other materials, which are available here:

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/justice-data-lab>

### How can I use the Justice Data Lab?

To use the Data Lab you will need to supply details of a group of offenders your organisation has worked with between 2002-2010. This is because reoffending data is not available for later than 2010. Data for 2011 is expected to become available in Autumn 2013. You will need to provide the information using a Criminal Justice Secure e mail address (CJSM), which you may need to apply to MOJ for.

For each individual client/service-user, you will need to provide MoJ with details of their; forename; surname; date of birth; gender; and - if possible - Police National Computer Identifier (PNCID) and/or Prison Number. You will also need to provide your **intervention start and end dates** and whether you worked with them in the community or custody. Any further data you can provide will be useful (although page 18 of the 'User Journey' document highlights some variables seen as too sensitive or inappropriate). MoJ will use this data to find the offenders you have worked with on their database and ensure that they are excluded from the control group they are compared with.

MoJ require you to submit information on a minimum group of 60 offenders to conduct their analysis. However, they cannot always identify people on their database, which can reduce

the size of the group submitted so larger initial sample sizes are recommended. Indeed, the more individuals you send, the more powerful the analysis will be (and the greater chance of illustrating impact). To increase sample sizes, you can therefore send details of people you have worked with as far back as 2002 – although if you do this you should also think about whether the services you provided were the same then as they are now.

You will also need to provide MoJ with information about the services you have provided. This is because the Justice Data Lab team want to know what is being evaluated and ensure the results are meaningful. A description of what this additional information should include is given on page 19 of the 'User Journey' document.

To begin the process you must complete the Data Upload Template on the MoJ webpage. Once you have done this you will be able to discuss the ongoing process and details with Justice Data Lab team.

### **What will I get back from the Justice Data Lab?**

Results from the Data Lab are provided in a 5 page report, explaining the findings and any limitations to the analysis. It will also provide a profile of the offenders you have worked with in terms of a range of variables such as age, gender, ethnicity, employment history, convictions etc.

For transparency the MoJ will publish all reports produced by the Justice Data Lab and use them to improve its own understanding of what works to prevent reoffending. In addition the MoJ expects that the full report will be published on your own website and is shared with stakeholders when you are discussing your impact with them. You will be free to use the findings for your own purposes. The MoJ only asks that the reporting and interpretation remains accurate and that they are acknowledged as the source.

Getting results from the Justice Data Lab takes around two weeks, although this might be longer if; your request is complex; your data needs cleaning; or if the Data Lab team are working at capacity. A further delay may occur if you need to apply for a Criminal Justice Secure email (CJSM) to send your data to MoJ in the first place. You will also need to spend time internally processing your data before sending it to the Data Lab.

### **What are the limitations of the Justice Data Lab?**

Because of confidentiality, outcomes will not be provided for individuals, only combined reconviction rates for groups of offenders. The only outcome the Data Lab is currently able to report on is the number of offenders who reoffended within 12 months of your intervention. Following the pilot period further analysis may be possible such as frequency and severity of reoffending, but only if the data lab is widely used.

Certain types of interventions cannot be tested through the Justice Data Lab. These include interventions that target severe mental health issues and substance abuse, as well as those focused on sex offenders. The reason for this is the difficulty in determining a reliable

control group. These issues are discussed further on pages 11-12 of the 'User Journey' document.

Organisations have expressed concern about confidentiality/data protection. MoJ have considered this and are satisfied that the Data Lab meets the necessary standards. In particular, they feel that because the purpose of Justice Data Lab is to test the effectiveness of interventions, the consent of individuals is not needed before their data is sent (although they do suggest that organisations take steps to satisfy themselves of this position). In addition, MoJ will ensure all individual data sent by organisations is permanently deleted. A detailed discussion of these issues is available in MoJ's Privacy Impact Assessment Report - available from the web address above.

This dataset used by MoJ is an extract of the Police National Computer, linked to other sources. It contains a wide range of variables relating to criminal history and previous offences, as well as the re-offending outcome. The comparison group is identified using a statistical approach called Propensity Score Matching. In short, drawing on as many variables as possible, a group of offenders with similar characteristics is defined, and their reconviction rate is used as the 'control group'. The weaknesses to the approach are; a) there may be other unknown variables that differentiate the treatment group from the control group; and b) individuals in the control group may themselves have received services/interventions which are not known about. However, it is important to stress that the control group is likely to have a much larger sample size than your 'treatment group' (because it is drawn from the full database). For this reason biases should be reduced to an acceptable level.

So far MoJ have encountered some problems identifying individuals and specific sentences from the data they have been sent by organisations. This has resulted in 'attrition', whereby the sample sizes have been reduced. To offset this you should send details of as many people as possible, along with date information ((i.e where they started working with each person, and when). If the sample size for your group of offenders is small then differences in outcomes to the control group may not be statistically significant. The report will highlight this and include a discussion about "what you can say" and "what you can't say" - based on the rates and statistics given.

### **What do NPC and Clinks think of the Justice Data Lab?**

The Justice Data Lab has the potential, for the first time, to give VCSE organisations the opportunity to prove what they achieve to a very high standard of evidence. This evidence could complement and greatly enhance your existing evaluation activities at virtually no extra cost. Evidence from the Justice Data Lab could be valuable for fund raising, and we strongly encourage organisations to use the data lab now if they hope to use the results in negotiations for services delivered under Transforming Rehabilitation.

We also believe that submitting data to the Justice Data Lab will demonstrate a commitment and ambition to both test and improve what you are doing. As such, it reflects our wider aim of helping VCSE organisations to examine their effectiveness and achieve the maximum positive effect for the people they support.