

# Explaining desistance: looking forward, not backwards

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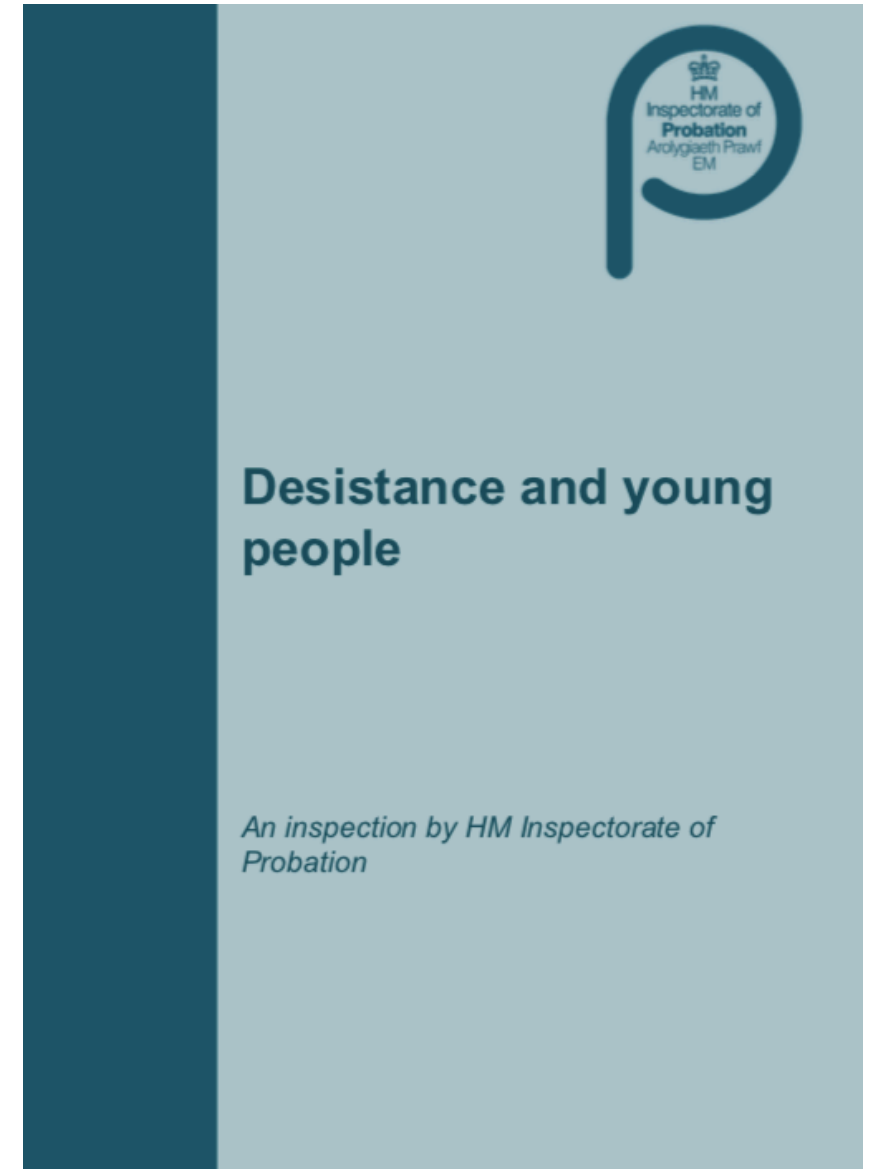


# The roadmap

- Why we need to think more about desistance and children.
- Factors in adolescent desistance – identity.
- Making the case for child-first desistance.
- Some thoughts on how we get there...

# The move towards desistance

- Introduced over the past five years in youth justice.
- Desistance theories do appear relevant to children.
- But evidence base primarily relates to adults.
- Can't assume lessons apply equally to under-18s.



# 'Desistance' versus 'Risk'

	Desistance	Risk
<b>Basis</b>	How people give up offending	Seeks to explain offending
<b>Intervention</b>	Supporting change	Based on risk
<b>Remit</b>	Holistic & strengths-based	Criminogenic need
<b>Success</b>	Complex & zig-zagging	Reconviction rates & risk management



The evidence:  
overlaps &  
inconsistencies

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Some **commonalities** in the  
desistance pathways of adults &  
adolescents.

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But these factors may affect  
children **differently**.

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**Inconsistencies** in the evidence  
base.

# A question of identity?

- Evidence that identity shifts play some role in desistance for adolescents.
- Identity change found to be important for those with lengthy histories of offending (e.g. McMahon & Jump, 2018).
- Although mixed evidence for the role of identity change in desistance in one study of young custody leavers (BYC, 2017).
- Identity 'irrelevant' to many in a small sample of children on court-ordered community sentences (Wigzell, 2020).



# Desistance in youth justice?

- Mixed messages of its importance at a national & local level – the legacy of risk.
- Overly focused on reducing offending (rather than broader well-being)?
- Too centred on changing the individual (neglecting structural factors)?
- In tension with the 'child first' ethos.







# Looking forward...

- The need for desistance through a **child first lens**.
- Greater emphasis on the ***whole child*** at a national level.
- Re-thinking youth justice?



# Some next steps...

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- Rethinking **measures** of effectiveness:

*Short term reoffending metrics are inadequate, and inappropriate, measures of the effectiveness of youth justice intervention whose efficacy should be evaluated by longer term developmental, and educational, outcomes and the promotion of children's wellbeing (NAYJ, 2019: 3).*

- Designing youth justice responses to reflect the **whole child**.