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Payment by results – but are these the right results for children?

‘The rationale for payments by results in the youth justice system is largely rhetorical with few arguments of substance’

Dr Tim Bateman, University of Bedfordshire and NAYJ Trustee

The Competition Strategy for Offender Services, recently published by the Ministry of Justice, reaffirms that the concept of ‘payment by results’ is central to the government’s ‘rehabilitation revolution’. The government argues that this initiative - which will apply equally to the youth justice system, will incentivise services for children in trouble with the law to reduce bureaucracy, operate more professional discretion and reduce re-offending.

But, in a briefing paper published today the National Association for Youth Justice (NAYJ) outlines their concerns that applying market mechanisms to youth justice services without evidence will have unintended consequences that will further disadvantage some of our poorest and most deprived children without impacting of the levels of youth crime.

‘There is a real risk that incentivising providers to focus on short term re offending rates will do nothing to address some of the real problems that give rise to youth crime’ said Dr Bateman.

NAYJ believes that payment by results will lead to ‘cherry picking’ with service being provided to those children most likely to meet to targets, and children with the highest levels of need being unattractive to contractors because of the risk to

the financial return on their investment. The introduction of market mechanisms will operate to sideline issues of proportionality and children's rights as material reward takes priority over matters of principle.

Notes for editors

1. This briefing is published as part of NAYJ's campaign for a child focused youth justice system in England and Wales, information about the campaign and a copy of this briefing and an executive summary can be found on the NAYJ website: www.thenayj.org.uk
2. For further information please contact: info@nayj.org.uk or telephone 07957 575480
3. NAYJ is a registered charity No. 1138177
4. NAYJ campaigns for the rights of and justice for children in trouble with the law.