

UNIT COSTS IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE

PSSRU

Outline of a research project funded by the Ministry of Justice

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BACKGROUND

Three prospective longitudinal studies are currently tracking large samples of offenders at different stages of the criminal justice system:

- Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction Study
- Offender Management Community Cohort Study
- Juvenile Cohort Study

These studies are designed to investigate custodial and community interventions aimed at reducing re-offending to find out which work, and for whom.

There is very little information on costs in the criminal justice field and this project will address the need for data to allow cost-effectiveness analyses for these studies. It will also provide the opportunity to address the long-standing and widespread need for unit cost information in this area for future economic evaluations.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The primary aim of the project is to generate unit cost information that can be used in combination with outcome data from the cohort research studies to enable cost-benefit or cost-effectiveness evaluations to be undertaken. A secondary aim is to identify the scope and demand for wider and longer-term use of unit cost information in the criminal justice field.

The objectives are:

- To identify and prioritise the range of interventions and processes for which unit costs are needed;
- To identify actual and potential sources of data to generate comprehensive unit costs, and important gaps;
- To undertake or support data collections required and, where necessary, to identify the types and bases for assumptions needed;
- To estimate unit costs;
- To investigate sources of variation in order to identify a basis for estimating those unit costs needed for the cohort studies that reflect factors such as offender characteristics;
- To present the information in a transparent, informative and (as far as possible) consistent basis;
- To identify a basis for updating estimates and potential for improving estimates as more information becomes available.

METHOD

There are two planned phases to the project. The first phase will focus on scoping and the development of methodology for estimating unit costs. This includes consultations with government departments, criminal justice agencies and those already commissioned to conduct the evaluations, an audit of potential data sources and a review of the literature.

The activities and timing in phase two, which will focus on generating unit cost estimates, will be determined by the first phase. It is anticipated that phase two will include the development of a unit costs spreadsheet, follow-up with the owners of

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source data, support for any additional studies required, advice on and design of data collection instruments and collection of detailed individual level costs.

TIMETABLE AND OUTPUTS

A final report for phase one will be produced in May 2008. This will identify the unit costs needed for the cohort studies and in the longer term, information already available, gaps in the information and sources of variation that should be investigated. It will also include recommendations for the programme of work and timing of activities in phase 2.

A final report, including all the estimated unit costs will be available in June 2010. The main focus will be on unit costs required for the cohort studies. However wider cost information will be available for future use.

RESEARCH TEAM

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