

OVERVIEW

Framework for Risk Assessment, Management and Evaluation: FRAME



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The publication of the FRAME policy paper represents the beginning of a multi-agency collaboration on an ambitious programme of change – the development and implementation of a framework that advances proportionate, meaningful and legitimate risk practice that is grounded in shared principles, values and standards.

Multi agency partnership working has developed considerably over the last decade or so in a number of fields, including child protection and community safety. The establishment of FRAME draws on learning from the significant experience and achievements in Scotland regarding the delivery of risk assessment and management initiatives within the wider Care and Justice fields. For each of the key agencies within the Criminal Justice Sector, assessing and managing risk has become an integral aspect of this work. Whilst this represents a shared responsibility, each agency also has their own particular objectives, responsibilities and functions in relation to risk practice.

During this period a significant amount of research has been undertaken to assess current practice and time and effort has been invested in inspections, reports and committees¹, the findings of which have prompted wide ranging changes to legislation and practice.² The Risk Management Authority was established in 2005 as a result of this legislative change and was tasked with promoting best practice in the risk assessment and management of offenders through the provision of policy advice, research and training. Following their inception and in recognition of the need for consistent, standards based practice within the criminal justice field, the Risk Management Authority published a range of standards designed to direct practice in relation to the assessment and management of risk posed by offenders who present a risk of serious harm.³

The Framework for Risk Assessment, Management and Evaluation (FRAME) builds on this foundation but seeks to broaden the applicability of these evidence informed practice standards. This is with the aim of establishing “a consistent, shared framework that promotes defensible and ethical risk assessment and management practice that is proportionate to risk, legitimate to role, appropriate for the task in hand, and is communicated meaningfully”. FRAME is jointly sponsored by the Scottish Government and the Risk Management Authority and has the agreement and support of the key criminal justice agencies including police, prison, criminal justice social work and forensic mental health services.

What is FRAME?

The purpose of FRAME is to bring consistency to the way in which agencies assess, manage and evaluate the risk presented by offending behaviour. It aims to achieve this by establishing agreed values, a structured approach, shared practice standards and a common language of risk. Acknowledging the uncertainty of risk and the challenges inherent in managing it, FRAME proposes a rights-based and evidence-informed approach to risk practice which will facilitate purposeful, appropriate and meaningful risk assessment and management across a range of agencies and offender groups.

¹ Scottish Executive (2000) *Report of the Committee on Serious Violent and Sexual Offenders*. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive; Scottish Government (2008) *Scotland's Choice: Report of the Scottish Prisons Commission*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government; SWIA (2009) *Assessing and Managing High Risk Offenders Who Present a Risk of Serious Harm*. Edinburgh: SWIA

² New sentencing powers in the form of the Order for Lifelong Restriction were introduced as part of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2003, whilst the Management of Offenders etc (Scotland) Act 2005 introduced a statutory requirement for agencies to jointly establish arrangements for assessing and managing risk paving the way for Multi-agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA).

³ RMA (2006) *Standards and Guidelines for Risk Assessment*. Paisley: RMA; RMA (2007) *Standards and Guidelines: Risk Management of Offenders Subject to an Order for Lifelong Restriction*. Paisley: RMA

To support this, FRAME identifies core elements which should apply to practice across all agencies:

The Foundations establish the values which underpin our work and inform our approach to risk practice. Their purpose is to ensure that practice is grounded in a clear understanding of the nature and place of risk within our work, is governed by a commitment to human rights and an individualised approach, and is characterised by the pursuit of transparency, inclusion and on-going improvement.

The Guiding Principles propose a proportionate, collaborative approach which is informed by up-to-date evidence, and prioritises the balancing of rights. These principles serve as a fixed point by which we can navigate our way through the complexities of risk practice.

The Language of Risk establishes a set of core definitions on which the key agencies are agreed, and encourages the meaningful use of terms in order to avoid misunderstanding, and misinterpretation when communicating about risk. Descriptions of risk need to be clear and unambiguous if they are to effectively inform the decisions and actions regarding the assessment and management of risk.

The Practice Standards identify the core elements that should be common to risk practice. These standards build on the foundations, principles and language to set a bench-mark for effective practice. They provide a means to direct decision-making, evaluate and reflect on work within individual cases, and design and review organisational structures and policies regarding the assessment and management of risk. The five standards are:

1. Risk Assessment

The assessment of risk will follow a structured process through which key pieces of information are *identified, analysed* for their meaning in the current context, and *evaluated* against the appropriate criteria. Assessment will be evidence-based and will be communicated in terms that are meaningful and easily understood.

2. Planning and Responding to Change

Plans to manage risk will be based on robust and proportionate assessments, and in view of the uncertain nature of risk, the dynamic link between assessment and planning will be maintained by means of regular and ongoing review. The level and immediacy of any response to changes in risk levels will be proportionate, and will be supported and justified by suitable reassessments.

3. Risk Management Measures

Measures to manage risk will be evidence-based and tailored to the individual whose behaviour poses a risk. Risk management strategies of monitoring, supervision, intervention and victim-safety planning will be proportionate to the level of risk and to the role and remit of the responsible agency to ensure practice is defensible.

4. Partnership Working

Agencies will communicate, co-ordinate and collaborate at a level commensurate with the risk and the complexities of the case to ensure effective risk assessment and management. Information will be shared responsibly and in a manner which is mindful of principles of privacy and confidentiality.

5. Quality Assurance

Those who have responsibility for the assessment and minimisation of risk will be appropriately qualified, skilled, knowledgeable and competent to fulfil their role and will be aware of the limits of their own expertise. They will be supported by appropriate training, supervision, policies and structures. Organisations will be responsible for ensuring the quality of assessment and management practice. Both self-evaluation and wider-scale evaluation will apply at practitioner, agency and multi-agency levels and will be used to inform the on-going revision of the evidence base regarding effective practice.

The FRAME approach

The standards aim to be definitive but continuously evolving, informed by the developing evidence base. They are developed in recognition of the fact that risk is dynamic and changes over time and to that end, the first four of the five standards have been developed as a tiered or triage approach. This promotes a degree of assessment, planning or intervention that is proportionate to risk, defensible and evidence-based. The individualised approach also allows for person-centred and responsive attention to needs.

What will be the impact of FRAME?

Aside from introducing consistency in the values, principles, language and standards of risk practice, the framework offers a wide range of other potential benefits. In the first instance, FRAME provides a starting point for the identification of the core competencies and training needs of those involved in assessing and managing risk. It offers a means by which individuals, agencies and government can address and support ongoing workforce development across the range of criminal justice agencies.

Beyond that, the broad applicability of the core elements within FRAME will facilitate and support the ongoing review and development of criminal justice policy and practice guidance across the justice sector by offering a base-line from which we can begin to establish consistency in language and practice.

In addition, the framework is informed by and supports the central role of research, evaluation and scrutiny in ensuring the provision of effective, evidence-based practice. FRAME's commitment to quality assurance at practitioner, agency and multi-agency levels will involve a long-term investment in on-going evaluation on the part of all agencies. The establishment of this framework offers the potential to ensure that the findings of such research and evaluation are used to inform the development of future policy, research and practice development.

Risk Management Authority

7 Thread Street

Paisley

PA1 1JR

tel 0141 278 4478

email info@rmascotland.gsi.gov.uk

www.rma.scot