

2 RATED AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

2.1 FRAME Approach

The RMA is tasked with promoting effective risk assessment and management practice. In July 2011, the RMA, along with Scottish criminal justice agencies and the Scottish Government, published the [FRAME](#) policy paper. This established the policy direction in which a shared consistent framework to promote proportionate, purposeful and defensible risk practice could be achieved. [FRAME](#) proposes an approach that is grounded in the principles of risk practice to ensure all professionals are aware of the processes and skills associated with effective risk assessment and management. It also helps professionals understand the contribution that different kinds of instruments make to this practice. Moreover, it firmly promotes the practitioner as the ‘assessor’ who skilfully, knowledgeably and within the parameters of his/her competencies, applies appropriate tools in a structured, meaningful process. [Logan \(2016\)](#) recommends that risk judgment can be substantially structured by utilising formulation, which organises the information into an explanation for why it happened and the circumstances in which it could possibly transpire again.

The framework promotes risk assessment practice that makes meaningful use of risk assessment tools without being over-reliant on them, by ensuring that the valuable contribution of such instruments is located within a structured approach to risk assessment which recognises the strengths and limitations of such tools and the importance of professional/clinical judgement. Risk assessment tools do not necessarily provide the comprehensive range of risk, responsivity and protective factors that inform an understanding of individual risk. Extrapolating from this, these tools should be used to inform rather than replace professional/clinical judgement.

2.2 Purpose of RATED

This is the fourth edition of RATED, a guide intended to assist practitioners in applying risk assessment tools as part of the [FRAME](#) approach to risk assessment to assist with the identification of risk factors and strengths of an individual. RATED also intends to keep researchers updated about the most recent developments.

The publication of RATED aims to provide a summary of the empirical evidence to inform a balanced and individualised approach to assessment, as well as to contribute to effective and ethical practice ([Andrews and Bonta, 2010](#)). The RATED directory is intended as a resource for Accredited Risk Assessors undertaking assessments for the High Court in Scotland when the court is considering imposing an OLR, in addition to other practitioners involved in risk assessment and risk management.

The objectives of the current publication are as follows:

- To provide relevant research information on each assessment tool included in the directory, which includes (but is not limited to) validation evidence.
- To provide an impartial and factual account of the strengths and limitations of each instrument.
- To provide a guide for assessors to consider when applying a tool as part of a holistic risk assessment process.

Risk assessment instruments may focus on specific types of risk developed and/or particular groups. This directory is structured by type of tools. This introductory section provides further background to the purpose of RATED and the criterion used to rate tools. The categories of tools are the following:

- **General Risk Assessment:** those tools that can be used for general application for risk.
- **Violence Risk:** instruments to establish the risk of violence.
- **Youth General Assessment:** similar to the General Risk Assessment category, but for use with adolescents.
- **Youth Violence:** instruments for measuring risk of violence in adolescents.
- **Youth Sexual Violence:** tools designed for measuring sexual violence risk in adolescents.
- **Intimate Partner Violence and Stalking:** instruments that relate to intimate partner violence and/or stalking.
- **Sexual Offending:** tools relating to sexual violence risk or internet offending.
- **Responsivity Issues:** this category consists of instruments for individuals with personality disorders or learning disabilities.

Whilst every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information presented in this publication, given the evolving nature of research relating to risk assessment and risk management, the evidence base is subject to change.

Practitioners are, therefore, encouraged to keep abreast of the emerging evidence when administering the assessment tools. Additionally, practitioners are invited to contribute to the development of the evidence base and subsequent editions of this publication by providing feedback on the contribution of specific instruments to their practice by emailing RATED@rma.gov.scot.

2.3 Responsivity Considerations

The 'risk-need-responsivity principles,' suggest that effective interventions are proportionate to the likelihood of re-offending, address the needs related to offending, and are responsive to a range of issues that may influence a person's ability to respond to interventions ([Andrews and Bonta, 2010](#); [Taxman et al., 2006](#)). [Hubbard and Pealer \(2009\)](#) found that the more 'issues' an individual has, the less likely a programme will be successful in achieving what it aims to do. To that end, strategies that are informed by responsivity issues are more likely to be effective and reduce recidivism ([Beaver and Schwartz, 2016](#)).

The [RMA's \(2018a\)](#) revised [Standards and Guidelines](#) highlights the importance to practitioners of ensuring that risk assessment and management practices do not disadvantage those with 'protected characteristics.' This is entrenched within the Equalities Act (2010), which attributes 'equalities duty' upon public sector organisations. The purpose of this is to recognise differences based on a number of protected characteristics and tailor services accordingly to ensure that people are not disadvantaged on the basis of those characteristics. The protected characteristics are:

- Ethnicity
- Age
- Mental disability
- Religion
- Gender
- Gender reassignment
- Sexual orientation

- Marriage/civil partnership
- Pregnancy
- Physical disabilities

As part of its equalities duty, the [RMA \(2015\)](#) seeks to “inform practitioners of relevant equalities considerations and help them apply appropriate risk assessment tools to specific populations.” Since RATED is a means by which the RMA advances this objective, the equality and diversity guidance laid out in the [Standards and Guidelines](#) (RMA, 2018a) informs the content of RATED. An Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) was also carried out to consider the role of protected characteristics in the publication of RATED.

When compiling a new edition of RATED, the available published literature relating to instruments was reviewed, including studies that have examined their applicability to specific groups. Where the empirical information is available, the applicability of risk assessments to the relevant protected characteristics is considered. Of the ten protected characteristics, a number have limited if any research evidence. Those that have attracted most attention in the literature are:

- people with a mental impairment/learning disability (mental disability)
- people from an ethnic minority (ethnic group)
- females (gender)
- adolescents (age)

The research evidence in relation to the remainder of protected characteristics¹ is lacking, with only a handful of studies available. For instance, transgender issues are explored in relation to the youth sexual violence tool *MEGA*[†] ([Miccio-Fonseca, 2018](#)); whilst a study by [Bhutta and Wormith \(2016\)](#) [incorporated a measure of religiosity and spirituality into the LS/CMI to test its effectiveness in a religious country.](#)

¹ The other protected characteristics within the UK Equalities Act (2010) are: religion, sexual orientation, marriage/civil partnership, pregnancy, gender reassignment (both biological changes or social functioning ones) and physical disabilities.

The existing research base is limited to the extent that many tools do not have published studies pertaining to protected characteristics. Moreover, when protected characteristics are reviewed in relation to risk assessment tools, the focus tends to be broad, e.g. mental ability broadly is reviewed; yet specific mental disorders receive less attention. If further research emerges then future editions of RATED may create new categories for these protected characteristics.

In the application of tools, practitioners should be aware of the available research, or lack thereof, in relation to applicability to persons with a protected characteristic.

2.4 Developments in RATED Fourth Edition

A number of significant changes have been made to the fourth version of the directory. These include a range of amendments to the format, layout and content of the directory, a summary of which is provided below.

Rearrangement of the directory entries:

- Learning Disabilities and Diagnostic/Personality Assessments were previously in separate categories. These four categories have now been amalgamated into a new category entitled 'Responsivity Issues,' documenting those tools specific to disorders that could influence offending.
- The Stalking category has been combined with the 'Domestic Violence' category, since these types of offences can often be interlinked (see Kerr, 2018). Additionally, the term 'Domestic Violence' has been replaced with the more commonly used term within the field 'Intimate Partner Violence' to give the new category of 'Intimate Partner Violence and Stalking.'
- 'Internet Offending' (offences related to indecent images of children) has been grouped with 'Sexual Violence Risk' and the category has been renamed as 'Sexual Offending.'

Regrouping of reference lists:

Reference lists are included as a separate document for each of the eight sections of tools. To facilitate accessibility for users, references within the lists are grouped by tools.

Inclusion of new tools:

Upon reviewing the literature for the current risk assessment tools, a number of new tools were identified. Following a review of their usefulness and applicability, the decision was made to include the majority of them in this revised edition. The additional entries within the directory reflect both the extent of the review for this edition and the speed of development in the field of risk assessment. The new additions to this edition of RATED are:

- Oxford Risk of Recidivism (OxRec) tool in the General Risk Section.
- Oxford Mental Illness and Violence Tool (OxMIV) in the Responsivity Issues section.
- Barr-2002R, Child Pornography Offender Risk Tool (CPORT), Sexual Offender Treatment Intervention and Progress Scale (SOTIPS) and Vermont Assessment of Sex Offender Risk 2 (VASOR-2) in the Sexual Offending section.
- Terrorist Radicalization Assessment Protocol-18 (TRAP-18) and Workplace Assessment of Violence Risk (WAVR-21) in the Violence Risk section.
- AssetPlus in Youth General Risk Assessment Section.
- Assessment, Intervention and Moving On Project Version 3 (AIM3), The AIM Project Assessment Models for Children under the age of 12 years old (AIM Under 12s), Protective and Risk Observations for Eliminating Sexual Offence Recidivism (PROFESOR) and Technology-Assisted Harmful Sexual Behaviour: Practice (TA-HSB Guidance), all in Youth Sexual Violence Risk.
- Structured Assessment of Positive Factors for Violence Risk: Youth Version (SAPROF:YV) and Short Term Assessment of Risk and Treatability: Adolescent Version (START:AV) in the Youth Violence Assessment section.

A number of tools have been upgraded from awaiting validation status in the third edition of RATED (RMA, 2015) to validated in this edition:

- Brief Spousal Assault Form for the Evaluation of RISK (B-SAFER) in the Intimate Partner Violence and Stalking section.
- Comprehensive Assessment of Psychopathic Personality (CAPP) in the Responsivity Issues section.
- Risk for Sexual Violence Protocol (RSVP) in the Sexual Offending section.

- The Multiplex Guided Inventory of Ecological Aggregates for Assessing Sexually Abusive Adolescent and Children (MEGA) in the Youth Sexual Violence section.
- The Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument (YASI) in the Youth General Risk section.

Rewording of rating criteria:

The rating criteria refers to the amount of evidence available for a particular element (e.g. inter-rater reliability). The terminology has been changed in this version of RATED:

- For zero bars, the wording of 'no or poor' has been changed to 'insufficient.'
- For three bars, the word 'little' has been replaced with 'preliminary.'
- For six bars, the term 'some' has been substituted with 'intermediate.'
- For nine bars, the word 'high' has been replaced with 'sufficient.'

Hyperlinks to research:

To improve the accessibility to research, where available hyperlinks have been included to the studies cited in tool entries. The hyperlink will generally take the user to the journal's page, which contains the article's abstract. Users may then check whether they have access to the full article through their institution or they may have the option to purchase it on the journal's landing page.

In cases where the full article is already freely available on the internet (for instance, through ResearchGate) the hyperlink to this is included to facilitate users' access to research. In a small number of cases, the research cited is not available online and, hence, no hyperlink is included.

Hyperlinks are available within individual tool entries and in the list of references for each of the eight sections.

2.5 Using RATED

Using RATED to select a risk assessment tool

The use of suitable risk assessment tools is an important concern for practitioners and agencies involved in the management of offenders. RATED is designed to inform and support decisions regarding which tools to use by:

- Describing the purpose and design;
- Providing information on the evidence base for the tool design;
- Evaluating the validation literature available;
- Setting out the appraisal against the assessment framework.

When using RATED, practitioners should consider the following:

- The type of risk that they wish to evaluate (general risk of reoffending, risk of violence, sexual offences, intimate partner violence or stalking);
- The age, gender, ethnicity, mental state and cognitive abilities of the individual;
- The performance of tools with respect to the criteria outlined which includes validation history, empirical grounding, inter-rater reliability and ability to identify targets for intervention.

Where they have the necessary competencies and training, practitioners can use with confidence validated tools that possess a robust validation history and empirical grounding. These tend to be tools that have also evidenced sufficient inter-rater reliability², specificity³, sensitivity⁴ and predictive accuracy⁵ in identifying individuals at risk of re-offending. Practitioners should use tools with caution that possess many of the essential attributes and have the potential to demonstrate all of these in the future (with further studies and/or evidence). Reports detailing findings based on the use of tools that are awaiting validation should outline the limitations of their use in this respect.

² Inter-rater reliability refers to the degree in which two or more assessors consistently rate items within a tool.

³ Specificity relates to the ability of a test to classify when an individual does *not* possess a particular characteristic.

⁴ Sensitivity refers to the extent to which an instrument can correctly classify when an individual possesses a particular characteristic. Sensitivity is inversely proportional with specificity, whereby one increases as the other decreases.

⁵ The predictive accuracy of a tool refers to its ability to distinguish between certain populations, such as those who reoffend and those who do not.

Practitioners should use tools with extreme caution that possess few of the essential attributes, but appear to have the potential to meet all of these in the future (with further studies and/or evidence). Reports detailing the findings based on the use of such tools must include a justification for selecting them and should outline the limitations of their use.

In cases involving the 17-21 year old age group, practitioners should use their judgement as to whether to apply instruments designed for young people, or those designed for an adult population. To inform this judgement, specific consideration should be given to the extent to which the tool incorporates evidence of its validity with young people and the impact of child developmental processes of the young person being assessed. Similarly, one should give careful consideration as to whether the selection of a given instrument is appropriate for certain minority groups, e.g. those with mental health problems, cognitive impairments and learning disabilities. A good guide to an instrument's suitability for a particular group is whether a sample from the target group has been included in the original research sample or been the subject of a successful pilot study.

In all cases, practitioners should have the necessary training for using the tool(s) of their choice; be aware of their limitations and the caveats of their use; be in a position to discuss these and to evidence their assessment. Importantly, these limitations should be clearly outlined in the assessor's report to inform future decision-making. Above all, risk assessment tools should be used as part of a risk assessment process to inform rather than replace professional judgement.

Practitioners are advised to review the range of guidance documents dealing with risk assessment. These include the RMA Standards and Guidelines, FRAME and the RMA accredited manner for risk assessment for Risk Assessment Orders (RAO) or Interim Compulsion Orders (ICO) when the High Court is considering an OLR.

The Standards and Guidelines states that practitioners should select risk assessment instruments appropriate to the risk needs and characteristics of the individual being assessed, as well as in accordance with their own competencies, experience and training. Practitioners should also be aware of the validity and

limitations of any tool that they use ([RMA, 2018a](#)). RATED sets out the RMA's evaluation of the evidence available for each instrument and highlights any limitations or caveats that professionals should take into account when using a tool as part of a holistic risk assessment process.

The directory also highlights that there may be cases (perhaps with unusual types of offending) where available instruments have little or no validity, wherein the following activities are recommended:

- Review the relevant publications to look at what the latest academic and clinical literature describes in relation to the type of offender and the approach to the risk under consideration;
- Seek the views of other experts on the approach to be taken in the case;
- Gather as much information as possible to support the formal risk assessment;
- Seek supervision from a sufficiently experienced and expert colleague;
- Use the structured professional judgement framework, as set out in this manner, to guide the process of case formulation and reaching a risk judgement;
- Be explicit in the report about the limitations of the approach used.