

Evidencing Success and Successful Evidence in Restorative Work:
Developing Models of Effectiveness, Efficiency, and Impact

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Abstract

This integrated doctoral thesis consists of five publications that contribute to an examination of approaches to recording and monitoring outcomes within restorative justice in the UK to identify innovative approaches to evidence success. It builds on the inquiry findings of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Restorative Justice that recommended investigation to develop guidance for gathering and using data to monitor and evaluate restorative justice to improve quality. Restorative justice service reporting documents are thematically analysed to understand current approaches. These are triangulated with thematic analysis of survey and interview data from restorative justice practitioners about their definitions of success and how these align with current recording and monitoring processes. Findings offer several original contributions to restorative justice literature, alongside the unique focus on service data. The contextual and subjective nature of success in restorative justice is identified within practitioner definitions of effectiveness, efficiency, and impact. These are contextualised with a socio-ecological systems lens to identify a range of invested stakeholders with their own concepts of success. The role of institutionalisation is identified in the way the dominant criminal justice system shapes service metrics and restricts public availability to evidence of success in restorative justice. Innovative metrics and approaches to measurement are outlined which go beyond current measurement processes and can contribute to the development of a national repository of evidence. Standardisation for case studies and a national reporting framework is recommended that can incorporate quantitative and qualitative evidence of success to address the nuanced, subjective, and contextual evidence needs of stakeholders and improve quality of restorative justice.

Author's Declaration

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

Signed Benjamin Mark Fisk

Date23rd March 2024.....

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Confidentiality and restricted access

This thesis includes analysis of restorative justice reporting template documents that are considered by their owners (RJ services) to be commercially sensitive. The respective owners of these documents have explicitly requested that these are not included within this thesis. The documents were analysed in full and referred to within a peer-reviewed publication (Fisk, 2023) that forms this integrated PhD thesis. The wishes of the document owners have been respected.

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List of abbreviations & glossary

Abbreviation	Definition
APPG	All-Party Parliamentary Group
Brexit	The name for the decision to leave the EU that resulted from the UK's democratic referendum of EU membership that took place in 2016
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CJA	Criminal Justice Alliance
CJS	Criminal Justice System
CMS	Computer Management System
EFRJ	European Forum for Restorative Justice
EU	European Union
FGC	Family Group Conference. Restorative process.
FOI	Freedom of Information. Enshrined in the UK Freedom of Information Act 2000. Members of the public are entitled to request information from public authorities, and concerning information held by public authorities who are obliged to publish certain information about their activities.
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation. Framework for the processing of personal data of individuals
HMPPS	His/Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service
IIRP	International Institute for Restorative Practices
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MP	Member of Parliament
NHS	National Health Service
NPM	New Public Management
OBA	Outcomes Based Accountability
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RJ	Restorative Justice
RP	Restorative Practice
RJC	Restorative Justice Council
SES	Socio-ecological systems. The theory developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979).
TA	Thematic analysis
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
VCOP	Victim's Code of Practice. An acronym used within the literature to refer to the name of the statutory guidance from the UK Ministry of Justice that is formally titled 'Code of Practice for Victims of Crime in England and Wales (Victims' Code)'
VOM	Victim-offender mediation. Restorative process.
WSA	Whole Systems Approaches

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Introductory comments: Setting the scene for this thesis.

It is important to acknowledge from the outset that this thesis would not be possible without the work of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Restorative Justice inquiry (APPG-RJ, 2022a), and the work of Associate Professor Dr. Jonathan Hobson and CEO of the Restorative Justice Council (RJC), Mr. James Simon. They translated some of the key findings of the APPG-RJ inquiry into a proposal for a jointly funded PhD studentship with the aim to understand approaches to recording and monitoring outcomes within restorative justice in the UK and identify innovative approaches to evidencing success. Without their combined wealth of academic and practice insight, this important work may never have been undertaken. The world of routine paperwork may not on the face of it appear to be the most exciting topic for anyone to spend three years and more studying. It is one that I, as both author and practitioner, have been begrudgingly embedded in for twenty years, often at the expense of working directly with children and families. But it is a topic that needs investigation, as highlighted by the APPG-RJ itself (2022a) and those who contributed their valuable time and effort to the inquiry. I am privileged to have been able to undertake this research within this context.

The research in this work was not undertaken in isolation, attendance at various conferences and events, in-person and online, domestic and international, has generated connections with academics and practitioners who have offered kind and deeply thoughtful critique and reflection upon components of this work. They signposted further research, relevant theories, and concepts that I was not aware of at the outset of this project. The way I originally envisaged this project unfolding as a single thesis, and my approach to identifying participants and data sources, quickly fell to the wayside as the opportunity afforded to me by the relationships I developed, transformed my best laid plans into something else. My original ideas for developing a grand model for measuring effectiveness, efficiency and impact in restorative justice (RJ) were quickly shattered when I talked to practitioners and read the

literature. However, at the very start of being awarded the PhD studentship to undertake this work, I attempted to be as systematic as possible to ensure methodological rigour. Other areas, such as organisational culture and RJ institutionalisation, were identified later as my PhD journey evolved.

The opportunity to work for the APPG-RJ inquiry as a researcher enabled access to a wealth of data. With consent from the submitting organisations, I was able to undertake a documentary analysis which went on to be my first formal peer-reviewed publication (Fisk, 2023). This analysis and others that I created or contributed heavily towards, and additional findings from analysis of this wealth of data, allowed me to contribute significantly to drafting the Workstream 4 report that was published by the APPG-RJ (Hobson, Fisk, Hook, & Jaffé, 2023). As such it was felt that a pivot towards an integrated thesis that enabled me to gain academic credit for this extensive work contribution would also enable a more integrated approach to the topic and achievement of the research aim.

1.2 Topic context

The overarching topic or perhaps more accurately ‘discipline’ within which this thesis sits is RJ, which is concerned with addressing harm in society and enabling those with a stake in that harm to work with one another to repair that harm and restore relationships (Wachtel, 2016). RJ is a topic of research and practice within the academic discipline of criminology, and often associated with the branch of critical criminology, however even this relationship is contested due to the way RJ is frequently applied within the context of state criminal justice systems and may not overtly challenge structural oppression in terms of racism, sexism, and class biases of said system (Cuneen, 2008). This relationship with the traditional CJS and in the context of RJ service recording and monitoring will be explored further in this thesis. RJ also sits under the umbrella of restorative practice (RP) which has been defined as a ‘transdisciplinary field of study that examines how to strengthen relationships between

individuals and improve social connections within communities’ and is also considered by the IIRP to be a unique subset of social sciences (IIRP, 2018; IIRP, n.d.)

What exists within the literature is a myriad of definitions, theories, and practice contexts, supported by empirical research and service evaluations from across the world that evidence the impact that RJ can have on the lives of citizens and the success it can achieve in society (Sherman et al., 2015, Paul & Borton, 2016; United Nations, 2020; College of Policing, 2022). However, what does not exist is an academic consideration of the role of data that RJ services collect and how success is evidenced using that data, and in turn how what is collected shapes and limits public perception of the potential success that RJ can achieve. The preceding context and the formal origins of this project, born of the collaboration between people with lived experience, practitioners, academics, and facilitated by politicians using the processes of the UK Parliament, will now be outlined.

1.3 The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Restorative Justice

Whilst restorative justice has ‘ebbed and flowed’ in terms of its development (Marder et al., 2023: 1), the global expansion of RJ initiatives is also ‘remarkable’, having influenced the policies of nation states at the micro and macro levels, as well as international bodies such as the United Nations (Dignan, 2012: 1; UNODC, 2006, 2020). It could be argued that the steady ‘flow’ of RJ in the UK context ended in 2017, embodied in policy through previous MoJ action plans (2012; 2014), that were not renewed as the UK parliament entered a period of political turmoil and instability with the ‘Brexit’ vote to leave the EU. This ‘ebb’ ended in 2021 with the formation of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Restorative Justice (APPG-RJ) and the undertaking of a formal inquiry (APPG-RJ, 2022a). The topic of this PhD project is a tangible component of that forward flowing momentum, directly conceived from the conversations that took place during the initial inquiry of the APPG-RJ and in the conclusions published (APPG-RJ, 2022a).

1.3.1 Organisation of the APPG-RJ, advisory board, and inquiry process

The APPG-RJ consisted of eight members from across the house of parliament and the house of lords, spanning multiple political parties including crossbenchers, Conservatives, Alba, Liberal Democrats, Labour and the Co-op. The group was first convened by the chair of the APPG, Elliot Colburn MP, on 21st April 2021, and started with a mission statement:

“To examine the use of restorative justice principles within the UK justice system and beyond; to raise the profile of restorative justice principles within Parliament; and to provide opportunities for policy discussion and consultation.”

(APPG-RJ, 2022b:)

To achieve this, the grouping instructed the establishment of an advisory board. The board included senior stakeholder groups who functioned as representatives for RJ services, academics, and sector representative groups with a specific interest in RJ. The APPG-RJ instructed two organisations, the Restorative Justice Council (RJC) and the Criminal Justice Alliance (CJA), to function as ‘umbrella’ groups for smaller stakeholders. Jim Simon, CEO of the RJC, was appointed Chairperson of the advisory board. The advisory board role was to support the APPG-RJ to accomplish their mission statement and:

“...take evidence from key stakeholders and reflect on the 2012 and 2017 government priorities (as established then) to review how these are progressing and what changes need to be made to improve the quality and availability of restorative justice and practices.”

(APPG-RJ, 2022b)

The advisory board supported the collection of written and oral evidence, and the creation of a report based on this evidence to make clear recommendations for the government on how to better improve access to and the delivery of Restorative Justice/practice. The inquiry focus was separated into two sections, the first involved setting the scene and the second explored access, capacity, and awareness of RJ and RP within the CJS. The full range of questions asked are publicly available (APPG-RJ, 2022b), and those that have a specific

relevance to this project include requests to understand what measures should be used to determine effectiveness; where is RJ not applied effectively and what are the blockages; how data recording and analysis could be improved; and whether a nationally agreed framework incorporating set criteria for recording across the country should be applied. Nine key recommendations (APPG-RJ, 2022a) can be distilled into three principal areas: service oversight; removing procedural barriers; and dedicated resources (Marder et al., 2023). The advisory board then formed four workstreams to further explore the nine recommendations and publish their own further recommendations. The author directly contributed to the research and writing of the workstream four report, which has been submitted as part of this integrated thesis and is referred to as ‘report one’ (Hobson, Fisk, Hook & Jaffé, 2023).

1.4 Thesis genesis and studentship commissioning

The publicly available verbatim minutes of the ten oral hearing sessions of the APPG-RJ include testimony from academics, practitioners, and citizens with lived experience. They discuss at lengths the strengths of RJ from their experience and perspective, but also the challenges they face (APPG-RJ, 2022b). During those sessions, it became apparent that something about the success of RJ is not being effectively captured or communicated. The ‘black box’ of restorative work was being alluded to (Shapland, Robinson & Sorsby, 2011: xii). Contributors to the APPG-RJ expressed that what is done on the ground is not communicated effectively in policy or evaluation and needs more thorough investigation (APPG-RJ, 2022a).

The original inquiry report and the work undertaken with the first wave of publicly available transcript data (APPG-RJ, 2022a, 2022b) was the catalyst for the RJC and University of Gloucestershire to commission the PhD studentship for this thesis. A common theme identified in submissions to the APPG-RJ (2022a; 2022b) was around how the RJ sector evidences success, and despite multiple evaluations of RJ services demonstrating multiple positive outcomes (Shapland, Robinson & Sorsby, 2011; Sherman et al., 2015), this evidence base has not achieved improved awareness or facilitated greater uptake of RJ processes.

Respondents in both published (APPG-RJ, 2022b) and unpublished submissions stated that current methods of evaluation do not capture all the potential outcomes and forms of success that RJ can achieve. How success is evidenced is linked to service oversight (Marder et al., 2023) and the data that services collect for the purpose of monitoring and evaluation. However, service oversight does not exist in isolation. A range of factors impact the ability to evidence success. These include funding, which shapes what services focus on for monitoring and evaluation (McCold, 2000), procedural barriers that include information sharing restrictions which limit RJ and external service collaboration, blanket bans on certain case types, and a lack of dedicated financial and material resources (Marder et al., 2023).

Routine monitoring and recording work undertaken by practitioners is under-represented in the academic literature, whereas the highly valued, expensive, and analytical product of their work, service evaluations, are the key mediums where evidence of RJ practice success is conveyed. Evaluations have focused on understanding the specific ways in which effectiveness, efficiency, and impact can be demonstrated with tight parameters to ensure their scientific rigour. These are well-established concepts, with clear definitions and a range of processes from international bodies like the OECD (2021) and extensive writing from key authors in the field of RJ around evaluation, such as Paul McCold and Joanna Shapland (McCold, 2000; Shapland, Robinson & Sorsby, 2011; Shapland, 2022).

This work aims to understand current approaches to recording and monitoring success within RJ in the UK and identify approaches for evidencing success by examining practitioner perceptions of success and their relationship with organisational data. The APPG-RJ work highlights an extensive range of stakeholders involved in RJ, including politicians and the institutions of government. Considering these factors, the research aim is addressed in the context of institutionalisation and through use of a socio-ecological systems (SES) lens to contextualise the lived experience of practitioners and their use of data for recording and monitoring their RJ work with members of the public.

1.5 Research aim and objectives

1.5.1 Research aim

To examine approaches to recording and monitoring outcomes within restorative justice in the UK and identify innovative approaches to evidencing success.

1.5.2 Research objectives

1. To identify the organisational methods used to record and monitor outcomes within restorative practices in the UK.
2. To explore the criteria that practitioners use to define success.
3. To analyse the alignment between practitioners' success criteria and organisational outcomes.
4. To identify innovative approaches for evidencing success within restorative practices.

1.6 The significance of this research

This research is significant because it builds upon submissions from leading RJ experts in practice and academia who contributed to the findings of the APPG-RJ inquiry (2022a, 2022b). The inquiry explicitly recommends exploration of recording, monitoring, and evaluation to develop further understanding of how services use data to evidence success in their work. These experts, particularly practitioners who are essential stakeholders in the field delivering RJ on the ground, have provided evidence that indicates a lack of data standardisation that has resulted in significant variations in data collection and usage between services. This requires critical analysis to understand the extent of this and to understand the impact this has on evidencing success.

Furthermore, this work aims to bridge the gap between practitioners' perceptions of success in RJ and organisational data that purports to evidence this for RJ services. This gap was indicated at the APPG-RJ inquiry (2022a) but has not been previously researched. By exploring the potential differences between these subjective constructions of success a nuanced

understanding can facilitate more effective recording and monitoring processes to improve evidencing of success within RJ services across the UK RJ sector.

This work also seeks to address the role of institutionalisation in UK RJ services and the impact on evidencing success by exploring this phenomenon in the context of RJ service data. Concerns expressed at the APPG-RJ (2022a) include the role of institutional gatekeepers and a lack of engagement from the MoJ in terms of supporting the use and analysis of data they collect to evidence RJ service compliance with the Victim's code of practice (VCOP).

Finally, this work is significant because it seeks to identify and offer innovative approaches to recording, monitoring and evidencing the success of RJ. Innovative approaches will be informed and developed by an analysis of current practices and user perceptions, an exploration of alternative methodologies supported by research and best practice, and a consideration of the role of institutionalisation and stakeholder involvement in promoting RJ awareness.

1.7 Thesis structure

Following from this introduction, a literature review (2.0) outlines the key definitions, theories, and concepts of RJ and institutionalisation across both academic and grey literature. The methodology section (3.0) outlines the broad research design including the overarching ontological and epistemological position, as well as the research methods used, sample population, a statement on the author's positionality as a practitioner and academic, thematic analysis, and a statement concerning ethical approval and adherence to guidelines. Ethical approval is included in the appendix one. The publications section (4.0) includes five publications with a brief introduction concerning their context and the author's involvement are included as evidence of research. These publications are:

- Paper 1: What Are Restorative Justice Services Recording? Qualitative Analysis of Six Restorative Justice Reporting Templates for Offices of the Police and Crime Commissioner in England (Fisk, 2023).

- Paper 2: Effectiveness, efficiency, and impact in restorative justice: Navigating the subjective and objective to evidence success (Fisk, Hobson & Twyman-Ghoshal, 2024).
- Paper 3: The purpose of data in restorative justice: a socio-ecological systems lens (Fisk, 2025b).
- Report 1: APPG for Restorative Justice RJ Workstream 4: The commissioning, collection, and dissemination of evidence-based research in Restorative Justice and Restorative Practice & the benefits of a national reporting framework (Hobson, Fisk, Hook & Jaffé, 2023).
- Report 2: Recording Success and Successful Recording: Practitioner and Service Perspectives (Fisk, 2025a).

The discussions section (5.0) leverages the findings of these five publications highlighting further connections and conclusions in addressing the research objectives by connecting the key findings and analysing these within the context of the academic literature. These include how organisations record and monitor outcomes (5.2), the criteria practitioners use to define success (5.3), the alignment between these factors (5.4), and innovations for recording and monitoring success (5.5).

The conclusion section (6.0) summarises the discussion section and outlines how the overarching research aim has been addressed (6.2). Claims to original contribution will be highlighted in these answers (6.3), and opportunities for further research derived from these findings will be outlined (6.4). Finally, a bibliography and appendices of key documents are included.

1.7 Summary

This introduction has outlined the keys points of genesis in the development of this studentship funded research project between the University of Gloucestershire and the RJC. RJ as a concept is introduced alongside the role of the APPG-RJ inquiry in highlighting the issues

that will be addressed through the aims and objectives of this research. This includes the practice context and justification for undertaking this doctoral research project to examine approaches to recording and monitoring outcomes within RJ in the UK and identify innovative approaches to evidencing success. The number of ways in which this work is significant are considered, identifying broader concepts such as institutionalisation, and the intention to identify innovative approaches to evidencing success in restorative work. The decision to adopt an integrated PhD approach is justified, accompanied by an outline of a clear thesis structure.

2.0 Literature review

2.1 Introductory comments

This literature review presents research in the field and discipline of RJ. It starts with a brief historical context (2.2), outlines a range of definitions (2.2.1) underpinning practice values, (2.2.2) and a typology of practices that are used (2.2.3). This section concludes by addressing the criminological context that RJ sits within. The concept of institutionalisation is outlined in relation to RJ and the role of the state, outlining the theory and literature around the concept (2.3). Furthermore, professionalisation and the development of RJ practice standards a consequence of institutionalisation are addressed (2.3.1) and literature that voices concerns about institutionalisation and the role of McDonaldisation, marketisation, and managerialism are outlined (2.3.2). Current approaches to evidencing RJ are explored (2.4). These include types of data, definitions of success and outcomes that can be achieved (2.4.1), and current approaches to capturing evidence through recording, monitoring, and evaluation (2.4.2). Finally, the concept of a distinctly restorative type of success that responds to concerns around institutionalisation and subsumption of RJ by the dominant CJS is considered (2.4.3).

2.2 Outlining Restorative Justice

RJ was not ‘invented’ by a single individual, but is a highly contested phenomenon, constituting distinct practices within unique cultural contexts that have enabled international development and sharing of knowledge as globalisation took place (Weitekamp, 1999). It has been likened to a process of discovery, as opposed to one of invention (McCold, 2000). RJ has been likened to a ‘continuum of ideas and approaches’ (Olson & Sarver, 2022: 941) with practitioners working in different types of services and systems, with their own methods and approaches, drawn from varying backgrounds with unique aspirations. Today there are European Forums and International Institutes which accept members from across the globe. There are enough academics, practitioners, adjacent professionals, and those with lived

experience to enable working groups to drill down into extremely specific issues and types of harm.

RJ has a ‘patchwork history’ in terms of the origins, theories, and practices that come to embody this discipline today (Zinsstag, Teunkens, & Pali, 2008:24). The work of Nils Christie (1977) and ‘Conflicts as Property’ is often credited as the point where the concept and terminology emerged, identifying how the state takes ownership of conflicts between individuals and communities, whilst outlining a need for greater offender accountability and reintegration, victim involvement and redress, and community involvement in RJ conferences. (Wood & Suzuki, 2020:1). Positioned as an alternative to retributive justice, RJ refocuses crime as harm done to others as opposed to merely a violation of law, justice is moved into the hands of people via specific processes and not simply something done by the state (Rossner & Taylor, 2024).

RJ from the 1970s through to the 1990s was marketed as a polar opposite to the dominant CJS, using exaggeration and overstatement to highlight a radical alternative nature and make it more appealing to those new to the concept (Gavrielides, 2008). Progress moved from innovation to implementation of RJ by the 2000s and discussion about integration of values, practices, and philosophy of the two systems (Gavrielides, 2008). Widespread use globally, but particularly in the UK, has seen RJ develop into a ‘contemporary justice mechanism’ (Daly, 2016: 14) whereby a range of specific practices guided by rules and procedures are used appropriately and contextually at different points in a criminal justice process to address crimes, conflicts and disputes. This integration is contested and continues to be debated within academic literature as concerns about the degree of institutionalisation of these practices within the CJS works to dilute the values and principles of this work that developed in opposition to the dominant processes of the state (Maglione, Marder & Pali, 2024). Within this historical and development context, a range of intersecting areas, definitions, theories, and practices have emerged which will now be addressed.

2.2.1 Definitions

Literature highlights a range of RJ definitions that go beyond simple understandings of both ‘justice’ and ‘restoration’. These incorporate ‘nuances in moral codes, rights, and responsibilities; and different contexts, backgrounds, and goals of researchers’ giving rise to further definitions that are focused on key features (Paul & Borton, 2017: 202). These include direct communication; contrast of RJ to retributive justice; harm repair; process orientation; direct involvement; participation; peace-building; and offender responsibility (Paul & Borton, 2017: 203). A process of aggregating definitions from systematic reviews of RJ-based programs and analysis of peer reviewed academic literature and non-peer reviewed literature discussing conception of RJ definitions, identified three common parts (Olson & Sarver, 2022). They include a shift from crime needing punishment to focusing on the harm caused by an interpersonal offense, reparation of the harm, and engagement with essential persons (Olson & Sarver, 2022: 945-947).

Paul and Borton (2017: 202) highlight the ‘fault-lines’ in the definitions they identify, citing the work of Gavrielides (2008), which considers the process or outcome focus, narrow or wide scope of use, and the relationship with conventional/retributive justice and whether it is dualistic or compatible within a single system. Dignan (2002:5-6) also explored ‘fault-lines’ in different strands of restorative justice thinking, using language around separatist and integrationist tendencies when outlining the RJ relationships with the conventional CJS, identifying the same distinction between process and outcome definitions, and focuses on civilian vs. communitarian tendencies in how RJ functions.

RJ is often discussed in terms of processes (what it is), and outcomes (what it achieves), reinforced by empirical evidence that is generated by the results of service evaluations (Presser & Voorhis, 2002; Doolin, 2007). This can be observed in the three main types of evaluation that are used with RJ services: process; impact; and economic (Hamad, et al., 2020: 17). Impact evaluations measure if and how outcomes are achieved, and economic evaluations assess the

cost-benefit of the programme, which can be considered an outcome for some stakeholders. Whilst process-focused definitions address the procedural justice of RJ, outcome-focused definitions focus on distributive justice, however these definitions are not mutually exclusive and other definitions have sought to combine the two, although they result in a narrower focus (Paul & Borton, 2017)

A key dichotomy is one of ‘purism’ and ‘maximalism’: terminology used by McCold (2000) in their approach to outlining a holistic mid-range theory of RJ that takes a social science approach to clarifying paradigms, frameworks, theories, and concepts that can be used to understand practice. These two approaches sit alongside the idea of RJ as a movement (Johnstone, 2008; Kirkwood, 2022: 2-3), with the three definitions summarised in the following table.

Table 1: Summary of purist, maximalist, and movement definitions and key authors

Purist definition	Maximalist definition	Movement definition
Micro focus on crime and RJ as a ‘process’, two-way, between person harmed and person who has caused harm, voluntary processes, usually developed from the ground up without state involvement	Micro focus on ‘outcomes’ for repairing harm that includes a broader more flexible range of RJ with the ‘option’ of processes, incorporating the role of state bodies that may compel participants to engage in a process.	System-wide focus, sees RJ sector as a body, as social response that can be used outside of the CJS, for individuals, organisations, politics, and society to change how people think about problems.
Marshall (1999); McCold (2000)	Walgrave (1998b, 1999); Bazemore & Walgrave (1999a, 1999b)	Johnstone (2008)

Since that time, no one definition has become dominant. RJ continues to be used with ‘increasing hybridity’ and ‘plasticity’ (Wood & Suzuki, 2016: 151), going beyond ‘purist’ definitions but neither becoming more fully embedded and compelled by the CJS, nor growing into a fully-fledged social movement across all of society.

2.2.2 Values

RJ practices have the potential to be any process or intervention that is grounded in RJ values (Presser & Van Voorhis, 2002: 165). Values can be categorised as normative and operational (Van Ness, 2005). Normative values, such as active responsibility, respect, solidarity, and a peaceful social life, can be realised through restorative processes. These processes include operation values that facilitate encounter and collaboration between parties, promote inclusion and empowerment, and offer assistance that supports resolution and amends. Ultimately, these processes protect all participants and reinforce community norms and values in response to harm (Van Ness, 2005: 4-5). Values and principles can be used to capture the nuances of restorative work to inform evaluation and practice frameworks (Presser & Van Voorhis, 2002; Doak & O'Mahoney, 2018; Kirkwood, 2022). The UN Handbook on RJ Programmes (2020: 5-8) outlines values in the context of RJ objectives:

- a) Supporting victims, giving them a voice, listening to their story, encouraging them to express their needs and wishes, providing them with answers, enabling them to participate in the resolution process and offering them assistance
- b) Repairing the relationships damaged by the crime, in part, by arriving at a consensus on how best to respond to it
- c) Reaffirming community values and denouncing criminal behaviour
- d) Encouraging responsibility taking by all concerned parties, particularly by offenders
- e) Identifying restorative, forward-looking outcomes
- f) Preventing recidivism by encouraging change in individual offenders and facilitating their reintegration into the community

Several organisations closer to direct RJ practice than the UN have developed institutional legitimacy in recent decades, with academics and practitioners collaborating under their auspices, leading to them having an important role in shaping RJ internationally,

particularly in terms of how these values are defined. These include the International Institute for Restorative Practice (IIRP), the European Forum for Restorative Justice (EFRJ) and the Restorative Justice Council (RJC).

The IIRP is based out of the United States and define RP as a social science (IIRP, 2018) and the umbrella term of which RJ is a subset, noting RJ is often reactionary, whereas RP can be preventative, build social capital and relationships, and involve processes that precede wrongdoing (McCold & Wachtel, 2003). The EFRJ, in their manual on restorative justice values and standards for practice (EFRJ, 2021) focus on values such as human dignity, solidarity and responsibility, justice and accountability, and truth through dialogue. These values highlight the importance of fostering respect, empowerment, safe environments, interconnected social responsibilities, and understanding diverse narratives to achieve integrative truth. In contrast, the RJC (RJC, 2012) emphasises restoration, voluntarism, neutrality, safety, accessibility, and respect in their key principles. In addition, the RJC outline their values as an organisation that operates to accredit services, practitioners, and trainers, highlighting commitments to impartiality, integrity, quality, trust, collaboration, and inclusivity in terms of their organisational practices (RJC, 2024). This makes the RJC distinct from other sector-level organisations such as the IIRP and EFRJ. The RJC values and principles purport to ensure high ethical standards, fair and unbiased processes, voluntary participation, and accessibility for all affected by conflict and harm, while promoting a diverse and inclusive restorative community (RJC, 2012).

2.2.3 Practices

A diverse range of RJ processes and programmes are employed internationally at various points within a criminal justice process (United Nations, 2020: 23-48). A typology of RJ categorises practice as fully, mostly, or partly restorative in terms of the degree to which any of the three components of victim reparation, offender responsibility, and communities of care reconciliation are involved (Wachtel, 2016: 3-4). Family group conference (FGC), peace

circles, and community conferencing would be considered ‘fully restorative’ (Wachtel, 2016: 4), but ‘quasi-restorative processes’ (United Nations, 2020: 37) such as community panels, circles of support, and victim surrogate programmes would fall outside of this definition depending upon the degree to which all three components are utilised. Recent developments have sought to define and measure ‘restorativeness’ in terms of RJ services and programmes (Olson & Sarver, 2022). RJ services and programmes that contributed to evaluations in systemic reviews use different RJ definitions, making it difficult to determine if restorative practices are used or if outcomes reported are due to using these (Olson & Sarver, 2022: 943).

Formality, goal, relation to formal criminal justice proceedings, implementation and operation, involvement of parties, and professional participation vary significantly in RJ processes (United Nations, 2020: 23). Key to any process is preparation, in terms of checking and risk assessing the suitability of a process for all participants, ensuring full understanding of the process, reasons for individual involvement, and expectations in terms of behaviour (Fellegi & Szegó, 2013; Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, 2019; United Nations, 2020).

Broadly speaking, there are three ‘main types’ of processes that are predominantly used which have been applied contextually with a range of variations to meet the needs of victims, offenders, communities, and the requirements of the CJS where they are employed: Victim-offender mediation (VOM), restorative conferencing, and circles (United Nations, 2020: 24). VOM is a ‘direct or indirect process wherein the victim and the offender engage in a discussion of the crime and its impact that is facilitated by an impartial third party trained for this purpose, either in a face-to-face meeting or through other indirect means’ (United Nations, 2020: 24). Restorative conferencing utilises similar processes to VOM, but ‘seeks to enable the offenders to recognize the impact that their offence had not only on the victims and their families, but also on their own family and friends, providing an opportunity to restore those relationships’ (United Nations, 2020: 27) by including a broad range of stakeholders affected by the offence, such as family, friends, community representatives, and, potentially other professionals. Circle

processes have been adapted to the contemporary justice system to provide a framework to practice Indigenous RJ, focusing on a specific issue and taking a systematic approach to participation using talking pieces for conflict resolution, early intervention, healing, and sentencing, which can be applied individually or as distinct elements in a larger multi-part circle process (United Nations, 2020: 30-36).

2.2.4 Criminological context

The lack of a coherent overarching definition is reflected in the consensus that no single theory can explain RJ, with gaps in theory and practice occurring due to a lack of a full understanding of what RJ is (Daly, 2003; Van Camp & Wemmers, 2013). The topic of this PhD research is focused on RJ services, which are positioned within the practice of UK policing and therefore the broader discipline of criminology. The seminal work of Sherman et al. (2015a), which demonstrated the cost-effectiveness of RJ conferencing for reducing recidivism, highlights the ‘strong theoretical connections’ between RJ conferencing and reintegrative shaming (Braithwaite, 1989), procedural justice (Tyler, 1990), defiance theory (Sherman, 1993), and interaction rituals (Collins, 2004). The College of Policing published a document, no doubt derived in part from the research of Sherman et al. (2015), that highlights seven theoretical mechanisms to explain the function of RJ for police officers in England and Wales (College of Policing, 2022).

Table 2: Theory used by the College of Policing for England and Wales (2022)

Theory and key author	Description of theory and RJ context
Techniques of neutralisation (Sykes and Matza, 1957)	RJ processes, risk assessment, and meetings that include relevant stakeholders prevents denial of responsibility, injury, victimisation, and minimisation of harm through techniques of neutralisation
Labelling theory (Becker, 2003)	The fairness, transparency, and participatory nature of RJ processes that does not label them as ‘criminals’ can avoid labelling and self-identification with a criminal identity leading to desistance
Reintegrative shaming (Braithwaite, 1989)	RJ separates the harm caused from the person who caused harm, shaming the criminal act and not the individual,

Theory and key author	Description of theory and RJ context
Shame and rage (Scheff & Retzinger, 1991)	allowing them to understand the harm within a process that is respectful, involves them, and is fair. RJ facilitates the acknowledgement of shame and harm by all stakeholders that lead to relationship repair and recidivism reduction as social bonding, treatment by the authority delivering sanctions, and societies' reaction to these shapes individual emotional responses to shame and sanction. Further shame and cycles of anger that can lead to violence may occur when shame is not acknowledged during sanctioning processes.
Procedural justice (Tyler, 1990)	When RJ ensures fair treatment of offenders it can increase the likelihood that they will respect the law in the future, thereby making the methods of the police and courts more effective if community perceptions and experience of these systems is transparent.
Defiance theory (Sherman, 1993)	Through a relational focus that acknowledges shame, with consequences that are viewed as legitimate and fair, RJ processes and outcomes can prevent future offenses occurring
Interaction ritual theory (Collins, 2004)	RJ processes involve the sharing of space, emotions, understanding, and purposeful focus where all participants are involved that can lead to improvement in individual confidence, group commitment to norms and values, and feelings of goodwill

These theories intersect in a range of ways that encompass both purist and maximalist definitions of RJ, with different focuses on the various roles of outcomes and processes. Sherman (1993) combines elements of procedural justice (Tyler, 1990) and references the role of shame (Braithwaite, 1989; Scheff & Retzinger, 1991). These multiple approaches reinforce the earlier claims that currently no single theory can encompass RJ (Daly, 2003; Van Camp & Wemmers, 2013). However, Sherman et al. (2015a) note that for their systematic review, interaction ritual theory (Collins, 2004) was key for limiting the scope of their review to those cases where a victim has been identified. This is due to the systematic review considering only the process of conferencing, which is one of many RJ approaches used and advocated for within international and national guidance documents. These can include indirect 'shuttle' RJ processes where facilitators go between stakeholders, 'quasi-restorative' referral order panels where a victim may not attend, and victim surrogate programmes in cases of 'victimless' crimes.

(United Nations, 2020; Crown Prosecution Service, 2023). Furthermore, the point at which a restorative justice programme is initiated during a criminal justice process can vary, occurring at any point during a CJS process, and even as a diversion away from formal involvement (United Nations, 2020; 41). However, as highlighted in the international breadth of chapters contained in Maglione, Marder, and Pali's edited book on institutionalisation (2024), the ability to undertake RJ at different parts of the CJS is constrained by national laws, constitutions, and long-standing policies of which there are many global variations (Soulou, 2024).

The College of Policing document (2022) is vital for empowering evidence-based policing by connecting RJ theory explicitly to practice, which is a key agenda for public services like the police, to ensure their actions are informed by research (Sherman et al., 2015a). However, there are concerns about the type of research designs applied to develop evidence-based policing, which appear at odds with the intersectional use of theory evident in RJ, and which has been accused of neglecting practical and theoretical interdisciplinarity and requiring greater methodological pluralism to address 'wicked' problems and complex socio-political contexts (Lydon, 2022). By clarifying the range of theories that can be used to justify RJ, the College of Police are essentially advocating for RJ whilst also positioning it within their own remit and control by using the language of the CJS, terms such as 'criminals' and 'offenders' in their application of the theory to RJ (College of Policing, 2022). It also focuses on the reduction of reoffending, suggesting that this is the only avenue where RJ has value, instead of the range of practices that improve outcomes, and the level of satisfaction it gives participants compared to the traditional and punitive approach taken by the CJS. This publicly available document (College of Policing, 2022) serves as an example of the debate around institutionalisation, a top-down approach that shapes the narrative of RJ, for many this subjugates RJ and presupposes the dominance of the CJS by actively associating RJ with language that does not align with the values and principles it espouses.

2.3 Institutionalisation of RJ

The on-going debate around how RJ is defined, and in turn how it is measured, has laid the groundwork for another debate, that of institutionalisation. Institutionalisation is understood as being how RJ services are “integrated into criminal justice processes, used as an instrument of penal policy, and in practice more professionalised and standardised” (Butler, Maglione, and Buchan, 2022: 2). Institutionalisation then is a term for describing what happens to RJ services. In practice, the implementation of RJ services is deeply contextual in terms of local and national laws, norms and values, but it usually occurs in one of two ways: top-down or bottom-up (Hobson & Payne, 2022). Top-down is usually driven by policy and politicians and aligns with a maximalist definition of RJ, whereas bottom-up is usually driven by citizens in their communities, and aligns with a purist definition (McCold, 2000).

Academics argue that institutionalisation has occurred in “virtually all Western countries and in a large number of other states around the world” over the last 40 years leading to the extent that “earlier visions and promises” connected to a purist RJ definition have in fact “given way to a more instrumental and institutional variety of RJ practices” (Wood & Suzuki, 2016:1). Indeed, this global manifestation of RJ institutionalisation has occurred in a range of different ways, clearly expressed in two comprehensive edited books written on the topic (Aertsen, Daems, & Robert, 2013; Maglione, Marder & Pali, 2024). Between them they illuminate institutionalisation in Australia and New Zealand (Wood, Suzuki, & Tauri, 2024), Belgium (Aertsen, 2013), Italy, (Mannozi, 2024), France (Faget, 2013; Soulou, 2024), Netherlands (Blad, 2013), Brazil (Rosenblatt et al., 2024), United States (Lanni, 2024), Canada (Roach, 2013), and Germany (Willms & Malzahan, 2024).

The above authors outline a range of competing views on the value of institutionalisation, with many of the arguments laid out by these authors contained in paper three (Fisk, 2025b), but for many authors institutionalisation is seemingly at odds with a purist bottom-up values driven definition of RJ (McCold, 2000; Llewellyn et al., 2013) or a

“principles-based approach” of just relations that goes beyond the formal justice system (Llewellyn, 2021: 385). Integration has occurred in the context of a spectrum of purist and maximalist approaches, with a range of different community and political starting points, that highlights how institutionalisation of RJ is far more complex than a theoretical dichotomy would suggest. There exist a range of intersecting positive and negative effects that have occurred resulting in a range of opinions on the quality of such integration in various nation states (McCold, 2000; Woods & Suzuki, 2016; Aertsen, Daems, & Robert, 2013; Maglione, Marder & Pali, 2024; Fisk, 2025b).

The ‘elasticity’ of RJ as a concept and the range of competing definitions (highlighted in section 2.2.1), is a key reason why processes and outcomes can be shaped to meet the needs of the respective organisations where they are being enacted (Marder, 2020: 502). Research that explored institutionalisation of RJ in Scotland found that practitioners challenged the narrow dichotomy of ‘purism’ and ‘maximalism’ in the expansion of RJ nationally in their advocacy for a locally sensitive but coordinated approach consisting of local and bottom-up processes alongside national referral pathways (Butler, Maglione and Buchan, 2022). Much of this was identified as stemming from scepticism of their governments approach, serious issues with the allocation of funding, and the perceived “impossibility of detaching RJ from the criminal justice system” (Butler, Maglione and Buchan, 2022: 17).

Work that offers critique of RJ institutionalisation draws on the field of transformative justice to identify further matters that relate to mainstreaming of RJ within the CJS (Llewellyn, 2021; Rossner & Taylor, 2024). The relational nature of RJ, it is argued, should take a systematic and structural approach to addressing harm at all the relational levels where it occurs (Llewellyn, 2021: 386). Between the two papers they identify multiple stakeholders that are involved in how RJ addresses ‘particular incidents of harm’ and the ‘interpersonal dynamics of an offence’ that takes places within the context of ‘embedding the practice within institutions

of criminal justice’ (Rossner and Taylor, 2024:363), highlighting a range of socio-ecological levels where addressing harm takes place (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

These concerns go beyond purism and maximalism and speak to a ‘movement’ approach to RJ (Johnstone, 2008; Kirkwood, 2022), identifying the potential for institutionalisation to limit the transformative potential of these practices. Not just at an individual level, limitation that prevents RJ being able to address macro level structural harm, inequality, and violence caused by the very institutions and structures it becomes embedded within (Llewellyn, 2021; Rossner and Taylor, 2024). Furthermore, institutionalisation of RJ could become corrupted and in turn strengthen potentially corrupt and violent institutions (Rossner and Taylor, 2024:363). Llewellyn goes further still, highlighting how a restorative approach “conceptually informs policy, practice, procedures, structures and systems” (Llewellyn, 2021:391) and requires a relational theory of justice to enable transformation of the justice system, a paradigm shift, that acknowledges that the work of justice must be “simultaneously interpersonal and structural all of the time” (Llewellyn, 2021:392). Llewellyn argues for a form of deinstitutionalisation, based on this relational theory of justice, that goes beyond RJ subsuming the current CJS to impact on all of society through “proactive and continual attention in all the spheres, places and spaces – across systems and social structures. Restorative justice must be secured in education, labour and workplaces settings, in environmental policy and protection, in economic development and infrastructure” (Llewellyn, 2021:385).

2.3.1 Professionalisation and standardisation

The professionalisation of standards and frameworks for practice are an important example of institutionalisation. RJ has expanded globally in this context, with international legal instruments being at the forefront of this. The Council of Europe (1999) Recommendation on Mediation in Penal Matters and the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Restorative Justice Programmes (Economic and Social Council, 2002) are key components of this initial expansion

and recognition. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Handbook on Restorative Justice Programmes (UNODC, 2006, 2020) and Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)8 concerning restorative justice in criminal matters have continued this further.

A policy-as-discourse analysis identified how bodies such as the Council of Europe (COE), United Nations (UN), and European Union (EU) have adopted managerial approaches focused on standardisation, bureaucratisation, and professionalisation to address their citizens' needs that ultimately benefit and reinforce the power of the state and their criminal justice institutions (Pali & Maglione, 2021). As RJ is co-opted and shaped by state policy, dominant cultures and practices, a tension between RJ values and the dominant punitive, managerialist ideologies within the criminal justice system emerges (Marder, 2020; Pali & Maglione, 2021; Maglione, Marder & Pali, 2024). By foregrounding certain issues in policy, while excluding other possible 'problems' and 'solutions', much like Case (2021) argued has occurred in Youth Justice, RJ has evolved into a 'pre-set product service' and 'individualistic penal mechanism' that is antithetical to RJ values and principles (Pali & Maglione, 2021: 525). Indeed, there is a 'risk of hardening what is intrinsically flexible and informal' (Mannozi, 2024: 99).

In Germany, institutionalisation has led to the embedding of a public standardised service (Willms & Malzahn, 2024). However, a 'deadly embrace' has occurred where the values of RJ have meshed with the logic and procedures of the dominant CJS leading to marginal RJ use and neglect of indirectly affected individuals (Willms & Malzahn, 2024: 193). A public standardised service has existed in Norway for over 15 years, but awareness of RJ continues to be low (Rasmussen, 2024), which should be an important caution for countries like Italy where recent law reforms have aimed to ensure 'consistency', that will enable RJ providers 'to comply with the standards identified by the law to ensure homogeneous quality and uniformity of services' (Mannozi, 2024: 98). In countries like Canada and New Zealand, VOM programmes and FGCs have been established and developed from Indigenous practices to facilitate dialogue and understanding between stakeholders in an offence (Connolly, 2006;

Morris & Maxwell, 2019; Umbreit, Coates & Vos, 2004; Stewart et al., 2018). However, the appropriation of Indigenous narratives by ‘plastic shamans’ to sell a ‘restorative justice product’ that reasserts settler-colonial control through professionalisation has minimised the transformative potential of RJ whilst reinforcing discrimination and systemic racism (Tauri, 2023: 46-48).

One of the earliest reports advocating for the integration of RJ principles within the criminal justice system, ‘Restorative justice options for Northern Ireland: A comparative review’ (Dignan & Lowey, 2000) has the aim to keep at risk young people from entering the formal justice system through early intervention (Payne et al., 2010). This report resulted in the conferencing model becoming a core recommendation of the Criminal Justice Review (2000) that went on to be implemented in Northern Ireland. The highly contextual nature of institutionalisation can be seen in the work of Keenan (2003), who noted that the work of Dignan and Lowey (2000) argued community was oppressive in Northern Ireland, and for any RJ programme to have legitimacy it would require criminal justice system integration. They argue that this undermined the potential for former paramilitaries in the community to be involved in justice matters, further exacerbated by the requirement for schemes to be accredited by state apparatus, which both Nationalist and Republican community RJ projects refused to engage with (Keenan, 2003: 58-59). Keenan goes on to cite the Northern Ireland Office (2002), who stated that ‘schemes which set out to deal with criminal matters and which do not attain accreditation pose a serious threat to the human rights of those involved and risk undermining the rule of law’ (Keenan, 2003: 59). It is clear from the example of Northern Ireland that institutionalisation is not a neutral process, indeed it has been argued that it manifests as another form of social control which obliterates and sterilises the cooperative-transformative approach that makes RJ different from and more effective than traditional approaches in criminal justice (Maglione, 2021).

In the UK, the work of the RJC has been at the centre of developing standards and frameworks for practice, addressing the role of individual practitioners, services and organisations, and those responsible for delivering training (RJC, 2016a; 2016b; 2020a; 2020b; 2020c). The RJC continues to adopt an approach to standards that is encapsulated in a blog post by the former CEO Jon Collins as they departed the organisation in July 2017. Collins explicitly highlights the concerns around institutionalisation, whilst making a case for the mandatory implementation of standards (RJC, 2017):

‘There are concerns in the field about mandatory standards stifling innovation and looking to impose a one-size-fits-all approach to service delivery. This is, however, misguided. Standards ensure quality and as restorative practice develops, a guarantee of quality is essential. Starting with the justice sector, I would therefore like to see standards become mandatory for all providers. This should be aligned with work to better support practitioners to develop their skills, ensuring a professionalised workforce delivering high quality restorative practice.’

Whilst the RJC may be considered literally and figuratively the standard-bearer of RJ in the UK, the lack of a statutory footing means that this position is not set in stone. The publication of the ‘RJ4All Restorative Justice Practice Framework: Values, definitions & statutory compliance’ (Gavrielides, 2024), which purports to offer a ‘scaffold (not a monolithic set of standards)’ (Straker, 2024) appears to suggest that the current standards (presumably those of the RJC) are imbued with indivisible power that are slow to change, and in turn inflexible to the needs of those using them. The existence of competing frameworks and standards highlights a very real and recent variation in how restorative work is perceived and then actualised and may indicate further marketisation of RJ (Wood & Suzuki, 2016).

The debate around institutionalisation may lead some to question the extent to which it can be stopped or prevented; however, it has been argued that the focus should now be on how best this integration can be maximised when it has already been implemented on a global scale

(Suzuki, 2023). In practice, it could be argued that institutionalisation can be rolled back in the examples of the elimination of funding to the RJC, the lapsing of MoJ RJ action plans, the inability to include RJ in the wording of the Victims and Prisoners Bill (2024), and the continued discretion afforded to PCCs on funding RJ services, as seen in significant funding variations between PCCs (Why Me? 2022), which could lead to further cuts or service abolition. However, in terms of delivering evidence informed professionalised practice, an increasing number of organisational bodies promote RJ theory for staff (College of Policing (2022)), but academics have expressed concerns that institutions have power to implicitly define ‘restorative’ and in turn legitimise it through their implementation shaping the narrative around success and the types of goals it can achieve (Wood & Suzuki, 2016). For example, the College of Policing actively promote RJ and have developed documents to support learning about RJ theory for police. However, the language they use and the theories they select to publicise may prevent wider reading around the topic of RJ, or infer that specific lenses are the only way to think about RJ and leave unquestioned the embedding of RJ and subsumption to the values of the police (College of Policing, 2022).

Stepping back and adopting a systems perspective suggests a reinterpretation of the ‘ebb’ and ‘flow’ of RJ (Marder et al., 2023), the dominant system continuously seeking equilibrium despite the disruptive inputs of RJ. Whilst Suzuki (2023) highlights the impracticality of deliberate attempts at deinstitutionalisation, the cycles of learning that have been taking place for over 50 years of modern RJ development suggest that a cycle of institutionalisation and deinstitutionalisation may be continuous unless there is a deliberate attempt to operationalise these concepts to prevent co-option. A critical stance may suggest that the debates around definition are a system-wide tactic used to distract practitioners, services, and the sector at large. Thus, the issue of those with real power through capitalism not being held to account for social harms caused is ignored, which continues to sustain an oppressive CJS that leads to the taming of the transformative potential of RJ for addressing harm between

individuals and in society at large. The increasing marketisation adopted in institutionalisation would suggest a close relationship to the tenets of capitalism. Deinstitutionalisation if taken far enough could be used as a tool to try and shut down the entire international RJ movement.

2.3.2 McDonaldisation, Marketisation and Managerialism

Expanding upon the idea of RJ becoming a product, further concerns have arisen about the practical extents of further institutionalisation and professionalisation, particularly in the context of the CJS. McDonaldisation as a concept describes the bureaucratic process of implementing fast-food principles of efficiency, calculability, predictability, work force control and profitability within social institutions globally (Bohm, 2007). The implementation of standardised and evidence-based approaches in a large-scale business way, where services are essentially franchised out to different areas, and are not developed within the local community by members unlikely to have formal credentials has been referred to as the McDonaldisation of RJ (Wadhwa, 2016). Whilst a fully franchised model has not been implemented in the UK, RJ services are frequently commissioned externally on a competitive marketised basis with several larger providers holding multiple PCC contracts across different geographical areas (Marder et al., 2023).

Research evidence has highlighted how some practitioners have felt pressured to deliver RJ within tight timescales, reinforcing concerns that institutionalisation could and indeed has for many led to the prioritisation of efficiency, service growth, and case processing at the expense of victim and offender needs (Umbreit, 1995; Jones & Creaney, 2015). Furthermore, the focus of multiple evaluations and subsequent promotion by the sector of outcomes related to cost-efficiency suggest this financial component is essential for many stakeholders (Shapland, Robinson, & Sorsby, 2011; APPG-RJ, 2022a; Grimsey-Jones et al., 2023). There are inherent issues with McDonaldisation and marketisation of services, with ‘restorative’ rebranding of piecemeal programmes that only include partial stakeholders and processes, and

do not address the full spectrum of harm (Umbreit, 1999; Wood & Suzuki, 2016; Marder et al., 2023).

McDonaldisation of the criminal justice system outlines the role of bureaucracy and the application of management principles to control criminal justice officials. In the UK, the New Labour government policy and the implementation of New Public Management (NPM) is responsible for the institutionalisation and normalisation of managerialism across the CJS in areas such as policing and prisons (McLaughlin, Muncie, & Hughes, 2001). NPM has resulted in the implementation of a hegemonic empirical evidence-base that has resulted in methodological reductionism, oversimplification of complexity, the restriction of conceptual lenses and the relative exclusion of competing explanatory paradigms and empirical methodologies in relation to crime, but especially that of youth justice (Case, 2018; 2021). Recognition of the socially constructed nature of the CJS and neo-liberal strategies of crime control through New Public Management (NPM) have led to systemic shifts in youth justice provision (Case, 2021) and resulted in the adoption and implementation of 'child first' youth justice. Within this model, Restorative Justice (RJ) is extensively used, focusing on strengths, relationships, and the systemic structural factors involved in crime. (Case, Browning, & Hampson, 2024; Hobson, Twyman-Ghoshal, Banwell-Moore, & Ash, 2022). Definition in terms of processes and outcomes, and measurement through economic and impact evaluations, have been shaped by the dominant NPM approach, which aimed to be a generalisable one size fits all method focused on improving service quality, expenditure, efficiency, and effective implementation which came to be embedded in organisations such as the OECD (Hood, 1991; Larbi, 1999).

Responsibilisation is a key neo-liberal strategy where children, families, and communities are assigned the primary responsibility for offending behaviour and their inability to desist, and for general exposure to criminogenic influences (Case, 2021: 4). This process of assigned cause and effect is further manifested using logic models within service

implementation which can neglect wider complexity and structural harms (Lowe & Wilson, 2015). This is an issue that RJ as a sector needs to consider further as it highlights how processes to repair harm between individuals and their relationships could neglect the structural violence that is responsible for placing process participants together (Case, 2021: 4). This is particularly in the case of restorative questions, where authors such as Howard Zehr (2002) have been instrumental in developing. Indeed, some models of RJ explicitly use the question ‘Who is responsible for this repair?’ (Bazemore & Umbreit, 2001:1), and the conferencing script which was used in the development of services that contributed to the Shapland Trials used the model O’Connell is credited for bringing to the UK from Wagga Wagga, Australia (Zinsstag, Teunkens, & Pali, 2008:59) with the question “What do you think you need to do to make things right?” (O’Connell, Wachtel, & Wachtel, 1999). Other services have employed a broader range of questions that do not responsibilise by asking ‘What needs to happen now?’ (Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, 2019:5-8). The diverse range of questions highlight a challenge in marketisation that occurs at the service implementation stage, prior to service delivery, as a restorative model or training package commissioned will shape the approach taken in practice and could reflect any of the myriad definitions and approaches that have been outlined in this literature review. Gavrielides noted that the original implementation of RJ in the 1990s was because of effective marketing practices that involved both ‘exaggeration’ and ‘overstatement’ of the potential success of RJ (2008: 171).

2.4 Evidencing RJ

2.4.1 What is being evidenced

To understand whether something has been a success, and outcomes have been achieved, recording, monitoring, and evaluation are required to enable an assessment to be undertaken. Success is defined as a ‘favorable or desired outcome’ (Merriam-Webster, n.d.) and ‘the achieving of the results wanted or hoped for’ (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). Within the RJ sector there exists a wide range of theories and definitions which highlight different results,

outcomes, and successes that can be achieved. As identified in 2.2.1 and 2.2.2, there exist competing views and interests about what RJ is and how it is done. Furthermore, a range of different practices are also identified (2.2.3) that may impact on the types of outcomes that can be achieved due to the context of a specific process.

The role of Paul McCold in developing restorative justice internationally cannot be understated (McCold, 1998, McCold, 2000; Wachtel & McCold, 2001; McCold & Wachtel, 2003). However, their role in shaping what is recorded and monitored within these practices is less popularised. Their protocols for evaluating restorative justice programmes (McCold, 2000: 18) offered a range of independent, intervening, and dependent variables to be used to understand the effectiveness of any RJ programme as services developed more formally on a global scale. The challenge of overcomplication in operationalisation is addressed, and concerns about data standardisation are outlined at this early stage of development. Measurement of outcomes is extensively considered, noting that ‘when’ to measure outcomes is a key issue, with differing approaches having a range of benefits and limitations, especially around victim satisfaction (McCold, 2000: 19-21). McCold is also cited as being involved in the shaping of how practitioners record their work, espousing a minimal recording approach in online professional forums that deviated from the norm of meticulous record keeping used in areas such as social work (Roche, 2003).

McCold identifies key variables at the case level and programme level (Table 3) that could be standardised and used to compare services if they did not have access to ‘moderately large research budgets’ (2000: 22). McCold also suggested ‘simple one-page’ satisfaction and fairness questionnaires could be used to measure ‘success from a restorative perspective’ incurring minimal further expense (McCold, 2000: 22).

Table 3: Minimal types of data that should be collected at RJ case and programme level
(McCold, 2000: 22)

Case level data	Programme level data
1. the type/nature of case (e.g. adult/juvenile, diversionary or not, theft/assault/other)	1. the type of intervention (e.g. mediation/circle/conference with/without private time)
2. facilitator time in preparing conference	2. number of cases referred
3. length of conference	3. sources of referral
4. number of participants	4. number of cases participating
5. nature of agreement	5. number of agreements reached
6. the reason for cases referred but not conferenced, (offender/victim refused, etc.)	6. number of agreements completed

Alongside case and programme level data about RJ intervention, further guidance exists on the practicalities, costs, and key professional and ethical issues offered to those interested in setting up and running RJ schemes in the sphere of criminal justice (Shapland, Robinson, & Sorsby, 2011). Designing and Implementing Restorative Justice in Scotland (Hamad et al., 2020: 17) offers a general definition of monitoring, explicitly linking it to quality assurance:

‘... routine processes for gathering basic data on the service’s operation, ensuring that processes are being followed and recorded correctly, and keeping track of the volume, flow and nature of cases being dealt with. This happens on a regular, ongoing basis as part of the service’s operation.’

The resource does not seek to define the data that should be captured but acts as a reflective tool for those designing services, asking the question ‘What data need to be gathered and stored about each RJ case?’. However, it does go further to note that ‘data must include details of the person(s) harmed, the person(s) who have harmed, facilitators and all contacts, as well as referrers and outcomes.’

Amidst guidance and expertise, the lack of a statutory footing for RJ in the UK means overarching guidance on what to record and monitor is limited. The RJC address recording and monitoring in their Service Provider Registration Framework (2020b) and suggest service providers should base their decisions on what to record in line with local needs and encourage the use of professional judgement on such matters. Evidence suggests individual PCCs set their

own data recording requirements but rely on quantitative data with a cost and efficiency focus that comes at the expense of evidencing service effectiveness (APPG-RJ, 2021a).

2.4.2 How is it being evidenced

Data recording, ‘the routine documentation of cases and what happens to them’ (Shapland, 2022) by practitioners and services is fundamental to the act of monitoring, which is ‘a basic duty of all schemes offering restorative justice and is part of being accountable to all those using the schemes’ (Shapland, 2022). Evaluation then, takes data that has been collected from recording and monitoring to identify ‘whether the scheme or provider is achieving its aims’ (Shapland, 2022). The nature of the aims is where approaches to evaluation can vary significantly, as Shapland (2022) goes on to point out, a service can have several different aims, and these aims can vary between services, but a research method must be selected in relation to the key aims.

Shapland’s guidance comes from extensive experience in the field of RJ evaluation, as principal author of what have been referred to colloquially across the sector as ‘The Shapland Trials’ (Grimsey Jones, et al., 2023). These trials consist of evaluations of three restorative justice services in England, funded by the Home Office and MoJ, which form the basis of positive evidence that led to the expansion of services across the UK (Shapland et al, 2004; 2006; 2007; 2008). The importance of these trials in the narrative of UK RJ cannot be underestimated. This is further emphasised by the fact that the major findings of these studies for the effectiveness and efficiency of RJ are cited more than any other research by contributors to the 10 APPG-RJ inquiry initial hearings (2022b). The specific findings referenced included: the financial savings in terms of reduced re-offending being considerably more than the cost of running the schemes (£9 savings for every £1 spent) representing value for money; participation by offenders reduces the frequency of re-offending; and victims who took part are more satisfied with the criminal justice response than those who did not, with over 80% satisfied with the process and outcome (Shapland, Robinson & Sorsby, 2011). The evidence

contributes to wider evaluations and systematic reviews that offer further evidence of success in RJ, particularly in terms of recidivism, cost-effectiveness compared to traditional CJS processes, participant satisfaction and feeling better off from participating in an RJ process, emotional and material restoration, and individual perception of victims healing from psychological harm (Strang et al., 2013; Sherman et al., 2015a).

Building on the work of the UK Home Office that expanded cost-benefit to consider the economic and social costs of crime (Heeks et al., 2018), further evaluations have built on the economic case for RJ by expanding the concept of cost benefit to the CJS by including the impact of crime on other aspects of society, such as the cost of physical and emotional harm, lost output as an individual victim, health services, and victim services (Grimsey-Jones et al., 2023). Research identifies a social benefit-cost ratio for direct and indirect RJ interventions for victims and offenders post-sentence in England and Wales of £3,394 per direct intervention using a base case estimate for the social benefit-cost ratio of restorative justice is £14 per £1 invested, with a direct return to the criminal justice system of £4 as a result of substantial reductions in reoffending (Heeks et al., 2018: 15; Grimsey-Jones et al., 2023: 9). Grimsey-Jones et al. note (2023: 7) that the economic and social costs of crime report do not consider ‘crimes against society’, where a victim is disembodied (Pali & Maglione, 2021), giving examples such as drug or motor offences, but offer the caveat that these types of crime are rarer in terms of RJ usage, whilst also not meeting the criteria for their economic evaluation which focuses on an ‘index offence against an individual (Grimsey-Jones et al., 2023: 7). These comments are especially pertinent when considering the challenges of any form of evaluation, which as Shapland (2022) highlights must be undertaken in relation to the key aims, as they are in effect narrow windows at a specific point in time, with a specific set of criteria, for providing evidence of outcomes.

RJ services in the UK, unless in the rare case they are run by a charitable or private organisation with their own independent funding, sit within the context of the public sector and

are operated per policy guidelines and plans in the wider context of their setting, be that CJS, prisons, education, health or social work. To understand the outcomes that can be achieved and the success of RJ within these contexts, they can be assessed in terms of policy implementation in three areas: process; programmatic; and political success (Marsh & McConnell, 2010). A focus on outcomes in the public sector of the UK has seen a drive towards understanding success using outcomes-based accountability (OBA) which purports to provide a model for implementing this approach to deliver results for public services (Friedman, 2005). OBA has seen large scale adoption at both local and national levels and publicly advocated for by some within the research and charitable sector (Cook, 2017; National Children's Bureau, n.d.; Orme, 2021; Kelly, 2023). Indeed, OBA has contributed towards favourable evaluation evidence concerning implementation of RP within children's services that ultimately supported further implementation of restorative values and ways of working beyond voluntary FGC processes and services into the practices of statutory social work teams (Mason, et al., 2017; Harris, Tinarwo & Ramanathan, 2020).

However, criticism of the academic rigour and limited evidence base of OBA have been raised by academics. Concerns arise about narrow analysis occurring in practice due to a focus on limited indicators and a single outcome, the inference of linear movement between process and outcomes which oversimplify cause and effect between process and outcome without context of the wider complex systems and potential extraneous variables (Bovaird, 2014; Lowe & Wilson, 2015; Gray & Birrell, 2017). Further concerns exist about the way OBA is applied in practice, with evidence suggesting inconsistent application as organisations have adapted key aspects of Friedman's original model, and the potential for distortion when used internally due to challenges in agreeing outcomes and indicators, and potential for data manipulation and context stripping to produce desired results (Flynn, 2012; Gray & Birrell, 2017). Whilst growing in popularity, other outcome-based models have been applied to understanding success in RJ, notably logic models and outcomes frameworks.

The document ‘Designing and Implementing Restorative Justice in Scotland’ outlines a logic model to support the design of RJ interventions which visually separates inputs, outputs, and outcomes and identifies logical links between these that help those involved in implementation understand the data needed to explore whether RJ worked as intended through process and outcome evaluation (Hamad et al., 2020: 20-21). Multiple outcomes frameworks exist across the health and care sectors which employ a range of indicators to identify data trends whilst monitoring service performance and outcomes (Outcomes Based Health, 2019; NHS England, 2024; GOV.UK, 2013). There is a developing trend particularly in the health sector where outcomes frameworks are being employed in the context of whole systems approaches (WSA) (Public Health England, 2019; 2020; Public Health Scotland, 2024). WSA approaches build upon the critique of OBA from authors such as Lowe and Wilson (2015), who argue that ‘the outcomes public service organizations are commissioned to deliver are not independently produced by those designing interventions or services but from the systems in which they are embedded’ (Lowe et al., 2021: 574). WSA purport that users of health, social care, education and criminal justice often have significant complex needs, and traditional approaches to measuring service performance and outcome delivery neglect the complex human element, the requirements for services to learn through performance management and evaluation, and need for a wider systems context for social interventions that goes beyond single organisations and requires awareness at the commissioning and funding levels when designing interventions to produce desired outcomes (Lowe et al., 2021: 574-575). The WSA approach used by Public Health England (2019) has been cited in the work of Banwell-Moore (2024) to support effective RJ implementation in the CJS to support ‘systemic change and a fundamental cultural shift’ (Banwell-Moore, 2024: 1041) across the entire CJS to support institutional buy-in to RJ, adoption of a victim focus, and simplification of referral processes to RJ services.

2.4.3 Restorative success

Claims for a fundamental cultural shift in how RJ is implemented and then used in the context of the CJS (Banwell-Moore, 2024) suggests that RJ is something other than business as usual. The concept of institutionalisation and arguments around the extent to which this should take place, and what should be measured and analysed to make claims of success in terms of the RJ sector itself or the overarching CJS, lay the groundwork for claiming that success in RJ is subjective (Doak & O'Mahoney, 2018). The favourable and desirable results and outcomes of RJ can vary significantly within the sector and in the context of the CJS, and there is no current uniformity as these ideas continue to develop.

Within the sector itself, types of success and outcome can vary if a view aligns with a purist, maximalist, or a movement definition of RJ, in terms of whether a better way of doing justice has been achieved by using a restorative process, or the achieving of a specific outcome, or whether a wider cultural shift in thinking that embraces restorative values has occurred within individuals, groups, or society at large (Marshall, 1999; Walgrave, 1998b, 1999; Johnstone, 2008). Furthermore, the idea that there is 'success from a restorative perspective' (McCold, 2000: 22) highlights broader external concepts of success that RJ works within, and that ways of measuring outcomes and success can be from a non-restorative perspective such as that of the dominant CJS, which reinforces the existence of multiple perspectives and value judgments involved in understanding success within RJ.

Reflecting this perspective of a success that is distinct for RJ, the 'agency-accountability framework' (O'Mahony & Doak, 2017) offers five common benchmarks for success in RJ that can be employed in the context of mainstreamed service provision that has been subject to institutionalisation within the CJS. These benchmarks consist of rates of participation, engagement, satisfaction, restoration and reducing recidivism. Recidivism is a key outcome used as evidence of success in RJ (Strang, et al., 2013; Sherman et al., 2015a), but increasingly authors are highlighting an argument for RJ to move beyond this as they

question the moral and empirical value of such a measure, calling for evaluation to focus on best practice standards, that would in turn require a shift to incorporate both qualitative and quantitative methods for understanding success within this context (Cunneen & Luke, 2007; Rossner & Taylor, 2024; Weisberg, 2013).

The ‘restorativeness’ of a service and the development of a restorative index to quantitatively rate this, has been claimed to also help understand and prevent co-option of RJ by punitive systems (Olson & Sarver, 2022: 941). The restorative index focuses on assessing the restorativeness of the programme mission and implementation, with several corresponding subgoals (Olson & Sarver: 961). An assessment of the program mission seeks to understand the extent to which a programme or service addresses harms and/or builds relationships, by making an assessment as to whether it identifies specific interpersonal harms, the needs of stakeholders arising from those harms, the assignment of obligations to repair harms, and engagement with essential people in doing so (Olson & Sarver, 2022: 961).

An assessment of implementation addresses inclusion, encounter, amends, reintegration, and transformation (Olson & Sarver, 2022: 961). Inclusion assesses whether essential people have the opportunity be involved, whether they have programme information, and whether participation is voluntary. Encounter considers the processes used, whether they are safe and respectful, use restorative dialogue, ensure equality of all participants in decision-making, and the attending essential people consist of the person harmed, the person who harmed, family and support groups, and the community. Amends assesses whether a mechanism to facilitate apology or restitution exists. Reintegration assesses mechanisms for ensuring physical and emotional safety post-encounter and removing or reducing stigma of participants to support acceptance of the person. These include the development of competencies and skills for any essential person involved, and follow through in terms of monitoring change and verifying outcomes to assure restitution and accountability. Finally, transformation is assessed in relation to whether the programme is a system-wide replacement to the traditional system or an

indigenous community level model, or whether it runs alongside traditional punitive systems, or if it is used as an immediate interpersonal tool between two individuals where harm occurred that does not include other essential persons or impact on changing the wider system (Olson & Sarver, 2022: 962).

Olson and Sarver (2022: 966) note the potential for their restorative index to be used to improve outcome assessments through the implementation of restorativeness as either an independent variable or a dependent variable in service evaluations and other studies. The index can be used to identify whether the degree of restorativeness has influenced outcomes, and whether it can be associated with better outcomes, leading to more valid claims around the effectiveness of RJ. Furthermore, specific types of broader outcomes that have been used to demonstrate the effectiveness of RJ can be analysed to see identify whether specific components of the index contribute to outcomes such as satisfaction or recidivism.

2.5 Summary

This section has outlined the current RJ landscape to contextualise the need to examine approaches to recording and monitoring outcomes within restorative justice in the UK and identify innovative approaches to evidencing success. Key literature that underpins this thesis has been identified that demonstrates the range of RJ definitions, values, and practices from around the world. These are placed within the context of criminological theory that seeks to understand how RJ functions when working with victims and offenders. The role of institutionalisation, managerialism, McDonaldisation, and marketisation are addressed as they have the potential to impact on the implementation of restorative processes. Global contexts where institutionalisation has occurred are outlined. It is demonstrated how these concepts are connected to a range of RJ definitions, alongside academic arguments around the extent to which institutionalisation should occur. Academic literature and practice guidance that address methods for evidencing RJ are explored to identify current approaches to recording and monitoring, and how these are connected to institutionalisation.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Introductory comments

This chapter will outline the key methodological components of this project. An interpretivist, constructivist ontology and epistemology is selected (3.2) as the subjective and contested nature of these components requires the input and commentary of persons working within the sector with inherent bias and issues of validity incumbent addressed (3.3). A qualitative multi-method approach is employed for this thesis (3.4). Documentary analysis (3.4.1), online survey (3.4.2), and interview methods (3.4.3) are used to collect data which are analysed thematically. The sample is outlined (3.5) and data collection techniques are addressed for the documentation sample (3.5.1) and both the survey and interview methods (3.5.2). The approach to thematic analysis and coding of the data is outlined (3.6). Ethical considerations for the methodology including strengths and weaknesses of the design are also examined (3.7). Finally, the publications that constitute the documentary evidence for an integrated PhD thesis are briefly introduced (3.8).

3.2 Research design

This research employs a qualitative methodology using the methods of documentary analysis, online survey and semi-structured interview, due to the underlying assumptions of the research author that reality is socially constructed and inherently subjective. Authors have developed a range of characteristics that constitute qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018: 81-83), and this works aligns with a qualitative methodology by leveraging multiple methods to identify multiple perspectives and meaning, using inductive and deductive logics in analysis of data, and acknowledging the context-dependency of participant experience garnered from social, political, and historical realities.

The idea that reality is socially constructed, multi-layered and complex rather than singular and verifiable, aligns with social constructivism and interpretivism (Cohen et al., 2005). The interpretivist paradigm claims that individuals construct their own reality based on

personal experiences and social interactions, meaning that all knowledge is subjective and contextualised (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Bacon, 2005). Additionally, social constructivism emphasises that reality is shaped through social interactions and shared understandings, suggesting that there is no single objective reality but multiple subjective realities (Crotty, 1998). Knowledge is seen as a product of social processes and interactions. This constructivist approach emphasises that understanding emerges through the interpretation of human experiences and is context-dependent, and by seeking to understand the world that restorative practitioners live and work, and to interpret their construction of meaning in success reaffirms this as a social constructivist project (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interpretivism focuses on understanding the subjective meanings individuals attach to their experiences, highlighting the importance of context and the role of the researcher in interpreting these meanings (Bell & Bryman, 2007). The subjectivity of RJ success, lack of standardisation, and the devolved marketised approach to RJ service implementation in the UK (Doak & O'Mahony, 2018; APPG-RJ, 2022a; Marder et al., 2023) highlights the need to analyse and interpret multiple organisational and individual definitions and meanings within a range of contexts.

3.3 Research bias and validity

From an axiological standpoint, this research acknowledges that the documents created by practitioners and then used in practice will be embedded with language and meaning that will be context-dependent (Bassey, 1999). Furthermore, analysis of documentation, survey and interview data collected with participants will be fundamentally value-laden (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This work chooses to acknowledge these facets, and to analyse and discuss these within the contexts of the aims of this research, using a reflexive approach that seeks to reduce bias whilst acknowledging it may not be entirely removed, as these may have impacted on the interpretation of the author through their own subjective experience as a practitioner (Davis, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

3.3.1 Author positionality

As stated by Creswell & Poth (2018:35) ‘All researchers bring values to a study, but qualitative researchers make their values known in a study’. The values of restorative practice drive this author, and as such their interpretation and analysis is shaped by their experience practising in the field. This includes values of identifying restorative, forward-looking outcomes by giving participants a voice and listening to their story, understanding diverse narratives to achieve integrative truth, and promoting accessibility and respect (United Nations, 2020; EFRJ, 2021; RJC, 2012).

By identifying as a restorative practitioner, the researcher acknowledges the inherent issues related to being an insider within this sample population (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). This could manifest in the shared understanding of terminology and the logistical and emotional synergy from undertaking a demanding job role. However, these assumptions could negatively impact the quality of this work if not clarified or elaborated upon effectively for the reader. Other components of identity may indicate the researcher as an outsider. These include being a registered Social Worker, former Independent FGC Coordinator, and Head of Boarding. The application of RP in children's social care and international boarding schools in South Korea and China means that those working in criminal justice may perceive the researcher as an outsider. This could impact the credibility of the researcher, and the work produced, requiring clarification with participants to ensure assumptions are not made that could prejudice the findings.

The author defines themselves as a pracademic due to their professional practice background as a restorative practitioner and registered social worker, informing the methodology, analysis, and theoretical lens adopted in this study (Hollweck, Netolicky, & Campbell, 2021; Gartner, 2024). This experience facilitates an understanding of recording and monitoring tasks involved in anti-oppressive work with citizens, enabling the humanisation of research and sustaining an ethical awareness of institutional inequalities (Strier, 2007; Shapland,

2022). RP and RJ are complex relational ways of working, and whilst embedded in many areas, continue to operate on the edges of statutory sectors, incurring long-standing issues with awareness and understanding (Ministry of Justice, 2012; Shapland, 2014). As a pracademic, it is crucial to create a safe interview space for contextual understanding of conversations that enable purposeful development of relationships and research that could foster future collaboration (Baldwin, 2024).

RJ draws practitioners from various professional human service disciplines with disparate approaches to documentation of work, necessitating a careful semi-structured interview approach that fosters relationships while preventing leading questions and interviewer effects (Adams, 2015; Husband, 2020; Twyman-Ghoshal & Hobson, 2022:11). Professional background information is mutually shared during interviews, and open questions are used to clarify responses or acronyms, as previous research has identified distinct and overlapping terminology used when RJ services report their data (Fisk, 2023).

Having these multiple identity facets means the position of a practitioner, as opposed to a researcher, could further impact the credibility of this research with participants or other academics. While striving to be research and evidence-informed throughout professional practice, merging these identities into one of 'pracademic' provides a complementary balance that can strive to meet the needs of both sample populations and the researcher (Baldwin, 2024). Positionality also connects to the different career roles the author has held at varying organisational levels. The author acknowledges from experience their own cognitive closure to organisational and sector-based knowledge that evolves through learning and practice.

3.3.2 Data validity

A process of validation is undertaken in this research which is strengthened through feedback on publications that are peer-reviewed, created in collaboration with other authors, or involved a data debrief with stakeholders (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). During research, the use of open and honest discussion with participants about the meaning of

documents and the content of their survey and interview responses is undertaken (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In doing so, this research employs three lenses, that of the researcher, the participant, and the reader or reviewer to validate the data and the findings (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Evidence is corroborated using triangulation across multiple methods and multiple stakeholders (Yin, 2009). Indeed, thematic analysis involves the locating of codes and themes from different data sources and triangulating that data to demonstrate validity of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participant feedback and member checking throughout the research process is essential for ensuring credibility and acts as further layer of triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.4 Research methods

For this multi-method study, three methods are employed. Documentary analysis is employed to review and analyse reporting templates used by RJ services (3.4.1). Online survey is used to capture data from a range of practitioners about their definitions of success in RJ by asking them to define effectiveness, efficiency, and impact in their restorative work (3.4.2). Semi-structured interviews are used to explore the journey of data within practice, and to contextualise how recording and monitoring relate to individual and service definitions of success in restorative work (3.4.3).

3.4.1 Documentary analysis

Documentary analysis involves systematically reviewing and analysing a range of documents (Bowen, 2009; Padgett, 2016). Documents used by RJ services are 'social facts' because of how they are produced, shared, and used in practice (Atkinson & Coffey, 2004). In this research, the documents used are reporting templates that RJ services use to deliver data about practice to those who commission and ultimately oversee the service. Further details about the documents analysed are included in Fisk (2023), under section 4.2.1 of this thesis. The meaning of such documents must be actively constructed through interpretative analysis, contextual examination, to understand meaning in textual discourses and how people construct

reality and access the 'official' language used by organisations (Carter, 2005; Gorsky & Mold, 2020). In this research context RJ services may use the same or disparate terminology, acronyms, and timescales for record-keeping. Given that documents can shape views, perspectives, attitudes, and behaviours (Gorsky & Mold, 2020), researchers must treat them as contextual, complex, and potentially problematic (Carter, 2005), requiring corroboration before making broad statements (Gorsky & Mold, 2020) which is undertaken via triangulation with other research methods.

3.4.2 Survey

The survey (appendix 4) is administered via Google Forms and received seventy (n=70) responses. Further details concerning the breakdown of participants is included in the methodology section of Fisk, Hobson & Twyman-Ghoshal (2025), under section 4.2.3 of this thesis. Participants are asked to define success criteria using these questions:

- “What does it mean for restorative work to be 'effective'?”
- “What does it mean for restorative work to be 'efficient'?”,
- “What does it mean for restorative work to have 'impact'?”.

This design enabled explicit separation of responses by category for data analysis. Respondents also described their current professional roles related to restorative work, their affiliated organisations, the countries where these organisations are based, and whether these organisations conduct direct restorative work with service users.

Fully qualitative online surveys are an underutilised method that offer flexibility and advantage to researchers and participants but have been perceived to lack depth within the context of the dominant qualitative method of interviewing (Braun et al., 2020). They can garner rich and complex accounts of subjective experiences and practices that access individual terminology and language of the participant yet simultaneously offer a ‘wide angle lens’ on the research topic (Frith, 2000; Toerien & Wilkinson, 2004; Braun & Clarke, 2013).

This approach is well suited for the research aim and the sample population of RJ practitioners, who are geographically dispersed nationally and internationally due to the nature of their localised work, offering an affordable data gathering tool that captures multiple perspectives to support wider inference and a degree of generalisation (Braun et al., 2017; Terry et al., 2018). Furthermore, they are unobtrusive and less demanding in terms of social pressure and interview effects, less burdensome than face-to-face methods, and offer more control to the participant in terms of how, when, and where they participate which is vital for ensuring uptake of those delivering RJ within a demanding work environment (Braun et al., 2020).

However, valid concerns exist about data privacy and ethical issues using online surveys, coupled with many of the strengths around flexibility potentially leading to response fraud, disinterest, and potential bias (Singh & Sagar, 2021). The less burdensome approach can result in poor attention to detail when reading to understand the survey requirements, that can impact the validity of online survey findings (Chandler et al., 2020). A further criticism is ensuring the survey receives a representative sample, and whilst this is difficult due to the voluntary nature of research, attempts to achieve this must be outlined (Zhou et al., 2021) and have been done so in the case of this research in section 3.5.2.

3.4.3 Semi-structured interviews

Interviews are conducted either in-person (n=2) or via Microsoft Teams (n=18), each lasting between one and two hours. All interviews are recorded with the consent of the participants, and followed a general design (appendix 5). Following brief introductions and outlining the participant job role and organisational contexts, they are asked to “describe the journey of data in your service from the earliest point of collection”. Participants are prompted to elaborate on any aspects of their recording and monitoring processes and to describe "what happens next?" in these processes. Although framed in the context of a linear three-stage model, participants used their own language to describe restorative processes, such as meetings, interventions, and conferences and the types of outcomes that are achieved and how these are

recorded and reported (Restorative Resources, 2015). Clarifying questions are asked to ensure that the researcher understood the participants' meanings, especially when acronyms or technical terminology are used.

Semi-structured interviews have several key strengths, flexibility allows for a balance between structured and unstructured approaches, providing a framework with predetermined questions while allowing for the exploration of new themes that arise during the interview. This flexibility can lead to richer and more nuanced data as current research into the practice of RJ practitioners and recording and monitoring is limited, focusing on the facilitation of processes, which are distinct from the human experience of recording and monitoring what has been done (Restorative Resources, 2015; Clark, Foster, Sloan, & Bryman, 2021). Furthermore, they enable careful targeting, allowing the researcher to rephrase questions, seek clarity, and explore emerging themes to focus directly on the research questions and illuminate causal relationships to focus directly on the research questions and illuminate causal relationships (Yin, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The open-ended nature of the questions enables participants to express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences in detail, building rapport between the interviewer and the participant, encouraging open and honest dialogue (Clark, Foster, Sloan, & Bryman, 2021). Interviews offer unique insights and understandings of participants' perceptions interviews elicited subjective views, providing rich, high-quality data as the researcher could prompt and probe for clarifications and additional information when needed (Seidman, 2006; Mack et al., 2005).

Conducting and analysing semi-structured interviews can be time-consuming, requiring significant effort in transcription, coding, and analysis (Mack et al., 2005; Bryman, 2016). However, potential biases must be carefully controlled which can be occur when questions are not used effectively, resulting in misunderstandings and poor rapport, or leading questions (Oppenheim, 1992; Yin, 2009; Cohen et al., 2005). The flexibility of the method can introduce

interviewer bias, as the interviewer's reactions and interpretations can influence the data (Clark, Foster, Sloan, & Bryman, 2021).

3.5 Sample and data collection

3.5.1 Documentation sample

Six digital templates are analysed using qualitative documentary analysis methods, supported by Nvivo 12 software, to understand what data RJ services collect and report to PCCs. Recording and monitoring methods serve as primary data sources for systematic review and evaluation through documentary analysis (Bowen, 2009). These documents are sourced from contributions to the APPG-RJ inquiry (2022a, 2022b) and are considered commercially sensitive documents by their owners. As such, permission was not granted to share these documents as part of the thesis, but permission was granted to analyse them and contribute findings to academic research. Further information concerning the methodology can be found within paper one (Fisk, 2023).

3.5.2 Survey and interview sample

70 practitioners self-identified as working in Restorative Justice and Restorative Practice, collected between September 2022 and April 2023. The survey is distributed using a non-probability purposive sampling method, targeting respondents working within organisations that deliver restorative practice to facilitate broad participation, minimise administrative challenges for the researcher, enhance convenience for busy professionals, and eliminate interviewer effects (Clark, Foster, Sloan, & Bryman, 2021).

Publicly accessible contact information of registered practitioners and organisations with the RJC and FGC service providers from the FRG are utilised to identify individuals involved in restorative practice or justice work. These organisations, which are sector representatives involved in training and advocacy for restorative approaches, are contacted directly by email. The survey is shared on social media platforms Twitter and LinkedIn using common industry hashtags like #RestorativeJustice and #RestorativePractice. Charities and

interest groups in the field of restorative justice and practice are contacted via email and social media, requesting them to share the survey with stakeholders. In addition, author attendance and presentations at sector events and conferences facilitated the sharing of the survey with potential participants.

Twenty participants (n=20) consented to participate in semi-structured interviews. A purposive sampling strategy is employed to select seventeen active RJ service professionals from a pool of 70 respondents who participated consensually in the online survey and consented to be contacted further. Participants are contacted directly by e-mail. A second process of consent is undertaken prior to all interviews. Three further participants are identified by interview participants as being able to illuminate other aspects of recording and monitoring. Consenting participants contacted their colleagues directly to enquire about availability and willingness to participate, where upon information and consent forms were shared prior to any further interviews.

3.6 Coding and thematic analysis

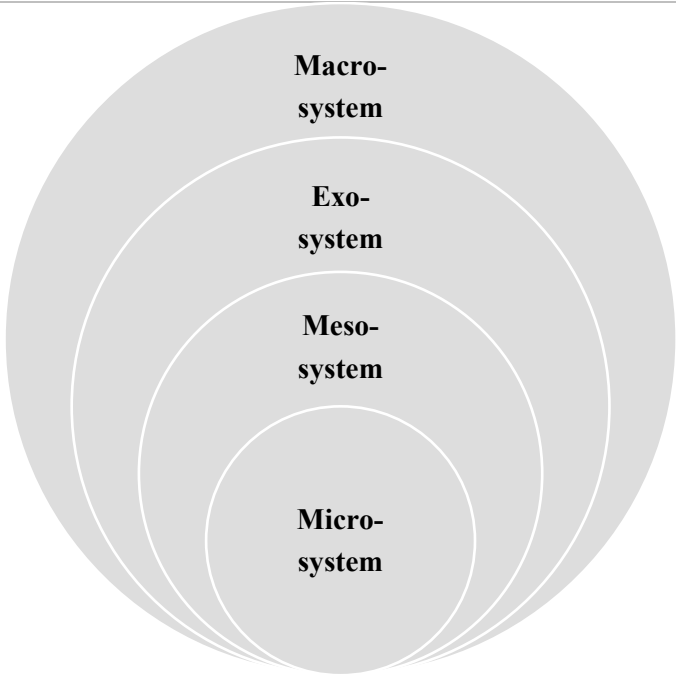
Two thematic analysis (TA) approaches are used across the publications which contribute to this thesis. Authors have historically distinguished between inductive (bottom-up) TA used to identify and analyse initial themes, and deductive TA (top-down) using previously identified codes and themes or application of a theoretical framework to a dataset (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Proudfoot, 2023). All the papers use an inductive approach to generate codes for compiling themes and subthemes, however paper three (Fisk, 2025b) employs an additional layer of deductive analysis through implementation of a socio-ecological systems (SES) lens (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1994). This results in a hybrid TA where the same set of qualitative data is analysed through a systematic linear combination of inductive and then deductive thematic analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). These approaches will now be outlined.

TA is undertaken using an inductive approach where themes and subthemes are constructed from codes identified in the dataset, which consists of reoccurring words and phrases (Bryman, 2008; Clarke & Braun, 2013). NVivo 12 is used for analysis to support efficient coding, collation of themes, and general organisation of the data. An inductive approach is taken for the initial rounds of coding and analysis, including a particular focus on similarities, differences, and repetitions (Ryan & Bernard, 2003) of headings and metrics used with RJ service reporting templates, practitioner definitions of effectiveness, efficiency, and impact derived from the survey, and the content of semi-structured interviews concerning recording and monitoring processes.

A hybrid approach is an iterative and reflexive process that offers greater rigor in qualitative data analysis from mutual reinforcement (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Proudfoot, 2023). The deductive SES lens applied the context of multiple stakeholders and layers of society to the purpose of data recorded by RJ service recording and monitoring processes in a way that highlights relationships and influence (Bronfenbrenner, 1979: 1994; Pranis, 2013). The SES lens aligns with a whole systems approach (WSA) by enabling the understanding of the parts actors play in the broader systems of implementation, governance and practice (Public Health England, 2019; Stansfield et al., 2020; Banwell-Moore, 2024). The SES lens is explored at length in paper three (Fisk, 2025b) and the original model is visible in figure one.

Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner socio-ecological systems model

	Macro-system: The overarching pattern of micro-, meso-, and exosystems characteristic of a given culture or subculture.
	Exo-system: The exosystem comprises the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings, at least one of which does not contain

	the developing person
	Meso-system: The mesosystem comprises the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person
	Micro-system: A pattern of activities, social roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting
Bronfenbrenner (1994: 39-40)	

3.7 Ethics

This thesis received project approval and ethical clearance from the University of Gloucestershire and adhered to British Sociological Association standards of ethical practice (BSA, 2017). Informed consent is ensured at all stages of the research process through the completion of consent forms, and participants are made aware of their right to withdraw. Any participants who engaged in further research are asked to consent again to ensure they fully understood the purpose of each research method. For example, any survey participant who previously consented and is subsequently selected to engage in a semi-structured interview is requested to complete another consent form and confirm they had read and understood the information sheet.

3.8 Publications

The publications are presented here in chronological order of publication.

Table 4: Summary of research publications for this thesis.

Publication	Summary
Paper one: (Fisk, 2023)	Title: <i>What Are Restorative Justice Services Recording? Qualitative Analysis of Six Restorative Justice Reporting Templates for Offices of the Police and Crime Commissioner in England</i>
Appendix 11 (170-197)	Method: Documentary thematic analysis of RJ service reporting templates Key findings: Significant variations in terminology and measures of success used across six RJ services. Focus on quantitative count data of process components for victims and their demographics as demanded by MoJ. Research objective(s) addressed: <i>RO1: Identify the organisational methods used to record and monitor outcomes within restorative practices in the UK.</i> <i>RO3: Analyse the alignment between practitioners' success criteria and organisational outcomes.</i>
Report one: (Hobson, Fisk, Hook & Jaffé, 2023)	Title: <i>APPG for Restorative Justice RJ Workstream 4: The commissioning, collection, and dissemination of evidence-based research in Restorative Justice and Restorative Practice & the benefits of a national reporting framework.</i>
Appendix 12 (198-201)	Method: Multi-method thematic analysis of survey, interview, and service reporting documents Key findings: Three recommendations made to expand and support regional RJ networks, further explore a national reporting framework for RJ, and to embed the evidencing of success across commissioning and reporting for services. Research objective(s) addressed: <i>RO1: Identify the organisational methods used to record and monitor outcomes within restorative practices in the UK.</i> <i>RO3: Analyse the alignment between practitioners' success criteria and organisational outcomes.</i> <i>RO4: Identify innovative approaches for evidencing success within restorative practices</i>
Paper two: (Fisk, Hobson & Twyman-Ghoshal, 2025)	Title: <i>Effectiveness, efficiency, and impact in restorative justice: Navigating the subjective and objective to evidence success</i>
Appendix 13 (202-243)	Method: Thematic analysis of 70 online survey responses Key findings: Success in RJ is subjective as effectiveness, efficiency, and impact definitions vary between practitioners. Analysis of definitions indicates perception of a link between efficiency achieved through high quality practice, that leads to both subjective and objective outcomes that can occur at any point in a process. Impact can be measured through participant self-reporting and external observation. Definitions suggest a nuanced approach to working with institutionalisation, whilst highlighting its' negative impact through quantitative CJS metrics that are at odds with those

Publication	Summary
	that accord with RJ values and subsequently neglect the measurement of personal transformation regardless of stakeholder role.
	Research objective(s) addressed: <i>RO2: Explore the criteria that practitioners use to define success</i> <i>RO3: analyse the alignment between practitioners' success criteria and organisational outcomes.</i> <i>RO4: Identify innovative approaches for evidencing success within restorative practices</i>
Report two: (Fisk, 2025a)	Title: <i>Recording Success and Successful Recording: Practitioner and Service Perspectives.</i>
Appendix 14 (244-282)	Method: Multi-method thematic analysis of service reporting documents, semi-structured interviews, and online survey responses. Key findings: Logistical data challenges in RJ service recording and monitoring processes impact practice efficiency and availability of RJ practice and services due to structural barriers and organisational gatekeepers. This occurs due to restrictive data policy and procedures, inconsistent RJ service designs, complexity within the practicalities for data use, and the quality, validity, and reliability of data collected. Research objective(s) addressed: <i>RO3: Analyse the alignment between practitioners' success criteria and organisational outcomes.</i> <i>RO4: Identify innovative approaches for evidencing success within restorative practices</i>
Paper three: (Fisk, 2025b)	Title: <i>The purpose of data in restorative justice: a socio-ecological systems lens.</i>
Appendix 15 (283-338)	Method: Thematic analysis of 20 semi-structured interviews Key findings: Institutionalisation and managerialism shape recording and monitoring processes, types of data collected, and reasons for collection. Subjective success definitions vary between socio-ecological system levels. The macro-level Ministry of Justice controls data submissions and demonstrates ambivalence towards leveraging RJ service data to evidence RJ success. Research objective(s) addressed: <i>RO2: Explore the criteria that practitioners use to define success</i> <i>RO3: Analyse the alignment between practitioners' success criteria and organisational outcomes.</i> <i>RO4: Identify innovative approaches for evidencing success within restorative practices</i>

3.9 Summary

The methodology section has outlined the social constructivist and interpretivist research design, addressing the role of author positionality and concerns about bias and data validity within this approach. The selected methods for collecting data are documentary analysis, online survey, and semi-structured interview. These have been justified in relation to the research aims and objectives and the overarching research design. A non-probability purposive sampling method is employed to gather all data. Inductive thematic analysis is the primary method used to analyse data; however, a hybrid thematic analysis is used to employ both inductive and deductive analysis through a SES lens understand the purpose of data collected by RJ services. This work complied with all ethical guidelines.

4.0 Publications

4.1 Introductory comments

This integrated thesis includes five publications which are all located within the thesis appendices (Appendices 11-15: 170-338). The thesis author is the primary author for all but one of these documents (Fisk, 2023; Fisk, Hobson & Twyman-Ghoshal; Fisk, 2025a; Fisk, 2025b). The thesis author is second author for the APPG-RJ workstream four report, tasked with contributing significant analysis and involvement in drafting the final report (Hobson et al., 2023). The details of these publications, consisting of three academic peer reviewed papers and two published reports will now be outlined.

4.1.1 Paper one (Fisk, 2023)

Fisk, B.M. (2013). What Are Restorative Justice Services Recording? Qualitative Analysis of Six Restorative Justice Reporting Templates for Offices of the Police and Crime Commissioner in England. *Laws* 2023, 12(2), 28; <https://doi.org/10.3390/laws12020028>

This publication (Appendix 11: 170-197) contributes to the research aim and objectives by identifying the organisational methods used to record and monitor outcomes within restorative practices in the UK and identify innovative approaches for evidencing success within restorative practices. This documentary thematic analysis of RJ service reporting templates identifies significant variations in terminology and measures of success used across six RJ services, and a focus on quantitative count data of process components for victims and their demographics as demanded by MoJ.

4.1.1 Report one (Hobson, Fisk, Hook & Jaffé, 2023)

Hobson, J., Fisk, B.M., Hook, K. and Jaffé, L. (2023). *APPG for Restorative Justice RJ Workstream 4: The commissioning, collection, and dissemination of evidence-based research in Restorative Justice and Restorative Practice & the benefits of a national reporting framework*. All Party Parliamentary Group for Restorative Justice. Available at <https://rjappg.co.uk/briefing-papers/>

This publication (Appendix 12: 198-201) contributes to the research aim and objectives by identifying the organisational methods used to record and monitor outcomes within restorative practices in the UK, analysing the alignment between practitioners' success criteria and organisational outcomes, and identifying innovative approaches for evidencing success within restorative practices. Three recommendations are made to expand and support regional RJ networks, further explore a national reporting framework for RJ, and to embed the evidencing of success across commissioning and reporting for services.

4.1.1 Paper two (Fisk, Hobson & Twyman-Ghoshal, 2025)

Fisk, B.M., Hobson, J., and Twyman-Ghoshal, A. (2025). Effectiveness, efficiency, and impact in restorative justice: Navigating the subjective and objective to evidence success. *International Journal of Restorative Justice*.

This publication (Appendix 13: 202-243) contributes to the research aim and objectives by exploring the criteria that practitioners use to define success. Thematic analysis of 70 online survey responses identifies effectiveness, efficiency, and impact as contested terms within practice. Many practitioner definitions are not reflected effectively in current recording and monitoring processes, particularly in terms of the measuring practice quality and the subjective impact RJ has on participants.

4.1.1 Report two (Fisk, 2025a)

Fisk, B.M. (2025a). *Recording Success and Successful Recording: Practitioner and Service Perspectives*. Restorative Justice Council: Norwich.

This publication (Appendix 14: 244-282) contributes to the research aim and objectives by identifying the organisational methods used to record and monitor outcomes within restorative practices in the UK and identifying innovative approaches for evidencing success within restorative practices. Thematic analysis of 20 interviews highlighted a range of logistical challenges around data in RJ service recording and monitoring processes that impact the efficiency and availability of RJ practice and services. These include data policy and

procedures, RJ service design, practicalities of data use by practitioners, and the quality, validity, and reliability of data collected. Report two emerged from a range of identified themes that are grounded in the day-to-day experience of practitioners and the routine logistics of the recording and monitoring tasks they undertake. Feedback from the CEO of the RJC was received on 4th March 2024.

4.1.1 Paper three (Fisk, 2025b)

Fisk, B.M. (2025b) The purpose of data in restorative justice: a socio-ecological systems lens. *Contemporary Justice Review*.

This publication (Appendix 15: 283-338) contributes to the research aim and objectives by identifying organisational methods used to record and monitor outcomes within restorative practices in the UK, analysing the alignment between practitioners' success criteria and organisational outcomes, and identifying innovative approaches for evidencing success within restorative practices. Thematic analysis of 20 interviews identifies impact of institutionalisation and managerialism on recording and monitoring processes which have shaped the types of data and reason why these are collected. Compatibility of RJ with top-down metrics explored in the context of institutional ambivalence from the MoJ collecting data but not using it publicly.

5.0 Discussion

5.1 Introductory comments

The documents and publications contained in this integrated thesis address the research aim to understand current approaches to recording and monitoring success within restorative justice in the UK and identify approaches for evidencing success by examining practitioner perceptions of success and their relationship with organisational data. The findings build upon the policy and practice consultation of the UK APPG-RJ (2022a, 2022b), and the academic literature concerning measurement, evaluation, and institutionalisation (Shapland, Robinson, & Sorsby, 2011; Llewellyn et al, 2013; Doak and O'Mahoney, 2017; O'Mahoney & Doak, 2018; Maglione, Marder & Pali, 2024) by demonstrating through empirical research the concept of subjectivity of success in restorative work, how this impacts recording and measurement practices, and the practical impact of these decisions which are grounded in organisational cultures, managerialism, institutionalisation of RJ and macro-level ambivalence towards data produced by services and submitted to the MoJ. This work offers potential avenues for coordinating and improving evidence of RJ success.

5.1.1 Addressing the research objectives.

The research objectives are directly addressed, including further interpretation and analysis with connection to the literature. Additional claims for original contribution will follow, and finally potential implications and limitations of these recommendations will be addressed.

The research objectives are referred to in numerical order as per the following:

1. To identify the organisational methods used to record and monitor outcomes within restorative practices in the UK.
2. To explore the criteria that practitioners use to define success.
3. To analyse the alignment between practitioners' success criteria and organisational outcomes.

4. To identify innovative approaches for evidencing success within restorative practices

5.2 Research objective one: identify the organisational methods used to record and monitor outcomes within restorative practices in the UK.

The publications which contributed to this research objective are:

- Paper one: Fisk (2023), What Are Restorative Justice Services Recording? Qualitative Analysis of Six Restorative Justice Reporting Templates for Offices of the Police and Crime Commissioner in England.
- Report 1: Hobson, J., Fisk, B.M., Hook, K. and Jaffé, L. (2023). APPG for Restorative Justice RJ Workstream 4: The commissioning, collection, and dissemination of evidence-based research in Restorative Justice and Restorative Practice & the benefits of a national reporting framework.

5.2.1 What do the papers say?

Report one identified concern about an extensive range and volume of data being collected by RJ services with significant variations in the types of data and approaches to collecting and formatting the documents produced to share said data (Hobson et al., 2023). Consensus is identified from RJ sector representatives that a national reporting framework would be beneficial if designed collaboratively, could be applied contextually, and is not burdensome in task. This would enable the generation of a standardised, reliable, and valid dataset to enable sector wise comparisons, and enable cost-effective evaluation through making data publicly available.

Paper one (Fisk, 2023) analysed six reporting templates from individual RJ services. These templates are used for reporting service performance data to the respective PCC, which is in turn used to report to the MoJ on VCOP (MoJ, 2021) requirements. A key finding is the divergence in language used to measure a range of common metrics across the different

services, and different approaches to counting these metrics. Further divergence is observed in the presentation and format of templates, and the amount of data that each service reports.

Services report on the timeline of case progression including referrals, participation or engagement with participants, on-going case status whether closed or open, the intervention or process or activity, and signposting or onward referrals. Outputs and outcomes achieved are reported but the way these are described and categorised varies across service templates. For example, some templates have an explicit outcomes section for reporting data, whilst equivalent data in other templates is not separated or highlighted as such. In some instances, outputs and outcomes includes data about case progression. Services are concerned with how many people they work with, as such data about the demographics of RJ participants is captured by some services, but this is done inconsistently, with half of the templates (n=3) not including this in their reporting templates. Those that did (n=3) employed different categories for recording data across a range protected characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation. Data concerning service accountability is collected, ranging from quantitative data about the workforce, staff numbers, hours worked, measurements of time across different parts of an RJ process, and training undertaken, and including qualitative data about complaints, lessons learned, and future focus.

Methods have developed from the experience of practitioners and academics, with existing methods observed in this research, despite significant differences in terminology that limit basic comparison, generally according with the guidance given by McCold and cited by Roche (2003), reinforced consistently in further publications concerning the collection of service data for recording, monitoring, and evaluation (Shapland, Robinson, & Sorsby, 2011; Hamad et al, 2020). Interviewees who described participation in regional RJ networks (Hobson et al., 2023; Fisk, 2025a) and others who have moved between services and employment, noted how they have identified differences in methods for recording and monitoring outcomes when they also discuss data and ways of recording. Services, through practitioners, adapt previous

methods and types of data recorded using these conversations and apply new ways to measure outcomes using the guidance and experience of other practitioners working in different areas.

The final theme identified in paper one is of the language of crime (Fisk, 2024), highlighting how the metrics that are applied to restorative justice services are dominated by those of the CJS, suggesting the impact of institutionalisation. The language of offender and victim featured prominently, despite the prevalence of terminology such as ‘harmer’ and ‘harmed’ within RJ parlance that has developed and become common place (Braithwaite, 1989; Rossner, 2017; Procter-Legg, Hobson, & Quimby, 2024). Whilst the offender focus metric of reoffending is tracked explicitly in two of the reporting templates, different approaches are taken to tracking this data, over a defined period up to two years or a simple count of how many have or have not reoffended post-RJ intervention. However, as identified in interviews with practitioners (Fisk, 2025b), despite some services collecting data about reoffending, this data is not requested by the MoJ and is only used at the local level by the RJ service and the PCC. Overall, templates demonstrated a disproportionate focus on victim data across all thematic areas identified in the reporting templates (Fisk, 2023).

Report two (Fisk, 2025a) featured the thematic analysis of interviews that identified four areas that impact on the organisational methods used to record and monitor outcomes. These are the role of data policy and procedures, service design and subsequent impact on data, the practicalities for practitioners working with data, and concerns about the quality, validity, and reliability of that data. Variations in service documentation and design aligned with and expanded upon the findings of paper one (Fisk, 2023). Practitioners highlighted the challenges navigating the identified variations when working with multiple CMS in a single service, engaging with or overseeing different RJ services who use different methods, and moving RJ job role to a different PCC that uses different methods. Participants described how recording and monitoring developed within a service over time, elaborating upon personal subjective preferences, navigating long-standing methods, changing demands from the MoJ. The role of

RJ training from accredited providers is identified as an area where services do not receive input into their organisational methods for recording and monitoring outcomes.

Information sharing and data protection policies and procedures reportedly have a significant impact on receiving referrals (Fisk, 2025a), offering several challenges to applying organisational methods for recording and monitoring outcomes. The number of referrals an RJ service receive is an outcome used within some PCCs (Fisk, 2023) despite the limited role the RJ service has in generating referrals due to the voluntary nature of RJ (Fisk, 2025b) and battling against the notion of an ‘ideal victim’ and external professionals who may gatekeep referrals (Banwell-Moore, 2022). Indeed, practitioners who have access to police facilities described the effort undertaken reaching out to individual officers, being visible and vocal, and going the extra mile developing relationships to increase potential referrals due to the lack of a statutory requirement to refer (Fisk, 2025b). Once a referral has been taken, the professional judgment that an experienced RJ practitioner has that they could positively progress a case towards an outcome can be restricted or closed by gatekeepers such as re:hub within HMPPS, who reportedly do not share information about their own processes and procedures, or recording and monitoring concerning outcomes, but can demand data through a mandatory information sharing agreement (Fisk, 2025b)

Satisfaction with the RJ service is an outcome that is recorded and monitored by services (Fisk, 2025a), and a key outcome within RJ literature where evidence suggests that participants feel more satisfied participating in an RJ process than those of the traditional CJS, although the reasons why this is felt are not adequately addressed in procedural justice theory or RJ literature (Strang et al., 2013; Tyler, 1990; Van Camp & Wemmers, 2013). Practitioners felt unable to accurately understand the level of satisfaction that participants have due to low return rates and concerns about the prominence of extreme satisfaction or dissatisfaction in feedback that is received (Fisk, 2025a). The key outcome for the MoJ is a count measure of number of victims better able to recover and cope with aspects of everyday life, and this is

captured by services using post-process feedback survey data, which are also used to capture service satisfaction data. All services reported the use of feedback surveys with participants, with various approaches to format and distribution, however all services reported low return rates. Services described a range of adaptive approaches to improving feedback rates, these included leaving forms with participants, posting surveys at a later date, online forms, phone calls to gather feedback, and email (Fisk, 2025a). The range of questions also varied, although all services complied with the core ‘cope and recover’ feedback demand for the MoJ, but concerns are expressed about the lack of guidance in how to undertake this, the potential subjectivity of the measure and inability to compare across services, and the absence of analysis and feedback from the MoJ about what they had submitted.

Participants outlined the use of computer management systems (CMS) as a method for recording and monitoring restorative work and evidencing success. Report two (Fisk, 2025a) identified several RJ specific CMS, such as MyRJ, although some services have purchased a generic database and management software to use off the shelf or adapt to meet their individual service needs. Data collected in these CMS correlates with those found in paper one concerning case progression, outputs and outcomes, participant demographics, and data for accountability of their own work and subsequently the RJ service (Fisk, 2023). Data is collated at the service level for reporting to the PCC on an annual basis, which eventually feeds into reporting for the MoJ. A number of services are required to use multiple CMS to record data, whilst some services are tracking data using spreadsheets due to the CMS they are using being primarily for case records that are unable to generate statistical data. The versatility and validity of current CMS to accurately report on data collected emerged as another common barrier to recording and monitoring success (Fisk, 2025a). Multiple services described the need to utilise additional computer software and take time to undertake their own analysis due to multiple cases of faulty or inaccurate reporting.

A key opportunity for evidencing success is identified in the form of case studies (Hobson et al., 2023; Fisk, 2025b), but at present services do not incorporate the submission of these to their CMS. They are created post-hoc as required, and usually on an annual basis for reporting to PCCs and the MoJ. Frequency and amount of these varies between services and depends on overall case numbers, service capacity, marketing strategy if shared on social media, and level of demand from PCC. They are anonymised documents that include key information about the type of case, the process undertaken, and the range of outcomes achieved. However, style and format vary, with services allowing individual practitioners to write these in their own style.

Lack of funding for dedicated, specialist staff to manage data is a common issue for services which results in limited use of recording and monitoring data for understanding success and targeting provision to potentially increase success (Fisk, 2025a). This also feeds into limited resources for advertising such success if services are able to harness data effectively for this. However, larger external service providers can utilise their shared resources across multiple PCCs to undertake this task.

5.2.2 Key findings

There is inconsistency in the language used to record and monitor RJ processes and outcomes that hinders the ability to easily compare and evaluate the performance of services, and to understand the range of potential successful outcomes that be achieved. Whereas literature has highlighted the difference between an output and an outcome in direct relation to RJ (Hamad et al., 2020), reporting templates do not currently make such a clear distinction. Data that should be categorised as a count of outputs, such as how many processes completed, is defined as an outcome within some templates. Likewise, the outcome of satisfaction with a service is not always clearly defined as such.

The lack of standardisation and general guidance is evident across multiple points in the journey of service data for recording and monitoring outcomes in RJ. This finding is not

surprising given the finding from the literature review of paper one that what to record and monitor is mixed (Fisk, 2023). The RJC Service Provider Registration Framework (2020b) deliberately errs on the side of freedom in professional judgement and practice and as such does not prescribe or detail approaches to recording and monitoring as it recognises the need for local flexibility. Given the current position of the RJC that would appear to be appropriate, as a sector-level representative and advocacy organisation, it lacks any statutory footing to dictate a single standardised approach and cannot routinely demand recording and monitoring data from RJ service providers. However, the MoJ with their oversight of the funding that PCCs receive and their role in monitoring compliance with VCOP (MoJ, 2021), can and does demand data, reportedly changing what they demand on a regular basis (Fisk, 2025b). However, the MoJ's limited scope in terms of victim data limits a broader understanding of the outcomes that can be achieved via RJ services, and the RJC does not have the resources or the statutory position to take recording and monitoring data further to more effectively evidence outcomes at a sector level, meaning that recording and monitoring data on a national level cannot be harnessed easily to demonstrate successful outcomes with the reliability and validity that could come with such an expansive dataset.

The devolution of services to individual PCCs and a lack of central standardised guidance from the MoJ about how to carry out recording and monitoring is a key factor that limits the ability of the restorative sector to leverage the basic recommended numerical data (McCold, 2000) on a national level to advocate or self-report for itself due to variations in format, measurement, and CMS. The need for operationalisation of terms and their shared understanding is at the heart of McCold's argument, noting that shared vocabulary must be outlined to enable RJ theory, research, and practice to move forwards (McCold, 2000: 2-3). Using FOI processes to gather information about the data RJ services submit to the MoJ, Why Me? (2022) identified the number of referrals, number of new cases, case referral outcomes, RJ outputs, victims supported, outcomes related to impact on victims, and satisfaction. This

research highlights that services collect a wider range of data than reported by Why Me? (2017a; 2017b), but the MoJ only request a small part of this, whereas the remaining data is used for internal RJ service review.

Furthermore, the lack of synergy at different levels of data, from the practical task of recording data with a member of the public, through to the process of capturing that data within a template for the RJ service, and then reporting that data to the PCC and the MoJ, suggests that individual decisions are made about RJ data that are shaped by subjective perceptions. Such variations in methods suggests that service data is used differently by various stakeholders at the practitioner, service, and commissioner level (Fisk, 2025b). For example, whilst the overwhelming majority of data collected concerns processes and outcomes with members of the public, services are also held accountable in terms of their finances, staffing levels, and the amount of time staff take on specific tasks whilst working with the public (Fisk, 2023), suggesting a distinction between success as an outcome for a participant and success of a service in terms of organisational metrics (Fisk, 2025b).

Recidivism is a key potential outcome of RJ that is often cited as evidence of success in literature (Strang et al., 2013; Sherman et al., 2015a), however most services are not routinely tracking this information, and even when they are, this is not being reported to the MoJ as they only currently track data related to victims. Barriers identified in report two (Fisk, 2025) contribute to this. They concern limited access to wider data, the way services are designed and commissioned that compartmentalises RJ within the broader context of the CJS, and the lack of resources to undertake further data analysis. This is further compounded by the findings in paper one (Fisk, 2023) that highlight the significant inconsistency in metrics across services which results in any attempt to generate and analyse a larger sample on a national level facing issues related to reliability and validity of data (Fisk, 2025).

Furthermore, issues related to recidivism data and compartmentalisation of RJ services can be linked to the impact of institutionalisation. Not only do reporting templates demonstrate

the subsumption of RJ language to that of the dominant CJS and their use of criminogenic language (Fisk, 2023), institutional ambivalence by the MoJ towards evidence of recidivism (Fisk, 2025b) suggests that an outcome that demonstrates the significant impact of RJ does not have the opportunity to be routinely measured due to the devolution of offender data to the local level.

The inconsistent approach to recording crime types addressed by RJ services and demographics of those using RJ services has implications for understanding outcomes. As highlighted by Olson & Sarver (2022) when discussing the importance of variables for evaluating RJ, an inconsistent approach to recording demographic data means it is difficult to analyse and compare data from services about success in terms of types of crime or protected demographic characteristics. Furthermore, the subjectivity of success is present in how individuals are offered the opportunity to engage in RJ as research suggests evidence of an ‘ideal victim’ concept (Shapland et al., 2017; Banwell-Moore, 2022), whereby professionals in the police and youth offending can decide whether to give information about an RJ service or make a formal referral. Whilst it is important to understand how protected characteristics are connected to successful outcomes, it is also important to understand whether these play a role in access to RJ generally and whether those receiving RJ are representative of the community a services works with to prevent discrimination to access by those with protected characteristics.

The position of an RJ service and the methods it uses to record and monitor outcomes must be seen in the context of wider victim services and the needs of others related to outcome. For example, whether an RJ service has ‘signposted’ or ‘referred onward’ to other services is identified as an outcome by services (Fisk, 2023). Whilst similar processes, these have distinct meanings and cannot be considered equivalent for the purpose of service comparison or evaluation. However, the data RJ services produce from this metrics contributes to how a PCCs evidence VCOP compliance (MoJ, 2021). RJ services can support their PCC by providing evidence of adherence with right four, referral to services that support victims and have services

and support tailored to your needs. This example demonstrates how guidance in terms of what to practically record has developed due to external factors outside of RJ itself. RJ literature supports a focus on all participants in a restorative process, even going beyond those harmed and those who have harmed by including essential people such as family members, professionals, and the community (Wachtel, 2016). The data focus identified in this analysis is overwhelmingly on victims at the expense of those who have harmed, or the offender, as is the parlance most frequently used in templates. However, when this context is applied, it suggests that RJ is perceived by PCCs and the MoJ as a contemporary justice mechanism (Daly, 2016) that is applied with limited capacity for delivering outcomes that serve the CJS at the expense of RJ values and principles. This also suggests a limited targeting of RJ that may infer a lack of full understanding at the macro-structural level about the potential for outcomes with stakeholders other than victims.

5.2.3 Summary

- Divergence within common metrics.

Common themes within RJ service recording and monitoring include timeline of case progression, outcomes and outputs, demographics, and service accountability (Fisk, 2023). However, across these overarching areas, variations are observed in quantitative and qualitative data types and amounts, use of language to describe common metrics, overall presentation and format of templates (Fisk, 2023). Furthermore, significant variations are observed between services in the way these metrics are counted which impacts on the reliability and validity of any conclusions drawn from using data collectively in its current form.

- Language and metrics shaped through institutionalisation.

An indicator of institutionalisation is identified in terms of how the language of crime permeated RJ service reporting templates, which is at odds with the values and principles of RJ, and in turn shapes recording for limited use as a contemporary justice mechanism that is focused providing data to support the agenda of the CJS (Daly, 2016; Fisk, 2023). This is also

evident through the victim-focus in service data that aligns with the demand of VCOP and to ensure monitoring towards this right to receive information about RJ, but in doing so neglects the role of any other stakeholder, which is key for RJ processes to be considered as restorative as possible (Wachtel, 2016; Olson & Sarver, 2022).

5.3 Research objective two: explore the criteria that practitioners use to define success

The publications which contributed to addressing this research objective are:

- Paper two: Fisk, Hobson & Twyman-Ghoshal (2025). Effectiveness, efficiency, and impact in restorative justice: Navigating the subjective and objective to evidence success.
- Paper three: Fisk (2025b). The purpose of data in restorative justice: a socio-ecological systems lens.

5.3.1 What do the papers say?

Thematic analysis of survey data in paper two (Fisk, Hobson, Twyman-Ghoshal, 2025) highlighted a range of approaches for defining and measuring success across the domains of effectiveness, efficiency, and impact as outlined in table 5:

Table 5: Themes identified from questionnaire data requesting participant definitions of the evaluation metrics of efficiency, effectiveness, and impact in restorative work (Fisk, Hobson, Twyman-Ghoshal, 2025)

Evaluation metric	Theme	Sub-theme
Efficiency	Practice	Quality
		Skills
		Reliability
		Participant focus
		Time
		Risk management
		Barriers
	Cost	Cost-Effectiveness
		Cost Prevention or Minimisation
	Rejection of efficiency	Hinder process
		Lack of relevance
Effectiveness	Process	Practitioner practice
		Restorative Principles
		Working With

Evaluation metric	Theme	Sub-theme
	Outcomes	Transformation Needs
Impact	Subjective	Defined by participant Felt by the participant
	Objective / Demonstrable	Change / Difference Positive effect Movement

Practice is perceived as fundamental to efficiency, practitioners utilising their skills from training and experience to focus on participants, demonstrate professional reliability and high-quality work. This included undertaking comprehensive risk assessment, careful but contextual time management, and navigation of barriers to process participation to deliver transformation for participants and the meeting of their needs. Interestingly, efficiency through practice quality and cost measures are complemented by a total rejection of efficiency in restorative work by 10 per cent of respondents (n =7) due to the perception that RJ itself is not efficient because of the longitudinal, subjective, citizen-driven, relational nature of the work. In relation to the literature on defining restorative justice, the practice/cost split appears to speak to the purist/maximalist debate (McCold, 1998), as rejection of efficiency could be related to practitioners rejecting managerialism and institutionalisation of RJ within the CJS which would suggest alignment more with purist positions. However, the practice definition may represent a more pragmatic approach that aligns with the findings around nuanced practitioner perceptions of institutionalisation in Scotland (Butler, Maglione & Buchan, 2024).

Effectiveness consisted of two themes, outcome and process, which reflects traditional definitions of restorative justice (Presser & Van Voorhis, 2002). The processes themselves are described in the context of restorative values and principles, and effectiveness is deemed to be in accordance with how processes are enacted as opposed to simply completing a process for the purpose of a count metric. Transformation of a participant and the meeting of their needs is outlined for definitions of outcome, which deviates from count metrics of processes and meetings, but does align with ideas such as recidivism and the MoJ metric of being able to

better cope and recover. Practitioners highlighted a key issue around ‘ownership’ of outcomes, noting that whilst outcomes are owned by the participants alone, services are held accountable for whether outcomes are achieved or not when it comes to reporting (Fisk, 2025a).

Subjective and objective impact emerged which incorporates both the perception of a participant in judging the self-defined impact upon themselves, and an externalised judgment concerning visible or marked changes, differences, or movements for an individual and positive effects within their life. that could include specific countable measures such as scales or observations undertaken by or with a professional. Thematic analysis highlighted both subjective concepts of impact that are individual, self-defined or ‘felt’ by a process participant, and objective concepts that can be directly observed or demonstrated, which can include.

5.3.2 Key findings

The criteria for success identified by practitioners are generally located in the micro-level interactions between a participant and a practitioner. However, several subthemes from the survey data can be connected to the findings of paper 3 (Fisk, 2025b), where a socio-ecological systems approach identified a range of different purposes of data, and in turn different interpretations of success in restorative work such as that of a service or the restorative sector. Efficiency as a measure of success included cost, with subthemes of cost-effectiveness, cost-prevention, or cost-minimisation (Fisk, 2023). Whilst this can be located at the individual level, it is difficult to quantify due to individual differences within cases and the time a process might take, and as such it is generally positioned at the service level rather than undertaken with individual cases. However, estimates of cost-benefit and social cost-benefit can be made at the individual level to support calculation (Grimsey-Jones et al., 2023), but these are not being routinely undertaken in practice and tools such as that devised by Grimsey-Jones et al., require further study and collation to contribute data towards the RJ evidence base. Expensive evaluations have played a significant role in facilitating and highlighting the evidence of this

form of success (Shapland, Robinson & Sorsby, 2011; Strang et al., 2015), which typically accord with institutionalised and managerialist metrics.

The location of practice within efficiency speaks to the importance and adherence to practice standards promoted by agencies such as the RJC (2020b) and the EFRJ (2021) align with these ideas of success, and whilst not explicitly referred to, suggest that the individual practitioner can support the achieving of success despite the structural barriers around evidencing success that have been identified in paper 3 (Fisk, 2025b). Success that is achieved may not necessarily always be reported in ways that align with institutionalised managerial processes but instead live in the practice wisdom and stories of practitioners that goes on to inform future practice.

Subjective and objective impact have the potential to overlap, whereby a practitioner works closely with a participant and supports them to self-define the type of impact and in turn the type of outcome, whether that is an internal feeling or a behaviour that can be considered positive and observed by themselves or others, and where some form of measurement can be applied to identify the amount of transformation, be that in terms of movement, change, or difference over a period of time (Fisk, Hobson & Twyman-Ghoshal, 2025). While objective quantitative data can be achieved through pre- and post-intervention methods, they may not fully capture the richness of the transformation experienced. Therefore, qualitative narrative accounts are essential to offer insights into success.

Recidivism is not a theme which explicitly emerged across the three conceptual areas, although there are incidences of it being mentioned in the survey data, despite it being a key area of success that is attributed to RJ from service evaluations and empirical trials (Strang et al., 2013; Sherman et al., 2015a). However, conversely, transformation in terms of change, movement, and marked difference that can be observed and measured externally does align with the idea of recidivism. Responses to the survey frequently employed participant neutral language that generally avoided naming the harmed or those who caused harm in terms of the

potential to achieve such outcomes. The focus of evaluations has traditionally been on those who have caused harm in terms of recidivism, and the challenges of measuring impact in this context are extensive (Piggott & Wood, 2018; Suzuki, 2023). The finding that impact, in the form of transformation, is not defined as being exclusively for the person who has caused harm or the person who has been harmed, suggests a further potential avenue that needs to be explored rather than a narrow focus on either stakeholder.

5.3.3 Summary

- Nuanced notions of effectiveness intersect RJ definitions

Practitioner criteria for RJ effectiveness incorporate both process and outcome definitions of RJ when considering success. Process criteria are defined in relation to the embodiment of RJ values and principles, and the extent to which these are delivered in practice. Outcomes criteria included personal transformation and the meeting of individual needs. The lack of a single definition of effectiveness reinforces the subjective nature of success in RJ (Doak & O'Mahony, 2018) and offers further evidence that practitioners take a nuanced approach in their interpretation of institutionalisation (Butler, Maglione, & Buchan, 2024) which extends to measures of success, with practitioner definitions leaning towards purist value driven definitions of RJ whilst acknowledging that there are maximalist needs due to the way services have been institutionalised that must be addressed (McCold, 2000).

- Contested notions of efficiency

Efficiency definitions are the most varied in terms of the stark differences in terms of how they are understood. Efficiency includes three themes (Fisk, 2023). Notions of cost that benchmark RJ in comparison to other types of CJS work and feature in traditional service evaluations (Shapland, Robinson & Sorsby, 2011; Grimsey-Jones et al., 2023). Definitions around how high-quality practice is fundamental to efficiency of RJ speak to the role of practice standards and frameworks that are grounded in restorative principles being important for achieving success (Kirkwood, 2022; EFRJ, 2021; RJC, 2020b). Finally, the outright rejection

of efficiency due to such a focus hindering processes or being entirely irrelevant connects with purist definitions of RJ that reject the use of RJ for purely instrumental purposes that subsumes RJ values and principles to meet the needs of the dominant CJS (McCold, 2000; Wood & Suzuki, 2016). Efficiency definitions point most starkly to the challenges of RJ institutionalisation and the range of arguments for and against this progression. These include through compliance with external metrics, doubling down on values and practices to benefit participants, and resistance to top-down managerial approaches that prevent processes taking place and outcomes being achieved.

- Subjective and objective impact

Impact criteria included subjective and objective measures. Subjective impact should be primarily defined by the invested stakeholders and included an emotive and felt component for the individual. Objective measures included elements of transformation, such as change, difference, and positive movement that could be observed and measured. The types of metrics that would be required to capture data about both these objective and subjective measures are not being tracked within the reporting templates RJ services use (Fisk, 2023).

5.4 Research objective three: analyse the alignment between practitioners' success criteria and organisational outcomes.

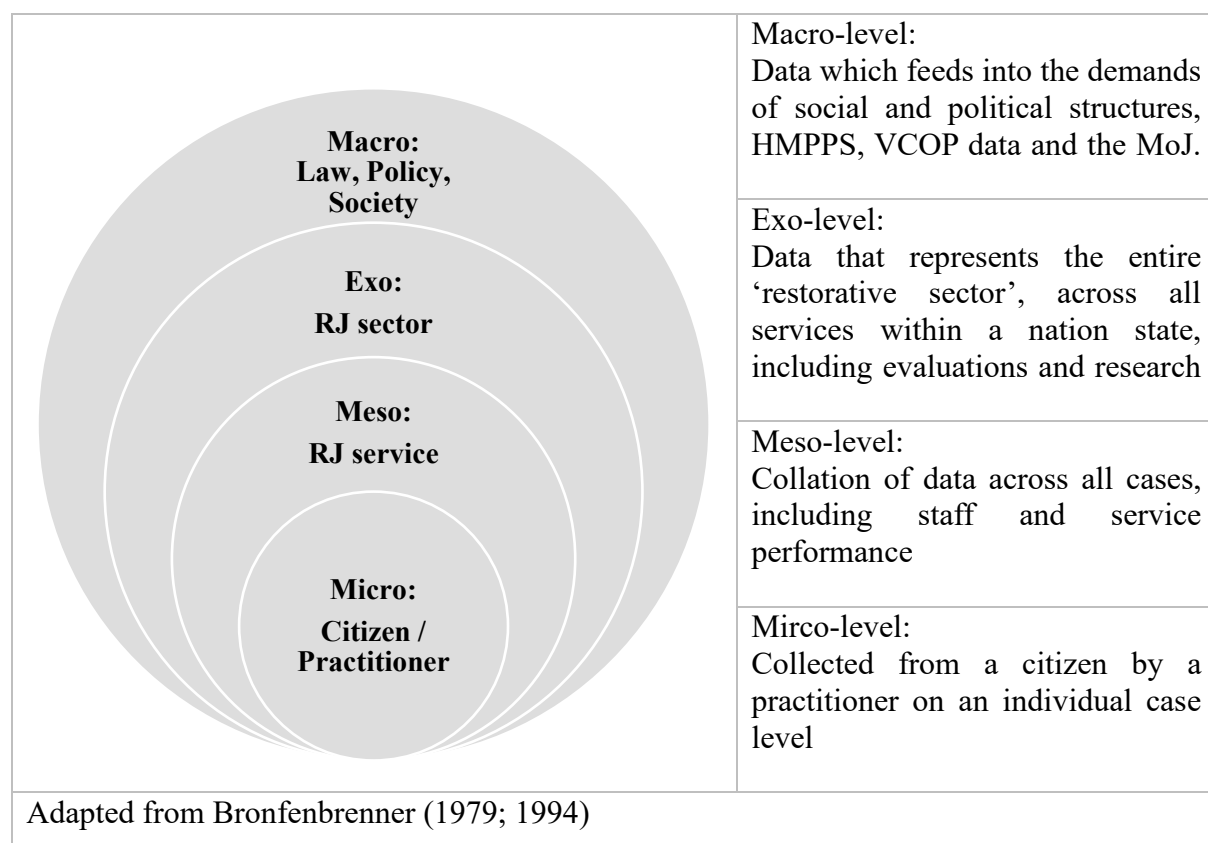
The publications which contribute to addressing this research objective are:

- Paper one: Fisk (2023), What Are Restorative Justice Services Recording? Qualitative Analysis of Six Restorative Justice Reporting Templates for Offices of the Police and Crime Commissioner in England.
- Paper two: Fisk, Hobson & Twyman-Ghoshal (2025). Effectiveness, efficiency, and impact in restorative justice: Navigating the subjective and objective to evidence success.
- Paper three: Fisk (2025b). The purpose of data in restorative justice: a socio-ecological systems lens.
- Report 1: Hobson, J., Fisk, B.M., Hook, K. and Jaffé, L. (2023). APPG for Restorative Justice RJ Workstream 4: The commissioning, collection, and dissemination of evidence-based research in Restorative Justice and Restorative Practice & the benefits of a national reporting framework.
- Report 2: Fisk, B.M. (2025a). Recording Success and Successful Recording: Practitioner and Service Perspectives.

5.4.1 What do the papers say?

The following analysis leverages the findings from the workstream four recommendations (Hobson et al., 2023) alongside the findings from analysis of organisational metrics used in RJ service reporting templates (Fisk, 2023) in the context of practitioner perceptions and definitions of success and the application of a socio-ecological lens to contextualise the purpose of RJ service data for different professional stakeholders (Fisk, Hobson, Twyman-Ghoshal, 2025; Fisk, 2025b). Figure two identifies SES levels and their application to the purpose of data collected by RJ services (Fisk, 2025b: 23).

Figure 2: Stakeholders and purpose of RJ data through a SES lens



Exploration of traditional evaluation methods for capturing outcomes from the perspective of practitioners highlights a range of further outcomes that are either not recorded by services or explored thoroughly in service evaluations or academic research. Practitioners reported to the APPG-RJ (2022b) that there is a range of success types that services are not capturing, which have now been highlighted and provide additional concepts that could contribute towards recording and monitoring processes to evidence a broader array of outcomes and success in RJ (Fisk, Hobson, Twyman-Ghoshal, 2025). These include a richer notion of success which can occur outside of traditional points of count measurement such as a referral or process completion, and can involve subjective or objective personal growth, transformation and movement for participants. The tension between purist and maximalist approaches is observed in terms of difference between practitioner perception and organisational metrics (McCold, 1998). Although individual differences are identified between practitioner

perceptions, some aligning in response with organisational metrics, many highlighted subjective impacts in the form of personal transformation as a key metric that could indicate success but is currently not captured by their organisation.

Many practitioners understand the importance of static quantitative metrics that services as organisations report on due to the demands of their PCC and the MoJ, noting that these figures are what encourages further funding and service expansion which will contribute to awareness raising (Fisk, 2025a, 2025b). However, many also believe that success goes beyond these metrics alone and that this can be captured more effectively to give a fuller picture of what success in RJ is (Fisk, 2025b). Indeed, many are concerned that quantitative data is overemphasised by PCCs and the MoJ at the expense of other forms of evidence. Satisfaction with a RJ service compared to a traditional CJS response is identified as a measure that is cited in literature and seen as a success of RJ (Shapland et al., 2007) but is increasingly difficult for services to evidence despite advances in technology and multi-pronged approaches to gathering such data (Fisk, 2025a). Concerns are raised about respondents at the extreme offering feedback which skews results, and the language of ‘satisfaction’ setting a low bar for the potentially transformative outcomes that be achieved by RJ participants (Fisk, Hobson & Twyman-Ghoshal, 2025; Fisk, 2025a).

Practitioners advocated for greater use of qualitative approaches such as case studies and lived experiences to evidence success beyond count data. Currently organisational metrics are predominantly quantitative in focus. Commissioners want to know how much work is done, how many participants are involved, and how many outcomes are achieved, with a particular focus on victims due to the importance of VCOP (MoJ, 2021), because this is what is demanded of them by the MoJ. Analysis of reporting templates, survey responses, and interview transcripts outlined how the qualitative transformational experience is considered secondary to numerical count data and in many instances is not recorded effectively. However, the limited sample size of six templates obtained does not mean this is not occurring elsewhere as

submissions to the APPG-RJ inquiry highlighted the role of distance travelled as metric, and this is referred to as a recommendation within report two. This both supports and goes further than the anecdotal claims made at the APPG-RJ inquiry (2022a; 2022b).

A further difference between practitioners and organisations is observed in terms of the macro-level MoJ. Analysis identifies their significant impact on shaping reporting requirements as they are responsible for setting metrics and accused of arbitrarily changing data requests which negatively impacts practitioners who are responsible for collating and organising this data. The MoJ have a focus on quantitative victim data due to the requirements for members of the public who have been victims of crime to have access to information about RJ. Whereas restorative services vary in what they capture and the way they capture it, for reasons connected to historically embedded practices, requests from multi-agency stakeholders, or changes in operational focus and demands linked to police strategy and policy. It is reported and observed that many RJ services collect data about those taking part in processes who have caused harm, but this data is not requested by the MoJ due to their remit and subsequent data focus. As such, the range of service data they collect is not representative of the full range of success that can be achieved by restorative services due to the exclusion of such data. The RJ sector requires a more innovative approach to addressing sector wide success that is aligned with the values of repair and restoration for all stakeholders in a case.

A socio-ecological systems lens reveals that practitioners and managers within a single service have different responsibilities for recording success (Fisk, 2025b). Responsibilities for recording success also vary between services, due to the unique demands of individual PCCs as well as multi-agency relationships with different organisational stakeholders (Fisk, 2025a). The extent to which data is shared varies, with volunteers being least likely to receive data about service success that they have ultimately contributed through logging their case activity on the CMS (Fisk, 2025a, 2025b).

From the outset key challenges are identified in relation to being able to even begin to record and monitor involvement, let alone potential examples of success. These are related to difficulties securing formal information sharing agreements, general cooperation with other services regardless of an information sharing agreement, and services being able to access data about potential participants to contact them to begin restorative processes (Fisk, 2025a). This can be directly linked to measures of success due to MoJ demand for data about referral numbers, whilst also limiting the potential for any and all measures due to inability to gain consent to begin a restorative process. Whilst practitioners valued measures of success related to personal transformation (Fisk, 2023), the socio-ecological lens applied to interview data highlighted the importance of expanding awareness and opportunity to take part in RJ (Fisk, 2025b), therefore being able to begin a process is important as the potential for ‘restorative conversations’ that have transformative impact compared to the traditional CJS processes is vital as success is perceived to be able to occur at any point within a process due to the nature of this work (Fisk 2025a, 2025b). Restorative conversation will be discussed more in response to research question six, innovative approaches to recording and monitoring success.

There is limited discussion about efficiency in terms of practical recording and monitoring tasks, as these are distinct from efficiency of individual process. However, thematic analysis of these practical logistics highlighted perceived gaps between current and ideal practices (Fisk, 2025a). Currently, some services report that their CMS generates inaccurate statistics from data input by practitioners, and ideally these would be accurate so as to prevent additional data checking or the use of cumbersome processes that necessitate data task duplication such as direct input of all numerical count service data into digital spreadsheets to complete a task they have already paid a service to provide.

5.4.2 Key findings

Participants generally favour an approach to recording and monitoring success in RJ that accords with the values and principles of restorative work. However, they have a nuanced

view as seen in other research (Butler, Maglione, & Buchan, 2024) about how these values interact with the dominant CJS when it comes to working at the coal face, and when the valuable work they undertake to repair harm and restore relationships must be reduced down to documentary evidence that continues to justify their employment and in turn promote RJ awareness and uptake for those they feel would benefit from this way of working. There is an awareness of a marketised system, concern that standardisation could lead to league tables, and fear of a McDonaldisation of RJ (Umbriet, 1999; Bohm, 2006) that ultimately impacts on the quality of practice.

Measurement of personal transformation is an interesting finding as the current RJ literature that refers to transformation oftens speaks from the context of broader criminological theory, such as transformative justice, and transformation in relation to the impact of RJ on the broader system of criminal justice and society at large (Llewellyn, 2021). Olson & Sarver (2022: 961) measure transformation in terms a specific programs' restorativeness in the context of where RJ is implemented, identifying incidental, corollary, and systemic transformation. In terms of the SES model, these represent the macro-level (social and system transformation) and the meso-level (transformation by a program of a setting), whereas findings from this paper refer to transformation explicitly for process participants at the micro level. Olson and Sarver (2022: 691) identify competency development and follow-through which bares similarities to the language of transformation that emerged in this research, which included skill building for participants and mechanisms to monitor change and verify outcomes. The case-study used to test the index could not find evidence of follow-through in terms of monitoring change and verifying outcomes, but participants did demonstrate competency development in using affective statements and restorative dialogue (Olson & Sarver, 2022: 965).

This finding also highlights the position of the researchers undertaking work and the potential for variation in findings, as both papers cited above used data from socio-ecological levels in contrast to this work, which used data collected from survey and interview with

practitioners, and documents employed by their services but used by them. Furthermore, it has been established that systematic evaluations do not consider the breadth of recording and monitoring that takes places within a service, and any consideration of definition and approaches to measuring outcomes are not tapping into the subjective reality of practitioners on the ground who record and monitor data for the purpose of delivering on metrics for services. Arguably, this finding reinforces the need for a whole-system approach in RJ that considers all levels as clearly transformation is a concept that transcends any single level and must be understood in relation to one another to ensure accuracy of meaning.

However, concerns about limited national awareness of RJ (APPG-RJ, 2022a) would suggest that at this point institutionalisation and potential McDonaldisation are at a relatively early stage in the UK context despite concerns about marketisation (Marder et al., 2023) precisely because of the evidence of a lack of standardisation and limited focus on efficiency from PCCs and the MoJ despite their focus on process data (Fisk, 2023; 2025b). Practitioner accounts demonstrate resistance to further institutionalisation in the form of a lack of alignment between their definitions and current metrics and their highlighting of alternatives (Fisk 2023; Fisk, Hobson, & Twyman-Ghoshal, 2025), whilst having an understanding of the broader macro-level factors within society and the context of commissioning and funding drawn from central government, and the need to provide evidence to satisfy those to enable the service to continue to run (Fisk, 2025b).

Furthermore, definitions of success are clearly shaped by the dominant CJS in terms of the types of success they value in the outcomes they request data upon (Wood & Suzuki, 2016), which do not entirely align with those of practitioners and their lived experience, which in turn shapes the methods for recording and monitoring success in RJ which are not currently evidencing the full spectrum of quantitative and qualitative outcomes and success narratives that practitioners have argued exist in their submissions to the APPG-RJ and highlighted in the

thematic analysis of effectiveness, efficiency, and impact definitions (Fisk, Hobson, Twyman-Ghoshal, 2025).

When definitions of success are restricted by institutionalised norms within the dominant CJS, what a service monitors is dictated by a focus on quantitative process driven metrics for recording and monitoring success defined by the MoJ. For example, the participant-led and voluntary nature of restorative processes (RJC, 2012) means an individual may decide to cease their participation if they feel they have managed to achieve what they wanted from a process without having a formal conference or meeting, meaning their process will not be counted as ‘complete’. Additionally, concepts such as personal transformation that are identified by practitioners as an indicator of success are neither routinely nor easily captured in quantitative data, and especially if a participant does not fully complete a process and that cannot be counted or is not subsequently turned into a full case study. Research has demonstrated that social cost-benefit estimates can be made around social wellbeing improvements for victims, but these are not currently possible to be undertaken with offenders as there are evidence gaps that prevent an accurate calculation being undertaken in this area (Grimsey-Jones et al., 2023).

However, evidence is found that suggests many services collect additional data for use on a local level in relation to the partnerships they have with other statutory and voluntary organisations (Fisk, 2025b). Also, some services have engaged in traditional and bespoke issue specific evaluations in partnership with academic institutions which have shaped the types of data they collect. Where this occurs, it is described as beneficial. However, for many the perception of institutional ambivalence due to the lack of individual, organisational, and sector feedback on data submitted to the MoJ is a key challenge as it limits the ability of these stakeholders who do not operate in broader local partnership with services or academics to develop services, raise awareness, and understand their service within the national context. This reinforces the lack of a relational theory in terms RJ generally but data specifically in the

context of the CJS and society more widely, and it could be argued that this is a form of harm, whether intentional or not, perpetrated by structural and systemic actors done to the disembodied sector of RJ that prevents growth and expansion through ineffective use and consideration of evidence gathered at the state level (Llewellyn, 2021).

5.4.3 Summary

- The role of subjectivity

When the existence of multiple stakeholders in a RJ process is considered, there are participants alongside the practitioner, but in the context of data that can evidence success, there are stakeholders who are essentially invested in every part but play no direct role in the process. This means success is being interpreted and constructed continuously by a range of individuals across socio-ecological levels for different reasons. Efficiency definitions serve as a key example. Institutionalised metrics such as cost are a key variable that is acknowledged by practitioner definitions in this research and frequently evidenced in research evaluations undertaken for those who fund services (Shapland, Robinson & Sorsby, 2011; Sherman et al., 2015a; Hamad et al., 2020). However, efficiency is also linked to high quality practice grounded in restorative values that manages time, complex risk assessment, navigation of multiple external barriers whilst staying participant focused. Furthermore, efficiency is also entirely rejected as a concept by some participants due to a perceived lack of relevance, with adherence resulting in hindrance of processes.

- Managing institutionalisation and McDonaldisation through practice values

The purpose of data in evidencing success varies for practitioners, services, the RJ sector, and for government (Fisk, 2025b). However, the dominant CJS sets success metrics that services are required to report on, such as victim data due to VCOP reporting requirements (Ministry of Justice, 2021). On the ground, practitioners take a holistic approach to success in RJ considering the role of those harmed and those who have harmed, and have a nuanced understanding of the impact of institutionalisation in shaping external concepts of RJ success,

also reflected elsewhere in literature (Butler, Maglione, & Buchan, 2024). This nuanced understanding of RJ success emerged as advocacy for greater standardisation that could contribute to development of a strong evidence, whilst cautioning the potential for McDonaldisation that could come in the form of league tables or guidance that prevents the ability for a service to adapt to their locals needs and those of their immediate stakeholders that could ultimately dilute values and in turn lead to practice quality deterioration (Umbreit, 1999; Wood & Suzuki, 2016). The SES demonstrated that RJ services act as sub-cultures, with distinct values, principles, practices, and standards from organisations they collaborate with or are embedded within (Fisk, 2025b). As such, service values and principles are sometimes directly at odds with the dominant criminal justice system in practice that concerns data. Currently, practitioners and services are subject to top-down institutionalised metrics that accord with the demands of the dominant CJS rather than those related to RJ and its system of values and principles (Fisk, 2025b). Structural issues related to GDPR and information sharing agreements limit the possibility of citizens to engage with RJ services, which in turn limit referrals and the potential for success through RJ regardless of approach taken.

- Going beyond institutionalised metrics

Whilst the range of subjective definitions demonstrate a nuance around the position of the practitioner in their service within the context of the dominant CJS (Butler, Maglione, & Buchan, 2024), a range of additional definitions of success emerged that align more with purist and values driven definitions of success (Fisk, 2023). These focus on the nature of transformative and needs-led subjective and objective outcomes for process participants rather than quantitative-based service metrics demanded by commissioners and government that count participants numbers and completion of process components (Fisk, 2023). For example, assessing quality of practice in terms of RJ effectiveness, and tracking of transformation for process participants are types of success practitioners believe occurs but is not formally monitored by services or requested by the MoJ. However, the result of neo-liberal devolution

means services can record what they want as there is no formal guidance (Restorative Justice Council, 2016b), as long as they also comply with the top-down metrics demands. Therefore, the potential to record additional evidence of success exists but is subject to resources, funding, will, and awareness of additional approaches for evidencing success.

5.5 Research objective four: identify innovative approaches for evidencing success within restorative practices

The publications which contribute to addressing this research objective are:

- Paper two: Fisk, Hobson & Twyman-Ghoshal (2025). Effectiveness, efficiency, and impact in restorative justice: Navigating the subjective and objective to evidence success.
- Paper three: Fisk (2025b). The purpose of data in restorative justice: a socio-ecological systems lens.
- Report 1: Hobson, J., Fisk, B.M., Hook, K. and Jaffé, L. (2023). APPG for Restorative Justice RJ Workstream 4: The commissioning, collection, and dissemination of evidence-based research in Restorative Justice and Restorative Practice & the benefits of a national reporting framework.
- Report 2: Fisk, B.M. (2025a). Recording Success and Successful Recording: Practitioner and Service Perspectives.

5.5.1 What do the papers say?

Practitioners have expressed a desire for national standardisation for data collection as highlighted in report one, including specific guidance on what to collect and how to count it, which does not occur currently in terms of practice standards nor specific training that practitioners receive concerning RJ practices (Fisk, 2025a, 2025b). This would enable practitioners to contribute towards the exo-level RJ sector evidence base (Fisk, 2025b), which could in turn lead to greater awareness and promotion of RJ. This request reinforces the identification of ambivalence towards RJ, seen in practice with the disconnect between the macro-level collection and use of data collected by the MoJ from RJ service recording and monitoring processes (Why Me?, 2022) which only focuses on victims and does not feedback to the sector, services, or practitioner (Fisk, 2025a, 2025b).

Professionals expressed interest in national standardisation of terminology for recording and monitoring that could produce quantitative data that could be analysed (Hobson et al., 2023). A recommendation for further research into a national reporting framework for RJ services is made in report one (Hobson et al., 2023) which could simplify and streamline the submission of data that would enable effective reporting on a national scale and facilitate empirical analysis by academics. However, concerns are expressed about the potential for data to be used to develop league tables of services (Fisk, 2025a), which would play into concerns about the negative impact of managerialism and institutionalisation if metrics are only concerned with numerical count data decided by the CJS, and not in accordance with restorative values and practice, which does not reflect the subjectivity of success and could lead to further subsumption of RJ (Llewellyn et al, 2013; Doak & O'Mahoney, 2018; Pali & Maglione, 2022).

Best practices should ensure the collection of all data about restorative justice participants, processes, and outcomes, and not just those of the victim due to the requirements of VCOP (MoJ, 2021). Whilst crudely calculated amongst the multiple ways of doing RJ, when one person harms another, and you only report data about one of those individuals, you are essentially losing 50% of your potential evidence of success. This is a prime example of how institutionalisation has shaped recording and monitoring of RJ services for the worse. VCOP (MoJ, 2021) has inadvertently acted like an unnecessary set of data blinkers for the MoJ. There has never been a restriction on reporting for 'offenders' or those who have caused harm, however an administrative decision is made to not collect that data due to a focus on VCOP (MoJ, 2021) which prevents the collection of the full picture of success in RJ.

Restorative conversations are a countable metric within some RJ services which enables the tracking of incidences of success that can be counted without the need to complete a formal restorative process (Fisk, 2025a). A restorative conversation is a dynamic dialogue with open lines of communication between a trained practitioner who uses a range of adaptable restorative

questions and reflective practice that have been developed through research and practice, that enables a participant to explain a situation from their perspective whilst identifying their thinking during and after, the impact on themselves and others, their needs, and the range of harm that has occurred to support potential agreements between themselves and others, as well as personal realisation and transformation at that moment or at a later time. (O’Connell, Wachtel, & Wachtel, 1999; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2014; Marcucci, 2021; Lodi et al., 2022; Relate NI, n.d).

Many services are limited to counting traditional components of a restorative process, in terms of referral and intervention, with intervention being a formal meeting, which for some services have even tighter definitions and may not include shuttle conferences, or conferences where a harmed person or a person who has attended (APPG-RJ, 2022a). Restorative conversations have been identified by practitioners as occurring at any point before, during, or after a process and being able to empower participants to make changes or facilitate personal transformation (Fisk, 2025a). These could happen during a referral conversation that result in the individual choosing not to progress with a case, during the extensive preparation phase which results in a decision to not proceed to a conference or meeting, or even after a successful conference that allows a participant to achieve another outcome that is not achieved at the conference or in addition to success being merely a countable formalised intervention (Fisk, 2025a). How these are defined and standardised to enable sector level recording and monitoring requires further research and collaboration with sector stakeholders to ensure reliability and validity of data (Hobson et al., 2023).

Practitioner definitions of success highlighted narratives of subjective and objective transformation as potential measures of effectiveness and impact within restorative work, and the potential for a longitudinal measure of distance travelled. Distance travelled can enable the quantification of transformation for more effective comparison using pre- and post-measures, tracked at regular intervals, and defined by the participants in any specific process,

Participants noted the creation of case studies for internal use that are submitted to commissioners and the MoJ, with some used publicly for service promotion (Fisk, 2025b). These are an under-utilised resource which could contribute to development of an evidence base (Hobson et al., 2023). As identified in paper three through the socio-ecological systems lens, a range of stakeholders exist that require evidence of the success of RJ (Fisk, 2025b). Any case study approach must enable members of the public, other professionals, and those in policy and government to be impacted by their content and to be consumed in a manner that appreciate the demands of their role and their limited time and availability to consider alternative approaches to the traditional CJS (Fisk, 2025a. 2025b). Whilst some practitioners rejected efficiency as a concept (Fisk, 2023), it is important for stakeholders to understand how long processes can take and the variations between these, which can be captured through case studies as well as traditional count metrics. Cost implications and savings are another important concept that commissioners and politicians will have to consider, and these should be reflected in case studies where possible.

The recommendation from report one (Hobson et al., 2023) for regional groups consisting of multi-agency and multi-stakeholders can facilitate the narrowing of the gaps between current and ideal practices, support standardisation, and facilitate the analysis of data that is currently lacking due to institutional ambivalence shown to RJ service data by the MoJ (Fisk, 2025b). However, central collation of such data and independent analysis by a body such as the RJC would be the ideal approach to addressing monitoring and evaluation from the sector by the sector and is identified in paper three (Fisk, 2025b).

5.5.2 Key findings

RJ services do not have the awareness or power to resist institutionalised metrics, and risk elimination if they cannot evidence success in the manner demanded. Whilst a move to measurement that reflects the relational and transformative potential will generate further evidence outside of institutionalised metrics, at present with ambivalence towards RJ data it

must ensure that what is currently demanded is of the highest standard alongside development of further evidence. Metrics need to be standardised nationally and effectively coordinated so that they are used to demonstrate effectiveness, efficiency, and impact.

MoJ need to go beyond the VCOP remit (MoJ, 2021) and request the data RJ services already collect about those who have caused harm, and to in turn undertake detailed analysis of the wealth of data they collect from the 41 PCCs in England and Wales and the Mayor of London. Further to data standardisation, the development of a national reporting framework for collating such information is identified in report one (Hobson et al., 2023) which will be elaborated further upon in response to innovative approaches in research question four.

Case studies are a key area of best practice that can be expanded and collated to effectively evidence success. However, this needs to be done on a scale that supports awareness and increases uptake of RJ, whilst targeting a range of stakeholders who have different needs in terms of the types of success they may value. A national repository of evidence requires significant further research and should leverage modern digital technologies. A standardised approach to case studies would improve efficiency for collating and disseminating evidence of success. To ensure that stakeholders can relate to the contextual and subjective experiences, they should contain as much data as is practicable in terms of protected characteristics, general geographical locations and characteristics, type of harm, and type of process used. Such an approach to case studies offers a vehicle for reimagining success (Rosser and Taylor, 2024: 374) that enables the measurement of traditional procedural justice elements that are still valued at macro-levels of the CJS, aligned with the finding here that practitioners perceive success as being directly connected to best practice, and going beyond tricky and costly recidivism measures using quantitative and qualitative understandings of practice.

There are cost and business implications for a repository of this scale, including the costs of designing and running such a resource that will need to be addressed. Ideally, an individual case study would be tailored for a range of stakeholders, and the growth and cost

effectiveness of artificial intelligence should be explored to facilitate this. Respondents highlighted the role of the RJC in such an endeavour due to the independent status and their role as a trusted advocate for RJ nationally (Fisk, 2025b). Going further than a framework for reporting and a repository for case studies, institution of a national repository of RJ evidence more broadly that brings together historical research and service evaluations is an important innovation that could effectively consolidate evidence of success in restorative practices. This is important because it is established in the literature review that service evaluations and systemic reviews are not only time limited but focus limited to address a specific aim (Grimsey-Jones, 2023; Shapland, 2022). Whilst there is institutional ambivalence from the MoJ in using the current data RJ services submit (Fisk, 2025b), this data is being continuously collected alongside a plethora of other data on a national scale that is not being utilised to evidence success in RJ. This is an undervalued and underutilised resource that should be made publicly available to facilitate independent academic analysis (Hobson et al., 2023).

This would be a significant task that would require cooperation across multiple sectors, access to paywalled research, and implementation of standards and elimination protocols to ensure high quality work is included. Gaps in evidence could be identified using the wealth of academic research and service data currently produced. However, such a task would be resource intensive and highly complex. It would need to address bias, ethnocentrism, political and social context to achieve such a utopian project, although such a dream should not simply be shelved because it would be difficult to achieve with modern technology. There are clear issues around databases, concerns about data security, cost, obsolescence, and examples where the implementation of large databases in the public sector have failed.

Distance travelled is loosely defined but authors have coalesced around the idea that it constitutes the ‘progress made by individuals in working towards achieving longer term objectives as a result of participation in a particular project or programme’ (Crabbe, 2006: 53). It has been used for measurement in a range of human service orientated sectors such as the

impact of sports on CJS involvement, and employment studies, particularly when working with long-term unemployed people, and there is extensive guidance on implementation and execution that can be adapted for use with RJ (Dewson et al., 2000; Lloyd & O’Sullivan, 2003; Barnes & Wright, 2019). Distance travelled can track the development of soft outcomes, such as ‘change’ and ‘transformation’ that are identified in paper two, using a diverse range of approaches (action planning, goal setting, journalling, recording observation, psychometric tests, in-depth reflections) if clear baselines are established (Dewson et al., 2000: 8-9). However, Dewson et al. caution that measurement may only be able to track that change occurs not how much (2000:10), the potential for inference due to other external factors that may be attributable to such soft outcomes (2000:11), and that the right questions must be asked to prevent ‘ambiguous, meaningless, or patronising’ (2000: 11) questionnaires and soft indicator systems being employed. With the context of discussions about NRF implementation, use of such a metric requires broader consultation with the exo-level restorative sector to identify best practices amongst services and practitioners currently employing distance travelled, ascertain further opinions of the impact on workload if implemented and how this can be incorporated into a CMS to maximise efficiency, and guidance from academics who can ensure measures are designed and implemented in a rigorous way. Furthermore, analysis of the data needs to be undertaken, and this will require resources and expertise to complete.

A distance travelled approach aligns with the findings of the restorative index designed by Olson & Sarver who noted that “quantifying restorativeness will allow the discipline to directly assess the influence of RJ mechanisms on behavioral, systemic, and societal outcomes” (2022: 968). In their work they did not explicitly offer metrics or approaches for “follow-through” (Olson & Sarver, 962), and the case-study analysed did not identify a methodology for verifying outcomes or monitoring change (Olson & Sarver, 965). Therefore distance travelled has the potential for fulfilling this promise and expanding upon a key area for evidencing success that complements traditional evaluations that align with the CJS, and

innovate methods that focus on key restorative values that seek to prevent the subsumption of restorative programs to “help protect RJ from co-option by punitive systems” and support resistance towards marketisation of un-restorative McDonaldised programs (Olson & Sarver, 2022: 967).

5.5.3 Summary

- Standardised recording and monitoring for reliable and valid analysis

Services should adhere to standardised terminology to ensure they are recording the same data and monitoring the same things in the same way. Evidence from service recording and monitoring processes needs to incorporate both the institutionalised metrics demanded as well as those that reflect the relational nature of RJ and the type of work it undertakes that is different from the overarching criminal justice system. This will simplify the process and limit the cost of analysis of a large national dataset. This requires further insight, agreement, and subsequently guidance that has buy-in across socio-ecological levels to reinforce adherence and demonstrate cultural shift around RJ data that empowers the RJ sector. Working with stakeholders involved in monitoring of institutionalised processes is vital to ensure ambivalence towards data is changed, but this must involve taking a collaborative approach with all stakeholders to ensure they understand the value of all data types including current and potential metrics.

- Expanding metrics

Expansion of metrics to go beyond the current individualised and victim-focused scope to reflect the broad communitarian values of RJ (Dignan, 2002). Data should not favour any single participant and should aim to include as much as possible about the person who harmed, the person who was harmed and go further still to capture data about other stakeholders and invested persons to demonstrate the scale of impact. Data should include both quantitative and qualitative measures of success that acknowledge subjective and objective impact. Metrics to expand beyond process completion to consider process components such as restorative

conversations, and evidence of transformation through longitudinal pre and post measures such as distance travelled. Case studies too need to be standardised to incorporate qualitative and quantitative data that can contextualise a piece of restorative work and demonstrate to multiple stakeholders with their own subjective measures of success how this addresses their needs. The above metrics are directly aligned with restorative values and principles, but measures that seek to assess the extent to which a service is restorative should also be captured as these have the potential to support analysis to understand whether certain innately restorative components are vital variables for achieving a range of RJ and CJS outcomes (Olson & Sarver, 2022).

- National repository of evidence

The range of evidence that can be coordinated using standardised quantitative and qualitative evidence of success, incorporating service level metrics and contextualised case studies from across the RJ sector needs to be housed in a national repository that is adequately funded and managed by the RJC as an independent sector representative.

5.6 Overarching findings and how they address the research aim

The aim of this research is to examine approaches to recording and monitoring outcomes within restorative justice in the UK and identify innovative approaches to evidencing success. This research found significant variations between services in their approaches to recording and monitoring across terminology, type of metric, and approach to counting (Fisk, 2023). The focus on counting process components and outputs have been shaped by institutionalisation to meet the needs of the dominant CJS (Fisk, 2025b). These metrics are at odds with practitioner definitions of success that highlight the role of subjective and objective impact that require measures that go beyond current processes to evidence (Fisk, Hobson & Twyman-Ghoshal, 2025). Achieving these is ground in effective practice by skilled practitioners that is driven by restorative values and principles, with participants able to achieve outcomes from simply taking part in a process that is not solely reliant on completion (Fisk,

Hobson & Twyman-Ghoshal, 2025; Fisk, 2025a). Current metrics do not capture all the rich evidence of transformation or having needs met, especially when a process is not ‘completed’, and requires detailed contextualised narratives such as case studies to convey effectiveness, efficiency, and impact in ways that incorporate success that is valued by a range of stakeholders (Hobson et al., 2023; Fisk, 2023; Fisk, Hobson & Twyman-Ghoshal, 2025; Fisk, 2025a, 2025b).

This research identified that not only is success subjective in the immediate micro-context of practitioner and participant interaction, but that it goes further when a socio-ecological lens is applied to the data services collect to evidence success (Fisk, 2025b). This means that success for a service (meso-level), the broader restorative sector (exo-level), and in terms of policy and governance (exo-level) have distinct characteristics even though parts of them intersect (Fisk, 2025b). Success for a service sits in the cumulation of all practitioner and participant interactions, however this is directly impacted by the level of awareness that members of the public have about RJ. A key purpose of data for the restorative sector is to raise awareness of RJ (Fisk, 2025b), which if done successfully can increase uptake for services at the local level. Therefore, there is a cyclical relationship between success at the micro-, meso-, and exo-level where each feed into the other. However, at the macro-level, MoJ ambivalence results in large amounts of data being collected on an annual basis which has the potential to provide significant evidence of success, but is currently going unleveraged. Furthermore, this is where metrics are controlled, demonstrating the role of institutionalisation of RJ to set reporting requirements that neglect the type of success that practitioners have described as being possible. Practitioners feel powerless in terms of data demands, with frequent changes occurring without meso and exo level collaboration with services or the sector at large (Fisk 2025a, 2025b). Devolution of services to PCCs means there is potential for services to collect data other than what the MoJ requests, but currently there is not a standardised approach to data that enables this to be undertaken in a coordinated whole-system way (Fisk, 2025a).

If services can adopt a standardised approach, supported at both the exo-sector level and the macro-policy and governance level, there is the potential for implementation of innovative approaches to evidencing RJ success that can benefit all stakeholders. A standard reporting template must be implemented for all services that uses common terminology and counts data in the same way to demonstrate success for those that value these metrics, whilst also enabling services data to understand their development needs and ensure accountability to their stakeholders (Hobson et al., 2023; Fisk, 2025a). Services would benefit from understanding how restorative they are (Olson & Sarver, 2022) to enable further reflection and contextualisation when evaluating their own success.

Measures such as distance travelled (Barnes & Wright, 2019; Fisk, 2025a) that enable participants to set their own outcomes, that can facilitate joint self-reporting and measurement by practitioners over the journey through a restorative process should be implemented. Data must be tracked for all participants in a process to demonstrate the wide range of impact that goes beyond institutionalised metrics such as recidivism with those who have harmed to consider other aspects of personal transformation and meeting of needs.

Approaches to case studies need to be standardised to include information about the multitude of success possible for a range of socio-ecological stakeholders (Hobson et al., 2023; Fisk, 2025b). These need to be publicly available in an open-access digital repository and categorised in such a manner that stakeholders can relate to, whether it be the protected characteristics or geographical area, or the need to understand the financial savings or the transformational impact. Such a repository would benefit from sitting in a larger database of evidence of success that incorporates service evaluations and academic research.

5.7 Summary

This discussion section identifies how the findings from the five publications that comprise this integrated PhD thesis have contributed to addressing the research aim and objectives. The strategy taken for understanding current approaches to recording and

monitoring success within restorative justice in the UK has employed thematic analysis to examine documentary evidence from RJ service reporting templates to identify the organisational methods used to record and monitor outcomes for RJ services employed by different PCCs across the UK. This approach has been complemented with survey and interview methods to collect data from practitioners to examine perceptions of success by exploring the criteria they apply to define effectiveness, efficiency, and impact in RJ. Ergo, it has been possible to analyse the alignment between practitioner perception of success and the types of success that are captured through organisational data using a hybrid thematic analysis and application of a socio-ecological systems model and a final layer of analysis within this discussion section to identify innovative approaches for evidencing success that are not currently captured through organisational data demands and where evidence from the literature supports expansion or redirection of metrics to offer a broader range of evidence than is currently possible. Further details of the specific findings in relation to the research aims will now be addressed in the conclusion.

6.0 Conclusion

6.1 Introductory comments

In this conclusion, the aims of this research and how they have been met will be addressed, and the key findings for each research objective will be outlined. Claims for original contribution are signposted throughout, and further claims for original contribution are made in relation to the overarching focus of the thesis topic on RJ service data and the deliberate inclusion of practitioner lived experience and analysis of their claims into the RJ evidence base. Finally, research implications and further avenues for future academic work are considered with concluding reflections.

6.2 Addressing the research aim

The aim of this research is to understand approaches to recording and monitoring outcomes within restorative justice in the UK and identify innovative approaches to evidencing success. Analysis of RJ service reporting templates and secondary data sources collected by the APPG-RJ, contextualised by survey data and interviews with practitioners identified several key findings. These are inconsistent use of terminology within metrics and across services, a range of different purposes for the use of data collected through recording and monitoring processes, and areas of dissonance between practitioner perception of success in RJ and the outcomes that are currently tracked by RJ services and the MoJ. These also include a current organisational focus on quantitative count metrics related to processes at the expense of data concerning the subjective and objective evidence of personal transformation for all participants in RJ processes. Furthermore, institutional ambivalence towards success in RJ is identified at the macro-level (government bodies) through the negligence of the wealth of data collected at the service level and submitted to the MoJ, and the absence of funding to support data analysis at the meso-level (services) and exo-level (RJ sector) that could raise awareness of RJ and aid further expansion within society.

A range of innovative approaches to evidencing success have been outlined that build upon these findings. Metrics such as distance travelled to track progress towards success, and the greater use of standardised case studies that harness quantitative and qualitative data would enable a more holistic approach to evidencing outcomes and success in RJ. The development of a national reporting framework, national repository of case studies, and a national repository of evidence for RJ would further awareness of RJ and enable a single point of access for all data types that demonstrate evidence of success and the transformative potential of RJ for individuals and communities regardless of their subjective perception of success.

6.3 Claims for original contributions

6.3.1 Thesis findings

The findings of the publications and the analysis contained in the thesis discussion (5.0) offer original contributions in the synthesis of academic evidence that recording and monitoring is inconsistent across UK RJ services. Furthermore, several innovative approaches are identified to support standardised evidence gathering and reporting that are not used in the sector.

6.3.2 Focus on the data

A key claim for original contribution comes from the focus on service data that RJ practitioners are collecting. It is established that the data collected by RJ services contributes significantly to their own evaluation, (Shapland, Robinson & Sorsby, 2011; Sherman et al., 2015; Hamad et al., 2020). Despite a range of approaches to understanding concepts such as institutionalisation of RJ through global policy analysis (Maglione & Pali, 2021), service evaluations (Shapland, Robinson & Sorsby, 2011), meta-analysis and systematic reviews of the evaluations (Strang et al., 2013; Sherman et al., 2015a, 2015b), and interviews with practitioners (Butler, Maglione, & Buchan, 2024), no work prior to this has explicitly focused on the data collected through routine service recording and monitoring processes, nor attempted to connect that directly to how practitioners interpret success in their work. Whilst evaluations

and guidance have highlighted criteria used for specific services or analysed multiple services on similar criteria (McCold, 2000; Shapland, Robinson & Sorsby, 2011; Sherman et al., 2015a; Hamad et al., 2020), this is the first to critically analyse the criteria multiple RJ services currently use in practice via reporting templates used in day-to-day practice and contextualise alternative approaches to evidencing success grounded in restorative values.

Furthermore, application of the socio-ecological systems lens to data is itself an original approach. It is established in paper one (Fisk, 2023), in line with a social constructivist methodology and the use of documentary analysis, that documents are social facts which require interpretation to understand how narratives, in this case around data and success, are constructed (Carter, 2005; Gorsky & Mold, 2020; Atkinson & Coffey, 2004). By considering the role of data that is shaped by such documents, in the context of institutionalisation, and then collected by said documents, the wider social context is considered using this lens offering insights into the purpose of RJ service data and how it is used in practice by a range of stakeholders.

6.3.3 Valuing and analysing practitioner lived experience and institutional knowledge for research rigour

The secondary dataset that contributes to paper one and report one (APPG-RJ, 2022a; 2022b), including those elements that are not formally published, highlight several concerns from practitioners about use of service data. These subjective concerns required more formal investigation and triangulation since individual submissions to an inquiry did not face direct academic scrutiny at the time. Prior to formal research with participants, access to and thematic analysis of this large secondary dataset helped improve the efficiency of data collection for this PhD thesis. This work, grounded in the author's experience as a practitioner, and informed by an interpretivist and social constructivist research methodology aimed to uphold rigorous academic standards while directly benefiting the restorative sector. The PhD research adds literature and analysis that offers a foundation for further research in this field.

A critique that could be posited at this work concerns allowing practitioners to define how their practice should be measured and to essentially ‘mark their own homework’. Whilst a valid critique, it prompts reflection in terms of norms, values, relationships, and connections between academia and practice. Such a critique may suggest an undervaluing of those who understand the work they are doing best which reinforces the issues of power that RJ is subject to from the dominant CJS, as expressed in the literature concerning the fear of institutionalisation (Pali & Maglione, 2021; Maglione, 2021; Maglione, Marder & Pali, 2024). Interestingly, there is a range of literature about how lived experience is incorporated in research and practice, for example an ex-prisoner being involved in the delivery of restorative justice (Albert, 2023) or those with lived experience of social work informing practice, education, and research which ultimately benefits the professional sector by informing and contributing to development (Parsell, Kuskoff, & Constantine, 2024). There is concern about ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ contributions to research, especially in the criminal justice sector, where writers fear conclusions that could shape policy and practice may be reached due to biased insight or insufficient interpretation (Randolph et al., 2023). However, the trend of including lived experience narratives in criminal justice research is a significant change from conventional empirical approaches to more experiential and inclusive ones (Antojado et al., 2024) which this work is clearly a part of in due to the consideration of alternative approaches to recording and monitoring RJ.

However, whilst RJ practitioners may have lived experience of social work services or the criminal justice system, the idea that RJ practitioners contributing to research may demonstrate bias as inferred by the peer review comment outlined previously is interesting as this is not an argument that exists in the literature about professionals without lived experience of service use. The idea that Restorative Justice (RJ) functions as a 'sub-culture' within organisations, as identified in paper three (Fisk, 2025b), may explain this phenomenon. RJ often pushes against institutionalised practices and conventional approaches to knowledge.

Furthermore, the RJ sector's academic wing is less developed than fields like social work, criminal justice, or medicine, despite the IIRP's efforts to establish Restorative Practices (RP) as a distinct social science. A key challenge for RJ as identified in this work is the need for greater awareness and expansion, as highlighted by the recommendation to develop regional networks in report one.

6.4 Research implications

This work fills a research gap and acts as a bridge between research concerning practice and that of institutionalisation of RJ globally. A socio-ecological systems view visualises the stakeholders who are actively involved in RJ on a domestic level and offers insight into how institutionalisation is taking place. Diagram two is a valuable tool that can be used when developing services to ensure that a practice-focus is seen in the context of the structural barriers and enablers of RJ and RP. There has been a turn to emphasise the role of structural barriers when working with harm, be that in trauma-informed practice or child first youth justice (Wood, 2024; Case, Browning & Hampson, 2024) and that is continued in this work as the evidencing of success at the service and sector level has been restricted via institutionalisation and devolution, and the financial neutering of the RJC that has led to a fractured RJ landscape in England and Wales.

Whilst this work has focused on the evidencing of success, it is important to address the potential absence of success. Extent of recidivism, self-selection bias, and rates of case attrition within individual evaluations and meta-analysis of research methods, with a recommendation made that future evaluations of RJ programs use randomly assigned treatment and control condition (McCold & Wachtel, 1998; Latimer, Dowden & Muise, 2005). The finding that RJ conferences are a cost-effective means of reducing the frequency of recidivism (Sherman et al., 2015a) is a vital component of the evidence base for RJ but is a narrow strand of success in the grand scheme of potential that focuses on the macro-level savings and the potential benefit for those who have harmed.

This work is focused on the UK context, with particular emphasis on England and Wales. However, the findings highlight several red flags that anyone setting up a service needs to consider in the context of data (Fisk, Hobson & Twyman-Ghoshal, 2025; Fisk, 2025a, 2025b). Such persons must pay heed to the role of wider restorative justice policies at the local and national level. Despite a range of narratives about how RJ services are being embedded in nation states around the world (Maglione, Marder & Pali, 2024), only a little attention is given to the role of data in services (Willms & Malzahn, 2024). It continues to be an overlooked area, and this research aims in part to ensure RJ service data is given due consideration when services are developed.

Furthermore, anyone involved in developing services needs to ensure they do not focus on policy and procedure development at the expense of including people doing the restorative work. This thesis demonstrates clearly how top-down approaches, particularly in the context of RJ data, are ineffective and can result in institutional ambivalence which can be demoralising for many RJ practitioners (Fisk, 2025a, 2025b). Those responsible for implementation should consider how the development and involvement of the disembodied collective of restorative justice practitioners is undertaken effectively as this consists of individuals, grounded in values and principles shaped by training and experience, alongside their contextual social norms and the laws of their lands (Hobson et al., 2022).

Data plays a vital role in developing services, and advocacy for the use of a whole system approach to implementing RJ is derived from a sound evidence base and explicitly linked to the procedural barriers RJ faces, particularly in the context of England and Wales but with implications for other anglo-phone nations (Public Health England, 2019; Banwell-Moore, 2024). Standardisation of data and a broader concept of success in restorative work must be embedded in any whole system implementation.

6.5 Closing remarks

Approaches to recording and monitoring outcomes within RJ in the UK have the potential to provide a wealth of evidence that can speak to the myriad types of success that a wide range of stakeholders can value and be invested in pursuing further (Fisk, 2025b). Whether that is cold hard public cash, reductions in recidivism of offenders, or the ability for a victim to sleep again at night for the first time in years, and many more due to the subjective contextual nature of success and the potential for personal transformation that transcends reductionist metrics (Fisk, 2023; Fisk, Hobson & Twyman-Ghoshal, 2025). When it comes to actively making attempts to get that data out there for all to see and make their own judgments upon, a key clash of values unfolds. Every day, a restorative ‘do with’ philosophy (Wachtel, 2016: 4) of collaboration and inclusiveness is fundamentally resisted on a structural level. This occurs in the way evidence is shaped to reflect a punitive managerialist ideology, that includes criminogenic language and overly quantitative goals of the dominant CJS (Fisk, 2023; Fisk 2025b); in the year on year reductions to funding of the RJC and removal of ringfenced funding to specifically deliver RJ at the PCC level (APPG-RJ, 2022a); and the institutional ambivalence that started with the lapse of MoJ action plans in 2017 and continues with the lack of analysis of a massive national dataset that only the MoJ have full access to (Fisk, 2025b).

This sector-wide data experience mirrors the gatekeeping victims and offenders experience in simply trying to gain access to RJ in the first place (Banwell-Moore, 2022). It limits social awareness and service availability on a national level (Fisk, 2025b). Greater institutionalisation, despite seeming ebbs and flows, continues to prevent evidence that is relational, collaborative, person-centred, and subjective from not only seeing the light of day, but from being valued enough in the first place to have such seeds planted that could result in transformational change of the dominant CJS. Whilst post-code lotteries exist for harmed persons and those who have harmed to access services (APPG-RJ, 2022a), the existence of a disembodied sector that harnesses the sum that is greater than its parts can continue to lobby

and advocate for ways that enable the success of RJ to be evidenced and gain awareness. The issue then is who is responsible for doing this, and what capacity do they have to even achieve it. RJ lacks a statutory footing and public sector funding continues to be politically and socially contentious in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis.

However, there is cautious hope. A restorative approach to solving this problem would advocate for a communitarian, dialogue-based approach, that is open and honest and includes all the most important stakeholders (Wachtel, 2016). Circle processes can facilitate this if they are done in a neutral way. But they would involve bringing those from a top-down managerialist perspective into an environment of flattened power that they may not be comfortable with. Forcing it to be done in this way would also go against the principle of voluntariness in a restorative process (EFRJ, 2021), and if those with power do not wish to have the dialogue then change to current issues that revolve around data in RJ, and in terms of implementing RJ more widely in practice, will not be able to change.

Rather than a seismic shift, much like the extensive process of preparation that is undertaken with any restorative process done properly, it will take time, effort, and steady repeated changes in perspective to achieve success. But as this research has highlighted, there is potential for transformation to occur at any moment. Fortunately, those who are operating in the macro-level political sphere have the potential to facilitate change within their immediate socio-ecological system. The continued work of the APPG-RJ, reconvened with the new Labour government, has serious potential to make strides over the next parliament (APPG-RJ, 2024). The recent ‘Do With’ call to action from the King’s Fund seeks to change the ‘Do To’ culture of the public sector and resist the ‘overwhelming focus on top-down performance targets and financial ‘efficiencies’ rather than actual improvements in people’s health and well-being’ (The King’s Fund, 2025). The embedding of restorative processes in areas outside of the CJS is steadily taking place, through the enshrinement of restorative practices such as FGC and family group decision making in law for children and families who encounter social work

services (Bowyer, 2025). But as has been a constant theme in this thesis, Bowyer (2025) cautions how restorative processes are institutionalised in ways that do not dilute practice and ultimately serve as tokenistic gestures performed in the shadow of governmental control and bureaucracy.

This overarching debate around institutionalisation has not ended and is unlikely to for some time, if ever. Academic work will continue to question the extent to which institutionalisation should occur. Many will advocate for paradigm shifts in values and practices of the CJS and for a reorientation of society at large to create fairer more just societies. But these are perspective amongst many, as success is subjective, and reality is socially constructed. This work has considered these factors within the CJS context and provided a range of metrics that seeks to restoratively bridge gaps and enable individualistic subjective demands for success to be satiated that may lead to greater understanding of a diverse range of perspectives, rather than a taken for granted single uniform approach. Ultimately this work has been a restorative endeavour, that has challenged power and advocated for a range of perspectives. It has addressed the research aim and objectives, and offered original in terms of contributions to research and practical outputs that can benefit the growth and development of restorative justice domestically and internationally.

7.0 Bibliography

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethical Approval

**UNIVERSITY OF
GLOUCESTERSHIRE**

School of Natural & Social Sciences Research Ethics Panel
Francis Close Hall
Swindon Road
Cheltenham
GL50 4AZ

nsethics@glos.ac.uk

Date: 11/04/2022

Dear Ben Fisk

Thank you for your application to the School of Natural & Social Sciences – School Research Ethics Panel (NSS-SREP).

Following institutional ethical review, I am pleased to confirm ethical clearance.

Please keep a record of this letter as a confirmation of ethical approval for your study (detailed below), reviewed by the School Research Ethics Panel of the School of Natural & Social Sciences, University of Gloucestershire, on 11th April, 2022

Project Title:	Evidencing success and successful evidence in Restorative work: developing models of 'Efficiency', 'Effectiveness', and 'Impact'.
Start Date:	01/10/2021
Projected Completion Date:	01/09/2024
NSS-REP Clearance code:	NSS.0422.11

If you have any questions about ethical clearance, please feel free to contact me. Please use your SREP clearance code in any future correspondence regarding this study.

Kind Regards



Dr Danielle Stephens-Lewis
School Research Ethics Lead
School of Natural & Social Sciences

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**Together we make
an unstoppable team**

Appendix 2: Research participant information form

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FORM

*Evidencing Success and Successful Evidence in Restorative Work:
Developing Models of “Effectiveness”, “Efficiency” and “Impact”.*

Purpose of this research:

The purpose of this research is to explore success and the standardisation of recording and monitoring in restorative work. This will be undertaken by engaging with practitioners and the organisations they work for to explore success in their work, and the examination of organisational data / recording and monitoring methods.

Why is this important?:

In 2021, the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Restorative Justice was formed, with the mission “To examine the use of restorative justice principles within the UK justice system and beyond; to raise the profile of restorative justice principles within Parliament; and to provide opportunities for policy discussion and consultation.” An inquiry into the current state of Restorative Practices in England and Wales was undertaken that received written and oral evidence from a wide variety of stakeholders, and a report was produced. An advisory board was established to guide the APPG through the agreed programme of work identified in the inquiry and to address the 9 key recommendations from the report.

Two recommendations were made which explicitly concerned the use of data within Restorative Practices. Further exploration was recommended around standardising the sharing of information between providers and partners, and the development of guidance for gathering and using data to improve the quality of Restorative Practices through effective monitoring and evaluation.

What will happen if I take part?:

This research will take place in two phases:

Phase 1:

Participants will be sent an electronic questionnaire to complete that should take no longer than 10 minutes. You will be asked some questions about yourself, your organisation, and success in restorative work. This will help the researcher gain an initial insight into the topic within your specialised field of work and identify organisations that can be approached directly to take part in phase 2, which consists of documentary analysis and focus groups. If you are interested in taking part in the second phase of the research, you will be asked to consent to be contacted again directly to undertake the next phase of research.

Research Participant Information Sheet	V3
<i>Evidencing Success and Successful Evidence in Restorative Work: Developing Models of “Effectiveness”, “Efficiency” and “Impact”.</i>	01/10/22
Benjamin Fisk	Page: 1 of 3

Phase 2:

The documents and tools in blank template form that a service uses to record data about their restorative work will be analysed to identify the types of data collected, the purposes for collecting this data, the types of documents used and the structure and format. This research will NOT collect private and confidential service user information.

Interviews and focus groups will be held in-person or online, and aim to include a maximum of 6 participants. Circle processes will be used with groups to explore what success in participants' restorative work means, and how this is captured in the data recording documents that they use.

Do I have to take part?:

Participation is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your association with the University of Gloucestershire, the Restorative Justice Council, or the researcher. Individuals are free to withdraw from participating at any time, however it will not be possible to remove contributions to focus groups as a whole due to the nature of the dialogue process and the impact this will have on the remaining data.

What are the benefits and risks of taking part?:

There will be no direct benefit to you following participation in this study. Your assistance through participation will help us to better understand how and what organisations using restorative practice record and monitor, and how these link with their concepts of success, and whether this can be improved. Your participation will help develop understanding about standardisation of recording and monitoring across UK organisations.

Discussion of sensitive topics related to restorative work has a risk of eliciting difficult or upsetting feelings about your own experience or that of service users. Participants should ensure they have access to professional supervision to discuss this, and can contact the researcher for signposting to appropriate resources if required.

How will confidentiality be ensured?:

During the study, the only people who will be in the focus groups are the researchers and participants. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. We may publish the results of this study in academic journals with strict anonymity of all participants. Results of the study will be available to you upon request following completion of the study. Confidentiality will be broken if any disclosure highlights concerns about professional conduct or harm to others. Participants should not discuss the contents of their focus groups and the views of other participants, with any other person.

The University of Gloucestershire Research Participant Privacy Notice can be viewed here: <https://www.glos.ac.uk/information/knowledge-base/research-participants-privacy-notice/>

Research Participant Information Sheet	V3
<i>Evidencing Success and Successful Evidence in Restorative Work:</i>	01/10/22
<i>Developing Models of “Effectiveness”, “Efficiency” and “Impact”.</i>	Page:
Benjamin Fisk	2 of 3

Who is organising and funding the research?:

This research is being organised by Benjamin Fisk and will contribute to the award of a Doctorate of Philosophy in Social Sciences. A studentship has been awarded to the candidate funded by the University of Gloucestershire and the Restorative Justice Council. The researcher is not receiving any additional payment for undertaking this work.

Who has reviewed the study?:

This research has been reviewed by the PhD students' academic supervisors Dr Jonathan Hobson and Dr Anamika Twyman Ghoshal, and a panel of academics within the School of Natural and Social Sciences who have formally approved the project. The University of Gloucestershire Research Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this work.

Problems and Complaints:

If you have any concerns or complaints regarding this work, please speak to the researcher directly (contact information below). If you continue to be unhappy about the response or wish to make a formal complaint please

Data storage:

All digital media (consent forms, questionnaire responses, electronic copies of recording and monitoring tools, audio/video recordings or focus groups and interviews) will be uploaded and stored in a password protected University of Gloucestershire Microsoft OneDrive account. Files will be uploaded promptly by the researcher and deleted from any recording devices once this has been completed. Any hard copies (consent forms, paper copies of recording and monitoring tools, focus group notes) will be stored in a locked drawer at the researchers home address, and will be digitised and stored with all digital data collected. The data will be stored for a maximum of 5 years, post-publication, at the School of Natural and Social Science (University of Gloucestershire) and will not be released without written permission or unless required by law.

Contact details:

For further information or if you have any more questions, please contact:

1. Benjamin Fisk (PhD Researcher, University of Gloucestershire)

[REDACTED]

2. Dr Jonathan Hobson (Academic Supervisor, University of Gloucestershire)

[REDACTED]

3. Dr Anamika Twyman Ghoshal (Academic Supervisor, University of Gloucestershire)

[REDACTED]

Research Participant Information Sheet	V2
<i>Evidencing Success and Successful Evidence in Restorative Work:</i>	01/10/22
<i>Developing Models of "Effectiveness", "Efficiency" and "Impact".</i>	Page:
Benjamin Fisk	3 of 3

Appendix 3: Research participant consent form

CONSENT FORM

Evidencing Success and Successful Evidence in Restorative Work: Developing Models of “Effectiveness”, “Efficiency” and “Impact”.

Name of Researcher: Benjamin Fisk

Please complete this consent form and forward it to [REDACTED] to participate in further research. If you have any questions about this consent form or the information sheet, please contact the researcher directly at the above e-mail address.

*If you agree,
please initial box*

1.	I confirm that I have read the information sheet dated 1 st October 2022 (version 3) for this study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	
2.	I understand that I will be asked about recording and monitoring processes within the organisation I am employed or affiliated with, requested to share blank documents and templates, and no confidential information about service users will be shared with the researcher.	
3.	I confirm that I have permission to discuss organisational processes related to recording and monitoring of restorative work, including documents and templates from the organisation I am employed or affiliated with.	
4.	I confirm that I have permission to share blank documents and templates from the organisation I am employed or affiliated with.	
5.	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. I understand that any contributions made to focus groups cannot be withdrawn.	
6.	I understand that information I provide is confidential but may be looked at by the academic supervisors of this PhD research for quality assurance or ethical purposes. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my information if required.	
7.	I agree to take part in this study.	

Consent Form	V2
<i>Evidencing Success and Successful Evidence in Restorative Work:</i>	01/10/22
<i>Developing Models of “Effectiveness”, “Efficiency” and “Impact”.</i>	Page:
Benjamin Fisk	1 of 2

Name of Participant	Date	Signature
---------------------	------	-----------

Name of Person taking consent	Date	Signature
----------------------------------	------	-----------

*1 copy for participant; 1 copy for researcher file.

Consent Form	V2
<i>Evidencing Success and Successful Evidence in Restorative Work:</i>	01/10/22
<i>Developing Models of “Effectiveness”, “Efficiency” and “Impact”.</i>	Page:
Benjamin Fisk	2 of 2

Appendix 4: Online survey



UNIVERSITY OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Evidencing Success and Successful Evidence in Restorative Work: Developing Models of "Effectiveness", "Efficiency" and "Impact".

Please read the following information fully, confirm you have read and understood the attached information and agree to take part by indicating your formal consent at the start of this survey.

You can view all of the survey questions before completing the survey. If you have any queries about the content of this survey, please email benfisk@connect.glos.ac.uk before you formally consent and submit any responses.

Before undertaking this survey, you must read the [Information Sheet for Research Participants](#) and the [University of Gloucestershire Privacy Notice for Research Participants](#) in full and confirm that you have read and understand these documents, and consent to take part in this research:

Information Sheet for Research Participants:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1MrR_PgaTXzovY2BtYzYcgHdLI7GFTGy6/view?usp=sharing

The University of Gloucestershire Privacy Notice for Research Participants:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1cq6m3lr3opreEbcP2k0WQZbqLIEAxAMTKtT8xa7WrvU/edit?usp=drivesdk>

Please attempt to answer all of the questions in this survey. Your name, e-mail address and formal consent to participate in this survey are the only mandatory questions.

benjaminmfisk@gmail.com [Switch accounts](#)



 Not shared

* Indicates required question

Formal Consent.

Please type your full name: *

Your answer

E-mail address: *

Your answer

*Please confirm that you have read and understand the [information sheet](#) and [privacy notice](#) and **FORMALLY CONSENT** to take part in this survey.* *

☐

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet and privacy notice, and I consent to participate.

*I would like to take part in further research for this PhD project, and I **CONSENT** to be contacted at a later date to take part in the following research activities (Please select all that apply):*

Consenting to take part in further research is not a formal commitment, and you have the right to decline to participate at a future time if contacted by the researcher.

☐

Interviews or Focus Groups with other professionals.

☐

Sharing of information about recording and monitoring processes within an organisation I am affiliated with, and the sharing of blank templates, pro formas or document outlines where possible.

Questions about the person completing this survey.

Please describe your current professional role(s) and how this relates to restorative work?

(E.g. Teacher - Our school uses restorative practice, and I have been trained in to implement these;
Service Commissioner - I have commissioned restorative services for the local authority I work for;
Academic - I have a research interest in restorative practice)

Your answer

Please provide the name(s) of the organisation(s) that you work for or are affiliated with that undertake restorative work:

Your answer

Which country are the organisation(s) based in?

Your answer

Do any of these organisations undertake restorative work with service users?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Questions about Success in Restorative Work.

Define "Success":

What do you define as success in restorative work?

Your answer _____

Define "Effectiveness":

What does it mean for restorative work to be "effective"?

Your answer _____

Define "Efficiency":

What does it mean for restorative work to be "efficient"?

Your answer _____

Define "Impact":

What does it mean for restorative work to have "impact"?

Your answer _____

Success for service providers:

If you are, or have been affiliated with a service provider, does that organisation have any formal definitions, outcomes or measures of success in restorative work?

Your answer

Other success:

Does your organisation capture all of the examples of success that you see in restorative work? If not, what types of success do you see that are not formally recorded?

Your answer

Are there any other comments, or anything you would like to share about success in restorative work that may not have been covered by the previous questions?

Your answer

Submit

Page 1 of 1

Clear form

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Google Forms

Appendix 5: Semi-structured interview design

Introduction

- Greetings and thanks for agreeing to participate
- Verbally confirm information sheet has been read and consent received, have documents to hand (if in person) or open (if online) to confirm date these were signed by participant
- Reiterate confidentiality, anonymity and consent verbally.
- Confirm right to withdraw, stop interview, and not answer questions
- Confirm data storage procedures
- Confirm consent to record the interview

Section one

- Brief introductions, confirm job role/title, clarify meaning, ask if there are any questions before we formally begin questions
- Interview questions:
 - Describe the journey of data in your service from the earliest point of collection
 - What happens next?
 - How do you record that data?
 - What happens with that data?
 - Is there anything you think we've missed?
- Clarify content of answers to ensure accuracy:
 - Ensure acronyms are explicitly explained
 - Ask participant(s) to explain terminology and processes (e.g: What does a referral or an inquiry mean? How do they differ? Who collects referral information and how is it received? Which computer management system do you use to record data?).

Section two

- Confirm that the participant submitted their definitions of effectiveness, efficiency, and impact to the survey. Ask the participant if they recall their responses. List the responses they gave verbatim.
- Ask the participant how the content of their definitions is reflected in the recording and monitoring processes they have just described.
 - Repeat definitions again if necessary

Section three

- Ask the participant if they have any blank templates or documents that they could share concerning recording and monitoring processes, confirming again that they have consent to do this
- Is there anything you think we've missed today?
- Is there anything else you would like to add today?
- Do you have any further questions about this research?
- Confirm researcher contact information
- Thank the participant for taking part in the research

Appendix 6: Samples of social media publicity to generate participation

Samples from the social media platform X (formally Twitter), demonstrating use of targeted hashtags and application of a QR code for enable survey access.





Benjamin Fisk [@BenjaminFisk](#) · Sep 26, 2022



I've had a really good response to my survey looking at success in [#restorative](#) work, but I'm always looking for more professionals who work in the sector to participate. Please RT&Share! You can scan the QR to go directly to the survey! Or click the link forms.gle/A8LXfE6giDVbNK...



1



5



7



Sample from the social media platform LinkedIn highlighting collaboration with RJ charities and organisations to promote the survey.



Benjamin Fisk • You
Doctoral Research Scholar, Social Worker, Restorative Practitioner, Ed...
2yr • 

...

Thank you to [The Mint House - Oxford Centre for Restorative Practice](#) for sharing my survey exploring concepts of success in [#restorativepractices](#) which is part of my broader PhD project "Evidencing Success and Successful Evidence in Restorative Work: Developing Models of "Effectiveness", "Efficiency" and "Impact". This survey is vital to understanding how professionals (practitioners, managers, commissioners, academics) use these terms as I move on to explore recording and monitoring within services.

Please share far and wide!

[Why me? UK Restorative Justice For All \(RJ4All\) International Institute](#)
[European Forum for Restorative Justice \(EFRJ\) RJC - Restorative Justice](#)
[Council Belong Make Amends \(Shekinah\) Restorative Solutions](#)

[#restorativejustice](#)



The Mint House - Oxford Centre for Restorative Pr...
670 followers
2yr • 

Please help Benjamin Fisk (University of Gloucestershire) with his PhD research into concepts of success and evidence in restorative work. As part of his research he is conducting a survey of those who work/volunteer in restorative practice: <https://buff.ly/3Q72Xf2>

[#restorativejustice](#)



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Evidencing Success and Successful Evidence in Restorative Work: Developing Models of "Effectiveness", "Efficiency" and "Impact".
[https://buff.ly/3Q72Xf2](#)

Evidencing Success and Successful Evidence in Restorative Work: Developing Models of...
[docs.google.com](#)

 3

 Like

 Comment

 Repost

 Send

Appendix 7: Interview invitation e-mail

Dear ...,

Thank you for completing my online survey “*Evidencing Success and Successful Evidence in Restorative Work*” and allowing me insight into your thinking about success in the field.

When you completed the survey, you consented to be contacted again to discuss recording and monitoring processes within the organization you are employed by or affiliated with. I am contacting you today to ask if you would consent to be interviewed and consider sharing blank templates and documents with me for analysis and comparison.

I want to understand how services record and monitor their restorative work, and I am interested in the types of data services collect and the documents, templates, and processes that are involved. I do not want to collect any personal data about service users. I am happy to talk about the documents you use and the types of information you collect if you are unable to share these documents with me for any reason.

I have attached the research information sheet and consent form for you to review before making any decision to participate further. I am happy to answer any questions you may have about the study before participating. If you agree to participate, please complete the consent form and return it to me by replying to this e-mail. When the consent form is received, we can arrange a suitable time to undertake the interview.

Kind regards,

Ben

Appendix 8: Survey invitation e-mail

Hello,

I am writing to invite to participate in a survey for my PhD project. I have been commissioned by the Restorative Justice Council to explore success in restorative practice.

<https://forms.gle/Pybi5SUjjH3qjH196>

This survey asks broad questions and is intended to understand the perspective of professionals and practitioners who work for or are affiliated with restorative services and organisations in that capacity. It should take between 10-15 minutes to complete.

One of the additional aims of this survey is to help identify individuals that could discuss their service recording and monitoring methods with me at a future time. Any information would be anonymised and would not include any data about service users. I am only interested in the documents themselves; formats, styles, types of data collected, headings and measurements etc.

I am more than happy to discuss this further if required and would be beyond grateful if the survey could be shared directly with any professionals you are aware of who work restoratively. Thank you for taking the time to read my e-mail.

Yours sincerely,

Ben

Appendix 9: Sample of a transcribed interview

Researcher
Tell me about when you first get some kind of data about a restorative case. What happens? What's the process? What do you do?
P3
OK. So firstly, generally we have like a generic inbox or it comes directly to me and usually there's either referral form, but I kind of just cause I have got access to all the police systems. Usually I just say can I have the crime reference number, the name or phone number and then you'll kind of have a conversation about what's happened and then I can pull all the other information and that's just because people referring tend not to kind of like referral forms because. They're long winded and it takes too much time so I've kind of just scrapped all of that and then just said look just e-mail me and people kind of tend to appreciate that more. And once that referrals come in, I take a look at it, do like sort of a desk based initial assessment just to see whether this is like suitable. And then I speak to the professional as well before I call them just to see what's going on. And I also recorded it on to our case management system, so. Where I've kind of used different case management systems throughout my like RJ kind of career and some are better than others. I think the most. The one that I preferred the most is X just because that is tailored to restorative justice, whereas the other ones. I kind of just generic and the more like Victim Support that side of that kind of stuff.
Researcher
Could you tell me where you've used those different systems and what they were and sort of whether they link to like the police databases or not or stuff like that?
P3
Yeah. So, uh, X use. So they've built their own case management system and that is really good as well because it's tailored to restorative justice. So when you wanna pull out statistics and sort of other information. It's really easy to do and cause it's tailored to restorative justice. All the information's there. X. And that is the same the same again, it's just tailored to restorative justice and the support you get there. So if there's any issues or if there's anything that you want added to that system, it's easier to. To ask and get that added on and and then cause they've got also like the victim and offender side as well. So if you wanna log notes for the victim, it's easily done. And if you want to log notes for the offender, that's also easily done so when you. When for example, someone asks for, I don't know, like all the victim information. It's easier to pull out and it's nice to keep that separate

Appendix 10: Codebook sample

This sample highlights the subtheme of time within the theme of practice for definitions of efficiency in restorative work. A range of codes are visible, alongside the text from the survey submissions where they are identified. The computer software Nvivo 12 is used to facilitate the process of thematic analysis.

v2.1 Evidencing Success and Successful Evidence in Restorative Work_ Developing...

Name	Files	References
Time	2	45
Working at a time scale acceptable to the stakeh	1	1
Used at the earliest opportunity to prevent probl	1	1
Timely response to victims	1	1
Timely response from experienced knowledgeabl	1	1
Timely does not delay or rush	1	1
Taking as long as is needed, but no more.	2	2
Prompt case allocation 10 days	1	1
Not unusual for process to slow down or halt te	1	1
Minimum expectations for practitioner hours of	1	1
Meeting needs in timely and appropriate ways	1	1
Contact maintained participants informed can he	1	1
Can take time	1	1
Appropriate case momentum maintained	1	1
A lot of time goes in listening and reflecting and	1	1

<Files\\v2.1 Evidencing Success and Successful Evidence in Restorative Work_ Developing Models of Effectiveness , Efficiency and Impact . Aug2022 (Responses)> - 39 references coded [3.49% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.03% Coverage

Taking as long as is needed, but no more.

References 2-3 - 0.08% Coverage

Victims are responded to in a timely manner by an experienced and knowledgeable member of the team

Reference 4 - 0.05% Coverage

Sometimes it takes time but efficiency is gained by reducing the risk of harm from the process

Reference 5 - 0.14% Coverage

To be timely and neither delay or rush work with relevant parties

Reference 6 - 0.14% Coverage

We have minimum expectations for all of our practitioners based on the hours worked per week. This enables us to measure the efficiency of service delivery.

Appendix 11: Paper one: Fisk, B.M. (2013). What Are Restorative Justice Services Recording? Qualitative Analysis of Six Restorative Justice Reporting Templates for Offices of the Police and Crime Commissioner in England. *Laws* 2023, 12(2), 28. doi: 10.3390/laws12020028

This paper analysed the reporting templates of six restorative justice service providers working for PCCs within England. Submissions to the APPG-RJ from academics and expert practitioners had indicated significant differences across PCCs in their approach to reporting data that is used internally and goes on for submission to the MoJ. This paper is the first within academic literature to explicitly analyse templates used by services. It aims to expand upon the claims made at the APPG-RJ inquiry through rigorous academic analysis. This work enables other authors who are undertaking research in restorative justice services to make claims concerning variation and inconsistency and have those supported by academic peer-reviewed research.

This article used secondary data from the APPG-RJ inquiry, accessed during the authors tenure as a researcher for the advisory board. A report was created for the APPG-RJ advisory board which was deemed to have unique insight and value which would benefit from being peer reviewed and externally published in a way that the APPG-RJ could not accommodate due to the specific remit of the advisory board. The advisory board facilitated the seeking of consent from the individual services and their commissioners who owned the templates that they submitted to the APPG-RJ. Paper 1 highlighted the significant variations in terminology and measures of success across services alluded to in testimonies collected and summarised by the APPG-RJ inquiry (APPG-RJ 2022a; 2022b) and highlighted through the metrics used in service data a range of subjective understanding that constitute effectiveness, efficiency, and impact in RJ. The article was submitted to the journals *Laws* on 26th January 2023. Results of the peer review were received on 19th February 2023, and the revised manuscript was submitted on 21st February 2023. The paper was published on 13th March 2023.

Article

What Are Restorative Justice Services Recording? Qualitative Analysis of Six Restorative Justice Reporting Templates for Offices of the Police and Crime Commissioner in England

Benjamin M. Fisk 

School of Natural, Social and Sport Sciences, University of Gloucestershire, Cheltenham GL50 2RH, UK; benfisk@connect.glos.ac.uk

Abstract: This paper is a qualitative documentary analysis of six restorative justice reporting templates used by the Offices of the Police and Crime Commissioner in England for collecting restorative justice service data. Findings identify differences in the following areas: general presentation and format of templates; types of data recorded; areas of interest; definitions and use of descriptive language; methods and timing for counting data; and interpretation of restorative justice processes and outcomes. Conclusions highlight the need to standardise definitions and methods, outlining potential pitfalls when using data to draw further conclusions when equivalency is problematic, and further research avenues that could illuminate the use of data to evidence effectiveness, efficiency, impact and success.

Keywords: restorative justice; restorative practice; service data; recording; monitoring; case management; outcomes; reporting templates



Citation: Fisk, Benjamin M. 2023. What Are Restorative Justice Services Recording? Qualitative Analysis of Six Restorative Justice Reporting Templates for Offices of the Police and Crime Commissioner in England. *Laws* 12, 28. <https://doi.org/10.3390/laws12020028>

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1. Introduction

The concept of a “black box” in restorative work is not new (Umbreit et al. 2002; Bolitho 2017; Lanterman 2021), but never has the metaphor been more literal or appropriate when considering the confidential and potentially commercially sensitive data captured through routine recording and monitoring processes undertaken by restorative services working with service users. The historic focus of the sector, and rightly so, on professional best practice in undertaking restorative processes with service users, and the wide variety of outcomes that can be evidenced as a result, has left this black box of paperwork and data largely untouched until recently.

The work of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Restorative Justice (RJ) has been pivotal in beginning to crack this black box. The APPG on RJ is chaired by Elliott Colburn, MP, and was formed to drive forward cross-party conversations on RJ and raise awareness about its principles. An advisory board was formed to support the parliamentarians, consisting of key stakeholders within RJ in the UK, and is currently chaired by Jim Simon, Chief Executive of the Restorative Justice Council (RJC). The APPG on RJ has three goals: to examine the use of RJ principles within the UK justice system and beyond; to raise the profile of RJ principles within Parliament; and provide opportunities for policy discussion and consultation (All Party Parliamentary Group on Restorative Justice 2021). The APPG on RJ initially focused on the criminal justice sector but quickly expanded to include the broader spectrum of restorative practice (RP). An inquiry was commenced in 2021 and a call for evidence received submissions from in-house statutory services, externally commissioned private and third-sector providers, practitioners, trainers, managers, academics, activists, those who have been harmed and those who have committed harm. Many of these identities intersect, such as Ray and Vi Donovan who were harmed by the impact of crime, and have become activists, practitioners, and trainers who were instrumental in the birth of the APPG on RJ.

The initial inquiry report highlights the evidence of RJ outcomes, including systemic cost savings, victim/perpetrator satisfaction, and decreased recidivism. However, contributors highlighted several concerns that formed the nine key recommendations from the report (All Party Parliamentary Group on Restorative Justice 2021, p. 19):

1. Registration of commissioned services;
2. Standardise the sharing of information;
3. Improving quality through effective monitoring and evaluation;
4. Publication of a new Action Plan;
5. Reviewing ring-fenced funding for restorative justice practice;
6. Explore automatic rights for victims through the Victim's Law;
7. End to blanket bans;
8. More and better communications;
9. Government minister with specific responsibility for restorative justice.

Four workstreams have been organised to address these recommendations and additional evidence has been gathered through virtual and in-person events throughout 2022. The workstreams are responsible for producing a briefing paper for the APPG on RJ, with three of those briefing papers published at the time of writing (All Party Parliamentary Group on Restorative Justice 2022).

This paper is the first attempt within the field of RJ to directly analyse the recording and monitoring processes of service providers and contributes to an analysis of evidence in respect of recommendations two and three. This paper will provide context to the qualitative analysis of templates used by six different Offices of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) in England by outlining the key literature associated with recording and monitoring in restorative work. The documentary analysis identifies several key themes across the templates and a variety of headings and data points which demonstrate broad use of terminology and count types that require standardisation to enable meaningful analysis of data collected.

1.1. Restorative Practice and Restorative Justice Defined

The lack of a single definition of RP or RJ is compounded by the complex socio-political background from which contemporary methods have developed. With at least 11 definitions of RJ outlined by Paul and Borton (2017), each with a different focus or key feature, the lack of a single definition reflects the multiple ways of working that have developed internationally, at different times, with their own unique culture and legal frameworks that confer institutional legitimacy (Boyes-Watson 2018). The International Institute for Restorative Practice (IIRP) define RP as a social science and the umbrella term of which RJ is a subset, noting that RJ is often reactionary, whereas RP can be preventative, build social capital and relationships, and involve processes that precede wrongdoing (McCold and Wachtel 2003). Marshall (1999) and Zehr (2002) agree that RJ is a process for stakeholders in an offence, but vary in using the language of resolution, dealing with aftermath and future implications (Marshall 1999) and putting things right through a focus on harms, healing, needs and obligations (Zehr 2002). Zehr appears more person- and relationship-centered, whereas Marshall is focused on the offence itself. It could be argued that the emphasis on the crime as opposed to the person is why Marshall's definition is used by the Crown Prosecution Service (2019) of the UK, which in turn reflects the focus of that institution. The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) notes stakeholder communication for repairing the harm and finding a positive way forward (Ministry of Justice 2014), whilst Calkin (2021) takes this a step further by emphasising the role of restorative questions (Wachtel 2016) and communication as being essential to the definition.

Presser and Voorhis (2002) and Doolin (2007) highlight processes and outcomes as driving forces behind the type of definition used, but Bazemore and Green (2007, p. 295) have argued that process-based definitions of RP are insufficient as no practice or process is inherently restorative. Rather, there exist multiple types of processes, with a generally accepted continuum model (Wachtel 2016, p. 4) that outlines the range of informal and

formal processes available. Specific outcomes such as victim satisfaction are complex and multiple factors may be at play which no single theory can explain outright (Van Camp and Wemmers 2013). Common principles, general guidelines, and commitments underpinned by values have developed separate RJ processes and outcomes from the criminal justice system (Doolin 2007; Anfara et al. 2013; Van Ness and Strong 2015). Research has identified that practitioners understand the work they are doing encompasses both practice and values (Anfara et al. 2013), of which encounter, amends, reintegration, and inclusion are considered ‘cornerstone’ values (Van Ness and Strong 2015, p. 49).

Challenges to definition have occurred when terminology and branding are used to describe practices that may not utilise or embody specific features (Wood and Suzuki 2016). Distinctions have been made about more and less restorative processes through typology and continuum, with emotional exchange as a core component that cannot occur if only one stakeholder participates (McCold and Wachtel 2003). In prisons, victim and offender terminology has been found to be unhelpful (Calkin 2021). In cases of drug use, the victim and perpetrator are the same person, and the ‘ecosystem’ is disembodied in environmental crime (Pali and Maglione 2021). As processes adapted during the COVID-19 pandemic, stakeholders were not physically present during virtual meetings (Velez et al. 2021). Analysis of international law suggests RJ is being used as a bureaucratic instrument, criminal justice option, and product-service used to enrich the ‘toolbox’ of traditional criminal justice, as opposed to a community-based, informal, and radical justice practice (Pali and Maglione 2021).

1.2. Recording, Monitoring and Accountability

Recording and monitoring serves a number of purposes in restorative work and there exist long-standing opinions that have shaped contemporary practice. Roche (2003, p. 182) cites communication to an internet discussion group “Family Group Conference Interest” from McCold in 2001 who promoted minimal monitoring of individual cases (case and agreement nature, preparation time, meeting length and participant numbers, reason why a case did not proceed), programme-level monitoring (numbers or referrals and sources, number of meetings agreements reached and complied with), and participant surveys around satisfaction, fairness, and referral to other interested persons. Twenty years later, interviews undertaken by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Restorative Justice (2021) highlight the vital role that service data plays negotiating or reviewing service contracts. Evidence is required by commissioners that demonstrates effectiveness, impact, efficiency, and value for money of restorative approaches, and can affect future work and funding opportunities which can impact staff and service users (All Party Parliamentary Group on Restorative Justice 2021).

Research in the US has highlighted training for those who wish to implement or employ restorative approaches (Lantermann 2020) as an area where information about recording and monitoring in the sector is problematic. Some trainers may not have been involved in delivering restorative processes themselves, and whilst the RJC training provider code of practice (Restorative Justice Council 2020c) states “trainers must be experienced restorative practitioners”, this is not regulated in the UK. Lantermann (2020) notes a lack of emphasis on quality assurance of practitioners post training and outlines the potential for further research with agencies who have operational quality assurance processes to examine the relationship between staff compliance and competency with RJ conference models and participant outcomes. This suggests a lack of consistency in how services and practitioners develop, and the potential omission of any quality assurance processes in some services. The role of trainers in developing recording and monitoring methods may be important, particularly if an organisation buys into a package with the intention of fully adopting restorative approaches in their work.

The Code of Practice for Victims of Crime (“Code”) contains a number of rights that enable the possibility for recording and monitoring related to RJ that takes place prior to a service accepting a referral and undertaking any formal work. The right to information

about RJ and the right to a referral to a RJ service has been interpreted differently by police services because of the use of qualifying language that includes it as a component of a suite of victim services and the lack of ring-fenced funding (Clamp 2022). The promotion of RJ to victims is undertaken broadly via websites, but also directly through informational leaflets, written letter, and verbally in person or over the phone. Who undertakes this promotion and how it is undertaken also varies, and with the offer being available throughout the criminal justice process, it is unclear if each attempt is recorded individually, whether prompts used in forms are actioned, or whether automated processes are checked for completion. Clamp (2022) evidences the role of computer systems in data collection processes, and the cited ease at which PCCs can access this information, but also the problems with data sharing between agencies that can impact on these processes.

Compliance with the rights under the Code continues to be the only requirement related to the recording and monitoring of RJ in the criminal justice sector, but restorative services do collect other data, and this is evidenced by the six reports published by the organisation *Why Me?* (2016, 2017a, 2017b, 2020, 2021, 2022) using PCC data gathered by use of the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act. The initial paper (*Why Me?* 2016) focused on how funding was used, with the further research papers moving into greater detail on monitoring and evaluation criteria that emphasised significant variations in terminology and reporting styles which call into question the reliability of any data comparison (*Why Me?* 2017b). Wider data around outputs and outcomes were explored (*Why Me?* 2020), with concerns about data quality and breadth in terms of questions and potential answers explored (*Why Me?* 2021) and a simple business model of restorative services as a flow diagram of inputs, outputs, and outcomes presented (*Why Me?* 2022). Corroboration of data occurred beyond the FOI data, as direct feedback from a number of PCC's and the use of case studies were provided for qualitative context (*Why Me?* 2017b, 2021). The most recent report (2022) reinforces the previous findings highlighting significant concerns about what data is collected and issues with accuracy that impact meaningful comparisons, making recommendations for the inclusion of other data sources such as probation, the public reporting of data, and collaboration between the MoJ and Association of PCCs to ensure accurate spending reporting, clarification of the data return for victims supported by RJ, and redefining outcome measures. Across the six reports, the following types of reported data (other than financial information) were identified:

- Number of referrals;
- Number of new cases;
- Case referral outcomes;
- RJ outputs;
- Victims supported;
- Outcomes related to impact on victims;
- Satisfaction.

These reports offer a valuable insight into the types of data collected for PCCs, highlighting that poor data hinders RJ service development and accountability, and demonstrating what happens to data collected in the types of templates analysed for this research paper. However, these reports include data reported by the MoJ and may not include all the data that is reported by services, let alone that which is collected and not reported to the MoJ.

FOI requests provide secondary data, are not voluntary, and may not be an accurate or complete representation of information from the PCC. The previously cited work of Clamp (2022) used a survey of PCCs, achieving an 88% response rate, and demonstrated the role of compliance monitoring in relation to RJ and the Victims Code directly from PCCs. Contributing PCCs outlined how performance monitoring took place using service user data, aggregate statistics and dip sampling. The majority of respondents described these processes as well developed, although those that stated development was on-going highlighted issues with procurement of new software, implementation of a new contract or uncertainty around monitoring the code and its implications. The research demonstrated

how compliance monitoring is varied across respondents using several different methods that include general contract reporting, measuring of performance against organisational action plans, internal working groups, and multi-agency compliance groups. In terms of insight afforded by this research about the types of data collected, differences were noted in types of referrals that are accepted, with some restrictions in terms of offence type, and which party initiates a referral.

The recording and monitoring of the formal restorative process by a service starts around the time of a referral. Research has demonstrated that referrals can be impacted by the perception of practitioners (Banwell-Moore 2022, p. 15), with notions of an “ideal restorative justice victim” affecting these. The making of a referral can be linked to information on offence type or victim characteristics, and some forces may only accept a referral if initiated directly by the victim. This work offers an insight into the types of data that may be captured by services at an early stage, such as demographics and referral source. Linked to this area, further research has offered an in-depth analysis of informational materials from PCCs to explore how RJ service providers explain the offer of RJ to victims (Clamp et al. 2022). There is limited research around the documents that RJ services use, and this paper is an example of important work in a developing area of the field. Both of these pieces of research (Banwell-Moore 2022; Clamp et al. 2022), along with that of Clamp (2022), suggest that services may monitor the work practitioners undertake before a referral proceeds, but how this is recorded and monitored is problematic as the service itself may not be the one initially offering information, and furthermore, it is unclear if this time is factored in to calculations of work undertaken in terms of funding received by commissioners. Both studies are exploring components of “the offer” of RJ in different ways and suggest that the recording and monitoring of services could happen earlier in the timeline of a case, but that this early part of the timeline is harder to track due to the potential involvement of multiple agencies that may have different reporting requirements.

Service evaluations and systematic research reviews provide valuable insight into the types of data captured by RJ services. These include, but are not limited to, the previously mentioned longitudinal study of three RJ services for the MoJ (Shapland et al. 2004, 2006, 2007, 2008), the Thames Valley Police restorative cautioning initiative (Hoyle et al. 2002), the Northern Ireland Youth Conferencing Service (Campbell et al. 2006), the Sacro RJ (Diversion) Services across Scottish local authorities (Kearney et al. 2007), and the systematic review of ten RJ conference control trials across three continents (Strang et al. 2013). Despite many historical evaluations of services, data collection methods and templates used by services have not been analysed directly. Aggregation of service data in academic analyses presents issues in relation to understanding outcomes measured in specific services, and broad definitions may not capture individual service nuances and how these differ in use (Strang et al. 2013, p. 35). Shapland et al. (2004) provide clear outlines of numerical data from the services evaluated in the form of counts and percentages concerning case flow and case type data, demonstrating the collection of referral numbers and sources, general demographic data, offender data (offence, sentence, and custody data), progression of cases for offenders and victims, time period for closed cases, interval time period between different parts of the process, general outcomes and individual items included in outcome agreements. Minor variations or omissions are observed between the different services in some of the data categories. Feedback from participants (Shapland et al. 2007) is another data source that contributes to the recording and monitoring of services. Evaluations are usually controlled and standardised to a significant degree for experimental purposes and may not be an accurate representation of the types of data collected and measures used by services more generally. The variations in data types collected by the services (Shapland et al. 2004) suggests that even in experimental conditions this degree of control is not always possible in restorative work. It is also difficult to separate out the types of data collected purely for the purpose of evaluation from that collected normally by services, or whether services continue to collect the full range of data presented in the evaluation after this involvement ceases. For services generally, it is unclear if evaluations shape the

data services collected, or if the services shape the data evaluations analysed. Indeed, Shapland (2014) states that the purpose of RJ service evaluation is not simply measuring satisfaction or impact on recidivism, but must consider the outcomes desired, if they have been achieved, and potentially the value for money, and that to evaluate a service on an outcome it did not seek to attain would be unfair (Shapland 2022). It is not possible to know the inner machinations of negotiation for every evaluation undertaken or the outcomes desired, but the literature highlights the distinctions between self and external evaluation and the potential challenges of a service choosing either option (Hamad et al. 2020, p. 19), and that those responsible for setting up services should consider professional appraisals of the dimensions the evaluation is looking at, such as practitioner, referrer, and other support service views (Hamad et al. 2020, p. 17).

Professor Joanna Shapland's contribution to the RJ literature was cited frequently by contributors to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Restorative Justice (2021) inquiry, and her work has made important contributions to how the evaluation of services should be undertaken (Shapland et al. 2011), how RJ services should be implemented, and the role of mitigation and risk in RJ for the Scottish Government (Hamad et al. 2020; Shapland et al. 2022). She has noted the important connection between monitoring and evaluation but clearly distinguishes between them as something that all services and practitioners should be doing, and the specialised skills and knowledge required for further evaluation (Shapland 2014), noting that evaluation enables economic analysis, it can attract more service funding, increase facilitator confidence and build reflective practitioners, and enable the documentation and evidencing of restorative processes (Shapland 2022). RJ service evaluations have explored effects and their congruence with the original service aims and have historically lacked transparency in terms of organisational set up, which is troubling given the need to understand measures to evidence effects (Shapland et al. 2011, p. 43). Challenges related to monitoring tasks varied, with volunteering organisations having more difficulty than those supported by statutory criminal justice organisations, but all services required a full-time administrator to track cases, undertake monitoring tasks, and deal with service queries (Shapland et al. 2011, p. 45). Monitoring is vital for effective service evaluation but is also essential to ensure the accountability of services participants, staff, referrers, and funders (Shapland 2014, 2022).

Ample guidance exists globally and publicly from organisations and government agencies about developing restorative services within specific contexts, but specific information on what and how to record and monitor is mixed (O'Dwyer 2014; Chicago Public Schools 2017; Scottish Government 2017; Gregory and Evans 2020; Lustica et al. 2020). The Criminal Justice System (2004) stressed the need for clear referral processes, formal written assessments, and clarifications of administrative tasks in co-working cases. The Sussex Police (2020) are an example of a force with data protection and information sharing requirements linked directly to electronic systems used to input RJ data.

In the UK, the RJC has played a key role in the production of documents that touch on this area, but they are limited in both prescription and detail by design to enable freedom in professional judgement and practice (Restorative Justice Council 2020b). These include the National Occupational Standards for Restorative Practice (Skills Sector Council 2013), restorative service standards (Restorative Justice Council 2016a), and the service providers handbook (Restorative Justice Council 2016b). In 2020 the RJC replaced the Restorative Service Quality Mark with a new Registered Service Provider status and published the service provider registration framework (Restorative Justice Council 2020b) and the service provider code of practice (Restorative Justice Council 2020a). These documents are used primarily by practitioners and services in the criminal justice sector, and emphasize the importance placed on ensuring quality of practice at the service level.

The evaluations of Leeds City Council's Children Services (Mason et al. 2017; Harris et al. 2020) provide some of the best insight and practice into what restorative services are recording. The project theory of change (Harris et al. 2020, p. 56) highlights the extensive outputs and outcomes that can be achieved when multiple agencies (schools,

early help, targeted support services and social work) adopt a single practice model and consistent approach to RP. The implementation of outcomes-based accountability enabled the service to monitor and track performance using the data it was collecting about itself on electronic systems. This suggests that services may track, use, and report data at different points in time across the life of a case, and the development and use of bespoke software can effectively enable systemic analysis of restorative service data sets.

Outside of general service performance and data about services users and cases, recording and monitoring can have other purposes. Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)8 ([The 2018 Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec 2018](#)) states RJ services should regularly monitor the work of their facilitators to ensure adherence to standards and safe, effective delivery ([Pali and Maglione 2021](#)). How practitioners and services undertake their restorative work can be categorized through these methods, and it is possible that best practice can be identified that can improve the field. However, the potential for managerial reach and control of practitioners could be called into question, which previous research has identified the role of financial reports for performance measurements and funding, which could impact on job security, managerialism, and the ‘McDonaldization’ of services ([Umbreit 1999](#)) which could affect consistency of reporting requirements ([Roche 2003](#)). It could be suggested that there is a potentially coercive impact on some practitioners from recording and monitoring processes.

The publicly available transcripts of submissions to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Restorative [All Party Parliamentary Group on Restorative Justice \(2021\)](#) inquiry highlight key challenges for recording and monitoring with individual PCCs setting their own data recording requirements, an over-reliance on count data that neglects the breadth of restorative work, and a focus on cost and efficiency of service rather than effectiveness, resulting in geographical inconsistencies that prevent meaningful data comparison. Contributors felt that this was further compounded by a lack of understanding by commissioners about what RJ is, with decisions about what to record based on other measures linked to experience of other services, and mixed definitions of RJ and the type of work it constitutes that directly links to funding. Maturity and experience of service is a factor in the type of measures used, where a new service may focus on referrals and service promotion, whereas a longer-standing service may be interested in diversifying the case types. A lack of categorization in recording allows these types of variations to exist. Contributors frequently offered their support for the implementation of a national recording template for RJ that would eliminate these variations and provide a national sample for effective quality assurance, analysis, and comparison that avoids the need for FOI requests if it were published directly by the MoJ.

Theoretical approaches, such as the agency-accountability framework, based on empowerment theory ([O’Mahony and Doak 2017](#), p. 65) and relational theory ([Llewellyn et al. 2013](#), p. 283), offer pathways for improving recording and monitoring by exploring how RP might be measured and what any indicators of success would be.

[Doak and O’Mahony \(2018\)](#) argue that there is no common view of what success is in RP, and discourse around success and what it means needs to be ‘finely attuned’ to the nuances of outcomes and practices within restorative approaches. RJ can be mapped against ‘empowering values’, ‘empowering processes’, and ‘empowering outcomes’ ([O’Mahony and Doak 2017](#), p. 65) via an agency-accountability framework, based on empowerment theory, that moves past the problem-focus of delivering RJ in criminal justice to articulate how and why RJ works at individual and collective levels. The framework envisions a justice system with the fundamental normative goal of re-empowerment, with victims and offenders more likely to achieve this through mechanisms that enable agency and accountability to be exercised ([O’Mahony and Doak 2017](#), p. 197). Crime disempowers victims, offenders, and communities, whilst RJ can be used to re-empower. They outline five common benchmarks:

1. Participation;
2. Engagement;

3. Satisfaction;
4. Restoration;
5. Reducing recidivism.

The agency-accountability framework is an overarching framework of values housed within those two concepts that help inform the benchmarks in evaluating and understanding success. Wood (2020) built on the work of O'Mahony and Doak (2017) in considering accountability as a core element of RP, but stressing the lack of consensus in definition and noting that research actually highlights two forms: temporal and object accountability. Accountability can be considered in terms of the accountability between participants, as well as accountability of services.

Llewellyn et al. (2013) propose different forms of measurement within RP that focuses more on the values of the process, and measures linked to those such as relational impact, as opposed to measures linked to financial efficiency or counting number of processes completed. The concerns these authors have is that rather than RJ defining these for itself, they have been a response and critique to the justice system and success is in reference to those measures rather than anything that has developed from the RJ field. They propose that RJ should be measured and subsequently evaluated in terms of the way people relate to each other and their communities, leading success to take on new forms beyond the limits of value and measurement as currently understood that reflect the normativity of RJ. They argue that relational theory explores the needs and capacities of human beings their systems, and as such supports the expansion of RP into other domains such as education, workplaces, and communities. Justice must take account of connectedness to others, and the multiple intersecting relationships that exist among them (Ministry of Justice 2014, p. 297). The principles that emerge from a relational theory of restorative approaches are (Ministry of Justice 2014, pp. 301–4):

1. Relationship focused;
2. Comprehensive/holistic;
3. Contextual/flexible;
4. Subsidiarity, inclusion, and participation;
5. Dialogical or communicative;
6. Democratic/deliberative;
7. Forward-focused, solution-focused, and remedial.

They note the significant challenge this theory presents for academics, particularly in the field of evidence-based practice and policy development. Measures of success would need to be developed that were convincing enough that resources would be put in place to support further research. Their critique of evaluation as the current method of measuring success notes that often the 'goal' of a program is also the 'outcome', meaning the change mechanism is often not explored, ergo RP goals, if they are inherently different from the criminal justice system, are not explored either.

The literature has highlighted a number of important areas related to recording and monitoring in RP. These include guidance, standards, and best practice; the types of data that could be collected; reasons why data is collected, whom it is reported to, and the purpose it serves; and theoretical approaches that outline areas of restorative work that can potentially be measured. What becomes apparent is that we do not understand how services are recording their data, or the language and categories they choose to use to capture data about different components of restorative processes. By outlining these in more detail, this paper intends to provide an initial insight into the question: what are RJ services recording?

2. Method

Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating an extensive array of document types (Bowen 2009, pp. 27–29), with increased complexity when using hardcopy and digital formats (Padgett 2016) by leveraging raw primary data sources such as policy documents and categorized literature for collection and analysis (Gorsky and

Mold 2020). Documents are ‘social facts’ because of the manner in which they are produced, shared, and used (Atkinson and Coffey 2004). This requires the researcher to become an ‘active constructor’ of meaning (Carter 2005, p. 373), leveraging interpretative analysis that explores context, language, and meaning of textual discourses that give insight into how people construct reality, and access to the ‘official’ language used by organisations (Gorsky and Mold 2020). Organisations may have their own terminology or acronyms and timescales related to record keeping, with different sources or rationales which may impact on the way documents are used by practitioners. Conversely, there may be language that practitioners are dissuaded from using, manager or commissioner preferences, or research-driven frameworks. Documents are ‘social facts’ and have the capacity to shape views, perspectives, attitudes, and behavior by the way they are produced, shared, and used (Gorsky and Mold 2020, p. 85). This requires the researcher to treat them as contextual, complex, and potentially problematic (Carter 2005), requiring corroboration before making broad statements (Gorsky and Mold 2020).

Six digital templates were analysed via qualitative documentary analysis methods, supported by the Nvivo 12 software to understand what data RJ services are collecting and reporting to PCCs. Recording and monitoring methods constitute raw primary data sources for systematic review and evaluation via documentary analysis (Bowen 2009).

For this paper, the researcher has been commissioned by the University of Gloucestershire, supporting Workstream 4 of the advisory board for the APPG on RJ, to provide evidence on recording and monitoring within restorative services in the UK. The blank templates were provided by six PCCs as part of their responses to the survey undertaken by the APPG on RJ, which was circulated to all commissioners and police forces in England and Wales. The original draft of this report was reviewed by members of Workstream 4 for clarity, and the service provider responsible for using an individual template provided comment on the initial report to give further insight on some of the findings, or provide clarity on items that were unclear. Further agreement and consent were then obtained directly from the commissioners for that report to be formally submitted for peer review and publication. No personal identifying data regarding commissioners, police forces, geographical areas, participants or practitioners was shared with the researcher prior to analysis, and full anonymity has been maintained for all parties in this report. Elements of the data are considered commercially sensitive and, as such, permission has not been given to share the templates publicly.

Initial observations were made about the variations in presentation and formatting of templates, the general prevalence of quantitative and qualitative data types, and the overarching categories and areas of data requested. Coding was then undertaken to identify all of the headings across templates. Those headings were then explored to identify to what extent different terminologies were being used synonymously. Further coding was undertaken to explore in greater depth the types of data requested, the types of language used to describe these, and the potential implications for categorization of data collection templates across restorative services. Finally, using the headings and groups of data, five themes were identified to broadly describe the data observed across all templates:

1. Timeline of case progression;
2. Outputs and outcomes;
3. Demographics;
4. Service accountability;
5. The language of crime.

3. Analysis

3.1. Overview of Templates

An initial analysis of the templates (N = 6) highlighted differences in their general structure, including presentation style, general layout of the template, and choice of digital format. Further analysis identified differences in the broader contents and types of data that were requested. These will now be explored in more detail.

3.1.1. Presentation and Format

Five of the six templates analysed used a spreadsheet (Microsoft Excel) format (T1; T2; T3; T4; T5) to facilitate input and the remaining template (T6) was in document (Microsoft Word) format. Immediately, this presents challenges for consolidation of data across services when different types of computer applications are used to collect and report data. Of the five using the spreadsheet format, divergent choices in layout have been made. The most significant outlier amongst these is T3, which has used a horizontal landscape-style format, ordering data categories from left to right using columns, whereas the other spreadsheets (T1; T2; T4; T5) have used a vertical portrait style, ordering their categories from top to bottom using rows. This makes a simple visual comparison of data challenging, but also suggests that basic compatibility across data sets could be problematic due to general presentation and formatting differences. T5 used four sheets within their reporting template to separate key areas of data (referral, outcomes, demographics, and workforce/finance), which supported ease of use when looking for specific information that matched those categories.

Use of spreadsheet software enables robust and automated collection and analysis of quantitative data; however, the power of such software has not been leveraged for these templates. Basic count data requires users to directly calculate totals themselves or select these options within the software. Only T5 is set up to automatically count and total this data, although the additional requirement to provide percentages for outcome measures still requires the person completing this to calculate that themselves. The document format used by T6 makes this particularly problematic as the software lacks these types of statistical functions. Furthermore, T6 asks the individual reporting to undertake further breakdowns of collected count data using a self-referential coding system which requires the individual to scroll back through the document and check the code itself to ensure the correct proportion of that sum is calculated accurately. This method could potentially lead to basic errors, as the software is not able to check this, and requires additional due diligence by the reporter.

Variations in reporting periods are evident across the templates. T5 offers the most comprehensive collection schedule, with data requested monthly for the period of one year, presented April to March, presumably for ease of cataloguing data across the financial year. Only T4 captures a broader range of data over time, requesting data for two years, although this is broken down into intervals of quarters over the standard calendar year, providing eight data points per category (four per year) compared to 12 with T5. T2 and T6 both collect data for the current reporting period and ask the inputter to provide figures related to the previous reporting period. However, T2 requests count data for the current quarter and inclusion of the same count data for the previous quarter to presumably enable quick visual comparison, whilst T6 collects count data for “this period” which is not defined in the blank document analysed, but the service provider confirmed is quarterly, and an additional column for “+/- PRP (previous reporting period)” which requires the inputter to calculate whether the figure for the current quarter is more or less than the previous, rather than simply reporting the previous period figure. The reporting periods for T1 are also not defined, and the majority of the template asks for data only from the current reporting period, except for 10 data points included at the start of the template that constitute a summary of the RJ Service Performance Report.

These data suggest variations in purpose and use of templates. Considering these reporting period variations, it could be assumed that T4 and T5 are longitudinal master documents that enable the continuous collection of service data in a single location, whereas the remaining templates (T1; T2; T3; T6) are individual reports that may or may not be collated into another document at a later time. Given the breadth of work that PCCs undertake, and the range of data they collect, it is highly likely that all of these reports will be used and data from them collated into further documents and reports for varying formats. As individual reporting documents, T2 and T6 ask for previous data which would require additional work of the inputter to locate and identify previous reports and log

(in the case of T6) or make additional calculations (T2) in a new report. This feels like unnecessary additional work. For anyone reviewing the data of a single service over a longitudinal period, they would need to review multiple documents to understand patterns and trends. For that function, T4 and T5 offer simpler approaches for quick use of data.

3.1.2. Contents and Data Types

The content and number of potential data inputs varies between templates. Variations in reporting periods make a basic count comparison of data points across templates difficult. For the spreadsheets, these vary from 30 rows to 250. It is not apparent how labour intensive the templates are for the practitioner or service to complete. A template that requires around 60 inputs every month would amount to over 700 points of entry, whereas a template that requires 250 inputs every quarter would accrue 1000 inputs over the year. As noted, formatting and presentation may have as much of an impact on labour intensity, but this study has not ascertained that information at this time. Whether documents that practitioners use can filter digitally into these templates, or require copy and paste by the inputter, or transposing from handwritten documents is not clear but would also impact on workload. Difference in input quantity is not indicative of template quality, as there is clearly a balance between rich detail for analytical purposes and concise data recording.

What is key in terms of general content is the differences between all templates in the way they order and group their contents, and the variations in language and terminology used. These will be explored in more depth throughout this paper. Other than templates which request a summary of key data across categories, the majority of templates begin with requests for data about referrals. T6 requests data on “proactive contact” before referrals, which explores data about potential victims who could be contacted by the service and next steps regarding contact with a RJ facilitator. T1 explores “contact” in the “participation” section, and T2 explores this in the “RJ activity” section, but the sub-headings used across templates are not entirely synonymous and it is unclear if all of these instances of “contact” are pre-referral or post-referral.

All templates request quantitative data predominantly in the form of basic counts, with T3, T4, and T5 requesting some input of percentages. For T5, percentages are required for all data related to outcomes, T4 for five types of conversion rate, whereas T3 asks for them across the majority of sections, including referrals, assessment and action plans, interventions and planned exits.

Qualitative data could be submitted in response to case study and example requests (T1; T2; T5; T6), with differing degrees of opportunity afforded across templates. The opportunity to add “any relevant comments” (T6) for the majority of sections, and two columns consisting of “definition/measure/narrative” and “supporting notes” (T4) for all measures, contrasts most significantly with T3 which uniquely does not request any form of qualitative data in the template itself. All restorative services, other than that of T6, provide additional narrative reports and case studies, and the templates themselves are positioned as tools to collect performance data.

3.2. Timeline of Case Progression

Most data in the templates tracked the progression of cases at a variety of different points in the life of that case work. Table 1 outlines four of these areas of data collection where variations in language were observed that described similar features, or where measurement varied.

Table 1. Timeline of case progression.

Referral	Progress	Case Status	Intervention
Number of referrals	Contact	Active/ On-going	Intervention
Number of new referrals	Engagement/ Participation	Closed	Activity
Number of new referrals accepted	Attrition/ Conversion	Completed	Process

3.2.1. Referrals

Methods and language used for counting referral data varied across templates, and this is presented in Table 2. These measures will inform different types of data depending on if referrals themselves are counted regardless of whether any further engagement with service users occurs, and specifically victims. The headings “accepted referrals by crime type” and “referrals by offence type where victim engaged (new victims only)” are similar data types, but technically distinct due to the additional caveats around “accepted”, “where victims engaged”, and “new victims only” which could lead to different interpretations for data. A total of 37 unique referral sources were identified across all six templates.

Table 2. Referrals.

Area of Language Variation	Example(s)
Declined/Rejected	- Variation in input options, including open text options for stating reasons for “other declined referrals”, and restriction to pre-defined choices that do not include “other”. - Lack of clarity about what constitutes declined or rejected, and whether there is a variation in the specific term selected by a service.
Referral source	37 unique referral sources identified (Range of 0–18 sources). - Use of “Other” varied, including the opportunity to elaborate on that further.
Offence/Crime type	- Referral by offence type where victim engaged (new referral only). - Offence type where victim engaged. - Accepted referral by crime type.

3.2.2. Contact, Engagement, Participation, Conversion and Attrition

These five concepts overlapped in use, but variations were observed in how they were grouped. Table 3 highlights the examples of these. Use of the terms “conversion” and “attrition” varied, appearing to reference the move from one stage of a process to another, offering an interesting insight on the general focus of the data. The depth of data in this area varies, with the “attrition” focus primarily connected to process completion when service users do not participate. Attrition language use suggests that offender (non-engagement) and victim (decline) involvement may not be considered equal, with further clarity from service providers highlighting the role of procedural factors such as a service only accepting a victim-initiated referral, or external services such as prisons or probation restricting direct contact with offenders, which highlights wider systemic issues in ensuring equity in the restorative process between victim and offender.

Table 3. Contact, engagement, participation, conversion, and attrition.

Area of Language Variation	Example(s)
Participation	- Used as a heading to capture different data types, with data included varying between templates that used it; - Heading for capturing all data regarding referrals, contact, and conversion (T1); - Heading to track data about offenders and victims who took part in process.
Contact/Engagement	- Terms appear to be used synonymously across templates to describe a professional making contact or engaging with a service user in the early life of a case; - Proactive contact (T6) was victim specific, and broken down into numbers identified, numbers agreeing to explore the process, and those declining.
Conversion	“Any participation by both parties to direct activity involving victim and offender”; “From referral to first contact with victim”; “Conversation rate %” (T4) included victim initiated accepted referral to contact made with victim/restorative conversation with victim; - Contact established with both parties to indirect/direct restorative process; - Offender initiated accepted to initial contact made with victim.
Attrition	- Reasons for victims declining RJ; - Reasons for offenders’ non-engagement.

3.2.3. Case Status

Language related to case status is outlined in Table 4. T6 requests the majority of its data about closed and completed cases. This is distinct from other templates (T1; T2; T5) where the majority of data about processes is about active and on-going cases. Whilst all the data would eventually be collected, there are implications for reporting, particularly if a case takes a long time to be closed or completed, so accuracy is problematic in this template.

Table 4. Case status.

Area of Language Variation	Example(s)
Active/On-going	Synonymous language across all templates, referral to open, active, on-going case work.
Closed/Completed	Distinct terms, case closure referring to the work of the service provider itself, and a case completion linked to processes on the commissioner’s system after the provider has closed the case.

It is unclear from the templates whether the amount of additional work that takes place post intervention is fully captured, such as whether cases are subject to further reviews or on-going follow-up, additional paperwork and time taken in relation to this, and where this other work might stand in terms of “completion” or “closure”.

3.2.4. Intervention, Process, and Activity

Language choice, outlined in Table 5, may provide insight into the view services have about what RJ is. Each template applies a different structure and order to the types of data they collect in terms of processes: T2 describes “RJ Activity” whereas T1 describes “Participation” for overall headers that capture a number of different types of data linked to RJ processes.

Table 5. Intervention, process, and activity.

Area of Language Variation	Example(s)
Intervention	• VOC or indirect intervention; • “Total referrals ending in restorative conversation” (T3).
Process	• Processes included as components of “participation” (T1); • “Direct or indirect RJ processes or mediations facilitated” (T6).
Activity	• “Indirect RJ” (T1; T2; T5); • Indirect separated between “shuttle” and “letter” (T2); • “RJ Activity” (T2); • Number of restorative conversations, distinct from direct and indirect activities (T4).

3.2.5. Signposting and Onward Referrals

The terms “signposting” (T1; T2; T4) and “onward referral” (T6) are used by templates in reference to service user interaction with other services. These service providers clarified that “onward referral” is a formal process that requires consent, whereas signposting is distinct from this. It is unclear what constitutes the act of “signposting”, and whether this is categorized in method (such as verbal, complemented with leaflets, direct contact details, and other methods) or counted in the same way.

3.3. Outcomes and Outputs

Feedback, satisfaction, and outcomes are used interchangeably across the templates, covering a variety of different measures, and were grouped differently across the templates. An overview of the differences is contained in Table 6. Many of the templates use counts of process, activity, or intervention as evidence of service outcomes. For example, T2 uses the header “RJ outcomes this period for closed cases” to cover total number of different process types that are undertaken, whereas T5 includes victim satisfaction measures in their “outcomes”. This could infer that the completion of the process is an outcome for some RJ services, which is distinct from outcomes for the victim or offender.

It is not possible to ascertain how feedback from service users is measured, as it is not obvious from the templates what options are given, such as a Likert scale or a binary yes or no, to allow participants to rate services. Service providers use surveys with participants and their results are reported in the templates. Clarification was provided by some providers that these feedback processes are formally agreed upon with the commissioners. The templates themselves do not provide further detail about how these surveys are undertaken (in-person, sent electronically, sent hard copy), and whether they are all distributed and completed at the same time. For example, T2 header “Feedback and Satisfaction” (which mentions a feedback survey) is distinct from the header “Victims Outcomes Distance Travelled” that notes an “Outcomes survey”.

Table 6. Outcomes and outputs.

Area of Language Variation	Example(s)
Feedback and Satisfaction (cases closed in period only)/Victim Outcomes (T1)	• Number of surveys given and completed counted, and numbers satisfied or dissatisfied, victim and offenders counted in same section; • Improved health and well-being; • Better able to cope with aspects of everyday life; • Increased feelings of safety; • Better informed and empowered to act.
Feedback and Satisfaction/Victim Outcomes Distance Travelled/RJ Outcomes this period for closed cases (T2)	• "Coping everyday life post support"; • "Satisfaction with outcome of intervention"; • "Satisfaction with RJ service"; • Total number of process types undertaken.
Feedback and Outcomes (T3)	• Separate sections for victims and offenders; • "Victims recommending service"; • "Victims viewing service in positive light".
RJ Activity/Victim Outcome/Feedback and Satisfaction (T4)	• Distinction in headings for measuring different counts and percentages; • Feedback and satisfaction included victims and offenders separately; • Count of surveys given, completed, number satisfied, number dissatisfied.
RJ Outcome Measures (T5)	• Separate sections for victims and offenders; • Number of new and existing offender referrals and longitudinal reoffending count data; • "Satisfaction" and "Outcomes for victims" separate; • Direct report victim measures and practitioner opinion of victims' report include the measures: "Coping everyday life post support"; "Satisfaction with outcome of intervention"; "Satisfaction with RJ service".
RJ Process (T6)	• Number of discussions between victim and practitioner. • Number of direct restorative process (face to face); • Number of indirect restorative process (Shuttle RJ); • Number of indirect restorative communication letter—apology or explanation); • Improved health and well-being; • Better able to cope with aspects of everyday life; • Increased feelings of safety; • Better informed and empowered to act; • Satisfaction in process/dissatisfaction in process.

Service providers clarified that practitioner opinion is captured to support the commissioner to distinguish between service user and practitioner interpretation, and that in practice victim survey response is generally low. Tracking of outcomes for victims varied. The reporting of the measure “victims better able to recover and cope with aspects of everyday life” varied in terms of those that reported this outcome. Victims were able to self-report if this had “improved”, “no change”, or “deteriorated”, and some templates allowed practitioners to report their opinion of the impact on the victim. Data from T6 has been included here as it is exploring what other templates have categorised as “outcomes”, but T6 does not explicitly use the word “outcomes” to describe the questions regarding victim reports.

3.4. Demographics

Half of the templates request data on demographics (T2; T5; T6), but the range of data requested is not uniform across templates. T5 does not request data on religion or belief, and T6 cross references age and gender into a single table for the inputter to break down more specifically, which is not requested in either of the other templates. T2 and T6 have a wider range of ages than T5, which only asks for “less than 18”, offering “12 and under”, and “12–17”. Information on sexual orientation varied, with the options of “gay” or “lesbian” omitted entirely on T5, but “heterosexual/straight”, “bisexual”, “other”, and “not stated” included on all three templates.

The positioning of these data on the templates varies, coming at the end of the template for victims who engaged in a RJ process (T6), towards the start, and for new and existing referrals (T2) and on a separate sheet for new referrals only (T5). Demographic data for offenders is not collected on any template.

3.5. Service Accountability

Terminology that describes the service itself and not necessarily the work it was undertaking included “workforce”, “staffing”, “training” and “service”. Data inputs for “staffing and training” (T2) and “workforce” (T5) were primarily quantitative, but T6 included qualitative sections for “Lessons Learned” and “Current/Future Focus for RJ Service”. Data about the service featured in all templates but was not always placed into such explicit categories. Inputs such as “service satisfaction” were classed as outcomes, and feedback indicating if service users “do not trust RJ service” were given as a reason for declining a referral. T3 tracked participants who would recommend or view the service in positive light. Only two services formally tracked complaints within their templates (T2; T5), and “workforce” combined complaints with staff numbers. All service providers clarified that further information is provided to commissioners in narrative reports which are separate from these templates, but not all services include these details in the template documents.

The approach to tracking staff numbers and hours worked varied, with only T1 and T6 requesting a count of practitioner contact hours. T2 asks for “current and optimum numbers” of staff, which adds a subjective judgment which may incorporate data on current referral numbers and staff caseloads, which could be guided by an “optimum” ratio. T5 asks for vacancies, but it is unclear if this is linked to staff attrition, increases in funding for new staff, or other reasons. T5 requested the most comprehensive pre-populated breakdown of all staff numbers (with six distinct staff types), T2 requested a breakdown of current and new staff and volunteers with further details about the training undertaken. T4 requested detail on current volunteer numbers, including numbers recruited, trained, and how many left the service. T1 only requested volunteer practitioner hours, and required count data on “total number of hours working on cases” and “direct contact hours”, compared to T6 which asks for “hours spent in direct communication” and “hours spent facilitating indirect communication”, but does not track data about additional work undertaken by practitioners.

The explicit reporting of financial data is referred to in T5 alone, with reference to the requirement to attach a quarterly contract finance report in the service workforce and finance Table. It is unclear from the other templates whether a separate financial report is required of them, and the detail required in T5 is not apparent. Questions are asked about numbers of hours worked, and staff and volunteer numbers in other templates which would have a clearer relationship with financial information than other data points. All service providers clarified that they undertake direct financial reporting to commissioners, with the majority undertaking this quarterly, reporting on actual spending and variances against budgets across multiple cost lines.

3.6. *The Language of Crime*

A common theme around language linked to crime was identified, with terminology such as “victims”, “offenders”, “crime”, and “offences” used frequently across templates. The terms “participants” and “service users” are used across the templates to broadly describe those involved in restorative processes related to crime. The term “victim” is used consistently across all templates, but “offender”, “perpetrator”, and “harmer” are used interchangeably across templates and on two occasions (T3; T6) interchangeably within a template. Data collected about victims is in greater quantities and suggests a general focus by services on the victim component of the restorative process. The majority of data about offenders concerns the specific offence and sentence stage. Demographic information is not collected for offenders in any of the templates analysed. Victim outcomes are requested on all templates, but the language used around offender outcomes varies, with some templates capturing them specifically (T3; T5), and others asking for “offender satisfaction”. T5 and T6 take different approaches to reoffending data as T6 asks for count data on how many “harms” have or have not reoffended, and T5 asks for the number and percentage of offenders who did not reoffend within 6, 12, and 24 months of the RJ intervention.

Some templates are designed with parallel columns for collecting both victim and offender data, such as number of referrals received and number of feedback surveys given and returned (T1), and RJ activity which includes contacts attempted, case progress, attrition, feedback, and satisfaction (T2). The combining of data occurs in several areas, making it difficult to differentiate between victim and offender, such as safeguarding and complaints (T2), how many people improved (I), saw no change (NC), or deteriorated (D) as a result of the service (T6).

“Offence” and “crime” are used interchangeably across templates, and positioning of offence type varies between templates where those data are requested (T2; T4; T5; T6), located at accepted referral (T2), new accepted referral (T4), referral where victim engaged (T5), and closed/completed cases (T6). Pre-populated options vary with some using breakdowns of certain offence types (e.g., injury/non-injury), and some asking for “other”. All templates combine “Arson” and “Criminal Damage” into a single reporting domain, so it is not possible to statistically separate the two. T6 includes “manslaughter” and “death by dangerous driving” which are not used in any other template. This may be indicative of the crimes where RJ has been used in this geographic area.

T2 requests “accepted referrals by crime type” but states that there should be “one main crime type only for each referral”. T5 does not state that one main crime should be added and is a potential for double or multiple counts if more crimes are involved. A “main crime” could be subjective and depends on who decides this. If at a given time a certain crime is seen as more or less important than another type of crime due to local or institutional priorities, the reliability and validity of data could be called into question.

The counting of offence type is positioned in different ways across templates. T5 describes “referrals by offence type”, and T6 requests “offence type” for closed and completed cases only. These will generate a different type of count of offences depending on if they are linked to the referral, or casework that carries on whether closed or completed. What happens to a referral, whether it becomes a case or not, could impact on reporting as services may get a broader range of offences at the referral stage than the closed or

completion stage as not all cases will go beyond referral. Hypothetically, this count could also be affected if services do not work with certain types of offences, which begs questions about whether an inquiry or formal referral about a case with that offence type would be considered a referral if it were rejected.

4. Discussion

An analysis of six templates for reporting data from RJ services commissioned by PCCs in England highlights common themes in recording and monitoring, but significant differences between templates. The differences identified were in general format and presentation, types of data requested, basic content, and use of data collection categories. For data to be used simply and meaningfully, these variations can be overcome by the adoption of a single system for reporting which enables and promotes effective data analysis, as called for in evidence submitted to the [All Party Parliamentary Group on Restorative Justice \(2021\)](#). The documents themselves do not provide information on author, origin or source, their specific purpose, or the underpinning research and background (Carter 2005; Gorsky and Mold 2020). Whilst we know they are used for reporting to PCCs, how or when they were created and the thinking behind how these developed requires further research to provide context and enable a more holistic analysis that would prevent repetition of previously tried and abandoned methods for recording and monitoring within a universal template.

The bulk of the templates were concerned with data that captured the timeline of case progression, with emphasis placed on different points of the process across the documents. Differences in language and wording were highlighted frequently across templates, but for reasons of volume alone case progression is where the highest number of variations were observed, even where commonality existed in the broad area of language linked to crime. Issues of synonymy and homonymy were observed frequently across the templates. Where language could be presumed synonymous, caveats were frequently added to measures that meant data collected and compared would not be equivalent (offences measured at referral or at case closure; interventions, which include or exclude certain types of restorative work). Different terms were used frequently where meaning should be identical. Take the language used to describe the same type of restorative processes, or the language used to describe individuals who have committed a crime; the different terminology used to describe the same person adds value judgements, and gives potential insight into the thinking of the commissioner and/or service that created their template and their relationship to these individuals.

The analysis highlighted the disproportionate focus on data about victims when compared to offenders, greater variations in terminology used to describe offenders, and differences in how and what data about them are captured. The greater consistency of language and higher number of data entry points for victims is likely due to the positioning of funding that commissions these services, with money coming from the Victims Service grant. Further research would benefit from comparing these findings with the data that the MoJ requests from PCCs, as the [All Party Parliamentary Group on Restorative Justice \(2021\)](#) highlighted that the MoJ has frequently changed the types of data requested, which would provide further understanding about how these templates have developed and how they go about complying with the data demand. The literature highlighted the variations in language when defining restorative approaches (Paul and Borton 2017; Marshall 1999; Zehr 2002; Crown Prosecution Service 2019; Ministry of Justice 2014) which it could be suggested has filtered into the processes for recording and monitoring, resulting in the lack of standardised terminology to enable effective use of the data captured by services. Whilst the RJC service provider registration framework (2020) made reference to attempts not to hamper creativity or constrain practice, by avoiding over-prescription and allowing flexibility, significant variations in recording and monitoring have been able to develop that limit purposeful use of data on a systemic level.

The data identified in the theme “outcomes and outputs” suggests that the results of restorative work are complex and contested. Differences in which components of a process and what type of restorative intervention are counted make comparisons difficult. Indeed, many counts of the process itself could be considered an output, such as number of referrals received or accepted, but are also classed as outcome in some templates. The placing of different process components within different interchangeable overarching terms, such as “activity”, “intervention”, “engagement” and “participation”, demonstrates a lack of clarity across the templates and potentially the sector. The intervention itself, whether part of the process or an output, or an outcome, or all of these requires further clarification and more detailed analysis. Many outputs are simple counts which lack qualitative detail that could highlight differences in impact. Limited information about the process of gaining victim feedback and satisfaction would call into question the reliability of any comparison of data sets, particularly if the analysis was not using primary data and clarification of the processes was undertaken with the service itself. The addition of subjective components, where practitioners are asked to give an opinion on victim outcomes, which is potentially aligned with professional judgement, adds an interesting factor. Whilst the reporting of the practitioner judgement of victim’s satisfaction is clearly separated out in the templates analysed here, it is unclear how that is processed once it is reported to the MoJ, and has implications for data about services that are collected by the PCC, reported to the MoJ, and could then be obtained in some form by an FOI request, such as those undertaken by Why Me?. For example, when processed, is that data then deemed equivalent to the self-report of the victims by anyone looking at it without the appropriate context, or is the data used as separate counts of individual cases that could suggest a higher level of satisfaction than achieved. This could therefore call into question the validity of any report that uses these data. Further information is required about the data journey, and how data are used in practice.

Measuring recidivism in restorative services is complex, but not impossible, as highlighted and elaborated on by previous research (Shapland et al. 2008; Strang et al. 2013; Sherman et al. 2015). The general absence of recidivism data, and mixed approach when included, suggests that recidivism can be tracked at the service level but more often than not requires additional data sources and further analysis to extrapolate conclusions. The templates themselves do not use the term “recidivism”, rather referring to “reoffending”. There may be variations in service access to data that enables judgements about recidivism to be made. Service positioning, in-house, externally commissioned, or another form, and the professional relationships between services may impact upon access to wider data that the restorative service itself is not responsible for collecting and managing, therefore limiting potential for analysis and judgement without the need for expensive commissioning of external evaluators to explore data that a service could collect by themselves.

Demographic data should be expanded to both victims and offenders and must be entirely consistent. It is not currently possible to draw wider conclusions about the availability, effectiveness, or impact of RJ within specific communities from templates alone. It is unclear how the templates relate to the methods for collecting data from service users, and whether the categories highlighted in the templates are representative of what service users are given. It is not possible to draw a conclusion about the omission of “gay” and “lesbian” from one template, which could be perceived as not being inclusive. Other sexual orientations, such as pansexual and asexual, are omitted entirely. This would necessitate the use of “other”, but it is unclear if the opportunity for elaboration is afforded to the service user. For a sector that focuses on relationships, this has the potential to negatively affect the one between service users and the service itself, particularly for those who may be more broadly discriminated against in society. Improvement in tracking demographics has the potential to further detail the societal make-up of “ideal victims” (Banwell-Moore 2022), and whether protected characteristics play a role in professional decision making that can affect participation and may highlight discrimination that results in exclusion of persons from restorative processes.

Differences were observed in data collected about services, workforce, and staffing. Hours and types of work undertaken by practitioners, training undertaken or delivered, and approaches to complaints requires standardisation of collection. Drawing wider conclusions about the size, experience, reach and status of the current workforce, their average case load, or numbers of practitioners working geographical areas is not possible with the current templates. This may be due to significant differences in how RJ services are formulated, which is an avenue for further research in itself. Financial input was difficult to navigate from the templates, as the way practitioner hours and associated costs are tracked varied, and financial reports where requested were to be added in separate documents that were not available for this research. From these templates it is unclear how services differ, but the work of [Clamp \(2022\)](#) offers more insight that could be used for triangulation in future work.

Areas of narrow focus, such as focusing on single victims or only enabling the recording of single crimes, draws back to [Wood \(2020\)](#) and the ideas of temporal and object accountability. Accountability towards only one victim does not recognize the impact on wider society or groups of victims, or an inability to link an offender to multiple victims through poor data capture—mixed capture over time—but also aspects of success over time. The many ways that accountability has been considered in restorative work ([Wood 2020](#), pp. 168–73) are predominantly in terms of the offender. Accountability goes beyond just the process and those service users that participate ([O’Mahony and Doak 2017](#); [Wood 2020](#)) and includes the accountability of the service itself to funders and the general public. Accountability in restorative work and the ability of the service to demonstrate this requires significant improvements to recording and monitoring. Reporting requirements for PCCs and subsequently the MoJ are a component of service accountability in terms of performance and whilst individual services may be able to report to better degrees than others, minimal reporting may be more satisfactory for some individual commissioners and even in accordance with earlier thinkers’ positions on data use in restorative work ([Roche 2003](#)), but on a systemic level it is difficult to gauge with the templates explored here. Training undertaken by staff, and training that the service delivered to others was a reporting requirement in a number of templates. The quality of either cannot be ascertained via the templates alone, even if evaluations are completed, as results are not reported here ([Lantermann 2020](#); [Restorative Justice Council 2020c](#)).

Whilst proformas for data capture are not offered in the literature in terms of alternative methods to measure RP ([Llewellyn et al. 2013](#); [O’Mahony and Doak 2017](#)), parallels between these templates and the five common benchmarks offered by [O’Mahony and Doak \(2017\)](#) are more apparent than the seven principles from [Llewellyn et al. \(2013\)](#). The benchmarks may appear to be more concrete and easier to measure, but this paper highlights how measuring constructs such as participation, engagement, and satisfaction is still a complex task where meaning can be interpreted differently.

The five themes in this work may be transferable to templates or monitoring processes where RP is used in other sectors, with the “language of crime” being adapted to the chosen professional language of that sector, such as education or social work. However, where service providers undertake restorative work across sectors, language may be observed that is more specifically “restorative” and not aligned with a specific work sector. It is possible that these types of templates may be more closely aligned with the relational theory of [Llewellyn et al. \(2013\)](#).

Given the highlighted differences between templates, it could be argued that the full range and scale of restorative work is not being captured by services. Each offers components, some overlap, but further research is required to understand how these templates relate to practice in the field, and whether templates can more effectively capture the depth of success in practice and outcomes. Leveraging the power of technology in any universal template would make recording and reporting easier in practice, whilst ensuring that data could be used in a meaningful way that provides oversight, insight, and the opportunity to reasonably draw conclusions about effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of restorative

services. Gorsky and Mold (2020) highlight the importance of corroboration before making broad statements about findings from document analysis, and this is true of this research. Further research should include a wider range of templates, and questionnaires or interviews with practitioners, managers, commissioners and others who have involvement in the collection of data to enable further elaboration on the initial findings of this document analysis. A further research avenue linked to corroboration would explore what is offered to victims, particularly in terms of the “mechanics of the process” and “outcomes of participation” (Clamp et al. 2022) and what services are recording. Further research is also required to understand how templates are designed, and who decides their content.

5. Conclusions

On top of navigating complex relationships and working with service users towards achieving restoration and repair, administrative tasks that may seem trivial in comparison to practice are drawing out important data. Even the most well-meaning service must be accountable for its actions when working with potentially vulnerable individuals, and when funds are coming from the public purse at a time of continued austerity and strained public resources. This analysis of six templates highlights the urgent need for measures used in restorative service data to be clarified and standardised to ensure that any claims of equivalency are accurate and meaningful. Areas that require particular focus are those of general language used and types of measures employed. Key decisions to improve these should include as many as stakeholders as possible and an agreement should be reached that is used by all services moving forward.

Language should be carefully considered if any attempt is made to standardise data categories, collection, and reporting schedules. Standardisation should enable effective analysis. Examples where this should occur include referral details, the types of intervention offered to ensure equivalence, the language used to describe those who have committed harm, and clear distinctions for feedback, satisfaction, and outcome that support effective evidencing of success. Any standardisation must be accompanied by clear guidance to support practice and ensure clarity. If a template enables the explicit measurement of “manslaughter”, but another would require this to be recorded as “other” crime, the perception of the potential impact of restorative processes on higher profile and more serious crimes could be diminished, or considered non-existent, which in turn would not provide evidence of the effectiveness or impact of restorative work with the most serious crimes.

Timescales for capture and reporting need to be carefully considered and agreed upon, particularly in terms of when specific categories of data are recorded such as types of crimes at point of referral or point of case closure, so any independent analysis of service data is an accurate snapshot at the time it is undertaken. An example of this is when comparing the data from a template that tracks data monthly and then reports, compared to a template that tracks quarterly and then reports, which demonstrates how accuracy can be impacted. Broader, infrequent counts may offer a simpler equivalence, but ignoring opportunities for detailed analysis when data exist limits opportunities for more informed and meaningful data use. It is likely that requesting data about only closed cases will produce data with lower numbers in general about progress, participant demographics, offence type, and sentence stage than those capturing active cases alone. If a system could be used that could accurately isolate and track active cases distinct from closed cases, more effective data reporting could be undertaken.

It is a testament to any service that is willing to be transparent and open its processes up to analysis and potential scrutiny by an outside party. For that, even under anonymity, these services should be applauded. The templates themselves are singular documents which touch upon the vast amount of important work undertaken by practitioners and cannot capture the rich, transformative, and emotional detail of restorative work, nor that of those tasked with compiling these templates. In this sense, quantitative measures of success can only say so much in isolation, and require further reporting by managers to give context, including the use of case studies as specific examples. Whilst each template is different, and

has its own merits, it is not the aim of this analysis to ascribe value judgements on specific templates as the restorative community at large must be responsible for deciding which of the components identified should be taken forward and which language and definitions should be used universally. It is interesting that templates have diverged so much from one another, and a further avenue of research would explore how this happened and elaborate on the reasons behind this.

The understanding of ideal measures that could be used would benefit from further research. There are implications for the evaluation of RJ services, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses where the researcher is using secondary or tertiary data. Analyses across international borders are potentially even more problematic if they do not factor in cultural context and use of language which could result in greater variation in definition. This does not negate the significant findings of effectiveness, efficiency, and impact within individual service evaluations, but highlights the need for assurances that any quantifiable claims to broader systemic success are accurate and based on valid and reliable data, and that terminology used is synonymous when drawing conclusions. These findings identify some of the practical challenges related to templates themselves, and the added layers of complexity within them that affect the analysis of data collected. Service or national level analysis drawn from these templates could result in significant challenges related to ambiguity of equivalence and complexity of task, resulting in issues of validity of findings from comparing and contrasting the majority of the collected data.

The simple answer to the question, what are RJ services recording?, is broad sets of different data in a few general areas that do not appear to have a shared language or meaning for terminology and measurement criteria. To call back to the black box analogy, if each service were an airplane, the respective flight recorders would differ in how they recorded speed by miles per hour, kilometers per hour, or knots per hour, and the flight departure times would vary between the point the plane physically moved from the terminal, when it began to accelerate down the runway, and the point of physical take off. Much like these templates, comparison of data gathered would not be impossible but it is unnecessarily complicated. The frequent omissions and data variations in comparable template categories is a lost opportunity to understand the true impact of restorative work and the effectiveness and efficiency of services within and across multiple domains. Further research is required to provide a more nuanced understanding of success in restorative services, and the wide range of success types that occur and could be measured in different ways at different points on the restorative journey for service users, practitioners, services and ultimately society at large.

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Appendix 12: Report one: Hobson, J., Fisk, B.M., Hook, K. and Jaffé, L. (2023). APPG for Restorative Justice RJ Workstream 4: The commissioning, collection, and dissemination of evidence-based research in Restorative Justice and Restorative Practice & the benefits of a national reporting framework. All Party Parliamentary Group for Restorative Justice. Available at <https://rjappg.co.uk/briefing-papers/>

Building on the work of the initial APPG-RJ inquiry report (APPG-RJ, 2021), four workstreams were identified for further research and consultation. Workstream 4 examined the reporting and evidencing of restorative work. The APPG-RJ advisory board arranged a series of consultation events for the new workstreams in partnership with Calcomms, the secretariate for the APPG-RJ.

The thesis author worked with the APPG-RJ advisory board as a researcher under the direct supervision of Dr. Jonathan Hobson, during the period of March 2022 and December 2022. During this ten-month period they undertook regular meetings with members of the APPG-RJ advisory board to discuss avenues for research and areas where the researcher could support this. The researcher contributed directly to data collection undertaken at online and in-person consultation events with practitioners and academics based in the UK. Furthermore, all data submitted to the APPG-RJ was reviewed for overarching themes and discussed with the advisory board.

The author created two internal reports for the APPG-RJ advisory board, one concerning evidence of research and evaluation from submissions, and the second focused on evidence concerning recording and monitoring, building on a key finding of the initial inquiry of concerns surrounding report template multiplicity between services who provide RJ. This involved the qualitative thematic analysis of all data collected by the APPG-RJ advisory board between the period of 2021 and 2022, including surveys submissions and transcripts of interviews of practitioners and academics.

This researcher made a significant contribution to the published briefing paper in terms of data analysis and the write-up of the published document. This briefing paper report provided three key recommendations concerning the benefits of a national reporting framework and the commissioning, collection, and dissemination of evidence-based research in RJ and RP. Report one was published to the APPG-RJ website on 24th January 2023 by Calcomms on behalf of the APPG-RJ advisory board.

PhD supervisor declaration for report one

As supervisor, I declare that the work outlined by the student for the following document produced for the APPG-RJ ‘Workstream 4’ was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and this is an honest declaration of their role as co-author of the report and the substantial work they undertook under my supervision.

Signed ...  Date ...23rd March 2025.....

Dr Jonathan Hobson

Signed  Date ...23rd March 2025.....

Benjamin Mark F



Executive Summary

The RJ-APPG is in the second phase of its inquiry into the current state of restorative justice (RJ) and restorative practices (RP) in the UK. This paper summarises the work of workstream 4, led by Dr Jonathan Hobson alongside Ben Fisk, Kate Hook, and Lucy Jaffé. The workstream examines potential mechanisms or processes for the commissioning, collection, and dissemination of evidence-based research in Restorative Justice and Restorative Practice & the benefits of implementing a national reporting framework.

The workstream received a wide range of responses in its call for evidence, including: data from the original 67 written and oral responses to the first report; further survey responses from 36 adult RJ commissioners, 3 private sector prisons, 2 delivery organizations, and 25 youth offending teams/services; feedback from 8 online and one in-person consultation events; and 10 detailed interviews and a further 16 survey responses from academics engaged in international research and dissemination on restorative work.

The analysis found that there was a wide variety of excellent practice across the field, but that there was a need to capture that evidence in a variety of different and consistent formats. There was also a need to support the dissemination of the extensive research and evidence-based practices that often underpin this work, and in doing so bring together practitioners, those responsible for service design and delivery, academics, and researchers. These findings are presented as three key recommendations::

- 1. To expand and support the use of regional, multi-stakeholder/multi-agency groups that can facilitate the sharing and dissemination of research and evidence-based practice.**
- 2. To design, develop, and embed a National Reporting Framework(s) for restorative services.**
- 3. To embed evidencing of success across processes of commissioning and reporting.**

Key recommendations for the APPG are:

- 1. To expand and support the use of regional, multi-stakeholder/multi-agency groups, that can facilitate the sharing and dissemination of research and evidence-based practice.**

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ), Restorative Justice Council (RJC), and other key stakeholders could work to support or establish regional multi-stakeholder and multi-agency groups. Where used effectively, these groups bring together practitioners, service providers and commissioners, and academics to share knowledge. Such groups have been demonstrated as highly effective in supporting communication, providing opportunities to disseminate research, and building new evidence-collecting and disseminating partnerships.

- 2. To design, develop, and embed a national reporting framework(s) for restorative services.**

In consultation, the MoJ and RJC could work with stakeholders to design and develop a series of clear measures for recording and reporting practice that would form the basis of a National Reporting

Framework. Such measures, would reflect sector differences and differences between youth and adult services, allowing for an overall assessment of impact and success as well as for sector-specific benchmarking. Such an approach would be greatly enhanced with the implementation of a digital system for the reporting, management, and analysis of data.

- 3. To embed evidencing of success across commissioning and reporting for services**

As part of developing greater visibility and sharing of evidence-based work, and of developing a National Reporting Framework, there is a significant opportunity to establish a series of success-markers for restorative work. This will allow for the greater evidencing of success across both interpersonal and system-wide indicators. A centralised national repository for case studies, service evaluations, and peer-reviewed research will enable the sector to promote evidence of success in restorative practices.



EVIDENCE AND CONTEXT

1. Expand / support regional, multi-stakeholder groups

Across the range of consultation responses, there was significant comment on the benefit of multi-stakeholder groups. Such groups were identified as successful in Belgium, the Czech Republic, and the Netherlands. In the UK, multi-stakeholder models are used impactfully, although not consistently, at a national level (e.g., in Scotland and Northern Ireland), at a regional level (e.g., the multi-county group in the South East), and at a County level (e.g., in Gloucestershire).

Respondents described how these groups provide: a location for the sharing of evidence-based practice and dissemination of research; access to further data for evaluation; opportunities to build networks in support of both service development and awareness; and help to 'connect' research to practice, service design, and service delivery. Expanding and supporting such groups, and encouraging connections between these groups, would provide a valuable structure for supporting restorative work.

Respondents identified that there is already much excellent research in the field, with more regularly undertaken. There is, however, a lack of financial support for this work, and limited opportunities for dissemination. Research is frequently undertaken by academics on a good will, low cost, or personal interest basis for the benefit of the restorative sector.

Respondents noted that bids and tenders for running services do not include funding for rigorous academic evaluation, which is important for ensuring quality, efficacy, efficiency, and the meeting of needs. As a result, large amounts of practice are not evaluated.

2. National Reporting Framework(s) (NRF)

Respondents reported that an extensive range and volume of data is currently collected, but that this varies significantly in format and type. Police and Crime Commissioner requests for data vary nationally in template format, terminology and definitions and services often do not have capacity to analyse their own data. The current MoJ data request focuses on wider victim services data and does not do enough to collect RJ specific information.

Respondents were generally in favour of an NRF, particularly if it were developed in consultation with the sector, considered academic input, reflected differences between areas (including youth justice), and not too labour intensive. Such a measure could: facilitate the collection of data across consistent measures; enable effective service and sector comparison; provide high quality and reliable and valid evidence of success; encourage evaluation by ensuring the use of similar baselines and measurement techniques; and support an effective separation of data from service, reducing potential bias.

Where suitable, respondents felt data gathered could be made publicly available for academic analysis, which would promote transparency in the sector and enable further research to be undertaken.

3. Embedding the evidencing of success

Respondents identified challenges to understanding the impact of service provision, including: a lack of a shared language and definitions; varied data collection points; and rigidity around measures and outcome types. Consequently, it was considered difficult to compare services and sectors on a type-by-type basis and at the national level.

Respondents highlighted the complexity of capturing 'success' in restorative work, noting that quantitative count data was reported in varying degrees by services, and that there was limited detailed qualitative contextual data, such as case studies and lived-experience voices.

Respondents felt embedding agreed success markers as part of an NRF would help to support the sector to identify and collect evidence across a number of impactful and comparable metrics. Such markers would be developed in an evidence-rich environment, and should involve input from academics, services commissioners and providers, and stakeholders.

Respondents suggested the creation of a National Repository of Restorative Work that includes case studies, service evaluations, and peer-reviewed research. This would promote evidence collection, demonstrate the variety of approaches, and could be used by policy makers, services commissioners and providers to inform service decisions.



Appendix 13: Paper two: Fisk, B.M., Hobson, J., and Twyman-Ghoshal, A. (2025).

Effectiveness, efficiency, and impact in restorative justice: Navigating the subjective and objective to evidence success. *International Journal of Restorative Justice*.

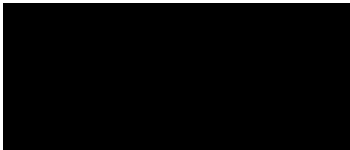
This paper was devised as a response to claims made in the APPG-RJ inquiry that recording, monitoring, and evaluation are not capturing all that could be achieved using RJ processes. Submissions noted an emphasis on metrics such as recidivism for capturing the effectiveness and impact of a process, and efficiency in terms of cost-benefit compared to the traditional criminal justice system. Report one supported the claim that standard RJ service reporting for PCCs and the MoJ focused on quantitative output and count data as the predominant measure of success. As such, it was felt that returning to practitioners to understand additional or alternative measures was important.

Paper two used primary data collected by the author of this thesis. Paper two analysed survey data consisting of participants definitions of effectiveness, efficiency, and impact in their restorative work. It was submitted to the International Journal of Restorative Justice on 23rd May 2024. It passed editorial desk review was accepted for anonymous peer review on 30th May 2024. Results of the peer review process were received on 18th October 2024 and revisions to be made were identified prior to publication. Revisions were completed and the paper was re-submitted on 15th January 2025.

Confirmation was received on 28th February 2025 that the article was now considered to be publishable subject to minor additional amendments. Amendments included unpacking some paragraphs to add more detail to ensure claims were fully supported in argument and literature; ensuring clarity of terminology; ensuring clear justification of the methodology in relation to working with practitioners and their self-perception of practice; and general editorial amendments around grammar, consistent use of British English, and checking all references are included. This document was resubmitted on 13th March 2025.

PhD supervisor declaration for paper two

As supervisor, I declare that the work outlined by the student for their second published paper (Fisk, Hobson & Twyman-Ghoshal, 2025) where I contributed as second author, was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and this is an honest declaration of their role as primary author of the report and the substantial work they undertook under my supervision.

Signed ...  Date ...23rd March 2025.....

Dr Jonathan Hobson

Signed  e ...23rd March 2025.....

Benjamin Mark Fisk

Abstract

The international debate around institutionalisation in restorative justice reveals tensions in service evaluation between maximalist definitions advocating for professionalization within criminal justice systems and purist definitions aiming to disrupt traditional justice systems. Evaluations offer important metrics for understanding the success of restorative justice, but academics argue that these metrics misalign with restorative justice values. These were highlighted amongst other concerns from academics, practitioners, and those with lived experience at the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group on Restorative Justice inquiry, which recommended further investigation into service evaluation. Evaluation is crucial for evidencing service success in effectiveness, efficiency, and impact but often aligns with dominant forms of measurement. This research aims to explore the criteria that practitioners use to define success, builds on the inquiry recommendation and adds to academic literature by using thematic analysis of questionnaire survey data from professionals with lived experience to explore their definitions of effectiveness, efficiency, and impact in restorative justice. This paper aims to understand how institutionalisation impacts practitioners' definitions and where lived experience challenges or offers new success metrics. It highlights the multi-faceted nature of success in restorative justice and identifies potential methods for recording, monitoring, and evaluation to support evidencing success.

Keywords: professionalisation, institutionalisation, transformation, monitoring, evaluation,

1. Introduction

Restorative justice is at a paradoxical moment in its development. While its reputation and evidence base grow, with impactful processes integrated into global systems and policies (Gustina et al., 2024; Kimbrell, Wilson & Olaghere, 2023; Latimer, Dowden & Muise, 2005; Maglione, Marder & Pali, 2024), success-driven institutionalisation risks subsumption by the very systems the underlying philosophy of restorative justice critiques (Pali & Maglione, 2021). Concerns exist that institutionalised restorative justice is being reshaped by dominant ideologies (Soulou, 2024).

Despite this debate, the presence of restorative justice in global policies and systems is increasing. Organisations like the Restorative Justice Council (RJC) in the UK, the International Institute of Restorative Practice (IIRP) in the US, and the European Forum for Restorative Justice (EFRJ) codify practice, provide standards, and support sector development. However, evidencing effectiveness is a key, often overlooked, aspect of the institutionalisation debate. Evaluation, while rigorous and standardised (OECD, 2021; Shapland, 2022), can align with maximalist definitions, potentially conflicting with purist views that prioritise relational, dialogical processes and citizen-centred outcomes (McCold, 2000; Gade & Chapman, 2022).

Calls for relational evaluation exist (Llewellyn et al., 2013; Olson & Sarver, 2022). While they can be critiqued for promoting restorative justice exceptionalism (Levin, 2022), this reflects a belief that current evaluations underrepresent the success of restorative justice. Llewellyn et al. (2013: 286) argue that success measurement should not be limited by traditional tools, and that efforts should be made to develop methods for assessing relational values despite ‘the fact that the ambitions and value of a relational approach to justice is not easily captured by existing measures’.

In the UK, the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Restorative Justice (APPG-RJ, 2022b) inquiry highlighted misconceptions about restorative justice success, including an overemphasis on reoffending reduction and face-to-face processes. They advocated for broader

outcomes like distance travelled, safety, and wellbeing (APPG-RJ, 2022b), and called for guidance on data collection and evaluation (APPG-RJ, 2022a: 19). However, data standardisation remains a challenge in England and Wales (Fisk, 2023).

This paper explores practitioner-defined success criteria, addressing empirical and practical knowledge gaps in institutionalised restorative justice. Through thematic analysis of survey data, it contributes to future evaluation frameworks that embrace the complexities of lived experience. It identifies synergies with current evaluation methods and explores practitioner-driven metrics to capture restorative justice's essence while preserving core values. By empowering the sector to define success, this fosters opportunities for beneficiaries and advances progressive criminal justice systems. The paper begins with a literature review on institutionalisation and measurement, followed by methodology, findings on efficiency, effectiveness, and impact, and a discussion and conclusion on institutionalisation.

2. Literature review:

Institutionalisation

Institutionalisation is understood as being how restorative justice is “integrated into criminal justice processes, used as an instrument of penal policy, and in practice more professionalised and standardised” (Butler, Maglione & Buchan, 2022: 2). Institutionalisation has occurred in the majority of Western nations and many other states, resulting in concerns that “earlier visions and promises” of purist definitions have “given way to a more instrumental and institutional variety of RJ practices” (Wood & Suzuki, 2016:1). The move towards institutionalisation and professionalisation in the field of restorative justice is evident in the increasing number of services embedded within criminal justice systems, education settings, social work, and other public sectors (Aertsen, Daems & Robert, 2006; Maglione, Marder & Pali, 2024; Pali & Maglione, 2021). In criminal justice, this includes a growing presence in policy, for example in the development of the United Nations Handbook of Restorative Justice (UNODC, 2006, 2020), the Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2018) 8 (Council of Europe, 2018),

to ‘develop and use restorative justice with respect to their criminal justice systems’, and the 2021 Venice Declaration on the Role of Restorative Justice in Criminal Matters (Council of Europe, 2021).

Restorative justice processes and services are embedded in the criminal justice systems of many countries, including Iraq (Al-Hassani, 2021), China (Zhang and Xia, 2021), Canada (Roach, 2012), Australia (Wood et al., 2021), New Zealand (Tauri, 2014), Italy (Mannozi, 2024), the United Kingdom (UK) (Marder et al, 2023), and the USA (Battjes and Zane Kaplan, 2023). In this context, restorative justice processes are on their way to becoming a ‘contemporary justice mechanism’ (Daly, 2016), a regulated transaction between stakeholders that can be measured for effectiveness and satisfaction and subjected to greater empirical and theoretical enquiry if conceptually defined in this way (Wilson et al., 2017). Pali & Maglione (2021: 515) describe this as a shift to professionalised, transactional ‘product services’ which are regulated by the state and have a growing requirement to perform, record, and evidence practice.

However, integration has occurred in multiple ways (Maglione, Marder & Pali, 2024) on a spectrum of purist and maximalist approaches (McCold, 2000) that highlights how institutionalisation is far more complex than a theoretical dichotomy would suggest. Top-down maximalist institutionalisation is seemingly at odds with purist bottom-up values driven definitions (McCold, 2000; Llewellyn et al., 2013) or a “principles-based approach” of just relations that goes beyond the formal justice system (Llewellyn, 2021: 385; Anderson, Islam & Li, 2025). Research that explored institutionalisation of restorative justice in Scotland found that practitioners challenged the narrow dichotomy of purism and maximalism in the expansion of restorative justice nationally in their advocacy for a locally sensitive but coordinated approach consisting of local and bottom-up processes and national referral pathways (Butler, Maglione and Buchan, 2022). Much of this was identified as stemming from scepticism of their governments approach, serious issues with the allocation of funding, and the perceived

“impossibility of detaching RJ from the criminal justice system” (Butler, Maglione and Buchan, 2022: 17).

The institutionalisation of restorative justice as a contemporary mechanism (Daly, 2016) has prompted concerns about mainstreaming, bureaucratisation, and standardisation, potentially undermining its disruptive philosophy (Butler, Maglione & Buchan, 2022; Maglione, 2021; Pali & Maglione, 2021; Shapland, 2014). This includes a shift towards a functional ‘product service’ (Pali & Maglione, 2021: 515), potentially neglecting the needs of service users in favour of systemic requirements. Hobson & Payne (2022) emphasise the importance of locally reflective services, differentiating between community-led and institutional models. Services inherently reflect their developmental context, responding to varying social, political, physical, and economic needs (Hobson et al., 2022). For instance, the bureaucratic and managerialist nature of the English and Welsh criminal justice system (Jones and Newburn, 2009; McEwan, 2011) fosters standardisation. In contrast, US provision is largely shaped by human service non-profits (Moore & Lawrence, 2023), while Sierra Leonean initiatives address post-conflict needs through economic opportunity (Hobson & Payne, 2022).

Concerns also exist regarding integration of restorative justice and its communitarian focus (Crawford & Newburn, 2002). Pali & Maglione (2021: 517) argue that managerialist approaches are often ‘taken-for-granted’ in restorative justice policy. A Canadian survey found 85% of restorative justice stakeholders favoured standardised measurement, although concerns were raised about reduced community control and flexibility (Asadullah & Morrison, 2021). Professionalisation and institutionalisation are viewed by some as undermining core values, ‘sterilising the transformative potential’ and reinforcing state dominance (Braithwaite, 2002; Maglione, 2021: 5; Shapland, 2014). In response, ethical and principle-driven practice frameworks have been developed (Kirkwood, 2022), and Italy has legislated for ‘restorative outcomes’ (Mannozi, 2024). The practical manifestation of these outcomes remains a key interest.

The perceived loss of a communitarian focus due to professionalisation and institutionalisation is of concern to some. This potentially minimises the transformative potential of restorative justice and reflects a broader commodification of crime control, reinforcing discrimination and systemic racism (Tauri, 2016). Tauri (2023: 46-48) critiques the appropriation of Indigenous narratives by ‘plastic shamans’ to sell a ‘restorative justice product’ that reasserts settler-colonial control. Pali and Maglione (2021: 517) also express concerns about standardisation’s ‘implicitly violent character’ when applied to young people, minorities, and Indigenous communities. However, practitioners demonstrate a nuanced understanding of institutionalisation, transcending purist dichotomies (Butler, Maglione & Buchan, 2022; McCold, 2000; Pavlich, 2005). A ‘movement’ approach (Johnstone, 2008; Kirkwood, 2022) addresses concerns about institutionalisation limiting the ability of restorative justice to address structural harm and inequality (Llewellyn, 2021; Rossner and Taylor, 2024). There is also concern that institutionalisation could see restorative justice ‘corrupted’ and strengthen corrupt institutions (Rossner and Taylor, 2024: 363).

Across these debates, restorative justice faces a paradox: at once more desirable, more established, and more available to those that might benefit from its processes; yet at the same time, potentially less transformative, less authentic, and less restorative as it moves away from its philosophical roots. The challenge is to navigate this paradox given that the integration and institutionalisation of restorative justice services are now a firm part of the criminal justice agenda. In this paper, we contend that one potential route through this is for the sector to be more engaged in shaping how that integration takes place. In particular, we argue that a key site for this engagement is how services that provide restorative justice construct ideas of success, particularly when required to do so as part of evaluations of processes and their outcomes.

Measuring success

Services often struggle with outcome definitions, which frequently reflect criminal justice contexts rather than restorative justice approaches (Doak & O'Mahony, 2018). This can lead to services conforming to external success definitions. The EFRJ has sought to help understand how we can evaluate restorative services (Shapland, 2021; 2022) and the APPG-RJ, the APPG-RJ has brought together academics, policy makers, service delivery organisations, members of the Criminal Justice system, and practitioners to explore how to understand success (APPG-RJ, 2022a; Marder et al., 2023).

Services have long collected quantitative data, such as McCold's 'minimal recording' which suggested collection of numerical data including referral and participant numbers; preparation time; number and length of meetings; and participant surveys of satisfaction and fairness (Roche, 2003: 182). UK Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) collect similar data, with victim-focused data reports returned to the Ministry of Justice (Fisk, 2023). However, concerns remain that the right things are not recorded; that something is missing: "all that is of value may not be quantifiable or measurable" (Llewellyn et al., 2013: 286).

Increased monitoring and evaluation, driven by impact evidence and public funding justification, is central to standardisation. Yet, evaluation is not value-free. Even empirical data collection is subjective, shaped by evaluator needs and ideologies, a 'process of determining the merit, worth, and value of things' (Scriven, 1991: 1; Gullickson, 2020). Evaluations are subjective tools, they require the setting of clear definitions and measures (Shapland, Robinson & Sorsby, 2011). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) provide definitions of 'effectiveness' (Is the intervention achieving its objectives?), 'efficiency' (How well are resources being used?) and 'impact' (What difference does the intervention make?) that can be applied to a range of policies, strategies, programmes, projects, or activities (OECD, 2021: 37).

Evaluating restorative justice is challenging (Hamad et al., 2020; Shapland, Robinson & Sorsby, 2011). For instance, defining success in restorative work is often regarded as highly subjective in nature (Doak & O'Mahony, 2018). Evaluations have focused on process and outcomes (Presser & Van Voorhis, 2002), but measuring restoration and reparation is complex and there is limited research focused on victim recovery (Suzuki, 2023). Satisfaction and perceived fairness, tracked in England and Wales (Fisk, 2023), correspond crudely to feeling harms have been repaired (Presser & Van Voorhis, 2002: 174).

Hamad et al. (2020: 17) outline three main types of service evaluation: process, impact, and economic evaluations. These are concerned with correct implementation of policy and practice (process), achievement of outcomes (impact), and 'value-for-money' (economic). There are significant strengths and weakness to either approach, including cost, timeliness, reliability, bias, and levels of expertise (Hamad et al., 2020: 19). These evaluation types are not mutually exclusive and are frequently run concurrently within a single project.

Process evaluations cover service delivery (Shapland, 2022). Outcome evaluations, considered more complex in the context of restorative justice, address victim safety (Angel et al., 2014), case satisfaction compared to traditional justice approaches and recidivism (Strang et al., 2013). Recidivism is a complex metric, defined broadly in terms of reoffending, rearrest, reconviction, or reimprisonment, recidivism has a variety of static and dynamic risk factors (O'Connell, 2020: 10), making it difficult to measure as interpretation of this term can vary practically, and measurement depends on the length of time captured (Shapland, et al., 2008: 20). Individual practitioners and services may also not have access to the type of data required to be able to routinely evidence recidivism.

The collection of process and outcome data might be routine, for example a requirement within a funded contract to evidence where and how money is being spent, and to provide direct comparison between restorative interventions and other processes. They might also be one-off events, for example as the Ministry of Justice funded 'Shapland trials', which are considered

seminal evidence of the effectiveness of restorative justice in reducing reoffending, increasing stakeholder participation, and growing satisfaction with the process (Shapland, Robinson, and Sorsby, 2011). The recent randomised controlled trials of Family Group Conferencing services across multiple English local authorities, also highlighted beneficial outcomes including service effectiveness and significantly fewer children going into care (Taylor et al., 2023).

Value-for-money evaluations include metrics that place a monetary value on outcomes, such as cost-effective reductions in repeat offending, victim satisfaction, improvements to victim health, reintegration into the labour market or the community, family reconciliation, and other such processes whereby participants are more able to contribute to social life. (Strang et al., 2013; Grimsey Jones et al., 2023; Shapland et al., 2008; Sherman et al., 2015).

Marder et al. (2023) advocate for principle-aligned standardisation. Llewellyn et al. (2013), Doak & O'Mahony (2018), and Olson & Sarver (2022) call for nuanced evaluations aligned with restorative justice values, including restoration, participation, and engagement (Doak & O'Mahony, 2018; O'Mahony & Doak, 2017), relationship focused, contextual, and democratic (Llewellyn et al., 2013). and a restorative index that enables measurement of the restorativeness of a service (Olson & Sarver, 2022).

These approaches are complicated for several reasons. Firstly, the lack of unified agreement on what constitutes restorative justice (Paul & Borton, 2017). Process-based and outcome-based definitions often appear mutually exclusive within academic literature, although research has demonstrated that a values and principles-based approach can encompass both (Anderson, Islam & Li, 2024). Restorative justice approaches can be viewed as a pyramid, with values as a foundation, on which practices skills are built, which lead to a pinnacle of restorative outcomes (Hopkins, 2004; 2009). Secondly, that there are many ways that restorative processes might be applied including direct, partially direct, indirect, and discrete interventions (Hobson & Payne, 2022). Thirdly, there is a perspective that only processes that involve the victim, the offender, and the community in various roles should be regarded as

‘fully restorative’ (Wachtel, 2016: 4). Finally, and partly as a product of the first two, that restorative programmes are implemented and integrated into criminal justice systems in a wide range of different ways, with different intended outcomes, and serving different groups. As Olson and Sarver (2022: 945) argue ‘... our knowledge about the success of restorative justice is limited to outcomes that are questionably related to Restorative Justice and that are based on differing definitions of Restorative Justice as found in reviews of programs in criminal justice and education.’.

In England and Wales, PCCs fund restorative justice, with data reported to them. In 2022, an estimated £5m was spent on restorative justice across the 42 PCC areas in England and Wales (Why Me?, 2022: 2). The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) collects annual data from PCCs, but faces criticism for frequent changes to metrics and a lack of transparency due to data remaining unpublished (APPG-RJ, 2022b; Why Me?, 2021, 2022). In addition, each PCC area may require additional data for their own reporting (Fisk, 2023); the commissioned services, some of whom are large national organisations, will also have their own reporting processes for their service delivery teams; and services or individual practitioners that have sought certification from the RJC will also have to provide information on their practice in order to attain and maintain that award.

The consequence for evaluation is a plethora of reporting mechanisms, of varying length, depth, and quality with no universal measure for effectiveness, efficiency, or impact. There is no common language, method, and process for recording and monitoring data (Cawley et al., 2023; Fisk, 2023), which makes service-level comparison challenging. However, there is movement towards standardisation, with new youth justice KPIs (MoJ, 2023a, 2023b) and APPG-RJ recommendations for further investigation to develop guidance for gathering and using data to monitor and evaluate restorative justice (Hobson et al., 2023).

3. Method

This research adopts a social constructivist and interpretivist methodology, exploring subjective meanings in contextual experiences (Bell & Bryman, 2007; Cohen et al., 2005). This is justified by varying restorative justice evaluation perspectives (Doak & O'Mahony, 2018; Olson & Sarver, 2022; Llewellyn et al., 2013; Shapland, Robinson, Sorsby, 2011; Shapland, 2022). Despite concerns of greater institutionalisation within a managerialist criminal justice system, service data lacks standardisation and the public have limited understanding of what constitutes success in restorative justice (APPG-RJ, 2022a; Fisk, 2023; Maglione, Marder & Pali, 2024). This highlights how reality is socially constructed, multi-layered and complex rather than singular and verifiable (Cohen et al., 2005). This study explores practitioner-defined success criteria, recognising their involvement in nuanced practice (Crotty, 1998). Understanding emerges through interpreting contextual experiences, reaffirming a social constructivist approach (Bacon, 2005; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

An online questionnaire survey, conducted via Microsoft Forms from September 2022 to April 2023, gathered data from 70 self-defined restorative justice practitioners. Participants defined effectiveness, efficiency, and impact in their work. This method facilitated broad participation, minimised administrative challenges, enabled explicit separation of responses by category for data analysis, and eliminated interviewer effects (Clark, Foster, Sloan & Bryman, 2021). Participants were asked to provide definitions of terms using the following questions: “What does it mean for restorative work to be ‘effective’?”, “What does it mean for restorative work to be ‘efficient’?”; and “What does it mean for restorative work to have ‘impact’?”. Online qualitative surveys provide rich subjective accounts, capturing participant language and offering a ‘wide angle lens’ while minimising interviewer effects (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Braun, Clarke & Gray, 2017; Braun et al., 2020; Terry et al., 2018; Toerien & Wilkinson, 2004).

A non-probability purposive sampling method was used (Clark, Foster, Sloan & Bryman, 2021). Potential participants were identified through the publicly accessible contact

information data of registered practitioners and organisations with the RJC (n=98) and family group conference (FGC) service providers (n=88) from the Family Rights Group (FRG). These organisations are sector representatives, involved in training and advocacy for restorative approaches. Furthermore, social media (Twitter and LinkedIn), charity and interest group outreach, and sector event attendance was leveraged to identify potential participants. E-mail contact yielded a 9.68% response rate (n=18), with social media and networking accounting for 74.29% (n=52) of the total sample.

Table 1: Survey participant job role and organisation type

Organisation type	Type of role
Youth Justice / Offending Team	RJ Practitioner
	RJ Service delivery manager
	RJ Lead
	RJ Worker
Criminal Justice RJ Team	RJ & Community Engagement Lead
	Director
	RJ Practitioner
	RJ Service Delivery Manager
	RJ Deputy Service Manager
	RJ Volunteer manager
	RJ Facilitator
	RJ Coordinator
	RJ Team Operational Manager
	RJ Advanced Practitioner
	Senior Case Manager
	Case Manager
	Restorative and Mediation Service Manager
	Restorative and Mediation Coordinator
Academia	Academic
	Postgraduate Researcher
Schools	Principal
	Teacher
Police Officer	Operational Lead
	Neighbourhood Policing Supervisor
	Anti-social Behaviour Officer
Government Department HMP/YOI	RJ Volunteer Manager
	Prison Chaplain
	RJ Volunteer Facilitator
Training	Coach
	Trainer
	Course Coordinator
Consultancy	Consultant
	Evaluator

Organisation type	Type of role
Local Authority (Education and Social Care)	FGC Team Manager
	FGC Coordinator
	RP Service Lead
	Operational Manager
	RP Learning & Organisational Development Officer
	Local Authority Research lead
	RP Worker
	RJ Coordinator
	Communications officer
Restorative sector organisation and charities	Practice adviser

Respondents were predominantly UK-based (n=61), with additional responses from New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and the US. Participants provided 43 distinct job titles across 11 organisation types. 20% held senior leadership roles (n=14), 37% held multiple roles (n=26), and 44.29% worked within criminal justice representing 14 different police constabulary areas (n=31), prisons (n=2), or were active police officers (n=3). Further breakdown is limited to protect anonymity.

Data was analysed using an interpretivist constructionist approach via thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013), using NVivo 12. An inductive approach was used, focusing on repetitions, similarities, and differences (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Response lengths varied, leading to multiple codes. Themes emerged in each definitional category: efficiency of costs and practice; effectiveness of process delivery, outcomes, and participant perspectives; and subjective and objective interpretations of impact.

Ethical clearance was granted by the University of Gloucestershire. Limitations include UK overrepresentation, potential self-selection bias, and English language use, which may have limited access for non-English speakers.

4. Findings

The findings of this research are presented under the three concepts that participants were asked to define: efficiency, effectiveness, and impact. These themes and their constituent sub-themes are shown below (Table 2) and are outlined and discussed in the following sections.

Table 2: Themes identified from questionnaire data requesting participant definitions of efficiency, effectiveness, and impact in restorative work.

Finding	Theme	Sub-theme
Efficiency	Practice	Quality
		Skills
		Reliability
		Participant focus
		Time
		Risk management
		Barriers
	Cost	Cost-Effectiveness
	Rejection of efficiency	Cost Prevention or Minimisation
		Hinder process
Effectiveness	Process	Lack of relevance
		Practitioner practice
		Restorative Principles
	Outcomes	Working With
		Transformation
Impact	Subjective	Needs
		Defined by participant
	Objective / Demonstrable	Felt by the participant
		Change / Difference
		Positive effect
		Movement

4.1 Efficiency

The most notable theme identified for efficiency was practice. Codes related to cost also emerged, and a theme of participants refusing to submit a definition by directly rejecting the concept of efficiency was also identified.

Practice

Codes related to practice were found in 82 per cent of responses (n=52). Efficiency was frequently defined in relation to the role of the practitioner or the service, including actions and

behaviours that can affect efficiency. Responses reflected ‘process’ and ‘outcome’ definitions (Presser & Van Voorhis, 2002). For example, ‘Efficiency is achieved when practitioners work relentlessly to achieve the required outcomes for participants.’ contrasts the use of ‘...organised and structured processes...’ to achieve efficiency.

Respondents described strengths and qualities that highlight how practitioners view their own role as essential to a service operating in an efficient manner, with practice quality assurance, within flexible but structured frameworks. These include: high levels of skill; actively setting targets; effectively managing risks; facilitating dialogue and communication; and doing what you say you will do, without overpromising. Responses highlighted careful balancing within efficient practice. Practitioners being “risk aware, without being risk averse”, “timely and streamlined” with “neither rush nor delay”. What is done by practitioners with the time they spend working with participants is subjective and contextual, and a component of their practice and professional judgment: “... efficiency is about spending the right amount of time with the right people throughout the process.”. Barriers to efficiency, were primarily related to wider system bureaucracy, such as accessing participant information of those who have caused harm or been harmed, and service capacity.

Time and practitioner attributes intersect, highlighted succinctly by one respondent: “Victims are responded to in a timely manner by an experienced and knowledgeable member of the team. Interventions delivered are of a high quality, monitored and evaluated.”. Another respondent noted: ‘We have minimum expectations for all of our practitioners based on the hours worked per week. This enables us to measure the efficiency of service delivery.’. This outlines the differences in role and perspective of respondents within organisations delivering restorative work. Practitioner effort, participant benefit, and time were intersecting codes. “Achieving success with minimum effort and inadvertent adverse effects” contrasts “Short term effort leads to long term benefits.”. Specific timescales for service processes were not included in efficiency definitions, although many services collect this data (Fisk, 2023).

Individual practice contributes to service efficiency, but wider systemic components were also identified. “Taking as long as is needed, but no more. Having systems that are flexible, to meet the needs of each participant and ensure practitioners are providing a high level of service.”

Time underscores the delicate balance required of practitioners, whose careful coordination of restorative processes can mitigate service dissatisfaction and secondary victimisation arising from delays. However, practitioners' control over timeliness is often constrained by external factors related to other stakeholders, necessitating careful navigation of referral intake, case allocation, and meeting participants' needs. Investment in comprehensive training, accreditation, and approaches to peer and managerial supervision that include regular practice observation are vital for enhancing operational efficiency.

Efficiency as practice, in terms of the service functioning and quality, suggests that providing restorative interventions is an objective itself, which can be measured by traditional process evaluations (Hamad et al., 2020; Shapland, 2014), but also the restorativeness of a service should be included in this process (Olsen and Sarver, 2022). There is a lack of research into restorative facilitator skill and outcomes, although evidence suggests there may be a relationship (Latimer, Dowden & Muise, 2005). Professionalization is a key element of institutionalisation for ensuring service quality, whilst standardised training and supervision play pivotal roles and can contribute to measures of restorativeness (Butler, Maglione & Buchan, 2022).

Cost

Efficiency and cost were described by 10 per cent (n=7) of respondents, summarised succinctly by one, “That it prevents cost, both physically, emotionally and financially.”. Responses included “resources” and “energy” applied to work, relative to “benefit” or “change”. Such definitions offer a more nuanced approach than financial cost-benefit which is seen across the literature in terms of service evaluation and success. However, variation in what ‘cost’ is or how it is measured adds uncertainty to the meaning of broader definitions provided, such as

“costs should outweigh or be equal to the outputs” or “activities required the least use of resources, material, human, emotional”

Cost ‘benefit’ differs from cost ‘prevention’, ‘reduction’, and ‘minimisation’. These terms relative to emotional costs are subjective and contextual compared to material and financial components, highlighting the complexity of efficiency when applying this concept to working with people who have been harmed or caused harm, and the restorative values that practitioners apply when delivering a service. These variations highlight different efficiency tolerance levels that may exist at the practitioner and service level.

Rejection of the concept

A further 10 per cent of respondents (n=7) rejected efficiency as a concept in restorative work. An overt conceptual rejection was not evident in effectiveness or impact definitions, suggesting the distinctiveness of efficiency from these other concepts. Participants described how ‘efficiency’ did not exist in restorative work, was “not measured”, “not useful” or could “hinder processes”. One respondent preferred the use of ‘...agile...’ as opposed to ‘efficient’, rejecting connotations of speed in such definitions. Services also needed ‘luck’ to reject efficiency, “...we are lucky that our contract does not require us to place timelines on our work. We do not require parties to have achieved certain milestones within a dictated timeframe...”

4.2 Effectiveness

Effectiveness consisted of two themes, outcome and process, which reflects traditional definitions of restorative justice (Presser & Van Voorhis, 2002).

Outcomes

Outcomes were coded across 45 per cent of respondents. (n=32) with two subthemes: transformation-based and needs-based. Transformation outcomes consisted of changes in “attitudes”, “behaviours”, and “beliefs”. The “movement” of individuals, “in a healthy and more positive way than they were able to before”, and “empowerment” of participants. They

also included receiving “some sort of benefit”, or “gaining something”, and for practitioners to be able “to evidence that work with families is making a positive difference”

Participants having their needs met or the outcomes being “appropriate to the needs of all involved” included whether “views or experience has been validated and understood”. Furthermore, being given a voice, and views being “heard and included...” were types of outcomes linked to need. “If parties felt that they had their needs met, whatever those needs where and whatever the support looked like, then our process has been effective.”

Both personal and programmatic transformation intersect with discussions around professionalization and in turn institutionalisation. Kirkwood (2022: 4) describes transformation as a "prudential value" of practice, linked to recovery from harm, which aligns with the needs and desired outcomes of participants. Transformation constitutes a 'restorative outcome' (Mannozi, 2024), illustrating how subjective concepts can be enshrined in legislation to institutionalise restorative justice on the sector's terms. Respondents emphasised that the right amount of transformation for the participant is vital, challenging assumptions that a lack of transformation implies a flawed process. As transformation takes various forms, it must align with the participant's needs (Kirkwood, 2022: 3).

Working to, meeting, or achieving needs requires input from the participant. The extent to which a participant believes or reports that their perceived needs have been met, their views and voice have been heard and they feel listened to and validated are also subjective and likely temporal in nature. The emotive component in terms of ‘feel’ and ‘believe’ suggests that these are not tangible concrete elements. There is a significant communication element in terms of ‘voice’, ‘hearing’, and ‘listened to’ which connects with ideas of restorative processes being dialogue based (Gade & Chapman, 2022).

Outputs were identified as the predominant information collected by PCC commissioned restorative justice services in England and Wales (Fisk, 2023), contrasting a preference among respondents for evidencing success through outcomes. Hamad et al. (2020)

uses logic models to differentiate these when designing professionalised restorative justice services. Outputs typically comprise quantitative data such as the number of processes and restorative agreements, while meeting needs and facilitating transformation for participants closely align with their definition of outcomes (Hamad et al., 2020: 21). Outputs may signal underlying factors warranting further investigation by managers or commissioners. It may act to ensure the greatest potential for transformation and meeting participant needs.

However, identified outcomes are not caveated with the need to ‘complete’ a process. These could occur during preparation, at the point of a conference or other intervention type. They may not occur until sometime after a process has concluded. Tracking these elements, and selection of appropriate points in time to track, could be burdensome.

Process

Respondents defined effectiveness in relation to process in 40 per cent of responses (n=28). Two further sub-themes emerged: practitioner skills and actions; and process participant behaviours.

Skills and actions included application of “the key principles of restorative practice to engage with restorative participants...”. This included “facilitating engagement, collaboration, and interaction” using “a person-centred approach, especially for victims to avoid re-victimisation”. Provision of “clarity and consistency” for participants whilst “ensuring aims and outcomes for all involved are establish early, always referenced back to”.

Participant behaviours included those that occur within a restorative process or are emergent as a result of being involved in one. Processes are effective if participants have “...have had their say in decision making process.” or “people affected by a problem are a significant part of the solution”. Additional definitions included “collaboration among parties to the process” and the degree to which “all participants are engaged with the process...”.

Actions and behaviours as part of a process are not routinely reported by services (Fisk, 2023), but could be captured by participant feedback, or service documentation like case

records, supervision notes, or case studies. Engagement and collaboration are complex metrics that are open to subjective assessment and could require observation that may impact on the impartiality of a process. Interpretation of engagement can be at odds with the principle of voluntariness (Sawin & Zehr, 2007). Evaluations, particularly in terms of the opportunity to interview practitioners and participants, could elicit this kind of information generally, but would be a snapshot. Producing this data on a case-by-case basis would be inherently burdensome on the practitioner in terms of paperwork.

4.3 Impact

Subjective and objective impact emerged as the two key themes, incorporating the perception of a participant in judging the impact upon themselves (self-defined), or an external form that includes observation by a professional or specific countable measures (observed). The themes emerged individually and sometimes together, as in the following quote:

“Impact is what difference does it make, or what change happens as a result of the work. It may be a change in thinking or action, a change in perspective, a change in behaviour. In restorative work, impact can happen at the intrapersonal, relational or system levels.”

Subjectivity of perception, definition, and ownership of outcomes in terms of personal experience were common sub-themes, respondents noted that “participants experience self-defined positive outcomes from the Restorative process (whatever type that may be)”. One respondent noted how “Impact can come in different forms and it differs for each service user”, whilst another highlighted the challenge this brings for evaluation as subjective impact is ‘...hard to measure as it will be different for each individual who goes through the process’. Respondents also alluded to process definitions, defining impact as participants being engaged in ‘...finding solutions themselves...’ and gaining ‘a sense of agency and power’, or feeling that ‘the process focused on what is most important for them’. This further reinforced the individual and subjective nature of impact.

Objective impact definitions frequently reference a ‘measurable outcome’ or evidence of ‘demonstrable and positive changes in individuals, groups and organisations’ that are ‘lasting, measurable’ and involve ‘discernible change over time’. Other stakeholders are included, with observation of ‘tangible change’ such as “improved relationships between family members and family members and professionals’. The challenge inherent in this theme is how this is measured:

“If it were possible to have an alternate timeline - one where parties engaged with RJ and one where they didn't - you should be able to see a difference between the two”.

Participants outlined the subjective and objective impact of the process in the form of the outcomes achieved, and the extent of transformation as an indicator of impact. While objective quantitative data can be achieved through pre- and post-intervention methods, they may not fully capture the richness of the transformation experienced. Therefore, qualitative narrative accounts are essential to offer insights into success.

Service evaluations present an opportunity to demonstrate objective and subjective transformation, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of findings. The subjective and temporal nature of definitions here make this problematic for a service to track longitudinally after they have ceased work with a participant, and without additional input from a deliberate evaluation of the service, or from other services working with those individuals. The focus of evaluations has traditionally been on those who have caused harm in terms of recidivism, and the challenges of measuring impact in this context are extensive (Piggott & Wood, 2018; Suzuki, 2023). Impact for those who have been harmed is a potential avenue that needs to be explored further within the context of these findings.

5. Discussion

Analysis of practitioner responses from a range of backgrounds (Table 1) highlights the subjectivity of success and the complex interplay between restorative justice and traditional criminal justice systems (Doak & O’Mahony, 2018; Marder et al., 2023). Themes within

practitioner definitions of effectiveness (achieving objectives) and impact (extents of effects) are distinct from one another and in that sense align with OECD definitions (OECD, 2021), but many sub-themes are fundamentally connected highlighting the complexity of working with stakeholders that requires a relational lens (Llewellyn, 2021).

Table 3: Summary of definitions from thematic analysis of data

Efficiency	Effectiveness	Impact
1. Practice	1. Process	1. Subjective
2. Cost	2. Outcomes	2. Objective
3. Conceptual rejection		

Practitioner criteria for restorative justice effectiveness incorporate both process and outcome definitions of restorative justice when considering success (Presser & Van Voorhis, 2002; Anderson, Islam & Li, 2025). Process criteria are defined in relation to the embodiment of restorative justice values and principles, and the extent to which these are delivered in practice, which reflects recent research that promotes measuring restorative justice on these criteria (Olsen & Sarver, 2022), and supports the idea that values lead to outcomes that meet the needs of participants and enable their personal transformation (Hopkins, 2004; 2009). Outcomes criteria included personal transformation and the meeting of individual needs. Impact criteria outlined approaches to measuring outcomes using objective and subjective measures, with subjective impact primarily defined by the invested stakeholders and included an emotive and felt component for the individual.

5.1 Conceptual interplay

Opinions varied on whether restorative justice effectiveness lies in process delivery or outcome achievement, reflecting the purist/maximalist debate (McCold, 2000). While process completion wasn't a prerequisite for success, practice quality was crucial for 82 per cent of respondents in achieving efficiency. Crude equations have been evidenced in restorative justice (Presser & Van Voorhis, 2002), of which satisfaction and practice quality are an example. This

must be expanded, as the subjective nature of ‘transformation’ and ‘needs’, identified in this thematic analysis, underscores the importance of clearly defined pre- and post-process measures for feedback, facilitating a nuanced assessment of impact. Feedback mechanisms must transcend the needs of the dominant criminal justice system (Llewellyn et al., 2013) whilst continuing to include them due to realities of institutionalised practice.

Process effectiveness, practitioner behaviour, and outcomes like transformation are interconnected, and may affect amounts of subjective and objective impact. While practice frameworks exist (Kirkwood, 2022), the ability of an individual to fulfil these is generally not addressed in literature. The relationship between practitioner skill and positive outcomes suggested here remains underexplored, highlighting a research gap that warrants further investigation. The role of professionalization, as outlined by Braithwaite (2002) and Gavrielides (2015), underscores the need for standardised training and supervision to ensure the quality and effectiveness of restorative justice services. Ultimately, the pursuit of quality practice must align with the overarching goal of facilitating transformation and meeting individual needs within restorative processes.

Participants focused on individual needs over service metrics, highlighting participant impact over reinforcing institutionalised metrics around costs, recidivism, and service satisfaction. While distinct from systemic and programmatic approaches to transformation outlined by Olson and Sarver (2022), this framework could directly apply to personal experiences of overcoming oppression, marginalization, bias, and racism resulting from unequal power structures.

Measuring transformation requires comprehensive recording. Objective measures include elements of transformation, such as change, difference, and positive movement that could be observed and measured. Findings suggest connectivity between these concepts, have implications for institutionalisation and evaluation, and offer opportunities for measurement and encouragement of success when leveraged. Transformation goes beyond criminal justice

system metrics (recidivism) and measures that seek to justify the institutionalisation of an alternative approach to a punitive system (satisfaction) to meet the relational needs of stakeholders (Doak & O'Mahony, 2018; Shapland, Robinson & Sorsby 2011).

Further research is needed on the relationship between needs, transformation, and practice quality. Standardising definitions, measurement timing, and success interpretation is essential. Addressing subjectivity concerns (Presser & Van Voorhis, 2002) requires clear contextual definitions to improve accuracy and ensure quantitative evaluation reliability if used in a larger dataset. Success indicators may vary from immediate outcomes before, during, and after a process, to sustained effects, reflecting the diversity of stakeholder perspectives and influences.

5.2 The balancing act of institutionalisation

Despite most respondents (87.14%, n=61) working in the institutionalised context of England and Wales, a diverse range of perspectives emerged, revealing multiple themes across the concepts of effectiveness, efficiency, and impact. Furthermore, responses and themes identified reflect the subjectivity of success in restorative justice (Doak & O'Mahony, 2018) and support previous literature concerning how practitioners take a nuanced approach towards institutionalisation in the context of their practice (Butler, Maglione & Buchan, 2022), understanding the position restorative justice finds itself in as a relational approach positioned in the context of a punitive managerialist system (Pali & Maglione, 2021). A spectrum of views emerged that sat between purist and maximalist approaches (McCold, 1998), some aligning in response with organisational metrics such as process outputs, whilst many highlighted outcomes and impact in the form of personal transformation as a potential metric that is currently not captured by organisations (Fisk, 2023) but could indicate success if evidenced.

This nuanced approach was most acutely observed within definitions of efficiency, often synonymous with cost-effectiveness, which occupies a prominent place in restorative justice success discourse (Grimsey Jones et al., 2023; Shapland et al., 2008; Sherman et al.,

2015; Strang et al., 2013), mirroring the traditional criminal justice system's focus on managerial and financial metrics (Jones & Newburn, 2009; McEwan, 2011; Pali & Maglione, 2021). 10 per cent (n=7) directly addressed cost as an efficiency measure whilst 10 per cent (n=7) rejected efficiency in relation to restorative justice, with the remainder focused on the importance of nuanced contextual practice grounded in restorative values as key to efficiency. This suggests resistance to institutionalisation via the commodification of restorative practices as product services (Daly, 2016) applied within the context of a managerialist criminal justice system, reflecting tensions between restorative justice and managerialist ideologies (Pali & Maglione, 2021). The question arises whether the pursuit of professionalization should align with managerialist principles, or if alternative methods of gauging success, as suggested in existing literature, could provide more meaningful alternatives (Doak & O'Mahony, 2018; Llewelyn et al., 2013).

This highlights an interesting tension around efficiency and institutionalisation in terms of standardisation that can adhere to restorative values and principles within the context of dominant systems, without overshadowing the individual needs of participants. Practice standards promoted by agencies such as the RJC (2020b) and the EFRJ (2021) can contribute towards maintaining and improving standards of practice and service delivery, in accordance with restorative values, to enhance efficiency and in turn effectiveness in process definitions, that can demonstrate impact. Although most respondents identified practice in relation to efficiency, standardisation is complicated by individual differences in practitioner skill and timely service delivery for unique service users, furthermore, the system has to value the type of impact that can be achieved. For example, recidivism, a key metric for institutionalised criminal justice systems, did not emerge as a theme, despite it being a key area of success that is attributed to restorative justice from service evaluations and empirical trials (Strang et al., 2013; Sherman et al., 2015).

However, transformation in terms of change, movement, and marked difference that can be felt or observed and measured externally can include recidivism. Survey responses were frequently participant neutral and generalised outcomes for any stakeholder. The focus of evaluations has traditionally been primarily, though not exclusively, on those who have caused harm in terms of recidivism, and the challenges of measuring impact in this context are extensive (Piggott & Wood, 2018; Suzuki, 2023). The finding that impact, in the form of transformation, is not defined as being exclusively for any single stakeholder, suggests a further potential avenue that needs to be explored, perhaps in a relational context, rather than a narrow focus on a single stakeholder which is currently enacted in terms of only reporting data about victims to the UK Ministry of Justice (Fisk, 2023).

6. Conclusion

Institutionalisation of restorative justice is not linear, with local devolution and RJC funding cuts suggesting a potential regression, despite APPG-RJ efforts. National ambivalence persists seen through a lack of oversight and standardisation (Fisk, 2023), yet practitioners value evaluation for its promotional potential, even when success metrics diverge from managerial processes. Practitioner experience, as demonstrated here, can and should inform future practice as this aligns with many restorative values.

Analysing practitioner-defined effectiveness, efficiency, and impact reveals approaches bridging purism and maximalism within institutionalised settings. Subjectivity necessitates diverse evaluation methods, combining quantitative and qualitative data. This enhances awareness, funding, and policy influence. While evaluations often combine evidence streams (Hamad et al., 2020), cost and expertise barriers exist (Hamad et al., 2020; Shapland, Robinson & Sorsby, 2011). Contract negotiations should include funding for robust evaluation. National standardisation of definitions and data collection, potentially facilitated by a funded RJC, would benefit the sector (Hobson et al., 2023).

6.1 Additional approaches and metrics

Recommendations must consider diverse national contexts with unique subjective, cultural, and structural contexts (Hobson & Payne, 2022) and stakeholder perspectives. While restorativeness is key (Olson & Sarver, 2022), additional metrics are needed until systemic change within criminal justice systems and society more generally occurs (Llewellyn, 2021). To achieve a comprehensive understanding of success, the following approaches to evidencing success should be integrated into service recording and monitoring processes to support evaluation:

- **Practice sub-themes:** Incorporate quantitative and qualitative data on service quality, practitioner skills and professional reliability, participant focus during processes, time management that reflects case context, risk management, and process barrier mitigation into participant feedback (Table 2).
- **Defined subjective and objective measures:** Use pre- and post-intervention measures for personal objectives, transformational outcomes, and distance travelled. Furthermore, alignment with Kirkwood's (2022) practice framework, including moral repair, shame and trauma response, dialogue facilitation, reparation, rehabilitation, desistance, and recovery.
- **Co-created Case Studies:** Combine longitudinal qualitative transformation narratives that capture participant collaboration and process engagement with stakeholders alongside traditional process and outcome quantitative data.
- **Restorative index:** Implement Olson & Sarver's (2022) restorative index to understand service context when applying any of the above metrics.

Further research is needed on the relationship between practice quality and success, considering organisational and staffing variations. Given the identified connections between themes and sub-themes, standardised metrics to address practice quality to measure and improve efficiency to potentially generate higher levels of impact for the participants should

be explored explicitly (Table 2). Variations in management and practitioner perspectives require explicit research. Data purpose should be explored, as stakeholders prioritise evidence differently based on their roles, experiences, interests, beliefs, and values.

6.2 Study limitations

This thematic analysis treated all survey responses equally, without differentiating by job role. While initial coding revealed no clear correlation between response type and role, future research should explore this further. Practitioners' nuanced understanding of institutionalised settings (Butler, Maglione & Buchan, 2022) was evident. However, responses hinted at variations in success definitions and data purpose, potentially reflecting different stakeholder perspectives at an institutional level that are explored in further research (Fisk, 2025b). Though efficiency was rejected by a small percentage, the roles of these individuals were diverse, incorporating academics, practitioners, and managers, and those with more than one position. The subjectivity of success and the lack of response consistency suggest a need for research that explicitly distinguishes between practitioners with and without managerial responsibilities. Semi-structured interviews would be beneficial for a more in-depth analysis.

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Appendix 14: Report two: Fisk, B.M. (2025a). Recording Success and Successful

Recording: Practitioner and Service Perspectives. Restorative Justice Council: Norwich.

This report aims to hold spaces for practitioners and build upon their struggles of trying to practice in a relational way within the context of the logistical challenges of an institutionalised system where they must collect and report their data. It aims to offer insight to managers and influential RJ sector stakeholders to make vital changes to simplify the recording and monitoring of RJ. Going beyond individual complaints within siloed services that can be rationalised and minimalised, by helping to understand the collective sector wide picture of these barriers from people who just want to do the best job they can to help repair harm. Report 2 highlights how service data processes can be a barrier to efficiency of practitioners and services and is at its core an emancipatory report that can support streamlining of administrative tasks and organisational data collection processes to enable more people to access RJ.



Recording Success and Successful Recording:

Practitioner and Service Perspectives

Author:
Benjamin M. Fisk
February 2025

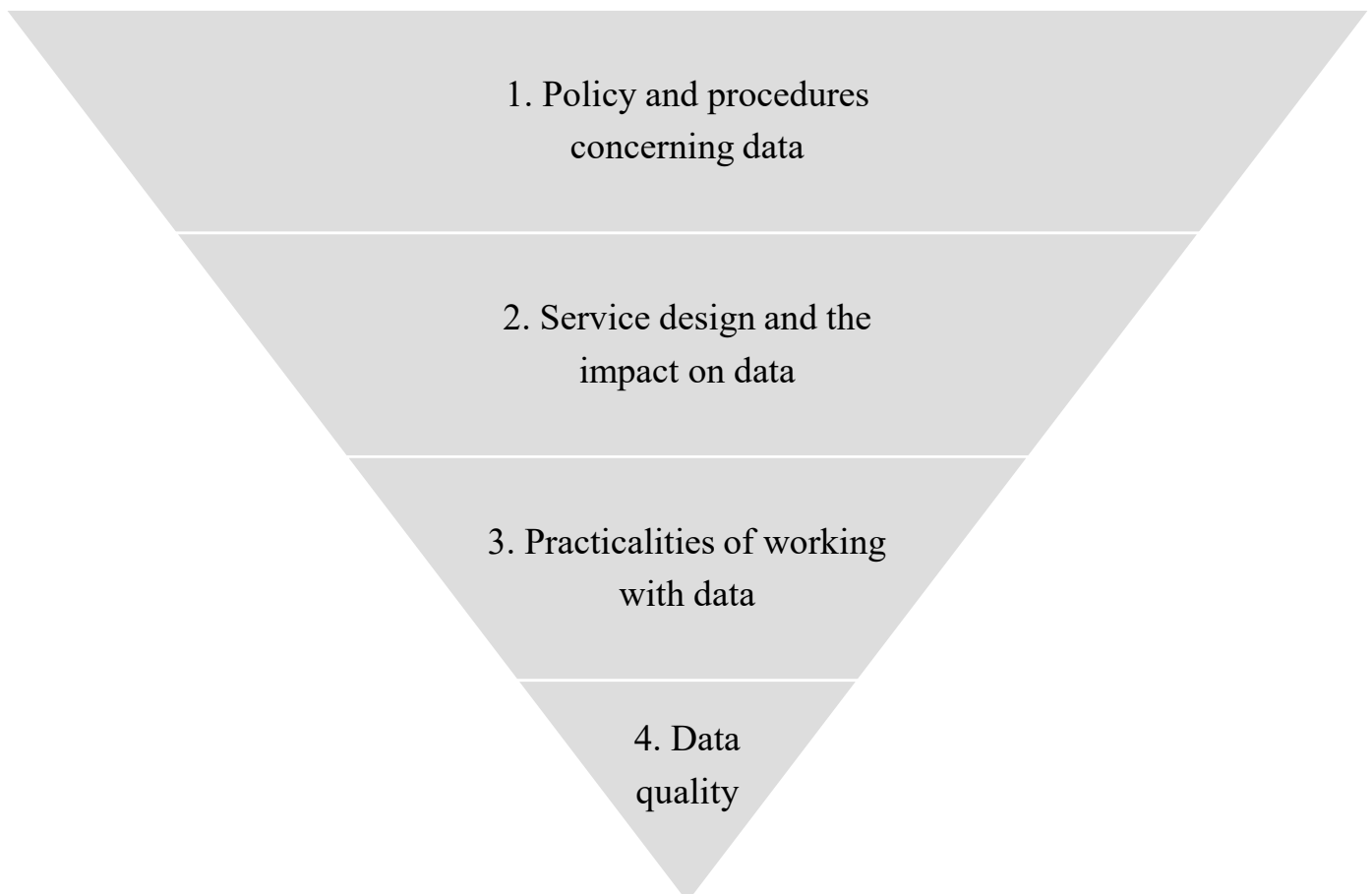
This report includes key findings from a PhD studentship commissioned by the Restorative
Justice Council in partnership with the University of Gloucestershire



Research overview

This report presents findings from a three-year doctoral research study undertaken by Benjamin Fisk, focused on Restorative Justice (RJ) practitioners and services in England and Wales and the data they record and monitor. This work was funded through a joint doctoral studentship established by the Restorative Justice Council (RJC) and the University of Gloucestershire, supervised by Dr Jonathan Hobson and Dr Anamika Twyman-Ghoshal.

Employing qualitative methods and thematic analysis of survey and interview data with RJ practitioners, as well as documentary analysis of their reporting processes, it delves into the critical role of recording and monitoring evaluating data within RJ services. Four overarching themes were identified concerning the logistical challenges related to recording and monitoring of RJ service data:



Summary of key recommendations

The above themes have informed key recommendations in the following area:



The most urgent and important recommendations are as follows:

1. Agreement must be made across the sector on the key language and measures to be standardised to support the analysis of data recorded by RJ services, and the case studies they produced. The RJC should play a key role in facilitating this to support effective evaluation for individual services and the entire sector.
2. Measures that are agreed must enable the tracking of ‘distance travelled’ for participants for them to understand their personal and relational growth and transformation, and to ensure that services can more accurately attribute their part in this process.
3. The development of a single repository of publicly available evidence for RJ, overseen by the RJC, must be developed to enable any stakeholders to understand the effectiveness and impact that can occur through these processes. This must include policy makers, collaborating professionals, RJ practitioners, and members of the public.
4. Funding must be made available to support the development of a single computer management system for RJ services that enables simple facilitation for data collection., training for staff to effectively manage data and encourage in-house analysis and evaluation. The RJC should be given authority to act as an independent statutory body to analyse the sector wide corpus of data collected by

RJC Registered Practitioners and services, with responsibility for reporting to the MoJ on behalf of all services.

Introduction by the CEO of the Restorative Justice Council, Mr. James Simon

This report is an important output from Ben's PhD research, and a key piece of research for the RJC and the restorative sector at large. It contributes to the vital work of the All-Party Parliamentary group on Restorative Justice (APPG-RJ) and offers insights into the lives of practitioners and services who methodically evidence the vital work they do delivering RJ with citizens of the UK. Many of the recommendations can have an impact across areas of work where restorative practices are employed.



Biography of the report author

Benajmin M. Fisk is a registered Social Worker with an MSc in Educational Leadership and Management, with restorative practice experience in the UK and internationally. He supported the APPG-RJ inquiry as a researcher and contributed directly to the report of Workstream 4. Ben has presented at national and international at criminology and restorative justice conferences both in-person and online. Ben was awarded a doctoral studentship by the Restorative Justice Council and University of Gloucestershire to undertake the research project: Evidencing Success and Successful Evidence in Restorative Work: Developing Models of 'Effectiveness', 'Efficiency', and 'Impact'.



SWOT Analysis

The ‘Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats’ (SWOT) matrix offers an additional layer of analysis and broader sector context to the findings of this report.

Strengths • Many RJ services actively use digital case management systems • Reporting to the MoJ already occurs annually and services are already geared up for this • Practitioners and services take data collection seriously and are mindful of the legal expectations for GDPR and information sharing agreements. • Larger service providers actively analyse and compare their internal data • Services actively collate case studies, and many publish these on their websites and social media • Regional networks exists and some services leverage these to share and compare data to explore best practice. • Relational skills, experience, and local knowledge of practitioners and managers has enabled development of close working agreements with agencies to support data access. • FOI requests from Why Me? have contributed to a greater understanding of the role of data in RJ services	Weaknesses • Multiple CMS exist, and service between these is inconsistent • MoJ data request changes annually and with little notice • Staff data responsibility often siloed, and tasks are onerous, lacking automation • Continued use of both paper and digital documents risks inconsistency and could lead to data breaches. • Remote working restricted as paper documents still required to be destroyed at a central office location. Remote working also impacts on service relationships and cohesion • Lack of direction and guidance in terms of standardisation causes confusion for some providers • Localised individual services can feel isolated and not able to contextualise their data and in turn performance, or develop further best practices • Marketisation of services leads to short term contracts and higher risk for secure data handover and quality of service for citizens • Practitioners frequently use their own digital devices which leads to issues of compatibility with software, and ability to use some features. • Lack of information sharing agreements between services hampers RJ access for citizens
Opportunities • Eagerness from practitioners and managements for standardisation to support internal practitioner and service owned evaluation, development of evidence base, and expansion of RJ nationally supported by the RJC. • More collaboration across the sector will strengthen practice and purpose, and encourage further promotion of RJ • Relational, growth mindset, solution focused approach of practitioners and services who want to deliver better services and evidence the effectiveness and impact of their work. • Digital systems are used by many services, and these are considered useful • Increased professionalisation and streamlining of data recording and monitoring processes if effectively included in training that meets a national standard • RJC is a neutral body that can support services if funded appropriately. • Lack of statutory footing for RJ in England and Wales means this can be designed with services, and potentially influence the MoJ return in years to come.	Threats • Oversaturation of data that becomes meaningless if not coordinated effectively or collected for the sake of collecting. Processes must be put in place to ensure data effective and meaningful • Approaches must not overburden practitioners with additional work • Increased digitalisation or data demands could exclude some volunteers and services if not funded adequately. Appropriate training is required to ensure this can be delivered effectively by all practitioners. • Institutionalisation and top-down prescription of recording and monitoring approaches, combined with a lack of sector coordination leads to increasing divergence that prevents effective multi-stakeholder collaboration and the development of an evidence-base that builds on the strengths of practitioner lived experience from the bottom-up • Standardisation leads to further marketisation, and development of ‘league tables’, that act to shame services and are not in keeping with RJ values.

Introduction and overview:

The lived experience of practitioners is at the heart of this report and their contribution was vital. It aims to do justice to them by representing their reality about this crucial and often overlooked aspect of the vital work they undertake. That work is with communities to build relationships, repair harm, and support transformation and forward movement in their lives. The day-to-day data collected by services plays an important part in their evaluation (Hamad et al., 2020), but most services in England and Wales have never been formally evaluated. Services have shaped data collection on their local needs and of those who have commissioned them, informed by long-standing norms and passed down by trainers in restorative practice and justice.

A key component of evaluation is efficiency (OECD, 2021). Survey data and interviews with contributors highlighted a range of perspectives around the topic. Efficiency in terms of the cost-benefit of RJ in relation to the traditional criminal justice system, as supported by academic research, was identified. However, several contributors directly rejected efficiency and felt that it had ‘no place’ in the discussion of RJ or wasn’t helpful when framing processes (Fisk, Hobson, & Twyman-Ghoshal, 2025). Overwhelmingly, the role of practice in relation to efficiency was outlined. Practitioners know that a process takes as long as it takes. This doesn’t mean just letting it hang. Careful risk assessment, strategic delay to allow participants to move where they need to be, the sheer volume of stakeholders that may be involved in a process and finding a suitable date amongst a myriad of other individual and unique factors are vital for successful restorative work. This balancing act is vital for the facilitation of real personal transformation and the repairing of harm that the traditional criminal justice system and statutory services in other sectors do not always accomplish.

This report approaches efficiency from a different angle. If we accept that each process is individual and subjective, and we can not put a timeframe on it, then we need to

make sure that everything else around that is streamlined and made as easy as possible for the practitioner navigating that landscape to support process participants. The efficiency of routine recording and monitoring can be improved and can be done so in a way that does not harm restorative processes. Data and evidence drawn from restorative work must facilitate the aims and values that underpin the sector, and it must be used to improve the lives of those who encounter it.

We do not live in a ‘fully restorative’ society, so we must work with the reality of what we have. However, what we have right now is not being fully leveraged. It is impossible for the sector at large to tell you about the people that have undertaken an RJ process or give a national picture of the types of harm where RJ most frequently takes place. We cannot currently understand whether RJ is used disproportionately with the most well off, or whether those from marginalised communities need greater support to access services. There is information out there, some of it is even publicly available, but there is no coherent narrative. Data can be a great leveller in all these examples, but it must not become a bureaucratic burden that benefits no one. Practitioners must be able to do the job, and gathering data about that work must be as simple and as streamlined as possible, and it must ultimately promote RJ and facilitate access for those who need and want it.

Background of this report:

The creation of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Restorative Justice (APPG-RJ) in 2021 was a seminal moment for RJ in the UK. Practitioners, services, academics, and those with lived experience came together to highlight the strengths and challenges facing RJ to a group of cross-party politicians invested in improving and promoting RJ, chaired by Elliot Colburn MP. This report would not have been possible without the recommendations from the initial enquiry of the APPG-RJ (APPG-RJ, 2022a). Nine key recommendations were made, with two of these being directly related to the role of data within RJ services. They are:

Rec. 2. Standardise the sharing of information.

The Ministry of Justice, in consultation with partners, should produce a national information sharing template which can be adopted by all providers and their partners.

Rec. 3. Improving quality through effective monitoring and evaluation.

Further investigation should be undertaken by the Ministry of Justice, in consultation with partners, to develop guidance for gathering and using data to monitor and evaluate restorative justice.

Recording and monitoring is a routine task that RJ services complete to evidence the work undertaken with members of the public. As is done regularly by those who work in health, education, social care, policing and many other sectors where restorative practice interfaces. Recording and monitoring has historically played second fiddle to the diligent practice of those working with individuals and communities who have been harmed and/or caused harm for any number of reasons. Practice itself is the single most important part of being and doing restorative. For many, data is a dry and bureaucratic component that takes away from the core relational work. However, data builds into the evidencing of restorative work that is vital for the continued promotion and expansion of RJ locally, nationally, and globally. This was made abundantly clear by the recommendations of the APPG-RJ inquiry.

Data allows services to hold themselves to account, to identify potential gaps in practice, and areas for progress and improvement that could benefit all stakeholders. Behind data is real people, individual stories and lives, and we must be respectful of the privilege we have to work with that data. But data itself serves as the backbone of equitable practices, human rights advocacy, and effective service provision. By analysing data, we inform evidence-based approaches, ensure quality, monitor case progress, and manage risk. Whether quantitative or qualitative, data empowers us to construct better services, target gaps and make informed decisions, and learn from shared experiences. Finance and resources are also key to this, and they are important for regulators and commissioners. Perhaps human learning systems will become more widespread and support a move to relational commissioning, but for now we restorative people will continue to work with these bodies to meet their needs too.

By outlining the strengths, variations between services, and the challenges faced, this report and its recommendations intend to act as a document for learning and further reflection within the sector. Services must be able to meet the unique needs of their local community through the data they collect, recommendations are made in this report concerning the standardisation of practice, processes, and terminology to support effective use of data on a national level. Further recommendations are made for the development of regional and national structures to support practitioners and services to collaborate and improve their use and understanding of data. These recommendations aim to alleviate the concerns and gaps identified by practitioners to support them, their services, and the RJ sector broadly to advocate for itself in local and national policy and legislation using high quality data and evidence of success.

Methodology and Findings

Twenty (n=20) survey participants were purposively sampled to partake in semi-structured interviews to gather their views and experiences of the use of data within RJ services. Participants outlined the how, what, when, and why of their routine data recording, including the range of methods and mediums for collecting and storing data. They were asked to talk about their professional relationship with data, their thoughts and feelings about these processes, describe how they and their service gathered and used data in their RJ work, and how their definitions of success align with their organisation's recording and monitoring processes. Interviews were transcribed and an inductive thematic analysis was undertaken with that data. Those selected were from a broad range of roles within a range of RJ services from across the UK, and a range of formulations such as internally employed by PCCs, externally commissioned, spanning cities and counties, based in rural and urban areas and those that oversee multiple services nationally. Individual participants included:

- Volunteers
- Lead Practitioners
- Service Managers
- Chief Executives
- Staff with specific data or administration responsibility
- RJ/RP Trainers

Participants discussed data and restorative processes from the earliest point at which they collected data which was often prior to a referral, through to post-intervention and the elicitation of feedback from participants. Clarifying questions were asked by the interviewer as these conversations unfolded. Those who were involved in the broader collation of service data for commissioners discussed these processes.

The position of practitioner and their corresponding organisational influence was related to the point in time at which they begin to work with and continued to manage data in practical terms. For volunteers, this was particularly pertinent as many were only involved in the using or collecting of data post-referral and were not involved in collecting data post-intervention, whereas service managers have the most oversight, with chief executives of larger services commissioned for multiple geographical areas have oversight over multiple services.

These interviews illuminated several of the initial findings from the thematic analysis of the survey data, particularly around the job role and organisational position in relation to the definitions given. In larger services, where the separation between a manager and a practitioner is more acute, managers are responsible for monitoring overall performance of their team and must have an awareness of caseloads, timescales, resources, and performance including issues relating to staff conduct. Most volunteers were not aware of the monitoring processes undertaken by senior staff, although some services do annually share their findings internally, and others also do this externally. Managers also make decisions about suitability of cases for their practitioners, although in some services case allocation is delegated to a senior practitioner, or in others where large pools of volunteers are used these are essentially ‘tendered’ and volunteers can offer to undertake work on a case that they feel equipped for or have the suitable skills and experience to work with based on a limited overview of referral. These could include harm type or geographical location. However, due to the variations in organisational structure across services, not all experiences were equivalent. Some services employ a specific team member to manage their data, although many practitioners and managers have responsibility or undertake data tasks as a part of their general role.

Summary of themes and sub-themes

The four overarching themes and their sub-themes are:

1. Policy and procedures concerning data
 - a. Information sharing agreements
 - b. Legal requirements
 - c. Data security and personal responsibility
2. Service design and the impact on data
 - a. Contracts and service level agreements
 - b. Organisational design and support
 - c. Documentation and design.
 - d. Data ownership, separation, and localisation
3. Practicalities of working with data
 - a. Receiving referrals
 - b. Navigating multiple systems
 - c. Case handover and staff turnover
 - d. Training
4. Quality, validity, and reliability of data
 - a. Accuracy and ambiguity
 - b. Feedback from stakeholders
 - c. Evidencing outcomes
 - d. Individual differences in practice

1. Policy and procedures concerning data

1a. INFORMATION SHARING AGREEMENTS

The role of data and information sharing agreements has impacted on the ability to progress cases, but the degree of impact is varied across services with some reporting better relationships with other services than others. Indeed, the role of relationships in securing information sharing agreements was seen as essential as there is no formal requirement or process to demand data from services to proceed with RJ cases. The lack of a standardised template or policy was highlighted as a barrier to securing effective and robust agreements.

Participants highlighted direct experience of difficulties in securing information sharing agreements with police forces, probation teams, youth justice services, and prisons. Unequal application of information sharing agreements was also highlighted, with a number of senior managers noting HMPPS and Re:hub being able to demand data from RJ services about complex cases without reciprocation in terms of case updates for work that takes place in prison, transparency of processes and decision making, and clarity around timescales. Re:hub is the name given to the 'Restorative Practice Hub' formed by HMPPS in 2019. They have an internal organisational remit to assure the quality, integrity, and safety of restorative practice.

1b. LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

Services report they feel they are managing these demands well, but practitioners feel that legal requirements can produce anxiety in terms of their personal responsibility for compliance. Types of requirements include General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR), Consent, Subject Access Requests (SAR), and Requests to Remove Data (RRD). Where services have taken over from different providers, or practitioners have moved to a new geographical area, navigating historical data that was in different formats has caused issues when services need to comply with SAR or RRD.

Logistical challenges related to SAR and RRD were outlined. Although numbers of these reported were low, the time-consuming burden was highlighted, particularly when services are small or where they have taken over from a previous service to deliver a new contract and need to access data created by a previous provider that had different processes and procedures for handling data. This is an area where a lack of standardisation impacts on the work and can lead to further delays.

The role of consent and the impact of GDPR are a significant barrier to delivering RJ but are accepted as vital and important. The degree to which information sharing agreements has impacted on the ability of a service to gather data varied across services, with external services noting their ability to pool experience and resources across the number of services they operate nationally to benefit others within their portfolio. Individual services, or those working with a variety of different professional stakeholders, have noted the logistical challenges and time-consuming nature of work around designing information sharing agreements. Once documentation has been designed, the next step is the time it takes for these to be approved and completed by partner organisations, which in turn can cause further delay to cases if a case is complex or a new multi-agency partner has minimal awareness of RJ. Services who have managed to streamline this process benefit from having long standing services and/or well-integrated multi-agency approaches.

1c. DATA SECURITY AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Interviewees described the lengths they go to in maintaining data security. Several noted the use of 2-factor authentication within their service CMS for reassuring themselves that data was secure. Personal device security was also key, use of passwords, face ID and fingerprints were outlined. Participants highlighted the balance between paper and digital and the importance of the office space for managing this, especially for scanning or destroying documents. Practitioners feel trusted to manage these responsibilities although the purpose of

supervision is primarily to discuss case progress as opposed to logistical issues related to data security.

The role of statutory requirements for data were mentioned frequently in interviews, and at all levels of employment type, with several interviewees reporting genuine concern and anxiety about ensuring that they and their services are complying with these requirements. This was especially the case for volunteers who understood their liability and potential for fines if they did not comply with GDPR. Interviewees described how seriously they take their personal responsibilities in terms of data protection and data security and credited the respective CMS they use and processes such as two-factor authentication (2FA) that give interviewees confidence in how they meet these security requirements.

The balance between digital and paper recording was highlighted, and it was noted by interviewees that this is an area of concern in terms of potential data breaches. This involved the writing up or scanning of paper documents, such as practitioner notes from meetings or consent forms to the respective CMS. Relative personal security needs for these types of data were outlined, with the need to use a formal organisational office space to destroy hard copies of notes and documents once uploaded to the CMS. A range of reasons for use of paper recording were highlighted, such as the format of service consent forms, use of diagrams and drawing when working directly with participants or general notes written on paper during conversations.

CMS access for volunteers was inconsistent. Volunteers in some services do not have access to the CMS and rely on co-working with employees who will be responsible for inputting notes. Personal choice was another dimension, many feeling that typing directly into a digital device would impact on the relational element of any meeting. Some interviewees noted the ability to recall most of the information from their meetings and chose to use their personal vehicle to enter this into the CMS directly after a visit. Those who use public transport noted this was not possible for them, unless they used a local café or other

place suitable to work with a high level of confidentiality. For those who needed to take immediate notes, it was attributed to their work style and a process they had developed

2. Service design and the impact on data

2a. CONTRACTS AND SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS

Whether internal or externally commissioned services, play a key role in the types of data that are collected by RJ providers. These lack standardisation and are often subject to negotiation at the point of initiation and later in the review.

Contracts for externally commissioned providers, or service level agreements where provision is provided internally, are key areas where data content and volume can be defined. The way this takes place varies significantly. Services reported that this can be determined by the level of knowledge or interest that a commissioner has of restorative work. There are reported cases where commissioners have requested guidance from the service on the types of data and metrics they can provide, and others where the commissioner decides this. Whilst the intricacies of the negotiation were not explored in this research, an awareness of the diverse ways that data types are shaped can be gathered. Certain metrics required per the commissioner's direction, or from the wording of the service contract can impact on what data is collected and how.

2b. ORGANISATIONAL DESIGN AND SUPPORT

Organisational structures vary across services, leading to a variety of formations, with services having varying degrees of paid and voluntary staff. In-house and externally commissioned services highlight the nature of variations in how services are designed, but these concepts are also generalisations as there are variations between the types of services that fit these descriptions. Larger commissioned providers can effectively support their services around data and enable conversations and wider analysis, and some services have joined networks of providers to support each other and discuss data.

Job roles and titles vary between services, with those internal to police services also receiving operational ranks which in turn enables access to data systems that other professionals are unable to. Specific data administrators are used in some services, with some

where managers were previously responsible delegating these tasks. Some services have practitioners who deliver RJ and are also responsible for managing data.

Managers' report oversight of service-level data, but organisational structure impacts on the level of support they receive to work with this. Externally commissioned services reported internal structures related to management of their own databases and additional input from senior management on data processes. The use of non-practising data administrators varied, with this role varying between services and task types. Data administrators may have the sole of responsibility of managing their service database, or they may have additional tasks around taking referrals, managing communications, and supporting the team more generally in terms of outreach and managing office spaces.

Services are composed of a variety of staff types, with variations in job roles and titles, and mixed use of paid staff and volunteers. A variety of benefits and challenges were highlighted in relation to staffing approaches that connect with data. Services that leverage many volunteers, and receive a high degree of referrals, are able to significantly increase the number of cases they work on, which results in staff gaining good experience of data recording and use of the internal CMS. However, when services are not receiving enough referrals, this results in a lack of work for volunteers, which impacts on their familiarity with processes. Interviewees also reported that lack of cases can affect turnover of volunteers who find other opportunities to use their time in the absence of case work.

Where turnover is not an issue, additional support from staff in terms of guidance and training may need to be delivered to ensure system and process familiarity. These gaps in case work also manifest practically for practitioners. CMS applications on mobile or desktop require routine updates which can change visual presentation, core components, or require a download, are not always applied automatically. Issues related to remembering passwords or 2FA processes can cause delays and impact on the time it takes to record and monitor, whilst also requiring some input from other staff or the CMS provider.

Volunteers have a broad range of experience, confidence, and knowledge in terms of using digital technology and managing data using a CMS. Likewise, volunteers come with experience working in different sectors, in a variety of different roles, who have developed approaches for recording and monitoring data in line with those experiences. Whilst there is a lack of data on the make-up of volunteers in the UK and their previous professional experience, they are anecdotally drawn from a variety of fields. These can include police, probation, education, and social care, which have various approaches to working with individuals. This may also include individuals from vastly different sectors, and those who have not been formally employed previously. Those who have harmed or been harmed previously also work as practitioners., with their own subjective interpretation of interactions, which connects to the theme of quality, validity, and reliability of data in terms of practitioner skill at separating facts and opinions in recording and monitoring. This can impact on the types of data captured, and the approach an individual takes. This also has implications for standardisation of recording and monitoring, although the type of data usually reported by services is quantitative does not consist of individual case notes, which are more likely to contribute to case studies, which would have some oversight from management prior to dissemination.

Implications for service design, use of volunteers, and practice varies. Services reported using older volunteers who are sometimes less confident in using digital processes for recording data and may require more training and support through supervision in terms of the types and volume of content that are appropriate for entering into the CMS. Managers noted the support of CMS providers in troubleshooting difficulties and supporting the training of volunteers to use their services. Managers noted that they do not want to micro-manage volunteers in terms of the content they upload to the CMS, and if the minimum is included, and confidentiality is ensured, any other challenges will be addressed in a supportive context via case supervision.

2c. DOCUMENTATION AND DESIGN.

Variation in documentation across terminology and formats was observed via documentary analysis (Fisk, 2023). When interviewed, those who are involved in overseeing multiple services for a single provider, and those who have worked for different RJ providers or services were able to illuminate how and why this occurred in their professional opinion and outline the challenges this has posed them as a result.

Services are not static organisations, they are continuously evolving, based on the needs of all who encounter them. Redesign of documentation has occurred for a variety of reasons. Top-down requirements due to the data needs of commissioners, the victims code of practice, or the MoJ changing their reporting requirements was highlighted frequently. As highlighted in section 2a, providers of multiple services have highlighted how data collection is considered at contract negotiations. Variations in need, demand, or awareness are observed at this point. Service responses to changes in data request from the MoJ have also varied. Some services have amended the documents they use or liaised with their CMS providers to change this at the practice level. Some have opted to manage this at the data coordination and management level, taking responsibility for this task rather than trouble practitioners with changing demands. How this choice was made varied, but some decisions occurred due to an active awareness of the organisational culture within a team and to minimise or prevent harm to internal relationships.

The personal and professional experience that practitioners and managers bring to RJ services has also been key to documentation design. Services have not developed at the same pace, or in the same way, and best practice or data collection efficiency has travelled with practitioners who have moved between services. Changes to data collection have occurred because of input from professional stakeholders or lived experience advisory groups about the kind of data they would be interested in finding out about. These can reflect broader trends in society, nationally and locally. Personal interest in a particular set of data as a result

‘light-bulb’ moments, circle processes and discussions, team development activities, or internal evaluation by managers has shaped the way documents and the data they collect have been developed.

Many services reported using documents that have been provided by the RJC, finding these generally fit for purpose and used as intended. Some services made minor adaptations to address their local needs. Risk assessments were considered a key document where services appreciated external guidance from the RJC. Changes in service personnel have frequently resulted in document redesign, although interviewees described how some of these are long standing and have survived staff turnover. In smaller stand-alone in-house services, where handover to new team members and managers has not been as smooth, it is unclear when documents were made or who designed them, leading to ambiguity which increases the likelihood that these will be replaced. This process also involves the adaptation of documents used by other services, either through professional connections or previous employment, as these were deemed to be a good fit in the absence of documentation or due to concerns a document is not fit for purpose.

2d. DATA OWNERSHIP, SEPERATION, AND LOCALISATION

Data ownership was discussed in the context of multi-agency and inter-service work between RJ providers that work in different geographical area or between those providing RJ/RP for CJS, prisons, education, and social care. Interviewees reported increased cooperation with other RJ services in recent times, with several highlighting their involvement in regional networks, although how these operate in practice varies nationally. Sharing and evidencing success was explored, particularly when there is not a pre-existing relationship between services. Examples of challenges in working this way were given such as when a service is not able to access case data when it is held on a data base they do not have access to, and how success is evidenced in terms of duplication of data when multiple

services count a single process or outcome in their reportable figures as practitioners have both contributed to a single piece of work.

Data ownership was referenced in relation to service transition when PCC contracts change in terms of the continuation of cases, data issues, and ownership of data where this involves a commissioner changing the type of provider in terms of in-house and external, regardless of the direction of change. Challenges to data ownership around the type of work undertaken when it goes beyond the 'strict definition' of RJ, such as other forms of direct work such as mediation. Separation and categorisation of data they receive from different practice approaches, where that is reported, and how success is evidence in relation to a service or RJ itself were reported as areas that still need to be addressed.

Localisation of service specific measures in recording and monitoring was highlighted, as these often respond to the needs of the service as well as the needs of collaborative partners and stakeholders that the service interacts with. The unique make-up of the geographical area with its own specific needs, interests, and challenges can also shape the types of data services record. The ease or absence of the ability to adapt the CMS can affect the data that is collected by a specific service or result in additional work such as excel spreadsheets to collate data that the CMS can either not collect or is unable to compute in a satisfactory manner and present relevant reports.

3. Practicalities of working with data

The need for accurate records impacted upon the practicalities of working with data, with case handover and staff turnover having a relationship with the quality of data recorded. One of the key identified purposes of ensuring an accurate record is for any other practitioner to be able to ensure the smooth continuation of a service for a participant.

A key challenge identified was the variation in the CMS systems used by services, which implies practical challenges related to standardisation and oversight of data nationally due to the assorted designs and terminology in use. Practitioners who have worked for different RJ services report clear differences which take time to reorient to. Those who were responsible for data, usually in a senior service position, reported the need for additional methods such as spreadsheets to manage the data they collected and input into their respective CMS. However, the reasons behind this varied. Some reported it was easier to maintain internal oversight of the service from a data perspective using a purposefully designed spreadsheet. These include the numbers of active cases, who they are allocated to, and where they are in terms of case progress. Others have used a long-standing spreadsheet designed to share and display data in a 'dashboard' format for working with multi-agency partners.

Concerns about the accuracy of the data reported by their CMS were outlined by interviewees, with incorrect figures about quantity of work being reported and issues with having these rectified by the service provider. These errors resulted in additional work to clarify existing data, leading to the use of spreadsheets which were considered a more trusted process that was easier to internally audit. However, despite spreadsheets giving services more control and functionality with data analysis, services reported the temperamental nature of these applications too. Reporting issues with formatting, the potential for errors in equations, potential for human error as the size of these spreadsheets continues to expand and become unwieldy over years of use.

3a. RECEIVING REFERRALS

Receipt of referrals and processes for undertaking this vary across services. Providers often reported an ‘anything goes’ approach to getting cases in, and were not restricted by formal processes such as referral forms as someone within the organisation would always reach out to gather more data. Services frequently received old or out-of-date referrals documents that did not contain all the information they required to process a referral. Of those involved in managing referrals, all highlighted that a referral form is only a precursor to a formal conversation with the referrer to elicit further information and clarify sensitive information that would be included in writing.

3b. NAVIGATE MULTIPLE SYSTEMS

Services frequently must navigate several CMS or digital databases to enable them to undertake their work. These often do not integrate, which results in additional manpower and the creation of other tools using excel spreadsheets to effectively use the data from different sources.

There also exist several different CMS for managing data about restorative cases in the CJS. Areas like social care typically being more integrated with the wider services that they operate with, and education having challenges in integrating restorative work into the systems they use to record and monitor student conduct and behaviour as restorative work is typically not used in a stand-alone fashion within education.

3c. CASE HANDOVER AND STAFF TURNOVER

Factors around the general constraints of time in delivering processes and workload affect ability to manage service data. Turnover, maternity, and sickness affect this, particularly in services where data responsibilities are centralized with a single individual, and more so when processes of managing and analysing data are complicated or designed by a single individual with few others having a practical understanding of how to manage the system.

Where staff have a particular responsibility for working with data, usually on top of being a practitioner or manager, turnover can have a significant impact on the service's ability to go further than just collecting data and limits internal analysis of and synthesis from what they have collected. Data processes are not standardised, and their design can occur in several ways. This can be in relation to dominant CMS systems, and the need to adapt restorative service data to these processes that other services are currently using. It can start from the ground up in response to the types of cases that are undertaken. It can be a continuation of previous methods, either from a manager that has previously left, or from a structure and format that was used by a previous service when a new provider takes over the contract. The managers confidence, aptitude, or enjoyment of working with data can impact on how data is used. These examples highlight again how significant variation in the face of a lack of standardisation can manifest.

When staff turnover and case transfer occur because of a change in service provider contract this becomes more complicated. Service providers may use different CMS which can impact on data transfer, or the overall process of contract transfer and the process of data handover may not be planned and integrated effectively, resulting in one service stopping and a new one starting the same day. This is particularly the case when moving from an in-house to an external provider or vice-versa. This is problematic for following up complaints, subject access requests, or removal of personal information.

3d. TRAINING

Training on data is not part of the broader suite of skills and knowledge that practitioners receive as part of their RJ journey. The concept of 'minimal reporting', particularly for practitioners who have limited involvement in day-to-day data management, has created a false impression of the amount of data that is collected and can be used to evidence the success of services.

Working with data is generally not a part of the core training that practitioners receive, and those interviewed who also train noted it is not part of what they deliver. Training focuses primarily on the values, principles, and practice of doing restorative work. Working with data is considered an administrative task, that is the responsibility of the service provider. The nature of localisation in terms of the variations in language used by service providers and general procedures means it is difficult for restorative practice training providers to offer insight into this, although some providers noted the existence of ‘minimal recording’ policies, although understanding of what this means and how it is interpreted in wider practice varied. This is connected to individual differences in how practitioner manage, recall, and process data and the volume of notes and detail they need to ensure a case is managed effectively.

Minimal recording has also been equated with services not producing much in terms of data output, due to limited data about conversation between practitioners and participants, whereas all services report significant levels of quantitative and qualitative data that is produced for internal oversight.

4. Quality, validity, and reliability of data

4a. ACCURACY AND AMBIGUITY

Interviewees noted the primary reasons for collecting any data within RJ processes is the collation of an accurate record of their work with participants. Interviewees were concerned about ensuring that data was recorded and uploaded to computer management systems (CMS) as quickly as possible and ensuring the accuracy of the data they have collected from participants in an RJ process. Significant individual differences were reported in terms of the level of detail and the way data is captured by practitioners, but all interviewees noted how they strive to do the best job they can, reflecting on their individual differences and needs. Managers highlighted the need to continuously support staff through supervision to ensure data input was factual and not opinion.

Those with higher level responsibility noted their concerns about whether they are collecting ‘the right data’, with siloing of services and limited senior level collaboration with other services in terms of discussion and analysis of data being a key factor in them feeling this way. Practitioners want to have a greater understanding of the types of success that are achieved by other services, and to be able to learn lessons for practice to improve their services. Currently the opinion of practitioners is that these opportunities are limited. Practitioners and services that have been involved in local networks between services to discuss practice, offer peer supervision, and discuss data have reported more confidence but continue to desire oversight about ‘the right data’ from those with institutional legitimacy such as the RJC.

These interviewees also highlighted the importance in understanding regional differences and the challenges in making comparisons between raw quantitative data when services are staffed differently, work with different populations in terms of sheer volume as well as socio-economic, ethnicity, and urban/rural divides. A fear expressed by several interviewees that connects to concerns about these significant variations, and the quality,

validity, and reliability of data is the potential for any data standardisation to lead to the use of league tables for services.

Those interviewed discussed previous issues with blanket bans of certain case types, noting the relational approach they had taken to overcome these over long periods of time. Interviewees reported awareness of some areas only working with individuals post sentence or upon receipt of a referral from probation, but no parties were interviewed that stated this was currently the case for them. Restrictions were identified in terms of working with Re:hub and their internal decision making process about working with individual cases, but not in respect of their current PCC. Any type of ban or restriction has the potential to skew data unless it can be understood and accounted for.

Interviewees report that the primary purpose of data collection in RJ services is the creation of a record of processes to support staff undertaking work. Many of the practitioners viewed the outcomes of processes as being for the participants, and their role is only to facilitate that and to not take ownership of that. Many saw the benefits of RJ as occurring at any point throughout a process as a result of restorative conversations, and not necessarily just a formal intervention. Benefit can therefore be gauged even if a process is not completed in terms of direct or indirect processes. Recording then served the purpose of accurately capturing the views of participants, to support the creation of agreements between stakeholders, and to ensure that in the event of any staff turnover that this can be continued without unnecessary delay. These records enable effective managerial oversight, particularly where services use a large number of volunteers who frequently work remotely and infrequently visit a centralised office location.

Services highlight concern that they are not collecting the right data, or do not know what others are collecting in practice and want to understand how their data relates to others but are fearful of the potential of league tables. Services state that they want to learn from other services about particular case types they have success with and approaches to engaging

communities. Providers feel that they are sometimes making value judgements about what to include, rather than making evidence informed decisions.

Timeliness is a concern for services as they recognise that the accuracy of any data practitioners collect can degrade if not input quickly.

4b. FEEDBACK FROM STAKEHOLDERS

Gathering feedback from process participants is low across all providers interviewed. Continuous diligent change was reported to actively address concerns, and to attempt to drive up responses, but that they are not receiving the amount of data required to make any reasonable judgement about the quality of their services that they would consider to be statistically significant, valid, or reliable. Some MoJ consistency (though this changes frequently), but services are asking a variety of questions, use different formats and techniques (Paper, in-person, posted, QR code, e-mailed links).

The significantly low-level of feedback from participants, both professionals and members of the public, means practitioners worry about being able to provide reliable evidence for the quality of the service they have delivered despite relatively high rates of satisfaction being reported from those that return feedback. Services continue to adapt and trial new approaches to gaining this data but have struggled historically to improve the number of responses. Interviewees across services described how feedback forms are internally evaluated regularly, with a range of approaches used. These include quantitative scales, qualitative feedback. These have been delivered immediately following a meeting, mediation or conference. Interviewees have concerns about how this is delivered, the ‘interviewer effect’ or a practitioner asking a participant to do this in front of them. Having the resources to have a dedicated member of staff be responsible for gathering feedback.

4c. EVIDENCING OUTCOMES

There was a tension between the idea of processes and outcomes in the interviews, with many noting that the outcomes are owned by the participants alone, whilst also noting a

need to evidence outcomes for service commissioners. In-house services reported less concerns about needing to provide this evidence, noting positive relationships with their commissioner, or being so long standing that this is now no longer an issue or agenda item in their regular discussions and reports. However, noting the previous comment about ‘right data’, services were concerned that there were outcomes that they were potentially missing, or outcomes such as recidivism that they would like to be able to contribute to but cannot as they as a service do not have access to the types of data required to be able to make those kinds of judgements in terms of service impact. Practitioners are concerned about a lack of standardisation in terms of how certain outcomes are defined and want to receive guidance from a trusted authoritative source about what and how to record certain data and outcomes.

In terms of the key outcomes and indicators of success that are prevalent in RJ literature, services are not able to accurately understand the level of satisfaction that participants have due to low return rates as outlined in section 4b. Interviewees also highlighted concerns about extremes of data, with those dissatisfied or highly satisfied more likely to return feedback which is not reflective of the service in general. Where ‘satisfaction’ is measured as an outcome of the service this was of a heightened concern. However other services use satisfaction to point towards practitioner effectiveness and performance. Use of the term ‘satisfaction’ was also discussed, noting that the word itself sets a low baseline for the types of outcomes that can be achieved.

In terms of recidivism, services either do not have effective access to the databases where such judgements could be made, or the skillset, peoplepower and resources to track and analyse that information effectively. However, there are also examples of RJ services which are well integrated within police forces, with strong institutional buy-in and a data driven focus, where internal digital tools have been developed that can track recidivism data and link this to the role of the RJ service.

Services also note challenges related to continued engagement with CJS and recidivism. A person will have technically reoffended if they undertake RJ in the context of a burglary but are later charged for any other crime, no matter the significance or relation to the original reason they took part in RJ. Practitioners highlighted the challenges in categorically evidencing the role of RJ for individual transformation, due to a lack of a joined-up approach for supporting individuals across CJS, health, housing, and social care.

A missed opportunity was identified in terms of the data collected by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) from Police and Crime Commissioners to evidence adherence with the Victim's Code. Practitioners noted the level of work required to complete this report, which changed frequently, sometimes with minimal notice. Change of data reporting requirements has previously occurred close to the deadline for submission, causing additional work and stress for those responsible for reporting. Services highlighted an absence of feedback from the MoJ about the findings of this data. Practitioners felt this could offer insight and support service development, as well as offer a national picture of RJ that is evidence-based.

Practitioners frequently highlighted the benefit of case studies to effectively evidence outcomes. Many of the services that practitioners work for use these regularly, however they can be burdensome, and some commissioners value them whilst others do not request them. A number of the larger providers regularly post these on their website and via social media, reporting referrals generated directly from a citizen reading one and reaching out directly. Use of case studies and participant testimonial was repeatedly identified as effective in prison settings for generating referrals.

4d. INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN PRACTICE

Practitioners are not recording conversations in a consistent way, with individual preferences around amount of data varying, with some capturing bullet points and others large text content, and likely connected to way RJ draws practitioners from a wide range of professional backgrounds.

There are also examples where individual practitioners track their own data with participants. Some used explicit scaling tools to track progress on self-defined participant well-being, or against specific outcomes that a participant wants to achieve through engagement with the RJ service. These do not typically form part of a service requirement and are not reported formally to management or commissioners. Practitioners noted that these fell into two domains: data to support the participant to understand their movement or transformation during a process, or for the practitioner to monitor the impact their involvement has had and to be able to compare this across their own cases and enable them to reflect and develop their own practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Funding

- a. Service funding should be made available to employ dedicated staff for the managing of data, or to enable staff to be trained on data management skills and best practices.
- b. Funding for a dedicated CMS system and associated funding for relevant training.

2. Sector standardisation for data and collaboration

- a. Guidance on standardised terminology with national agreement on key measures across the MoJ and RJC to support practitioner and service confidence that they are collecting ‘the right data’.
- b. Building on the APPG recommendation, the development of a national information sharing agreement template should be undertaken urgently and made publicly available for all services to use with their professional stakeholders
- c. Development of regional networks for services to share data and best practice that is relevant to their locales, and where they may be more likely to engage in cross-border referrals. Oversight from RJC can encourage promotion of these networks and increase their legitimacy.
- d. National panel of service managers to regularly meet to discuss data and enable the RJC to gain a better understanding of the data needs on a national scale, to support continued discussion with the APPG and to enable a restorative collective approach to managing data that is predominantly understood at that institutional level. This will also support the potential for an internal national level evaluation with all stakeholders. This can also have with standardisation of terminology and procedures.

3. Evidencing success

- a. In the absence of publicly available MoJ data, the RJC, as an independent sector representative, must build on the recommendation for standardisation of terminology and measurements, and be funded to collate both the quantitative and qualitative data collected by services and to publish this annually. The RJC should be funded to take sector wide responsibility for MoJ reporting. By simplifying and standardising the reporting across all services, the RJC can remove the burdensome task of managing MoJ data returns from services. Any last-minute adaptations to data requests from the MoJ can be managed by a single body, ensuring consistency of reporting.
- b. The MoJ should work closely with the RJC to agree metrics and ensure longitudinal timescales are put in place to prevent or minimise burdensome last-minute changes to reporting.
- c. Further embracing fully digital processes can facilitate the collection and analysis of service data, enabling practitioner and service owned evaluations to be undertaken within the sector, whilst facilitating the potential for rigorous large scale and longitudinal evaluations supported by the expertise of academic partners
- d. Further research and guidance is needed to support services to improve the level of feedback they are able to obtain from participants in restorative processes. This will ensure evidence of satisfaction with processes is valid and reliable using a large sample of responses.
- e. Development of a standardised approach to case studies and public dissemination of a template that all services can use to ensure all key information is captured. Knowledge sharing around successful approaches

to gathering feedback and further research into successful approaches to gathering feedback.

- f. Greater publicity of key stories of success, and the potential implications for practice are required to enable practitioners to learn from other services and to enable them to develop their practice. This needs to be developed in terms of publications, but also the facilitation of dialogue between services more regularly to hear stories of excellent or unique practice.
- g. Distance travelled must become a key metric for tracking transformation and growth. Only deliberate, repeated, longitudinal, quantitative and qualitative, collaborative tracking of progress on the terms of the participant and those of the service can provide real evidence of success in restorative work wherever it is taking place. This metric will enable services to more accurately attribute their part in this process with participants, a criticism that has been levelled at RJ in terms of their ability to directly demonstrate impact and in turn effectiveness of a service that frequently works with citizens within multi-agency processes.

4. CMS best case scenario requirements

- a. Fully digital joined up systems that can capture consent and routine data recording to enable evaluation of data in the same place. Can be used on mobile and desktop. The system should be robust enough to capture consent to participate in a process, and separate consent to collect data for the purpose of evaluation by the service, and then again on a sector wide basis.
- b. Must not be reliant on a constant internet connection. Practitioners must be able to operate in areas where there is poor mobile phone signal or no Wi-

Fi access. This promotes active CMS use and minimises the cost for practitioners who have to use data at their own expense.

- c. User Interface (UI) must take a relational approach and allow access to all stakeholder data securely. It should employ visual tools like genograms, system networks, and socio-ecological modelling.
- d. It should have the capacity to include images, files, and incorporate their respective readers into the app.
- e. Data systems must be able to effectively integrate the data of the harmed and the harmer, whilst also being agile enough to allow the separation of that data for SAR and RRD
- f. The CMS must be able to collate data across all services, and enable a neutral, independent body such as the RJC to be able to undertake effective analysis of this, whilst maintain confidentiality of participants, or until the RJC can be granted statutory footing to manage this data fully.

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Appendix 15: Paper three: Fisk, B.M. (2025b) The purpose of data in restorative justice: a socio-ecological systems lens. *Contemporary Justice Review*.

The overarching theme of ‘data purpose’ emerged during analysis of interviews with practitioners concerning their relationship with RJ service data and the journey that data takes from conception to reporting. All practitioners highlighted additional stakeholders that were invested in the data they collected in some capacity. As more interviews were undertaken, and a wider range of practitioners at different levels of an organisation were involved, a bigger picture emerged from the initial analysis that seemed to suggest a linear vertical movement in terms of data reporting from a practitioner working with an individual member of the public, to the service they work for, from that organisation to those directly funding a service (PCC), and finishing at central government in the form of the MoJ who PCCs must report to.

A theoretical lens of socio-ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) was adopted by the author, informed by their experience as a restorative practitioner and a qualified Social Worker, because of the different types of stakeholders that were identified as having an interest in this data. The theoretical lens had been frequently employed by the author for their own case analysis and used when working directly with members of the public as a visual and cognitive aid to support them to understand the challenges they are facing in their own social context, particularly when seeking to leverage their friends, family, and professional stakeholders to support them in planning for making positive changes within their life.

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The purpose of data in restorative justice: a socio-ecological systems lens.

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Author Note

This research was completed as part of a PhD fees-funded studentship commissioned by the University of Gloucestershire, UK and Restorative Justice Council, UK.

Abstract

The institutionalisation of restorative justice and integration of these practices within government policy and criminal justice systems is an international debate. This work contributes to the literature by using a socio-ecological system lens to examine practitioner perspectives from semi-structured interviews about the use of data for recording, monitoring, and evaluation of restorative justice services in the UK.

Findings highlight the influence of various stakeholder groups, organisational cultures, and competing value systems on data collection which are shaped by institutionalisation. Practitioners collect data to accurately represent initial engagement and case progress, demonstrating professional accountability and contributing to service development while showing value to their commissioners. Although service and practitioner success raise restorative justice awareness at a sector level, awareness and success are limited by government-imposed metrics and managerialist approaches that demonstrate ambivalence towards restorative justice data.

The study concludes that addressing structural barriers to data access and citizen engagement is essential for expanding the evidence base and promoting a nuanced, whole-system approach to embedding restorative justice in society. This requires evidencing restorative justice through standardised and expanded approaches that include quantitative and qualitative measures, and further developing an institutionally subversive and empowered sector to enhance awareness of restorative justice.

Keywords: restorative justice; organisational culture; criminal justice system, recording and monitoring; socio-ecological systems

1.0 Introduction

Institutionalisation has shaped the development of Restorative Justice (RJ) services to reflect the values and practices of state institutions (Maglione, Marder, & Pali, 2024). This paper analyses the perception of practitioners through their experiences with service data processes, aiming to understand the extent to which institutionalisation impacts their ability to evidence success in RJ. Service data offers unique insights into the institutionalisation of RJ, outlining the impact of policy on practice. Recording, monitoring, and evaluation are essential for evidencing RJ practice (Shapland, 2022). However, even in nations where RJ is embedded within the police and exists as a public standardized service with clear data processes, service data challenges persist because of institutionalisation. In Germany, the embedding of RJ into the logic and procedures of the dominant criminal justice system (CJS) has resulted in a ‘deadly embrace,’ leading to marginal use and neglect of indirectly affected individuals through ‘morally charged’ and individualised processes (Willms & Malzahn, 2024: 193). Despite the German state collecting national statistics on RJ since the 1990s, data has been shaped by processes that arguably do not reflect the values of RJ (Willms & Malzahn, 2024). Similarly, in Norway, a public standardized service has existed for over 15 years. Yet, awareness of RJ remains low, and the public availability of statistical data has recently ceased (Rasmussen, 2024). These examples highlight the challenges to data access and illustrate how policy shapes what is practiced and the types of evidence that can be produced.

RJ has gained significant international recognition as a holistic and relational approach to addressing crime and promoting healing for victims, offenders, and communities that seeks to repair the harm caused by crime and restore relationships, shifting the focus from punishment to restorative practices (Wachtel, 2003). The principles of RJ have been integrated into policies and practices worldwide. For example, New Zealand has pioneered the use of family group conferences, involving victims, offenders, and their families in decision-making about restorative responses to harm (Connolly, 2006; Morris & Maxwell,

2019). In Canada, VOM programs have been established to facilitate dialogue and understanding between stakeholders in an offence (Umbreit, Coates & Vos, 2004; Stewart et al., 2018). International legal instruments, such as the Council of Europe (1999) Recommendation on Mediation in Penal Matters and the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Restorative Justice Programmes (Economic and Social Council, 2002), were vital for global recognition of RJ. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Handbook on Restorative Justice Programmes (UNODC, 2006) and Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)8 concerning restorative justice in criminal matters highlight how this has been further solidified over more than 20 years. While RJ has gained prominence on global political stages, it's crucial to recognize the tension between its values and the dominant punitive, managerialist ideologies within the criminal justice system, as it undergoes institutionalization and professionalization, often reflecting the state's dominant cultures and practices. (Marder, 2020; Pali & Maglione, 2021; Maglione, Marder & Pali, 2024).

Recording and monitoring of RJ within professionalised services has received a renewed focus since the publication of the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group on RJ (APPG-RJ) inquiry (APPG-RJ, 2022a). The inquiry brought together Members of Parliament from diverse political backgrounds around 3 key aims: to examine the use of restorative justice principles within the UK justice system and beyond; to raise the profile of restorative justice principles within Parliament; and to provide opportunities for policy discussion and consultation (APPG-RJ, 2022a: 8). Nine key recommendations were produced to improve access, capacity, and awareness, with recommendation two being the specific grounding of this research to support the investigation of 'gathering and using data to monitor and evaluate restorative justice' (APPG-RJ, 2022a: 19).

Submissions to the inquiry offered initial insight into practitioner concerns about the consistency of data between police forces (APPG-RJ, 2022b). Further research into data reported by RJ services funded by Police and Crime Commissioners (PCC) identified a range

of differences between six RJ services and the data they collect, including terminology, counting methods, and approaches to presenting and reporting data (Fisk, 2023). PCCs prioritise quantitative measures of processes and outcomes over qualitative evidence of transformative narratives that capture both objective and subjective measures of success (Fisk, 2023; Fisk, Hobson, Twyman-Ghoshal, 2025). Recommendations since the initial enquiry have advocated for a national reporting framework, a repository of evidence, and for services to ensure approaches to embedding evidence of success in their data (Hobson, Fisk, Hook, & Jaffé, 2023).

This paper uses a socio-ecological systems lens (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and hybrid thematic analysis of interviews (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006) with RJ practitioners to explore the intersections between the institutionalization of restorative justice, marketization, metrification, and organizational culture challenges among RJ service providers and the various organizations and bodies they interact with in practice. This paper aims to build upon the technical and descriptive literature of RJ institutionalisation by drawing on qualitative data from the field to add a further critical account of this phenomenon through the lens of RJ service data and the perspective of practitioners who collect it (Maglione, Marder, & Pali, 2024). By identifying the range of stakeholders invested in RJ processes and outcomes, who have a role in a whole system approach to implementing RJ (Banwell-Moore, 2024). and the types of data they value as ‘success,’ this paper enables those expanding restorative practices globally to consider their own subjective socio-ecological context and identify the range of barriers, potential successes and evidence required to meet their goals.

2.0 Literature Review

Institutionalisation and the contextual implementation of RJ services

There is no universal way of implementing RJ. At the international level, the UN and the Council of Europe (CoE) were instrumental, but implementation of RJ is shaped by national legislation, societal values, language, and the organisation of government departments, on state-wide and locally devolved levels, resulting in services which operate in their own distinctly national way in countries such as France, Italy, Germany, Denmark, United States, Australia, New Zealand, and Brazil (Wood, Suzuki & Tauri, 2024; Soulou, 2024; Mannozi, 2024; Rosenblatt et al., 2024; Lanni, 2024; Willms & Malzahn, 2024; Rasmussen, 2024).

The institutionalisation of RJ has been an area of study for some time (Morris and Maxwell 2001; Aertsen et al. 2006). It involves understanding how RJ practices have been mainstreamed and integrated into formal criminal justice systems, often through state-regulated processes and services. The ‘RJ movement’ or sector reflect this too, advocating for changes to dominant systems and the application of restorative values in society, whilst becoming more established as a formalised network that reflects self-perpetuating and inequitable hierarchies that do not meet the needs of citizens, and that RJ originally aimed to transform (Maglione, Marder, and Pali, 2024: 1-2). Academics have raised concerns about the potential for co-option of RJ as it becomes formalised and aligned with dominant institutional cultures and goals, potentially compromising its original values and principles (Crawford, 2006).

The study of RJ institutionalisation makes it possible to critically identify the common themes where barriers to successful implementation exist. These include the lack of full institutional buy-in that involves the absence of ‘dedicated resources that provide clear direction, policy and commitment, for example, legislation, policy and processes and funding’, and specific to data, the need to ensure ‘*automated and uncomplicated referral processes, data-sharing agreements, specific RJ ‘offer’ points*’ which work to streamline access to and then delivery of RJ (Banwell-Moore, 2024).

Institutionalisation can result in top-down control of services, resulting in significant variation in the types of cases that services are allowed to use RJ with, which amounts to blanket bans for some offences (Banwell-Moore, 2019; Marder, 2020; Shapland et al., 2020). This naturally impacts on the types of data that will be collected if these types of harm are omitted, which can shape the way services record data, and are then evaluated (Fisk, 2023). However, this depends on a complex array of cultural and subjective components and can occur from the bottom-up or the top-down (Hobson & Payne, 2022). RJ is used in different areas of criminal justice which have their own distinct aims, such as prison and probation (Calkin, 2022) and front-line policing (Clamp, 2022). A lack of standardisation in terms of organisational structure (size, staffing, methods) and data collection make evaluation difficult, impacting on the ability of services, and the broader RJ sector to deliver evidence of success despite delivering similar work (Fisk, Hobson, Twyman-Ghoshal, 2024).

Consideration of political, social, physical, and economic ‘*spaces*’ can contextualise the implementation and development of RJ services ‘*providing an understanding of the conditions through which they came and the nature of what it is that emerges*’ (Hobson et al., 2022:7). RJ in the UK has ebbed and flowed over the last 30 years, highlighted by the lack of action in the political and economic space evidenced by the lapse of the MoJ action plan and RJC government funding removal (Marder et al., 2023). Whilst many places have invested in RJ, there are places where it has declined. This begs the question, *why has it worked in some areas and not in others?* Banwell-Moore (2024) offers a whole systems answer for this, building on the work of Shapland et al., (2020), noting that institutional buy-in, referral processes, and victim focus and the lack of any one of these components can affect successful implementation. Monitoring is essential to ensure that RJ takes place, as a drop-off in referrals and a lack of institutional cultural change can mean RJ does not embed (Clamp and Paterson, 2021).

Further barriers exist due to how services are funded, positioned, organised, and staffed to undertake work with the public. There are a range of service structures in place that utilise

RJ. Petrilla (2024) highlights the role of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) in the United States who are closer to communities than the CJS and perceived as less bureaucratically and politically compromised, enabling them to deliver work that aligns with the key values and principles of RP. For many parts of the sector, this is clearly important in terms of the identity of a service. Perrott (2017) highlights the role of organisations that work with the public sector, and the way they have developed historically in England and Wales. The role of ‘new public management’ (NPM), which has had a significant impact on a variety of areas where restorative work takes place, has shaped how organisations collect data as a response to external demands around targets and performance. For example, youth justice is a statutory service where NPM has resulted in increased demands around recording and monitoring, with bureaucratic demands impacting on the quality and creativity of practice, leading to bureaucratic, managerialist, localised, and decentralised services. The incompatibility between the state system of doing justice and the principles of restorative justice may mean the implementation of RJ will ultimately be ineffective (Boyes-Watson, 2004). In modern western societies where RJ has a long history, such as Australia and the United States, an ‘individualist ontology’ and ‘instrumental rationality’ has led to managerialism dominating politics and public administration, which have shaped how RJ services are formed into hierarchical bureaucracies which in themselves do not represent restorative values (Stout & Salm, 2011). Recent introduction of a key performance indicator for victims explicitly mentions RJ but does not consider the person who has caused harm, shaping stakeholder awareness of RJ values and functions in relation to service performance (Youth Justice Board, 2023).

In the UK, PCC’s have discretion in how they implement RJ services from their funds for victims (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2016). A range of bottom-up and top-down approaches to delivering RJ reflect the local priorities of a police service, that can be driven by a range of intersecting community and institutional needs (Hobson & Payne, 2022). These variations occur because funding for RJ is not ringfenced and there exists no right for citizens

to access RJ, only to receive information about RJ, and the process of implementation is not formally proscribed (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2016: 12-13). These policy decisions allow variation in implementation of RJ and demonstrate how the policy context has allowed institutionalisation of RJ in the UK to occur in the form of marketized services (Marder et al., 2023). Marketized RJ services are subject to accountability measures (Shapland, 2022), and organisational culture theory offers a range of insights around the role of the institutionalisation in recording and monitoring.

Impact of organisational culture

Organisational culture can be defined as the shared values, attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, and common practices within an organisation (Schein, 2010). A tension exists between the relational value base of restorative justice and the dominant managerialist systems within which it operates, with significant variation of dominant cultural and system values across nation-states where RJ institutionalization has occurred (Pali & Maglione, 2021; Maglione, Pali, & Marder, 2024).

Handy (2009) argues that variations exist between cultural categories in organisations. The ‘power’ and ‘role’ cultures which focus on centralised decision making, competitive work environments, bureaucracy, and predictability of practice contrast the ‘personal/cluster’ culture which emphasises people, rejects formal hierarchy and encourages power sharing (Handy, 2009). Hofstede’s cultural dimensions (2003) highlight the range of ways that culture can shape the way organisations can operate in practice, noting the emphasis on *long versus short-term orientation*, *individualism versus collectivism*, and the extent to which an organisation will tolerate or avoid uncertainty. Schein’s cultural iceberg model (2010) theorises how organisations operate with unconscious and taken for granted values, assumptions, beliefs and expectations which are difficult to change as they are not discussable, with public challenge even resulting in defence mechanism activation. Peters & Waterman (1982) highlight how organisations cultures can embody ‘rational approaches’ that prioritise monitoring, evaluation

and efficiency with targets and budgets, and ‘cultural approaches’ that value traditions, shared purpose, employee trust, and autonomy. However, Boisnier and Chatman (2003) caution that organisational culture is not homogenous as subcultures can form, especially in dynamic organisations, which can disrupt practices if they channel dissent towards the core organisational values but can be useful as a mechanism to disrupt and change peripheral values if the overarching culture is generally effective.

There is precedence for exploration of culture within organisations that use restorative justice. A managerialist approach and focus on risk management in the CJS has been shown to impact on the rate of victim participation in RJ through victim-protectionism and the subsequent restriction of equal access to RJ (Banwell-Moore, 2024). Managers themselves play a crucial role in shaping organizational culture and facilitating a shift towards restorative principles (Clamp, 2023). Clamp (2023) highlights how RJ as a cultural approach to police practice has transformed from original pilot programs to being a service referred to by officers in neoliberal countries such as US, Australia, England and Wales. The type of successes that police are looking for, particularly when quantitative targets are applied such as quotas for arrests, differ from the types of success that RJ can produce. Within police forces, there is disparity of understanding between those in senior ranks having a better grasp of RJ theory and values, whilst frontline officers are more concerned with doing RJ in practice (Stockdale, 2015). When Police are using RJ ‘to close the case rather than to meet the needs of those involved’ (Clamp, 2023: 7), there is a lack of alignment between the principles and values of RJ and policing more generally.

2.2 Recording, monitoring, and evaluation in the UK

Recording and monitoring serve different purposes from evaluation (Shapland, Robinson, & Sorsby, 2011; Shapland, 2022). While evaluation assesses how well a service meets its stated aims, monitoring is ‘*a basic duty of all schemes offering restorative justice and is part of being accountable to all those using the schemes*’ (Shapland, 2022). However,

recording, monitoring, evaluating the efficiency of services, or measuring success have been rejected by some on the grounds that these acts reinforce the institutionalised controls of government over RJ, particularly when these ways of making RJ concrete are attached to state funding (Barter, 2022; Willms & Malzahn, 2024).

Standardisation of reporting processes can support comprehensive evaluation of services to provide evidence of the success of RJ (APPG-RJ, 2022b; Marder et al., 2023; Fisk, 2023). However, others have highlighted the way RJ has been traditionally evaluated in relation to the dominant CJS at the expense of measures that align with the values of restorative work (Pali & Maglione, 2022; Doak & O'Mahoney, 2018; Llewellyn et al, 2014). Restorative practitioners define evaluation measures such as effectiveness and impact differently from the ways traditional evaluations have been applied, whilst some reject that a concept such as efficiency can exist within restorative practice (Fisk, Hobson, Twyman-Ghoshal, 2024). Building on the institutional knowledge of practitioners is key to successful integration of RJ, shaping potential measurement that can be demanded by commissioners and policy makers, whilst preventing the subsummation of RJ into the values and practices of other sectors (Pali & Maglione, 2020).

Longstanding principles have shaped processes, such as 'minimal recording' (Roche, 2003) which continue to manifest in modern policy and practice. Coventry Children's Services practice standards (2024) describe how 14 services have agreed the same standards since 2009. They state that 'only minimal additional records will be kept about each FGC process' and 'no minutes of an FGC are taken', with the co-ordinator having the specific practice role of ensuring 'there is no minute-taking or recording of discussions during a FGC beyond the Family Plan'. Co-ordinators themselves keep working notes which are not filed on databases due to their neutral facilitative role.

The MoJ were instrumental in funding and setting the agenda for the recording, monitoring, and evaluation of RJ in the 'Shapland trials' with three English police forces

(Shapland et al., 2004; 2006; 2007; 2008). Shapland's work has influenced service development and recording and monitoring globally, and sits firmly within institutionalised provision, contributing to international debates and service development guidance (Shapland et al, 2020; Hamad et al, 2020; Shapland, 2022). The UN Handbook on RJ programs (2020) outlines data for recording, monitoring and evaluation but notes challenges to understanding RJ success due to variability in potential indicators and concerns about the possibility of quantifying highly subjective elements of RJ that are interactive and personal to participants. It offers examples of statistical and qualitative information that can be gathered through monitoring within a typical process (referral, preparation, agreement, evaluation). Satisfaction, frequently gathered through a quantitative scale, can be interpreted by the participant in terms of satisfaction with one or more of these components: (a) the way their case was handled; (b) the outcome of the case; (c) with the facilitator; (e) the fairness of the process; and (f) the interactions with the offender.

Practice frameworks that highlight potential outcomes grounded in the values of RJ include the opportunity for the process to facilitate moral repair for participants, reparation, rehabilitation, desistance and recovery (Kirkwood, 2022). Researchers have sought to understand the cost-effectiveness of RJ, which can be shaped by the needs to address managerialist and bureaucratic approaches to funding and commissioning that demand evidence before committing large sums of public money to specific projects (Taylor & Bailey, 2022; Grimsey-Jones et al., 2023). As cautioned by the UN Handbook (2020), how success is evidenced depends entirely on what is being measured, and even more so, what people think they are measuring (Doak & O'Mahony, 2018). Furthermore, transformative and subjective success may be neglected if 'all that is of value may not be quantifiable or measurable' (Llewellyn et al., 2013: 286).

RJ processes can be monitored at 3 points on a timeline: pre-conference, conference, and post-conference (Restorative Resources, 2015). Other metrics include numbers of referrals,

time taken to get to a conference, and number of meetings needed with stakeholders (Hamad et al., 2020). The objective count of a single conference brought to fruition by a service, cannot capture the subjective variations of work that go in (Fisk, 2023). Likewise, a larger number of community stakeholders involved may not mean that a process will take longer or shorter. Time is a key component of efficiency, but it is subjective and contextual and difficult to make inferences about success from this alone, if efficiency is accepted as a measure of success in restorative work (Fisk, Hobson, Twyman-Ghoshal, 2024).

The challenge with a linear 3-stage concept of this type is that success can be minimised and perceived as just the achieving of a conference. It could be argued that this is a factor in terms of the historical reductionism in what success in RJ looks like that has shaped the quantitative demands of service commissioners and the data subsequently reported by services (Fisk, 2023). Practitioner submissions to the APPG-RJ inquiry stated that in their professional opinion successes can be achieved during a process without achieving a formal conference (APPG-RJ, 2022b). An interpretative challenge exists if outcomes can only occur upon completing an ‘intervention’, as many successes may not be recorded or formally associated with the service or sector due to logistics and challenges of evidencing.

A critique of RJ in terms of evidencing success is the difficulty demonstrating cause and effect between a process and an outcome, and there existing a need for longitudinal work to demonstrate effectiveness and impact (Menkel-Meadow, 2007; Gregory and Evans, 2020). Experimental studies have demonstrated positive outcomes, but the wealth of studies undertaken predominantly demonstrate correlation, and even if that is considered better than nothing, repeated studies which eliminate or reduce major competing explanations of causations are limited (Sherman, Strang, Newbury-Birch, 2008). Recidivism, a key measure in the broader CJS is a prime example of this. It features prominently in evaluations of RJ effectiveness (Strang et al., 2013; Gaffney et al., 2024) and is an important social issue that research has looked to address. Whilst there is empirical data and testimonial accounts that

suggest RJ has a positive impact on reducing recidivism (Shapland et al., 2008; Kimbrell, Wilson, & Olaghere, 2022; APPG-RJ, 2022b), there also exists evidence that challenges the extent of this.

A recent meta-analysis (Fulham et al, 2023) of largely unpublished non-peer reviewed evaluations from government agencies, consultants, and university research centres across English speaking nations internationally highlighted only modest reductions in recidivism from RJ. Specific types of crime where it may not be as effective as other approaches especially those that focus specifically on recidivism and repairing of harm, cases where programmes which have not adhered to restorative principles have seen greater reductions in recidivism than those that did, and ‘lower quality’ studies reported greater reductions in recidivism than ‘higher quality’ ones, suggesting potential bias in study methodology (Fulham et al, 2023). Evaluations struggle to tap into outcomes that are not easily measurable, and success of implementation relies on organisational values aligning with the values of RP despite the incongruence between the rigidity of professional structures and the need for subjective professional judgement (Bevington, 2015). Such variations in the evidence base highlight how individual a process can be. RJ does not happen in a vacuum as usually multiple other services can be involved, and participants can be affected by a variety of other social factors outside professional spheres of influence.

In summary, recording and monitoring of RJ is a complex and contested task that generates a variety of data. It is shaped by institutionalisation of policy and managerialist organisational culture. This paper will explore these concepts from the perspective of RJ practitioners and consider potential practice and policy implications from the findings.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research design and data collection

This study employed a social constructivist, qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews (n=20) with RJ service professionals. A hybrid thematic analysis (TA) was used (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006), employing inductive TA to identify initial codes and themes, and a deductive TA using the theoretical framework of socio-ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1994) to identify the purpose of data for different stakeholder groups from the perspective of the interviewees.

Social constructivists take the position that knowledge construction is a primarily social and cultural process, where individuals bring their own perspectives driven from their experience (Vygotsky, 1978; Shepard, 2000; Sutherland et al., 2004). Traditional approaches to measurement, whether in education or the realms of social work and criminal justice, frequently do not measure what they purport to. Adams (2006b: 233), in their critique of traditional measurement approaches, states:

‘...mental activities and processes are indirectly observed through the prism of actions and reactions, which in turn are seen to provide reliable information about the type, scale and quality of learning... to use such observations to comment upon anything other than specific, context-bound performance misses two fundamental points: learning, or at least aspects of it, occurs in the mind; and behaviour is not a priori a reliable indicator of cognitive processes’

Short term, easily measurable gains, rooted in behaviourism and managerialism, come at the expense of longitudinal transformation and success (Fisk, Hobson, Twyman-Ghoshal, 2024). Such approaches ignore how individuals acquire, select, interpret and organize information in multiple different ways (Adams, 2006a; Adams, 2006b). Social constructivism therefore acknowledges the subjective nature of success in RJ (Doak & O’Mahoney, 2018), recognizing that participants, practitioners, and other stakeholders hold varying definitions and interpretations from their own lived experience.

The social constructivist qualitative interview design allows for capturing the richness and complexity of subjective stakeholder perspectives on recording and monitoring practices within RJ services due to the range of social actors that are involved in constructing services, and the various negotiated orders that exist within and between RJ services which are constantly changing (Bryman, 2016).

3.2 Sample and procedure

Twenty participants (n=20) consented to take part in semi-structured interviews. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select 17 active RJ service professionals from a pool of 70 respondents who participated consensually in a survey of definitions of success in restorative work and consented to be contacted further. Participants were contacted directly by e-mail. A second process of consent was undertaken prior to all interviews. 3 further participants were identified by participants during interviews as being able to illuminate other aspects of recording and monitoring. Consenting participants contacted their colleagues directly to enquire about their availability and willingness to participate, where upon information and consent forms were shared prior to any further interviews.

Interviews were conducted in-person (n=2) or via Microsoft Teams (n=18) and lasted between one and two hours. After brief introductions and outline of the participants job role and organisational context, they were asked an initial question:

- Describe the journey of data in your service from the earliest point of collection

Participants were prompted if there was anything else they wished to say about an aspect of their recording and monitoring, and to enquire ‘what happens next?’ in recording and monitoring. This was framed in the context of a linear-3-stage model, however participants used their own language to describe restorative processes, such as meetings, interventions, and conferences (Restorative Resources, 2015). Clarifying questions were asked to ensure meaning was understood by the researcher if unclear, and where acronyms or technical terminology were used.

3.3 Author positionality

The author defines themselves as a pracademic due to their background in professional practice as a restorative practitioner and registered social worker, which informs the methodology, analysis, and theoretical lens adopted in this study (Hollweck, Netolicky, & Campbell, 2021; Gartner, 2024). This experience facilitates an understanding of recording and monitoring tasks involved in anti-oppressive work with citizens, that enables the humanisation of research and sustains an ethical awareness of institutional inequalities (Strier, 2007; Shapland, 2022). RP is complex relational work that operates on the edges of statutory sectors, incurring long-standing issues with awareness and understanding (Ministry of Justice, 2012; Shapland, 2014). As a pracademic it was important to create a safe interview space of contextual understanding for conversations that enable purposeful development of relationships and research that could enable future collaboration (Baldwin, 2024). RP draws practitioners from a vast array of professional human service disciplines with disparate approaches to documentation of work, which required a careful semi-structured interview approach that fostered relationships whilst also preventing leading questions and interviewer effects (Adams, 2015; Husband, 2020; Twyman-Ghoshal & Hobson, 2022:11). Professional background information was mutually shared and open questions were used to clarify responses or acronyms, as previous research has identified a variety of distinct and overlapping terminology used when RJ services report their data (Fisk, 2023).

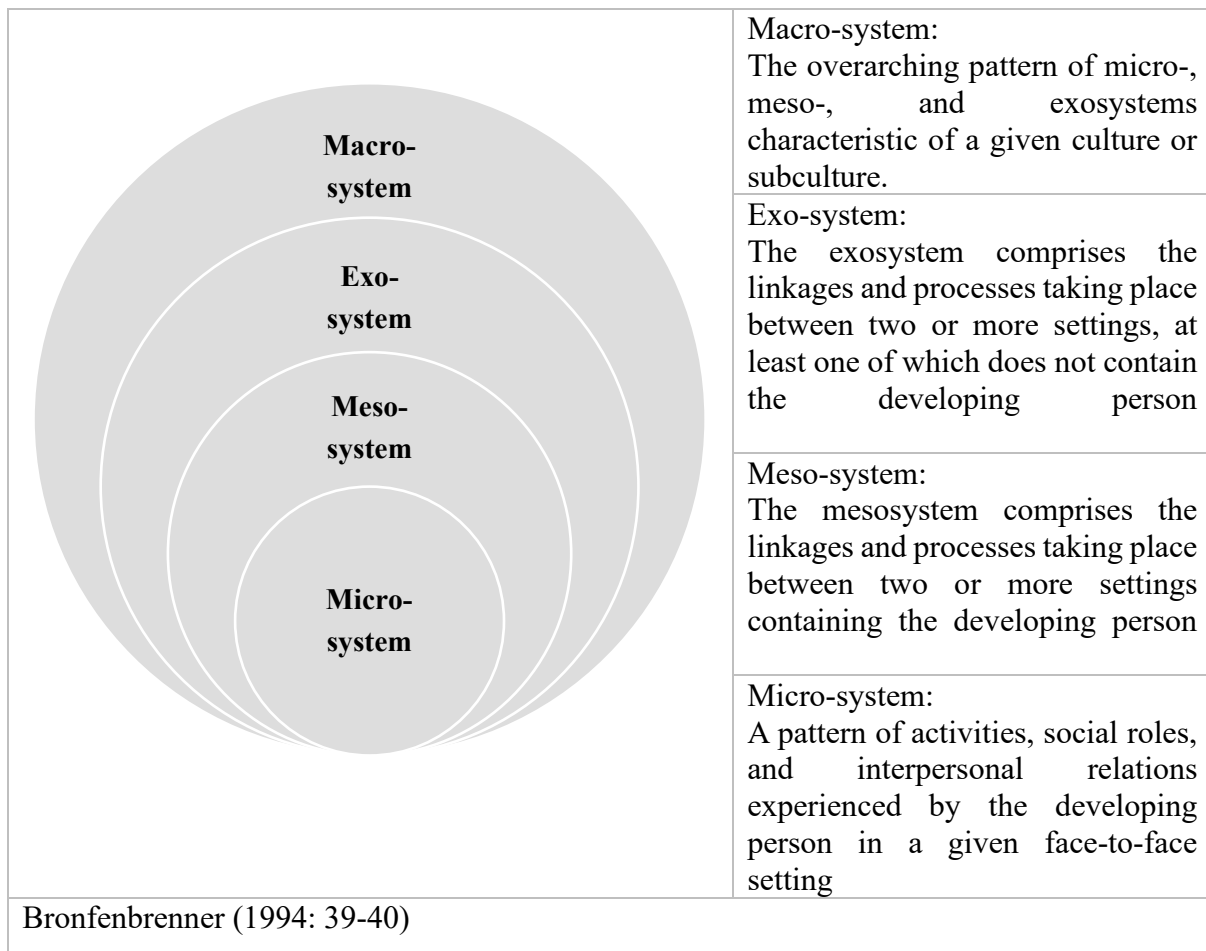
3.4 Data analysis and theoretical framework

The hybrid TA (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006) uses a systematic linear combination of inductive and then deductive TA with the same set of qualitative data. Authors have historically distinguished between the two approaches (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006), with inductive (bottom-up) TA used to identify and analyse initial themes, and deductive TA (top-down) using previously identified codes and themes or application of a theoretical framework to a dataset (Proudfoot, 2023). A hybrid approach is an iterative and reflexive

process that offers greater rigor in qualitative data analysis from mutual reinforcement (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Proudfoot, 2023).

This paper utilizes the socio-ecological systems (SES) model for deductive TA to understand the use of recording and monitoring processes, and how stakeholders within RJ services interpret the use of the data collected (Bronfenbrenner, 1979: 1994). SES allows us to consider multiple stakeholders and societal layers. This approach emphasizes their influence in a pragmatic and relational manner that aligns with restorative values (Pranis, 2013). In turn, it supports a call for a whole systems approach (WSA) framework to enable the radical implementation of RJ for social action in accordance with concepts such as social phenomenology where hybrid TA has also been used (Schutz, 1967). This can bring about sustainable change by enabling the understanding of the parts actors play in the broader systems of governance and practice (Public Health England, 2019; Stansfield et al., 2020; Banwell-Moore, 2024).

Diagram 1: Bronfenbrenner socio-ecological systems model



SES uses concentric circles to visually represent layers of an individual's social life. This analysis considers the journey of data collected about individuals taking part in an RJ process. SES typically uses 4 levels starting from the individual and their micro-system, moving through the meso-system, exo-system, and finally the macro-system. These layers hierarchically represent the different layers of an individual's social world. No individual SES is the same due to the complexity and subjectivity of human experience. A potential limitation exists in the visual representation of these layers that can be misleading, suggesting a lack of direct interaction between them (Healy, 2022). Concepts such as the 'ecotone', unique and dynamic places where interactions between different systems occur are useful to enable a metaphor for the potential of change and new opportunities (Normore, Lahere & Zoller, 2019). Although again, this is limited as it may infer only a linear relationship between neighbouring

systems. Complex systems theory offers a more nuanced understanding of the non-linear interactions and constant change within systems in human service work (Shafi et al., 2020). However, concerns still exist that this approach is overly technical or reductionist (Healy, 2022). SES acknowledges power dynamics and structures at play between stakeholders, services, practices, the wider restorative sector, and social policies influencing RJ implementation. Individual layers shape and are shaped by others, creating a complex system of interconnected relationships (Adams, Dominelli, & Payne, 2017).

The SES lens offers several advantages for understanding stakeholder perspectives on recording and monitoring in RJ services and has precedence in previous research. The SES lens sheds light on the broader power structures impacting restorative justice and enables a move beyond simplistic visual binaries (Downes, 2017), such as service-client relationships, acknowledging the multifaceted and complex nature of human lives and interventions. This is particularly relevant in RJ, where personal transformation and success may involve interactions with multiple services and ongoing personal change. McCold (2000:4) considered RJ theory at the socio-psychological micro level with harmed citizens, and the connections to political theory that operate on a macro level. SES has been adapted to consider the role of resilience in learning and education within complex contexts (Shafi, Middleton, Millican, & Templeton, 2020; Shafi et al., 2020). Combining public health and restorative justice perspectives has been explored using a SES approach (April et al., 2023). Resilience is essential for health and harm repair. By embracing complexity and understanding the various societal layers that value it, traditional service evaluations can adopt alternative approaches that overcome the limitations of conventional methods, aligning more closely with restorative values (Hood, 2018).

Macro- and meso- level challenges to RJ use have been outlined in political and social structures, and within institutions and communities (Wood et al., 2021). The macro policy system is resistant to inputs from the RJ sector system, and integration whilst attempting to subvert traditional justice mechanisms highlights the paradoxical nature of the RJ sector (Schiff,

2013). The policy and RJ sectors have been identified as different systems with their own language and rhetoric, with the RJ sector being subordinate and having to change its' language, values, and practices to be amenable to the dominant perspective on how crime should be managed (Tauri, 2023:45).

3.5 Ethical and project approvals

This research received full project and ethical approval from University of Gloucestershire.

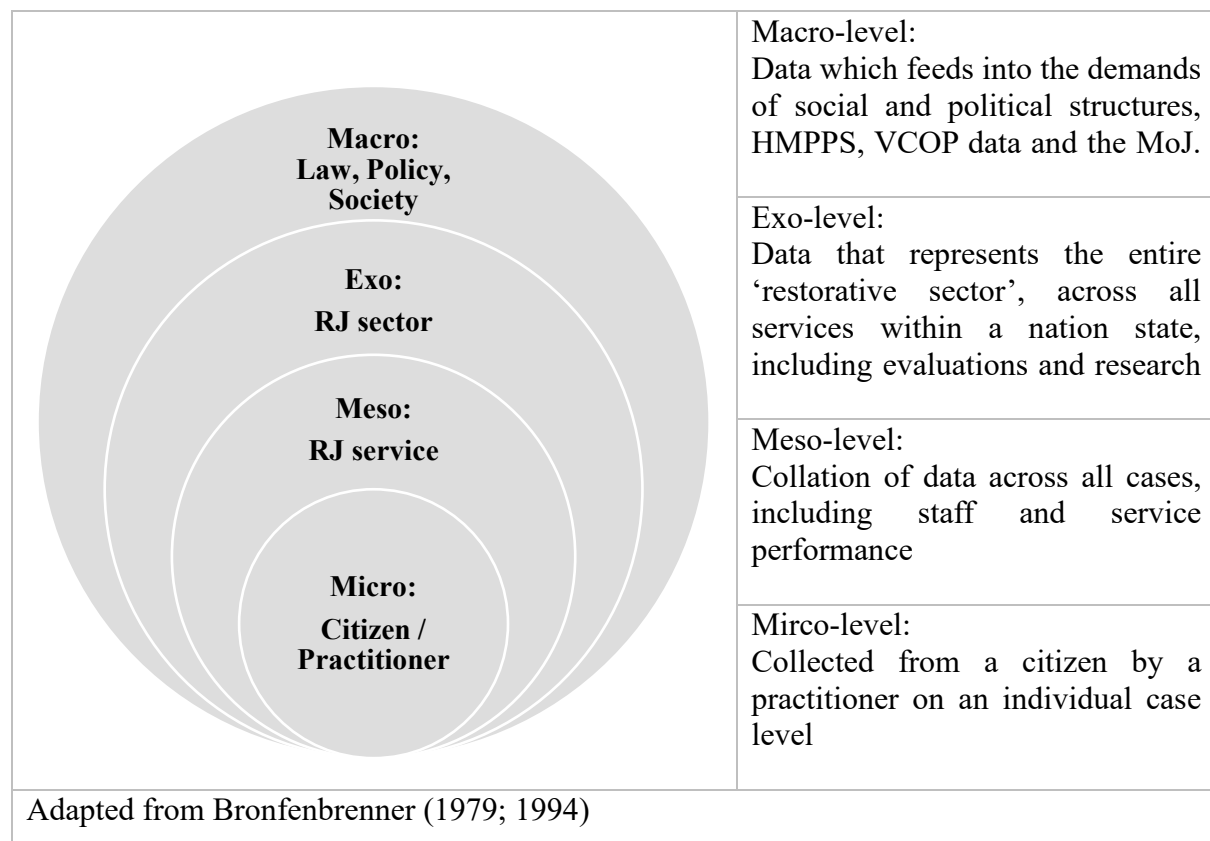
4. Findings and analysis

Within the context of a hybrid TA (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006), an inductive TA of interviews transcripts highlighted a range of purposes for collecting and using RJ service data, and a range of individual and collective stakeholders that received, requested or required data. Using the SES lens (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1994) for deductive TA, a range of themes were identified that further elaborated upon the purpose of RJ service data, and the stakeholders involved can be mapped across four SES levels:

- Policy and government (Macro)
- Restorative sector (Exo)
- Restorative services (Meso)
- Participant and Practitioner Interaction (Micro)

These findings are visually represented in diagram 2.

Diagram 2: Stakeholders and purpose of data RJ through a SES lens



The four systems will now be outlined, starting with the closest proximity to the generation of data within a restorative process between a citizen and a practitioner, and moving out to service, sector, and policy and governance.

4.1 Micro-system: Participant and Practitioner Interaction

Data at this level is concerned with initiating restorative case work with participants that enables practitioners to accurately represent their story and a routine task, essential for tracking and informing case progress and evidencing professional accountability at the practitioner level. Responses frequently intersected case progress and accountability, as demonstrated in the following quote:

Initial engagement

Recording and monitoring starts with individual people, groups, or communities and an identified type of harm to start the process of engagement between a citizen and a practitioner to undertake a restorative process. Participants identified ‘*inquiries*’ and ‘*referrals*’ as processes where data is initially collected about those who may go on to work with a service. Inquiries and referrals can come from a potential participant or another stakeholder, such as a professional. They include only basic data such as name and address and does not capture equality, diversity, or inclusion details. Practitioners described the delicate and sensitive process of taking limited information, to ‘*build relationships*’ with citizens, gaining consent to turn inquiries and referrals into cases and then beginning the process of formally recording and collecting a range of personal data, particularly the citizen’s story.

‘I wanna get to know that person. And then what we don't wanna do is necessarily re-traumatize somebody. So we take them on the day that we meet them. If they, at that point if they wanna talk about what's happened, they will. If they don't, they won't’

However, at this early point, not being able to gain data about participants was a key barrier. Inconsistent application of information sharing agreements, or the inability to form these between services due to issues of bureaucracy or service awareness was a common issue.

'If I don't have data. I can't do the job, because I'm not a clairvoyant and I can't contact victims and offenders through that medium, pardon the pun....So, you need good information sharing agreements with police, probation, youth justice, prisons.'

Data barriers at this early-stage manifest through power imbalances between services that prevent restorative work taking place. RJ services that are not able to engage directly with individuals must wait for other gatekeeping services to enable them access to the range of citizens involved in harm.

'we referred it to re:hub as is the process, and it was six months before a multi-agency meeting was arranged, and at that multi agency meeting, the offender had still not been approached to see if he would even consider engaging'

Accurate representation

Once access is gained and consent is given, data must *'accurately represent'* the personal story and the story of the process, particularly where young children are involved. Accurate representation included *'evidencing clear outcomes'* and *'agreements'* for participants, as well as any changes that occur post-referral. Formal plans were recorded consistently, but for some services and individual practitioners these also involved tracking participant well-being and progress in respect of self-defined outcomes through dialogue or scaling tools. These were agreed at the start of a process and development over the duration of their involvement was monitored. These are used as a reflective tool for the participant to identify *'distance-travelled'*, *'growth'* and *'movement'* in terms of the initial harm that led to an RJ referral. Accurate representation was described as having the benefit of minimising *'story repetition'* for participants engaged in multi-agency work and was considered vital to *'promote trust'*,

"It's just making sure that it's all recorded accurately and then working with them to accurately record what they want from the process... it always has to come from them. It's just

making sure that if it changes as well, noting on our information on the case management...It's just making sure that I capture it in their words more than anything.'

Creative approaches that were not easily transferable or quantifiable were often employed. These included *'sculpting'* approaches, drawing *'pictures'* or *'network-maps'*. Practitioners described taking photos or scanning these, and ensuring evidence was uploaded to the CMS and included with plans and agreements shared with participants to accurately and fully represent their involvement.

The degree of detail captured by practitioners in their case records depended on the practitioners own writing needs connected to *'having a good memory'*, strategies related to neurodiversity, practices from previous employment such as social work or probation, or organisational procedures such as a *'minimal recording principle'* (Roche, 2003). Accurate representation had the benefit of positively influencing practitioner accountability by demonstrating *'reliability'* and *'professionalism'* which *'prevent complaints'*, and ultimately encourage processes to continue and be completed.

Case progress

Recording varies individually or due to services requirements, highlighting a subtheme of recording and monitoring inconsistency across practitioners within and between services. Some practitioners record the *'three or four minutes'* of a phone call, whilst others *'don't record how long things take'* because they *'don't need to, we're not asked to'*. Practitioners are allowed a *'fair degree of autonomy'* in terms of the amount of recording undertaken if it *'complies with confidentiality'* and is *'factual'* as opposed to *'opinion or judgement'*. Tracking *'on-going case suitability'* and *'risk assessment'* were vital purposes of this work. Use of *'minimal recording'*, *'basic notes'*, or *'bullet points'* for *'reminders of conversation'* contrasted more detailed recording to prevent *'forgetting things'*, *'maintaining accuracy'* and *'fully transparency'* to ensure *'professional accountability'* and *'watertight'* case management by *'recording everything'*. Level of detail in a recording was seen as important if a case needed to be handed

over to another practitioner due to *'sickness'*, *'leaving the service'*, or *'winning the lottery'*, to ensure processes can be completed with minimal delay and prevent participant re-traumatisation from having to relive their story.

Case progress, tracked by senior staff and managers was essential for understanding staff well-being and any needs they may have as practitioners. Some checks occur *'Every week or two'* for active cases, although some services rely more on formal supervision which can occur monthly or less frequently, depending on the needs and experience of the practitioner.

Practitioner accountability

Practitioners feel accountable and responsible for progressing a case and securely handling data. This is a challenge for practitioners as they understand the subjective contextual nature of the work that is fundamentally participant led, and by their own account not efficient in practice (Fisk, Hobson, Twyman-Ghoshal, 2024), but there is also an organisational need to turn-over cases due to service-level metrics. Services can be held to account for this in terms of commissioning and expectations. However, macro-level barriers and gatekeepers which delay processes can cause practitioner responsabilisation due to the lack of case progress caused by data gatekeeping from external statutory services. These can include the police, re:hub within HMPPS, or GDPR rules which are an example of government policy that directly impacts on practitioners. GDPR was described as adding *'75 extra steps'* to a process that requires practitioners to ask the Police for data whereas before access was easier. Practitioners felt that *'GDPR has impeded the delivery of services'* because it was slowed down the speed practitioners can reach people. Access to police systems for gathering basic personal data have been restricted for some services. Even once cases are progressing, cases are *'bogged down by administrative, legal, permissions'* and struggle to *'move forward'*. The personal impact of GDPR on practitioners also shapes recording habits, as data must be anonymised to ensure they are *'data compliant'*, as responsibility *'ultimately comes back onto the person who has written the note'*.

Whilst the macro-factor of a policy like GDPR can impact on practice, accurate representation and demonstrating case progress factor into practitioner accountability. As professional managerial organisations, RJ services do undertake performance management of individual practitioners due to complaints or lack of progress. Interviews highlighted significant variation in the number of cases individual practitioners hold in different services, related to local RJ awareness, referral numbers and capacity, case complexity and training levels. For some services, it was an issue of performance management if '*a 20 hour a week practitioner did 20 cases in a year*'. The '*what's going wrong*' could be the level of support from a manager, the volume of work to start with, or effective allocation of cases. However, some services shared that they are not reaching this figure across their entire team, so accountability is contextual.

4.3 Restorative services (Meso)

The types of data collected were generally in line with those recommended for service collection (UN Handbook, 2020; Shapland, 2022) however there are significant variations in terminology and reporting (Fisk, 2023). The purpose of data at this level was primarily for reporting to the service commissioner but was also used for internal service development. It covered performance and accountability such as referrals received, active case numbers, interventions completed, tracking hours of work undertaken, service satisfaction and complaints.

Reporting for commissioners

Participants described the construction of an '*annual report*' as a key service level output of recording and monitoring processes. The annual report is primarily for service commissioners, although engagement and sharing of this information locally with other statutory, voluntary, or third sector organisations does occur. Requests from these other agencies can then shape the content of the annual report. Changes of elected PCC, who have their own personal and professional interests, political agendas, and knowledge of restorative

ways of working, also impact on the content of the report and the approaches managers take to present their report. Some services report more frequently on a monthly or quarterly basis (Fisk, 2023).

Annual reports can impact on contract renewal or extension, which influence staff job security, morale, and public access to an RJ restorative service. Report format and content were unique to a service, with significant variation in structure and data demands with a focus on raw numerical count of quantities and transitions from inquiry to referral to process and outcome numbers, as identified previously via documentary analysis (Fisk, 2023). Interviewees expressed concerns around the primacy of quantitative count data despite mixed attempts to add qualitative data and case studies for context when evidencing success using PCC metrics, as interviewees believe data does not reflect the amount of work or range of success observed. This reductionism has resulted in a *'focus on tangible outcomes'* and a subsequent *'misconception'* of the *'whole manner of work that happens before we even get to the point of assigning facilitators'* which means that *'all those other successes'* are not considered or captured using the processes they have been allocated.

Some PCCs are clear about the types of data they want a service to evidence and may have an *'off the shelf KPI idea'* which can change over years of a contract when *'they realise we don't need all that, there's far more valuable information that we could get from you than that'*. Other PCCs requested the service to inform them of the types of data that can be collected. These variations were described as connected to the PCC understanding of RJ or their management and leadership style and can change during the life of a contract, such as a focus on *'how many hours volunteers have done'* but not the work of paid practitioners. The professional experience of how commissioners choose metrics highlights further the issues of RJ awareness, subjectivity of success, and the impact of relationships in reshaping these.

In terms of the purpose of reporting *'whether you're an in-house service or an out-house service...you're still beholden to your funders... you've got to provide data to show that*

you're worth paying for'. However, externally commissioned services explicitly outlined the need to provide evidence that *'service agreements were fulfilled'* and *'value for money'* was achieved. There was less concern from services *'internally employed by the PCC'* with commissioners that have a *'good understanding of RJ so we don't actually need to explain why certain things take as long as they do'*, because *'there's not that pressure...that other services feel to prove themselves'* as they report strong relationships and are *'having conversations with the commissioner and their office all the time...So we sort of don't have those targets'*.

Fundamentally, PCC data collection is shaped by the MoJ annual data request and practitioners feel that there is false equivalence between cases as the level of impact RJ has on an individual is not effectively captured through current data demands.

'Restorative justice has been life changing for this victim ... But when you look at the MoJ report, it's just captured her feedback. Her experience is captured in the same way as those just having a telephone call with someone that says that was really helpful.'

There is a growing awareness in the sector that some services are pivoting to track *'restorative conversations'* at any point during a process as evidence of success. Those not recording these noted that they could but were concerned that *'it's so subjective'* and would need standardisation. A restorative conversation *'indicates that facilitators did a real piece of work...spent a lot of time working with maybe one participant, but it never quite got there'*. This metric was considered useful when working with victims for a long period such as two years allowing the service *'to capture the work that they've still done'* even if a process is not completed and a *'traditional outcome'* is not achieved.

A key data area that many services have said they struggle to report on is recidivism. The nature of many referrals means tracking reoffending data can be difficult: *'Most of my cases are sensitive and complex and most of the time the offenders are in prison, so they're in prison. Chance of reoffending is probably next to nothing.'* Many services lack access or capacity to work with the longitudinal data and there was scepticism about the extent to which

services are routinely tracking this across the sector. Current data management systems are not equipped to facilitate this task as *'you'd have to go into the police systems and go into every single case and kind of do it that way'*. There is also concern about how recidivism is interpreted as reoffending can be a *'yes or no'* metric regardless of repeated offence or *'de-escalation'* as reporting does not *'delve any deeper as to why'*.

Service development

Service statistics, case studies, and participant feedback are used as an internal 'snapshot' to learn how RJ services can improve and develop. Frequency of review varies across services. Example identified included decreased *'referrals from probation'*, increased *'hate crime referrals'*, or *'to improve burglary referrals'*

Data enables evidence-informed discussions with other services to increase referrals from specific individuals, agencies, geographical areas, and case types. Data enables services to work with their professional partners to *'investigate why that's happening and unblock some of the issues if there are any'* and to understand *'is the work that we're doing working, do we need to be doing something else?'*

Senior practitioners or a manager undertake internal evaluation, although some services have developed relationships with local universities to explore their data by paying academics or on a free basis with students completing undergraduate or postgraduate research projects. Services can use this data to critically understand trends in referral sources and the types of case work undertaken, and identify areas where RJ is underrepresented and take action.

Understanding and using data for service development was described as *'a bit tricky'* and a time-consuming task, but one that those with this responsibility find *'interesting'*, enabling a retrospective account of service development over previous years. Analysis difficulties are exacerbated by databases and computer systems that did not easily facilitate this task. Few services have a dedicated data-manager, with many being practitioners or managers who take on this role in addition to their regular duties. Elaborate spreadsheets prone to human

error due to large data volumes require time-consuming manual input to transfer data, due to a lack of trust in the accuracy of the service database and the inability of computer systems to communicate.

4.4 Restorative sector (Exo)

The restorative sector as the exo-system is reminiscent of a disembodied stakeholder, one that is the production of multiple social actors over decades, one that consists of both individual practitioners and organisational groupings such as services, that are represented by institutionalised RJ regulatory institutions, with the RJC being the primary body for this in England and Wales (Maglione, 2017a; 2019). However, in the UK it is questionable the extent to which the RJC could be called a 'state-funded institution' which constitutes 'RJ's macro-regulatory core' (Maglione, 2019: 660), as it does not have a statutory basis in law and receives no funding from central government.

The primary purpose of data at this level was for the raising of awareness. Two subthemes were identified to support this purpose, in terms of developing an evidence base to support awareness and a restorative identity that practitioners align with that supports their need to use data to fulfil this aim.

Raising awareness

Raising awareness is not a passive task of advertising or sharing leaflets, but one that is active and relational, that also seeks to generate understanding of the potential of RJ. '*Success for the statutory agency that you're working with, might be different to what your success is*'. It is undertaken by savvy practitioners who may feel that they are subverting social and organisational norms. Raising awareness is something all services do but discussed in terms of a collective *we* sector identity that is linked to embodying and believing in restorative values. However, awareness and profile raising is a cyclical problem that has not improved despite sector evidence from domestic and international evaluations of effectiveness (Shapland, Robinson & Sorsby, 2011; Strang et al., 2013). In the restorative sector '*The same*

conversations that are taking place in 2001 and 2002 are still happening'. A direct connection can be drawn across the socio-ecological system, from handling micro-system data correctly, being able to evidence work for a service in the meso-system, that can provide evidence to support the expansion of the entire restorative sector exo-system.

'if we can continually contribute to the growth of the integrity of the service...it inspires confidence in us, the better the reputation ... we're gonna get more referrals, then we can increase the restorative capacity ... we can increase the growth of restorative justice ... I just totally believe in the restorative way of working'

Embodying RJ values comes into conflict with how data is used. RJ services are trying to raise awareness of their values and their service to generate referrals, but valued by external services for meeting their data needs, alluding to a professional play-off within institutionalisation. Understanding how data shapes other areas and services is key to raising awareness. The police or probation point of view that RJ can be counted as a sanctioned responses or countable intervention may *'not be born of a belief and a passionate drive for RJ, but that's what ticks their box'*. Participants presented a pragmatic approach driven by data, noting that *'It's not being naive to different agencies have different views in regard to how much numbers matter and from a policing point of view numbers really matter, quality less so, numbers really matter'*. However, professional knowledge and experience *'knowing what makes the agency tick'* could increase awareness and generate more referrals.

Whilst the marketisation of RJ services has led to competition for contracts (Marder et al, 2023), participants highlighted a sector-wide collaboration to ensure practice quality, awareness and availability across geographical boundaries. Informal regional networks have been formed, some pre-existing the recommendation of APPG-RJ workstream four (Hobson et al., 2023), although these vary in terms of organisation and purpose. Some explicitly share best practice and discuss service data, but this is inconsistent due to commercial sensitivity. Peer-supervision for smaller services for complex and sensitive cases was seen as vital for reflection

and improving practice. Larger providers that operate multiple services reported internal processes to analyse data across these, alongside participation with some networks. Many services use their own social media to promote their successes which feeds into a national or sector picture. The role of the RJC was discussed and the potential for them to more proactively promote the sector and facilitate data collection, analysis, and dissemination of qualitative and quantitative service data in a national archive as they already collect registration and renewal data for practitioners and services and have ideological power and the general perception of neutrality amongst marketised service provision.

A sector wide data approach to understanding RJ awareness was considered as a '*duty of care*' and a '*responsibility*' for practitioners and services to gather as much meaningful and useful information for the RJ sector and share that. Service data can identify challenges, trends, and gaps which can then be explored on a national level. However, the issue of RJ services practically collaborating on cases has issues in terms of data too. Siloed data systems can result in data duplication or services not being able to evidence '*successes of a case*' for their commissioners when a case is held by a practitioner in a different service.

4.5 Policy and governance (Macro)

Interviewees described government organisations as having significant institutional power to demand data from all services and perceived the purpose of data for those in policy and governance as being different from those at other levels. Policy and governance shape the types of data services collect and how they organise these (Fisk, 2023), varied approaches to doing this are due to manager perception of the value of the MoJ data request.

Furthermore, the purpose of data at this level was unclear due to the two key themes that emerged: top-down control of data and institutional ambivalence towards the data collected by services. Ineffective macro data requests, non-transparent decision making and top-down one-way communication that are contrary to the relational, collaborative, dialogical approach

of most RJ practices highlight a fundamental clash of values between RJ and the dominant CJS (Umbreit, Vos, & Coates, 2006).

Data control

The role of the MoJ, the Victim's Code and the right for members of the public to be offered RJ, and the role of re:hub who oversee RJ for HMPSS were key examples of bodies that have a role in RJ data at the macro level. Interviewees described the ineffective use of data at this level. Power is exerted through data demands, that *'don't really fit' and 'doesn't make any sense'*. They must be adhered to because *'no one can change that'* due to the perception of the institutional power of those demanding it.

However, participants highlighted how the MoJ data demands have changed, during certain periods *'changings every six months'* but this only occurs as a top-down activity done to services: *'historically we used to... feature victim and offender data, but then they got rid of that. So now we only report on victim data'*. This highlights how changes in institutional policy focus, such as the VCOP, have affected service data collection which clash with the values of RJ as a focus has switched to the singular harmed party at the expense of data about those who have harmed them. However, some services reported that they continue to collect this data despite not being asked to report it, resulting in the feeling that the data they use internally *'tells us a lot more than what the MoJ data does'* as *'locally they get quite a lot of qualitative data. MoJ is yes or no', and a feeling of 'luck' that services can record a narrative that enables them to 'look at the immense difference this has made. But in terms of the (MoJ) data, that's not captured anywhere.'*

The frustration of macro level data demands are also experienced with re:hub, who are perceived as *'gatekeepers in prison who don't understand what restorative justice is'*. Practitioners feel they restrict RJ access for those in prisons and work in ways not aligned with restorative values such as accountability, collaboration, and transparency.

'it's really widely known, right the way across the RJ field that we are now required to have an information sharing agreement with Re:Hub, and let them know about all of our complex and sensitive cases, and then they make a decision as to whether or not they can go ahead and that is going to continue to be a real barrier for lots of reasons... On what basis are they making these decisions? It's not transparent enough... why do they feel like they need to and on what basis are they making the decisions? If you could share that with us, we could make decisions based on the same criteria. Could we not?

External demands from policymakers, such as frequent changes to data collection requirements are perceived negatively by service providers who feel pressure to comply without collaboration or consideration of the impact on their practices. This reinforces the need for a more collaborative approach to data collection and utilization, something that is expected by restorative services given the value base they operate within that runs counter to traditional hierarchical CJS processes (Wachtel, 2003).

Institutional ambivalence

The lack of a reciprocal data relationship, and the absence of feedback in terms of information and analysis received from the MoJ post-submission highlights institutional ambivalence towards RJ seen through data. Participants described how *'once you send the MoJ statistics...you just hear nothing back.'* and *'you don't see it going anywhere. You don't see it being used or cited in anything'*. Changing demands that do not reflect the needs of the RJ service are generating reciprocal ambivalence due to the lack of communication and dialogue, or effective use of data.

'It's never easy and we don't align our recording with it. It can be different every time, so it doesn't make any difference. We just work out what we can give it on the data that we've got so. Yeah, it's not, honestly, it's not something we pay a lot of attention to, really. Don't necessarily see the value in it.'

The MoJ also request qualitative case study data from services *‘one or two case studies per year’*. One participant noted their assumption but with a lack of evidence that the very collection of this type of data would infer a purpose, but they had *‘no idea what the MoJ did with them...surely it goes somewhere or you know, showcase it or something’*

The lack of standardisation of data across RJ services is linked to institutional ambivalence, as services are recording data in different ways. Participants understood that *‘everyone records differently’*, and *‘everywhere is so different any...comparisons are, you kind of can’t quite trust those comparisons anyway’*. This affects the quality of data at a sector level, as one participant succinctly summarised, *‘You’re comparing apples with bowling balls’*. Such ambivalence from representative of the macrosystem towards ensuring the quality of data collection reinforces the dominant CJS and prevents RJ developing a national evidence base that could lead to institutional change of the CJS and a more relational way of dealing with crime. Clearer guidance and support on terminology and processes are needed (Fisk, 2023). However, even when strong methods are embedded within an individual service and terminology is standardised at the service level, findings are rejected by funders and decision makers, highlighting issues with evidencing cause and effect that beg the question why is data being collected (Gregory and Evans, 2020)

‘Where we’ve had robust monitoring and evaluations of both victims and offenders. When that data is then being turned in and analyzed we then said look at the impact we’ve had on offender substance misuse and alcohol abuse following RJ intervention and met with, well, that’s not down to you, though, is it, that’s down to probation service work or drugs and alcohol service. How can you make that claim? ... Then why are we monitoring it?’

Whilst RJ services send data to the MoJ, participants noted how the language used in data focuses on a single stakeholder, the victim, and suggests an ambivalence towards RJ due to the exclusion of those who have caused harm in their data demands. *‘MoJ currently get nout in regard to RJ, they get the victim services stuff. It’s not fit for purpose to really reflect RJ; it*

doesn't really fit'. The minimisation of the role of RJ, or the lack of an explicit mention of RJ, and a singular focus on 'victims' and victim services is connected to the issue of RJ awareness identified in the exo-system. This is also reflected in the inclusion of 'KPI 9 – Victims' in youth justice services, that measures 'number of victims engaged in restorative justice opportunities as a proportion of the total number of victims who consent to be contacted' (Youth Justice Board, 2023). These measures minimise the role RJ can play for all stakeholders and may impact on awareness of RJ for anyone involved in crime if it is seen as merely a component of victim services, and not a radical alternative to doing justice for all more generally.

RJ is not a primary focus within police services and the organisational culture of the police does not align with RJ services (Clamp, 2023). Frequent promotions and staff turnover disrupt police relationships with RJ services. RJ services are significantly smaller than the police forces they work for, with a limited range of roles, and less room for internal and external promotion.

'You get a senior police officer who is really, really into it and it's really, really pushing for it. Then they get promoted or retire. And then you start again and it's another lottery, then once again because it's not embedded as policy. You're then very reliant on does he or she believe in it'

RJ and the value system it embodies is not embedded at the macro level, indeed the ambivalence has a silencing effect which shapes RJ (Maglione, 2022), highlighting further still the variations in organisational culture. This constant change, as RJ services must continuously rebuild connections with new individuals. This turnover means those in leadership who grasp RJ values move on and are replaced by those moving up from the frontline who are more focused on practice and will take time to grasp the theory and values (Stockdale, 2015). This induces cycles of learning and ambivalence towards RJ which hinders the development of data and policy.

5. Discussion

This paper uses a social-ecological systems lens (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1992) to understand the purpose of data collected by recording and monitoring processes within RJ services from the perspective of practitioners and service managers. The themes identified and their corresponding socio-ecological system are presented in table 1.

Table 1: Themes identified across socio-ecological systems

Socio-ecological system	Themes identified
Micro-system: Participant and practitioner interaction	Initial engagement Accurate representation Case progress Practitioner accountability
Meso-system: RJ Service	Reporting for commissioners Service development
Exo-system: RJ Sector	Raising Awareness
Macro-system: Policy and Governance	Data control Institutional ambivalence

This research highlights how institutionalization shapes what is valued and collected (Maglione, Marder, & Pali, 2024), revealing contrasting organizational values through recording and monitoring processes. Institutionalization has fragmented the RJ socio-ecosystem, resulting in poor data use, a breakdown in trust with the macro-system, and limited national growth of restorative justice.

Recording and monitoring reasons across the RJ sector are multi-faceted and influenced by top-down macro-system power. NPM embedded in legislation and stakeholder demands has enforced a hierarchical structure on RJ services, focusing on quantitative metrics over transformative narratives (Marder et al., 2023; Fisk, 2023). This creates tensions between RJ values and dominant CJS practices. RJ services are often positioned as outsiders, culturally opposed to traditional services and approaches across multiple sectors (Maglione, 2021). Restorative services have distinct cultures and values from the police they serve (Clamp, 2023), whether externally commissioned or as in-house services.

RJ services can function as internal sub-cultures within larger organizations (Boisnier & Chatman, 2003). Practitioners adapt data collection methods to ensure both qualitative stories of success and quantitative metrics are heard, aligning with stakeholder priorities. They recognize the barriers they face and adapt their methods to ensure different stakeholders receive the prioritized data. Practitioners understand that not all RJ values are measurable (Lllewellyn, 2013) but strive to provide evidence of success and increase RJ awareness (Doak & O'Mahoney, 2018; Fisk, 2023).

Limited RJ awareness impacts recording and monitoring, hindering a cohesive evidence base. The sector-level exo-system is not a creator of data but collates data created by practitioners and services. Limited funding restricts the capacity of exo-level sector organizations like the RJC to effectively coordinate service data, research, and dissemination. Raising awareness locally is challenging without sufficient funding for practitioners. The APPG-RJ's engagement with dominant hierarchies aims to raise RJ's profile and influence policy (Maglione, Marder, Pali, 2024).

A centralized data repository would facilitate access and analysis of existing evidence. Improved tracking and a sector-level approach to awareness-raising could enhance understanding and referrals. The lack of a centralized repository and managerialism hinders collaboration and national service formation. Recidivism, a key CJS metric, often sets RJ services up to fail. Evaluations using this measure struggle to provide sufficient evidence due to data access limitations.

Despite macro-level resistance, leveraging subjective success can improve RJ awareness. However, the disconnect between RJ and CJS values poses a risk of RJ being institutionalized as a tool rather than a holistic approach (Peters & Waterman, 1982; Clamp, 2023). While some police embrace restorative approaches, differing understandings of RJ at organizational levels, exacerbated by turnover through promotion and retirement, prevent sustained implementation (Stockdale, 2015).

Restorative processes can foster dialogue through proactive processes (Wachtel, 2003), but underlying values are often not openly discussed (Schein, 2010). RJ services understanding how to meet the needs of other professionals can increase referrals and service provision, acting as a Trojan horse for RJ values. Awareness of RJ is a significant barrier, but leveraging subjective success can improve this. However, the disconnect between RJ and CJS values can lead to the institutionalization of RJ as a tool, not a way of doing business.

Next steps

This work advocates for a pragmatic approach that acknowledges the SES context of data and the challenges and benefits of institutionalization while supporting practitioners and services in increasing RJ implementation. Macro-level political momentum must be harnessed, or progress in RJ may be delayed for years. This requires balancing the potential dilution of restorative values, navigating marketisation, and addressing the challenges of limited awareness and resources in a hierarchical and punitive society.

Previous research on the approaches that can be taken for measuring RJ from the perspective of how practitioners define success (Fisk, Hobson, Twyman-Ghoshal, 2024) has been criticized for letting the RJ sector ‘mark their own homework’. This study identifies a macro-level authority that neither guides nor supports, leaving 'homework' unmarked and feedback absent. Applying the SES lens and the social discipline window (Wachtel, 2003), the macro-system imposes and controls metrics but shows ambivalence to reported data, stifling RJ growth. The CJS sets metrics, which the RJ system must follow. Metrics capturing RJ's true potential are neither collected nor valued by the CJS, posing a challenge for the sector to raise RJ awareness and shift macro-system views.

Whilst institutionalisation of RJ is cautioned due to the risk of CJS subsumption, organisational theory suggests that internal sub-cultures can change entrenched organisational values and cultures from within (Boisnier & Chatman, 2003; Schein, 2010). Currently, the

macro-system is resisting RJ, but by relational attempts to get closer to these powerful stakeholders, deliberate attempts by practitioners and services in their organisations, and collective sector effort with politicians and decision-makers, supported by a dedicated evidence base could lead to sub-cultural development that changes wider social and political values.

It is crucial to resist NPM ideologies and promote a balance between qualitative and quantitative evidence which encompasses tangible outcomes and intangible benefits as these are all evidence of the impact of RJ (Fisk, Hobson, & Twyman-Ghoshal, 2023). This requires a range of data collection methods to evidence success. Considering stakeholder perspectives when capturing the multifaceted nature of success can help address challenges in building an evidence base that speaks the organisational language of the listener.

By leveraging institutional exo-system sector power, RJ can develop a pragmatic approach to evidence success, align with core RJ values, and address stakeholder needs, like agreements created through restorative processes. Regional networks need exo-level promotion and recognition to influence local and national macro-level decision makers. Services often operate in isolation with distinct organizational cultures and struggle to measure longitudinal outcomes due to their service remits and ongoing commissioning cycles. Representatives of regional networks could gain institutional legitimacy and contribute to the RJC's work. This research advocates for sector-level organizations to collaborate with services in developing communication strategies that consider the SES model when disseminating RJ evidence to policymakers, professionals, and the public. Sector-level organizations like the RJC in the UK need to leverage their power to unify stakeholders in defining agile ways of evidencing success. This requires valuing all mediums and stakeholders while meeting diverse needs. Further work is needed to support RJ services in applying consistent language and measurement approaches to enable cost-effective evaluation of basic components without rigorous external involvement.

Further research is needed to develop a centralised data repository that can host the wealth of service data submitted to the MoJ and going unused. Such a resource can enable

further empirical research to be undertaken whilst signposting stakeholders to current evidence of success in academic publications and service evaluations. Case studies are under-leveraged and can contribute to a richer understanding of outcomes that resist quantification and offer positive subjective experiences of RJ and their situational context. A standardised case study framework to capture the subjective experiences of restorative processes, and experience of transformation, alongside traditional quantitative data, can foster meaningful dialogue with policymakers and the public.

This work highlights the potential challenges of applying a whole systems approach to implementing RJ, emphasizing the diverse stakeholders involved and their investment in data (Banwell-Moore, 2024). A significant barrier exists at the macro level which resists and controls input. Although the APPG-RJ united stakeholders, changing policy and legislation remains challenging due to the structural power of the macro CJS over services and data. Acknowledging the complexities and power dynamics between stakeholders who prioritize different types of data and success is crucial for RJ to expand and advance towards a whole system approach supported by data collection and utilization.

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