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YOUNG ADULT PROBATION HUB TOOLKIT

Implementing a bespoke service for 18-25-year-olds



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Evaluation Team

Middlesex University

Jenni Ward
Matt Cracknell
Karen Duke

Sheffield Hallam University

Jake Phillips
Katherine Albertson
Andrew Fowler
Laura Riley

Probation Service Contributors

Melissa Wilfred

Senior Probation Officer,
Newham Probation

Caroline Clements

Senior Probation Officer, Regional Young Adult
Lead, Yorkshire and the Humber

Sarah Ryan

Senior Probation Officer,
Manager for Leeds Young Adult Hub

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HM Prison &
Probation Service



Middlesex
University
London

Sheffield
Hallam
University

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Illustrations © Nick Kemp 2026. All Rights Reserved.

Toolkit design & layout by: Nick Kemp

nick@kempnick.co.uk

<https://kempnick.co.uk>

1 Why young adults need a distinct approach the case for change

There are growing calls for young adults (18-25-year-olds) in the criminal justice system to be treated as a distinct group and for service responses more attuned to the developmental life-course phase of this age group (Ward *et al*, 2026; Phillips *et al*, 2025; Woodward & Lynch, 2021). Tailored young adult probation can help support the specific needs of this age cohort and strengthen pathways towards desistance from crime.

“ It’s like a culture shock coming into adult probation and they don’t know what is expected of them, they don’t know how to traverse some of the areas that they are expected to adhere to.

Probation Officer

”

Young adults are responsive to programme interventions with those centred on developing self awareness, relationship building and ‘pro-social’ identity formation effective at curtailing offending careers (Schmidt *et al*, 2021). Young adults make up around one fifth of the total probation population (Ministry of Justice, 2025) and reoffending rates are higher than for older people under probation supervision.

In most countries adult justice begins at age 18, but this cliff edge does not reflect the connection between age and maturity. It is not the case that people become adults – from a maturity perspective – the day they turn 18. Thus, adult probation can be difficult for young adults who are closer developmentally to children.

Staff and young adults we spoke to illustrate some of the challenges that come with being a young adult in an adult service:

“ You go from what is, at times very much a welfare approach in youth justice where if you forget your appointments we’ll phone you, we’ll remind you, we’ll come and knock on your door, to probation where you are now chronologically 18 and so you’re an adult so you manage this.

Hub Manager

”

“ ...in [location] they treated me like a fully-fledged adult and it wasn’t really helping me. It gave me more anxiety, and it made me feel a bit uneasy going to probation, but as I’m here [at the Hub]...now I find it really easy to come here, as I know I will be treated for who I am, like my age group, so yeah, I feel like the Hub for me personally is amazing.

”

YA, male age 20

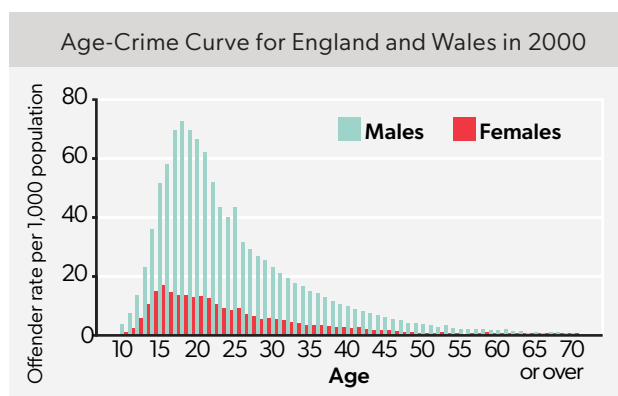
‘There is a substantial and increasing body of evidence that Probation’s approach to working with Young Adults should, where possible, be distinct to reflect the particular needs of this age group in order to secure positive outcomes’

Ministry of Justice & HMPPS, 2022: 4

Young adults are in a particular stage of neurological and psycho-social development that impacts maturity, and influences patterns of offending behaviour (Steinberg *et al*, 2014). The peak age for offending is around 17 years old.

The ‘age/crime’ curve shows the majority of those who commit offences, even serious ones, grow out of offending by their mid-20s and evidence indicates this occurs alongside social and emotional maturation.

(Farrington *et al*, 2012).



Source: Moody (2021).



2 About this toolkit

In this Young Adult Probation toolkit we share learning from the Newham 'Youth to Adulthood' (Y2A) probation Hub evaluation (Phillips *et al*, 2024). The Y2A Hub was a co-located probation and commissioned services partnership. A key objective was that by linking adults into services most closely aligned to the difficulties they face, disruption to further offending can be achieved.

Research design and methods

The evaluation used a qualitative research design comprised of one-to-one semi-structured interviews with staff from across probation and commissioned services working in the Hub (n=60) and 35 young adults under supervision. Three phases of interviews at six-month intervals were completed (June-July 2022, February - March & November - December 2023). These provided longitudinal insights into service implementation and delivery overtime, how the co-located, multi-agency partnership operated in practice and how this bespoke probation service was experienced by young adults.

The primary aim of the Newham Y2A hub was to:

- Implement a bespoke young adult probation project utilising a co-located probation and commissioned services partnership.
- Create a safe and welcoming, age-appropriate space that encourages young adult engagement.
- Support young adults in pro-social identity formation, building resilience to negative peer influence and shaping a future-focused orientation.
- Encourage compliance and promote desistance from offending.



The toolkit has emerged from the two-year (2022-2024) Ministry of Justice funded evaluation of the Newham Youth to Adulthood (Y2A) Probation Hub pilot, thus is evidence-based.
[Newham is a borough in East London.]

The toolkit briefly covers the benefits of tailored young adult probation services and provides guidance on how to set up Hubs or bespoke services across other regions and areas of England and Wales and in other jurisdictions.

The toolkit is designed for senior probation leaders and managers who are interested in implementing tailored young adult services. It will also be of interest to the criminal justice organisations working alongside probation, such as the police, the courts and sentencing, judges and magistrates, prisons, Youth Offending Services, statutory health and safe-guarding services, social work agencies, leaving care services and voluntary and third-sector groups providing services within probation.

In addition to the main evaluation, input has been provided by senior probation staff from HMPPS Yorkshire and the Humber who have used findings from the Newham evaluation to establish tailored young adult provision in the city of Leeds and across North Yorkshire.

3 What We Found Key Findings

Our evaluation of the Newham Y2A probation Hub drew on interviews with probation staff, commissioned partner services and young adults on probation. We carried out data collection across three phases of implementation to understand how the Hub developed over time. Key findings included:

Operating Model

- The co-location of services was a key asset enabling quick and easy referrals into support services (i.e. mentoring and coaching, employment, training and education (ETE), well-being support, speech and language communication etc.) and encouraged young adult engagement.
- The speed with which referrals could be made was one of the greatest advantages.
- The 'young adult first', trauma-informed and strengths-based approaches were integral to the Hub's working practice and lay behind young adults' positive views and experiences.
- A strong leadership and management team with effective oversight helped to create a unique staff identity and a shared young adult ethos based on rehabilitative values.

“

What I've liked about this project is that whereas in the past the young adults would access generic adult services and those generic adult services would have to tailor their support to those young adults, we've been able to design services from the bottom-up based on young adults' distinct needs.

Hub Manager

”

“There is a sense of shared purpose: ... relationship-wise, everyone really works well and we're looking at the welfare of that young person and see what's best for them. So, I think we've got that really nice environment here.”

Partner service

“

...it's very positive because we have layers of agencies working within the Hub. They come in on different days. So, it's quite easy to speak with them and they're able to talk to the young people quite quickly if they are free.

Probation Officer

”

Staff

- Probation staff expressed high levels of job satisfaction through the shared young adult ethos and knowledge exchange across professional practice.
- Specialist young adult training was highly valued and led to feelings of expanded skill sets and extra specialisms.
- Staff were positive about the impact the Hub was having on young adult engagement, the successful completion of their sentences and importantly on their wider lives.
- The collaborative practice enabled partner services to act as an advocate for young adults connected to the different layers of trust developed, in their role that sat outside of probation.

“

they are way better off, way better off than when they first came. Young people who have hope, didn't even know what hope was. Just seeing over time their development, seeing their potential being unlocked. It's transformational. The Hub is transformational.

”

Partner Service

3 What We Found Key Findings

Young adults

- The welcoming and friendly environment created by staff with a special interest in young adults helped them to engage and request the support they needed.
- In Newham, the most widely used services by young adults were mentoring and coaching, ETE, well-being, and speech and language support.
- In the eyes of young adults, employment support was critical (including self-employment, and training opportunities) and helped foster a sense of hope for their futures.
- Offering a separate women-only probation space is important, but a flexible approach to where women are supervised is needed.

“ It's comfortable, inviting, relaxing, welcoming, lots of like bright colours, relaxing colours, soothing colours, just have a nice atmosphere so you feel like you are not walking into a probation service or you don't feel like a criminal. ”
YA, female aged 25



“ ... it's the more rehabilitation side of things, for example finding you work, finding you a place to stay, all these kind of things, that's the stuff that helps.... I would put more emphasis into finding jobs, that's what you really need, a job. ”
YA, male aged 20

“ Talking to the staff, not just about what you have to do on probation, but they talk to you just normally, about life and what's going on, they give advice. ”
YA, male aged 20

“ there is a little common room where you can feel safe, there's a space where you can relax and sit down, that's where a lot of probation related people are doing work and that is where I have met a lot of good people. ”
YA, male aged 21

Performance & outcome evaluation

- When working with young adults in the criminal justice system, change can take time, especially when multiple forms of disadvantage are a factor.
- Hubs should think about success by focusing on intermediate outcomes and devise alternative measures to capture the smaller, cumulative gains made by young adults as they progress through their sentence. These include obtaining a training place, gaining employment, establishing pro-social relationships, seeking help etc.
- Systematic recording of data is needed that focuses on these outcomes and Hubs should build in ways of measuring the positive impacts.

“ the change that I referred to is with regards to attending probation, with regards to opening up about their offending behaviour. It's with regards to something we tend to overlook, the mental health itself. The way they see themselves. ”
Probation Officer

“ It takes time for young people who haven't had the same benefits, the positive inputs, the positive attachments, the community. If they haven't had that, they need time and time isn't two years, it's three years, for long lasting change. ”
Partner Service

4 What a Young Adult Hub can look like

The Newham model

Young-adult guiding principles

The Y2A Hub was set up to operate with an explicit '**young adult-first**' approach with a set of guiding principles that drove professional practice. Core and essential requirements for young adult-oriented services are:

- Strengths-based and trauma-informed practice;
- Developmentally appropriate approaches that acknowledge 'maturity';
- Recognition of neurodivergent conditions, speech and language support (communication passports).

Trauma informed practice

Trauma-informed practice means 'recognising the impact trauma, including adverse childhood experiences, has on an individual and in acknowledging this, providing appropriate support.' A trauma-informed approach is a change of perspective from "What's wrong with you?" to "What happened to you?". A trauma-informed approach seeks not to re-traumatise with blame and sanction, but to recognise strengths and skills, build confidence and re-educate – embedding new coping skills to enable recognition and regulation of behaviour' (McCartan, 2020:8).

Young-adult approach

The 'young adult-first' Y2A Hub approach can be defined as an adaptation of the 'child first' design (Case & Haines, 2015). Child first approaches comprise four key tenets- the **ABCD** formulation. This lens was used to illustrate what 'young adult-first' practice should look like (Phillips *et al*, 2025).

- A.** Treating people on probation **As** young adults
- B.** Working to **Build** pro-social identities
- C.** Collaboration with young adults and other organisations
- D.** **Diverting** young adults from stigma and further criminalisation

It reflects the evidence that young adults are in a different but still transitional stage of life, face myriad structural barriers and need aspirational role models who understand them and their needs. Such practice needs to be adapted to reflect the unique life stage of young adulthood.

Developmentally appropriate approaches: young adult 'maturity'

Young adulthood is a distinct life stage in which cognitive, emotional, and social development is ongoing. Young adult probation should tailor its approach to reflect these needs, using methods that support decision-making, identity formation, and the development of pro-social behaviour (Clements, 2026:4).



Strengths-based practice

Best & Bridgland (2025) writing on rehabilitation in prisons and probation define strengths-based approaches as those that:

- **treat people as individuals with talents and abilities** to contribute to society.
- **are person first** – work with people in a collaborative way to explore their whole circumstances and 'what matters to them'.
- **focus on community and family**, using people's family and local community resources, environments and social support networks.
- **provide opportunities to contribute** to others and to the wellbeing of the community.
- **are relational** – recognising relationships with family, friends, peer networks and professionals as key to supporting for change.
- **involve peers and those with lived experience**.

4 What a Young Adult Hub can look like

The Newham model

The Hub Space

The Y2A Hub was a separate designated space within the main Newham adult probation building with an open plan layout and adjoining private meeting rooms. Brightly coloured furnishings, wall art, a mini library and a food-bank was designed to encourage engagement with the support services on offer. A separately located partner project for young adult women was used linked to the recognition women in the justice system typically come from 'trauma' experiences with gender-specific spaces needed (Ministry of Justice & HMPPS, 2024).



MAIN RECEPTION AREA OF NEWHAM Y2A HUB



ARTWORK IN Y2A HUB



Y2A LIBRARY



ARTWORK BY YOUNG ADULTS Y2A HUB



MEETING ROOM Y2A HUB



Y2A FOOD BANK

The Caseload

The Y2A caseload comprised all 18-to 25-year-olds under supervision within the Newham Probation Delivery Unit (PDU) plus 17.5-year-olds transitioned from youth offending services due to turning 18 during their sentence 'order'. Between 162 and 248 young adults were on the caseload on any given month.

Young adults were serving either:

- A community order
- A suspended sentence order (SSO)
- On licence in the community after prison.

4 What a Young Adult Hub can look like

The Newham model

Staffing

Probation staff were recruited to the Y2A for their special interest in working with young adults. The probation team was made up of professionally qualified 'probation officers' with expertise in managing complex and high 'risk' cases, 'probation service officers' managing lower 'risk' young adults and a 'senior probation officer' holding oversight and responsibility. Dedicated young adult case administrators (n=3) supported operational systems and monitored attendance. All staff undertook specialist training in trauma-informed practice, issues of neurodiversity and developing maturity.

Sentence planning and compliance

On allocation to the Y2A Hub, a risk-assessment and sentence plan was carried out with 'sentence collaboration' and input by young adults. Referrals were made into the co-located services depending on need. Young adults were mandated to comply, attend on time and engage with their 'order' with the potential for breach decisions for failure to comply. One way the Hub sought to respond to the needs of young adults was through the pre-breach interview embedded into Hub practice. This helped to engage young adults with extra support and opportunities to demonstrate compliance. Impact analysis shows the Y2A Hub was associated with a significant increase in engagement with probation, a higher rate of attendance at statutory meetings, and a decreased likelihood of unacceptable absences (Singh *et al*, 2026).

“... before we even instigate a breach, we give them an opportunity to re-engage...and then we say look, this is where you're at, you've got two warnings, we don't want to breach you, what's going on? What can we do to motivate your compliance? If there's something going on, then at least that way we can identify it, address it, deal with it and support that person to then engage and comply.”

Probation Officer

Mandatory and voluntary parts of young adult probation

The Newham Y2A model brought together statutory probation services and commissioned partner services from the voluntary sector to support young adults on the caseload.

Mandatory probation provision • Probation attendance appointments • Rehabilitation Activity Requirement (RAR) days • Unpaid Work hours • Monitoring of other requirements imposed within a sentence or licence conditions (i.e. drug use assessments, personality disorder assessments, 'serious violence prevention order' etc.)	Voluntary services (Some commissioned partner services in the Newham Hub) • Mentoring and coaching • Speech and language communication support • National Health Service (NHS) Psychology and well-being support • Substance misuse (drugs & alcohol) • 'User Voice' • Restorative justice • Art therapy
Statutory service provision Housing support Employment, training and education (ETE) Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)	

5 From evidence to implementation the how-to

The evaluation shed light on key issues that need considering when implementing a Hub-based operating model (see below). For the Hub model to be transferred elsewhere a set of core components are needed. These include co-located services (if feasible) in a dedicated, welcoming space; a workforce trained and motivated to work with young adults; flexibility around breach and enforcement; trauma-informed and strengths-based approaches and processes that engage young adults and celebrate their successes. This can act as a template for application in other areas of London, England and Wales and in international contexts.

6 Implementing young adult probation in your area

A Practitioner's View

By Caroline Clements, Senior Probation Officer, Regional Young Adult Lead, Yorkshire and the Humber.

This section complements the evidence in the toolkit with practical guidance for setting up young adult provision locally.

It draws on the Newham evaluation findings, adapted through the development of young adult hub provision in Leeds and North Yorkshire, alongside learning from young adult practice across urban and rural Yorkshire.

1. Governance, leadership and investment
2. Designing a model for your local context
3. Local adaptation
4. Partnerships & pathways
5. Courts and unpaid work
6. Workforce and support
7. Risks, barriers and mitigations

1. Governance, leadership and investment

Senior ownership and a clear investment case are the foundation; without them the model stays dependent on goodwill.

- Identify a regional Young Adult lead (SPO or project lead), working alongside a PDU Head, reporting into the Regional Probation Director (RPD).
- Develop and communicate a clear strategic narrative to underpin delivery.
- Establish a multi-disciplinary project team with representation from Commissioning and Partnerships, Engagement (including young adult voice), Courts, Unpaid Work, and Performance and Quality.
- Ensure the model is actively championed and steered by senior leaders, rather than left to work in silos.
- Secure resourcing early — physical space, staffing and capacity, staff training, and commissioned services — and build a clear investment case linked to young adult outcomes.
- Funding may be sourced through a range of routes, including Regional Probation Director investment, regional or local innovation funds, partnership contributions from local authorities, health funding streams, Violence Reduction Units, Police and Crime Commissioner PCC-funded initiatives, and co-commissioning arrangements with voluntary and community sector partners.

2. Designing a model for your local context

Be explicit about which elements are non-negotiable and which flex to local circumstances. This is key to transferability.

Core model - present everywhere, regardless of location:

- A clear focus on 18–25-year-olds and developmental maturity.
- Relational, trauma-informed and strengths-based practice.
- A developmentally appropriate, neuroinclusive environment, considering the whole reporting journey - reception, waiting, appointment space and exit.
- Staff who understand young adult development, trauma, exploitation, neurodiversity and transitions.
- Meaningful young adult voice in design, delivery and review.
- A focus on engagement, substantive compliance, identity shift and desistance.
- Clear governance, leadership and performance oversight, with a mechanism for measuring outcomes and learning.

6 Implementing young adult probation in your area

3. Local adaptation - shaped by geography, estate, staffing, caseload and partners:

- Align the delivery model to geography and transport, estate availability, the local partner landscape, staffing capacity, and caseload profile (number of 18–25s, risk scores).
- Choose the model that fits: a dedicated young adult team versus ‘concentrators’ within blended caseloads; hub-based (as in Newham), hybrid, or lighter-touch; a central hub versus young adult spaces attached to existing offices; neutral off-site space versus adapted probation environments.
- Match provision to setting. Urban areas (as in the Leeds pilot) may sustain a visible hub with regular partner attendance and group work, while rural or dispersed areas (as in the North Yorkshire pilot) may require a hybrid model operating across multiple sites.
- Let local need drive priority pathways (e.g. substance misuse, mental health, accommodation, care leavers, exploitation, prison release). OASys data can identify trends, criminogenic needs and responsivity factors across the local cohort.
- In short: the core model is the set of principles that must be present; local adaptation is how those principles are delivered given geography, estate, staffing, caseload and partnerships. This protects fidelity while avoiding a rigid ‘one size fits all’.

4. Partnerships & pathways

Provision depends on the surrounding system, so build partnerships and transitions in from the start.

- Undertake service mapping to identify gaps in provision, and consult young adults on what they need, as Newham did. Service mapping is a process of auditing what services already exist locally and planning what happens where there are gaps.
- Engage statutory and voluntary partners early: Youth Justice Services, Leaving Care teams, NHS trauma-informed networks, police (including safeguarding and exploitation teams), Offender Personality Disorder (OPD) services, and voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations.
- Link into existing strategic forums — Reducing Reoffending Boards, Violence Reduction Partnerships and Community Safety Partnerships.
- Build strong transition pathways with Youth Justice Services, Leaving Care teams, Adult Social Care and prisons, focused on continuity of support and relational consistency.
- Agree shared outcomes and named leads so partnership enthusiasm is sustained beyond launch.

5. Courts and unpaid work

Get the front end right so young adults reach the service and are supported within it.

- Establish clear processes with court teams for identification and allocation, and with unpaid work teams for Young Adult specific approaches.
- Consider Young Adult champions in courts and unpaid work, for example, helping direct magistrates to the sentencing guidance that covers young adults.

6. Workforce and support

The model depends on the people delivering it.

- Recruit staff whose skills and values fit relational, trauma-informed practice with young adults, and where possible involve young adults or people with lived experience in recruitment and service design.
- Draw on partner expertise (Youth Justice, Leaving Care, mental health services, police, psychologists) to train staff in trauma-informed practice, young adult development, exploitation and serious organised crime, neurodiversity and communication.
- Support staff to sustain the approach through reflective practice sessions, group formulations for complex cases, and help to manage the emotional impact of the work.
- Develop a clear approach to performance and evaluation & consider creating a Young Adult dashboard or simple monitoring framework from the outset, including engagement, compliance, progression and qualitative feedback.
- Involve Performance and Quality teams to support monitoring and continuous improvement.

6 Implementing young adult probation in your area

7. Risks, barriers and mitigations

Anticipate the common barriers and review them regularly through the project governance structure.

Staffing capacity and resilience

Small teams are vulnerable to sickness, vacancies and competing pressures. Build resilience through young adult champions, wider team awareness, shared cover, or a small pool trained in the model.

Recruitment and staff experience

Newer staff may struggle to hold the young adult ethos alongside wider probation demands, especially as concentrators with a split caseload. Support consistency with supervision, mentoring and reflective practice.

Estate and waiting areas

Existing buildings may feel institutional; waiting rooms are a particular anxiety point. Consider quieter waiting options, staggered appointments, informal seating, clear signage, sensory factors and a more welcoming entrance.

Geography and transport

In rural or dispersed areas, a single central hub may be inaccessible. A young adult space attached to an existing office may work better than one central hub.

Low footfall across smaller sites

Where a full hub is not viable, consider a lighter-touch model: shared staffing, scheduled young adult hub days, outreach, remote provision or targeted partner input.

Partner engagement and sustainability

Early enthusiasm fades without structure. Build named leads, clear referral pathways and regular reviews; complete Information Sharing Agreements (ISAs) and vetting early to avoid delays.

Court identification and allocation

Young adults need identifying early enough for allocation and sentence planning. Consider young adult champions in court teams and clear allocation guidance.

Data and evaluation

Impact is hard to evidence without baseline data. Develop a dashboard or simple monitoring framework from the outset — engagement, compliance, progression and qualitative feedback.

Cultural resistance

Some staff or partners may see young adult provision as 'preferential treatment'. Counter with clear communication on maturity, responsivity, desistance, trauma and the evidence base for age-appropriate practice.

Over-reliance on one individual

Embed the model structurally — through governance, champions, documentation and senior sponsorship — so it does not depend on a single enthusiast.

Implementation checklist

- Have we identified the main risks, with a risk log (owners and review dates)?
- What are the non-negotiable features of our model, and what can flex locally?
- Does the model reflect geography, transport and estate ? Would one central hub work, or are local young adult spaces more realistic?
- Do we need a dedicated young adult team, 'concentrators' or champions?
- Have we considered the whole young adult experience of attending probation — reception, waiting, appointment and exit?
- Are staff supported to work relationally, with resilience if key staff are absent?
- Which partners are essential locally, and do we have clear roles and referral pathways?
- Are court and allocation processes clear?
- How will young adult voice shape the local model?
- What data will we collect from the start, and how will we know the model is working?
- Is the model owned by more than one person?



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Glossary

ETE	Employment Training and Education
HMPPS	His Majesty’s Prisons and Probation Service
MOJ	Ministry of Justice
MOPAC	Mayor’s Office for Police and Crime
NHS	National Health Service
PCC	Police and Crime Commissioner
PDU	Probation Delivery Unit
RPD	Regional Probation Director
SPO	Senior Probation Officer

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