



A survey of the ComRes MP Panel and members of the public conducted on behalf of T2A Alliance:



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CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Methodology	4
Executive summary	5
Section 1: The courts – mitigating factors	7
1.1 All MPs and members of the public	7
1.2 MPs by party	8
1.3 MPs further analysis	9
1.4 Public further analysis	9
Section 2: Treatment in court	11
2.1 All MPs and members of the public	11
2.2 MPs by party	12
2.3 MPs further analysis	13
2.4 Public further analysis	13
Section 3: Types of maturity	14
3.1 All members of the public	14
3.2 Further analysis	15
Full data tables	16

INTRODUCTION

The T2A Alliance believes that young adults are a significantly over-represented group in the criminal justice system. Despite this, T2A argue that their complex needs go largely unnoticed and almost wholly unaddressed. Throughout this report, “young adults” are defined as those people aged between 18 and 24 years old.

This report adds texture to a concerted effort by the T2A alliance, which aims to raise awareness of the problems faced by this group. In essence, through a series of coordinated pilot projects and open communications with legislators involved in the system, T2A intends to push forward fresh and innovative new ideas which they hope will be taken on-board and eventually result in improved services and a renewed approach to justice for all young adults.

This report tests the opinions of members of the public and parliamentarians on a series of similar issues. This allows for a stark comparison to be made between the beliefs of the general public and legislators who shape the nature of the system as it stands and as it goes forward. The key thread of this report is to determine how people feel maturity should be defined and measured along with the extent to which it should be taken into account in the courts. This adds a more vocal dimension to the question of whether 18-24 year olds should be treated as adults, youths, on a case by case basis or as a separate entity in themselves. This report adds a democratic element to the pilot schemes that are being run to test the themes and agendas of the T2A Young Adult Manifesto.

METHODOLOGY

MPS

ComRes surveyed 150 MPs on the ComRes parliamentary panel between 13th January and 7th February 2011 by self-completion postal questionnaire and online.

Data were weighted to reflect the exact composition of the House of Commons in terms of party representation and regional constituency distribution.

THE PUBLIC

ComRes interviewed 2,051 GB adults online between 4th and 6th February 2011. Data were weighted to be representative demographically of all GB adults.

ComRes is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules (www.britishpollingcouncil.org). This commits us to the highest standards of transparency.

The BPC's rules state that all data and research findings made on the basis of surveys conducted by member organisations that enter the public domain, must include reference to the following:

- The company conducting the research (ComRes)
- The client commissioning the survey
- Dates of interviewing
- Method of obtaining the interviews (e.g. in-person, post, telephone, internet)
- The universe effectively represented (all adults, voters etc)
- The percentages upon which conclusions are based
- Size of the sample and geographic coverage.

Published references (such as a press release) should also show a web address where full data tables may be viewed, and they should also show the complete wording of questions upon which any data that has entered the public domain are based.

All press releases or other publications must be checked with ComRes before use. ComRes requires 48 hours to check a press release unless otherwise agreed.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Encouragingly for T2A, MPs and the public alike agree that mitigating factors such as age and emotional maturity should be taken into account by the courts at least to some extent. Furthermore, around half of the public and parliamentarians are calling for some sort of change in the way young adults are treated by the courts. T2A should capitalise on, and publicise further, its belief that 18-24 year olds are not yet established in the realm of full adult maturity, and that this should be acknowledged by the courts. One in three members of the public and MPs believe 18-24 year olds should be treated on a case by case basis in court.

The courts: mitigating factors

Encouragingly for T2A Alliance, MPs and the public agree that the maturity and responsibility of young adults should be taken into account by the courts. More than half of all MPs and all members of the public say that the age, emotional and psychological maturity, family responsibilities, intellectual ability and ability to live independently should *all* be taken into account by the courts, either to some or to a great extent, when scrutinising young adults (18-24 year olds) within the system.

MPs are the greatest champions of this, being much more likely to say that each of these factors should be considered in sentencing. Within this group, Liberal Democrats are the most likely to be in line with T2A's manifesto proposals.

T2A may wish to direct a more concerted stream of communications towards those Conservative and Labour MPs who are less sympathetic to T2A's concerns surrounding the current approach to young adults within the system.

Given T2A's voiced concerns not only about the status of young adults within the system today but also their apprehension for minority groups within that, notably women, it is interesting to note that women are more likely to be sympathetic to T2A's objectives than men.

Treatment in court

Encouragingly for T2A Alliance, more than one third of all people (35%) and parliamentarians (35%) say that 18-24 year olds ***should be treated on a case by case basis***. Furthermore, although half of all MPs (51%) and members of the public (53%) say that young adults should be treated the same as older adults (25 or above), ***it is important to note that around one half of parliamentarians (47%) and the public (45%) support some kind of change to the existing system.***

Perhaps impending T2A conferences will continue to heighten MP awareness of their beliefs surrounding how this group should be treated. Once more, Liberal Democrats appear to be the champions of T2A's argument here. There is a real opportunity for the T2A Alliance to capitalise on both public and parliamentary sentiment surrounding the treatment of young adults on a case by case basis and the strong support for change.

Types of maturity

Generally speaking, for all areas tested, people believe that young adults have reached full maturity before the age of 24. While T2A argues that 18-24 year olds are still in the crucial transitional and developmental stages of their lives, it appears that the latest point at which people think young adults reach full maturity out of all the areas tested, is 23 years and 8 months old (being mature enough to raise a family). T2A Alliance believe emotional maturity to be very significant to this debate. It is therefore fundamental to note that the greatest percentage of the public (29%) think that emotional maturity is not reached until between the ages of 25 and 30 years old. On average, people think that emotional maturity is reached at the age of 22.

The notion that this age group is not fully developed or established in all areas of maturity tested is fundamental to T2A's case. It is therefore worth focussing and basing a heightened volume of communications on pilot schemes that support T2A's arguments.

SECTION 1: THE COURTS – MITIGATING FACTORS

MPs and members of the public were presented with a list of possible factors that could be taken into account by the courts, when a young person is accused of breaking the law. Of these factors, they were asked to what extent each of these should be taken into account.

Q1: When a young person is accused of breaking the law, to what extent, if at all, do you think each of the following should be taken into account by the courts?

- Their intellectual ability
- Their age
- Their emotional and psychological maturity
- Their ability to live independently of family support
- Whether they have caring responsibilities for children under 16
- Whether they have caring responsibilities for an elderly or sick family member

1.1 ALL MPS AND MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Fig.1.1 compares the percentage of MPs and members of the public who say that each measure of maturity should be taken into account either to some or to a great extent by the courts.

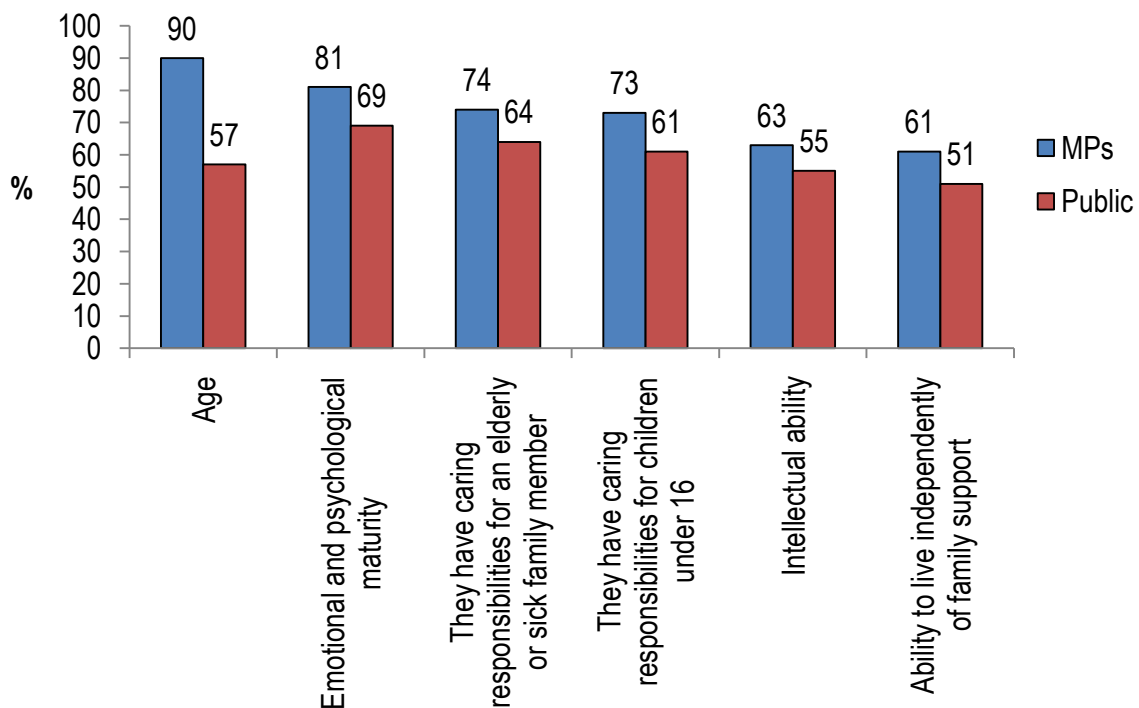


Figure 1.1: Measures of maturity that should be taken into account either to some or to a great extent

Base: All MPs and members of the public

For all measures tested, MPs are more likely to say that each of these should be taken into account either to some or to a great extent, than members of the public. It is encouraging for the T2A Alliance that for all measures tested, the majority of both groups say that each one should be taken into account either to some or to a great extent. This compliments T2A’s recommendation that young adults (18-24 year olds) should be treated on a case by case basis and indicates that these two groups recognise that young adults are still in the transition period towards full adulthood.

Interestingly, MPs are most likely to say that age (90%) followed by emotional and psychological maturity (81%) are the two measures of maturity that should be taken into account either to some or to a great extent. While the public also say that emotional and psychological maturity (69%) should be one of the top two measures taken into account either to some or to a great extent, they see caring for a sick or elderly family member (64%) as the second most important factor that should be taken into account here. The public are significantly less likely to say that age (57%) should be taken into account, which offers a stark comparison to the 90% of MPs who say that it *should* be. *There is clear evidence that the maturity of young people is significant in the criminal justice system.*

1.2 MPS BY PARTY

Fig.1.2 examines results according to party divide.

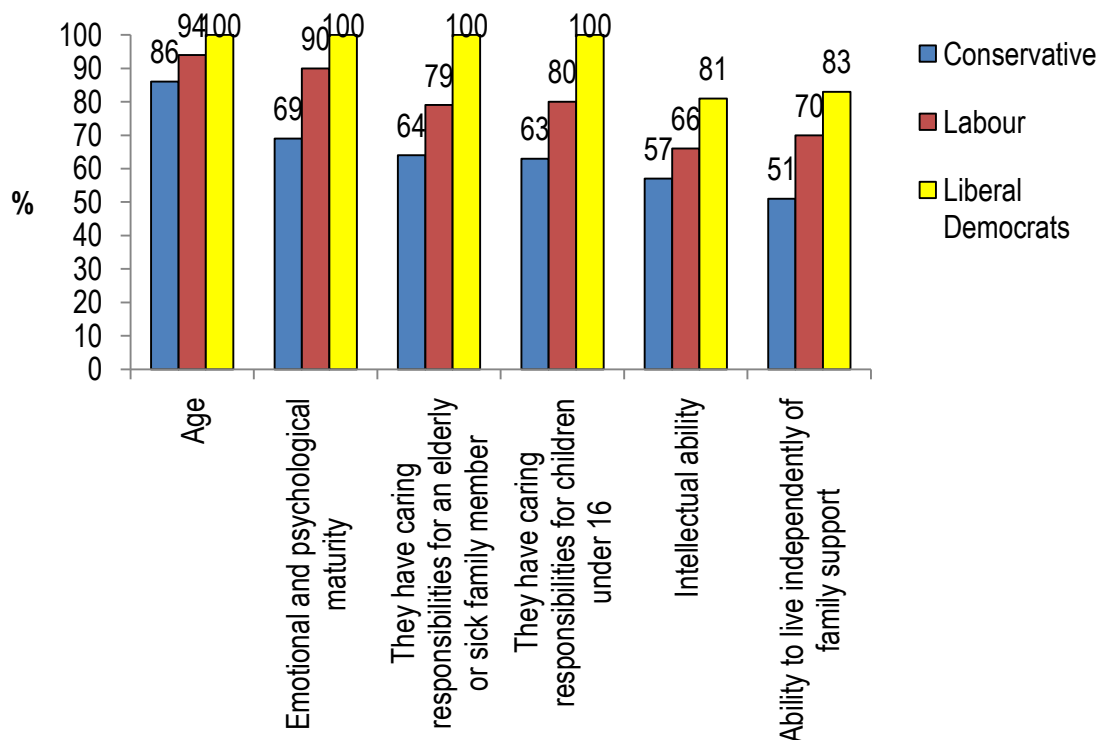


Fig.1.2: Measures of maturity that should be taken into account either to some or to a great extent

Base: MPs, by party

For all measures tested, it is clear to see that Liberal Democrat MPs are most likely to say each of these should be taken into account, either to some extent or to a great extent. This is particularly the

case for four of the six measures tested, with 100% of Liberal Democrat MPs says that these four should be taken into account at least to some extent. This is encouraging given the Liberal Democrat's role within the coalition Government. Having said this, recent polls suggest that their position is far from stable and it is worth T2A exerting a more channelled and targeted approach towards the less enthusiastic party groups.

Conservative MPs are the least likely to say that each of these tested measures should be taken into account at all. This is especially noticeable for the offender's "ability to live independently of family support", with half of Conservative MPs (51%) say that this should be taken into account either to some extent or to a great extent, which compares to nearly three quarters (70%) of Labour MPs and a clear majority of Liberal Democrat MPs (83%) who say the same.

1.3 MPs FURTHER ANALYSIS

Interestingly, female MPs are more likely to say that each potential measure of maturity should be taken into account to a great extent, than their male colleagues. For example one third of all women (33%) say that the offender's age should be taken into account, which compares to just one in five men (21%) who say the same. This is true for all measures except those involving the care of other people, for example one quarter of all male MPs (25%) say that whether the offender has caring responsibilities for children under 16 should be taken into account *to a great extent* which compares to around one in five women (19%) who say the same.

1.4 PUBLIC FURTHER ANALYSIS

We have already established that MPs are more likely to say that each potential measure of maturity should be taken into account by the courts either to some or to a great extent, than members of the public. Now it is worth examining if there are any interesting patterns that emerge from the different demographic groups.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, people aged 18-24 (63%) are notably **more** likely to say that age should be taken into account either to some or to a great extent by the courts, when compared to people aged 25 or over.

Throughout each measure tested, **people in social groups AB and C1 are more likely to say that each potential measure of maturity should be taken into account**, when compared to people in groups C2 and DE. For example, for the measure of emotional and psychological maturity nearly three quarters of all people in groups AB (71%) and C1 (72%) say that this should be considered, in comparison to around two thirds of people in groups C2 (66%) and DE (64%) who say the same.

There is an interesting difference by gender, which mirrors the pattern seen among MPs. **Women are more likely to say that each potential measure of maturity should be taken into account than men.** This is true for five of the six measures tested, for example nearly three quarters of all women (73%) say that the offender's emotional and psychological maturity should be taken into account, compared to around two thirds of men (64%). **This is poignant given T2A's focus on the paucity of support for vulnerable women offenders and the increasing rates of young women being drawn into the system.** Interestingly, this gender difference fits in with a recent Cabinet Office study that

cited young women under 30 as being most likely to have multifaceted and deep rooted needs that need to be recognised.

For four of the six potential measures of maturity tested, people working in the public sector are more likely to say that the measures should be taken into account by the courts. For example, nearly two thirds of people working in the public sector (62%) say that the offender's intellectual ability should be taken into account either to some extent or to a great extent. This compares to just more than half of all private sector workers (53%) who say the same.

SECTION 2: TREATMENT IN COURT

Now that potential measures of maturity have been explored among both MPs and the public, both audiences were asked how they think young adults should be treated in court.

Q2. Currently, an individual is considered a fully mature adult at the age of 18 and is subject to the law as it applies to adults. When someone aged between 18 and their early 20's is accused of breaking the law, which of the following best describes how you think they should be treated in court?

- They should be treated the same as older people (25 or over)
- They should be treated the same as 16-17 year olds
- They should be treated as a separate age group
- It should be decided on a case by case basis whether they are treated like an adult or an under 18 year old

2.1: ALL MPS AND MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Fig.2.1 offers a comparison between how parliamentarians and the public think young adults should be treated in court.

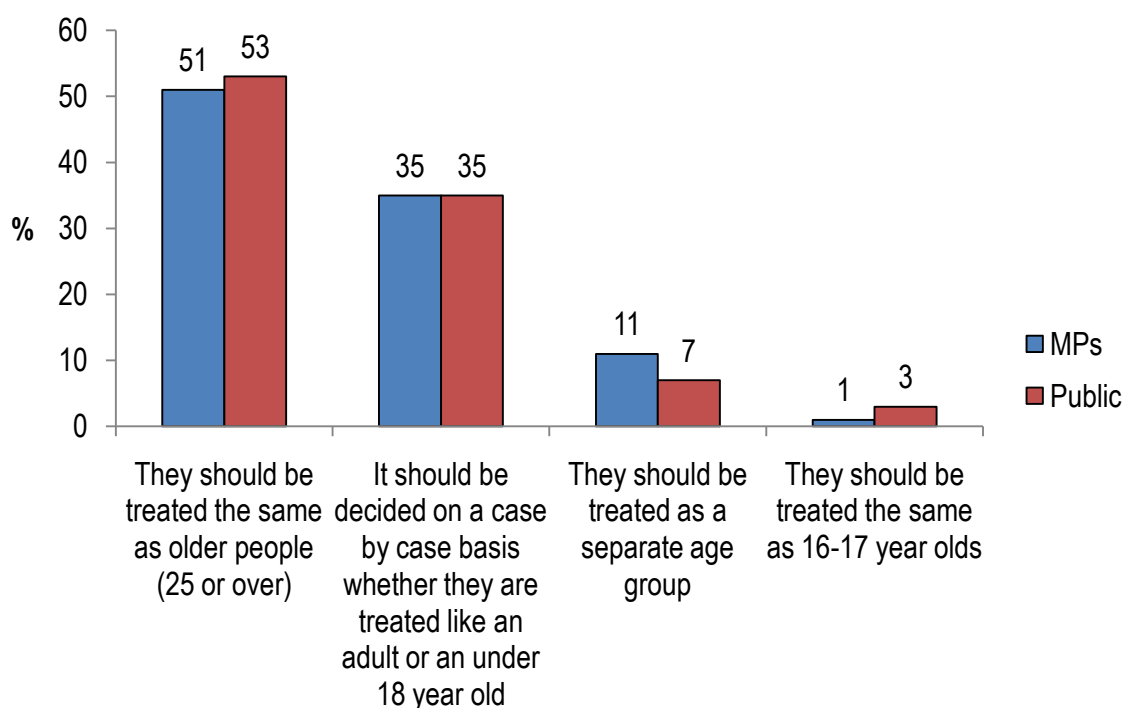


Fig.2.1: How young adults should be treated in court

Base: All MPs and the public

It seems that the public and MPs are very much in line with one another's opinion on this issue. Despite one half of the public (53%) and MPs (51%) saying that young adults should be treated the same as older people, a similar proportion **of parliamentarians (47%) and the public (45%) support**

some kind of change to the existing system. A substantial part of both groups support the notion that either they should be treated the same as 16-17 year olds, they should be treated as a separate age group or that it should be decided on a case by case basis. **Encouragingly for T2A Alliance, around one third of all people in both groups (35%) say that they should be treated on a case by case basis.**

Given that the T2A Alliance is campaigning for 18-24 year olds to be treated on a case by case basis, results here are not only encouraging, but also reflect an opportunity whereby the existing level of public and parliamentary support for change, can be capitalised on further. Perhaps T2A should direct a heightened concentration of briefing materials towards MPs who sit on relevant select committees or APPGs to expand upon the one third of parliamentarians whose support they already have.

2.2: MPS BY PARTY

As can be seen in Fig.2.2, results were then analysed by party group.

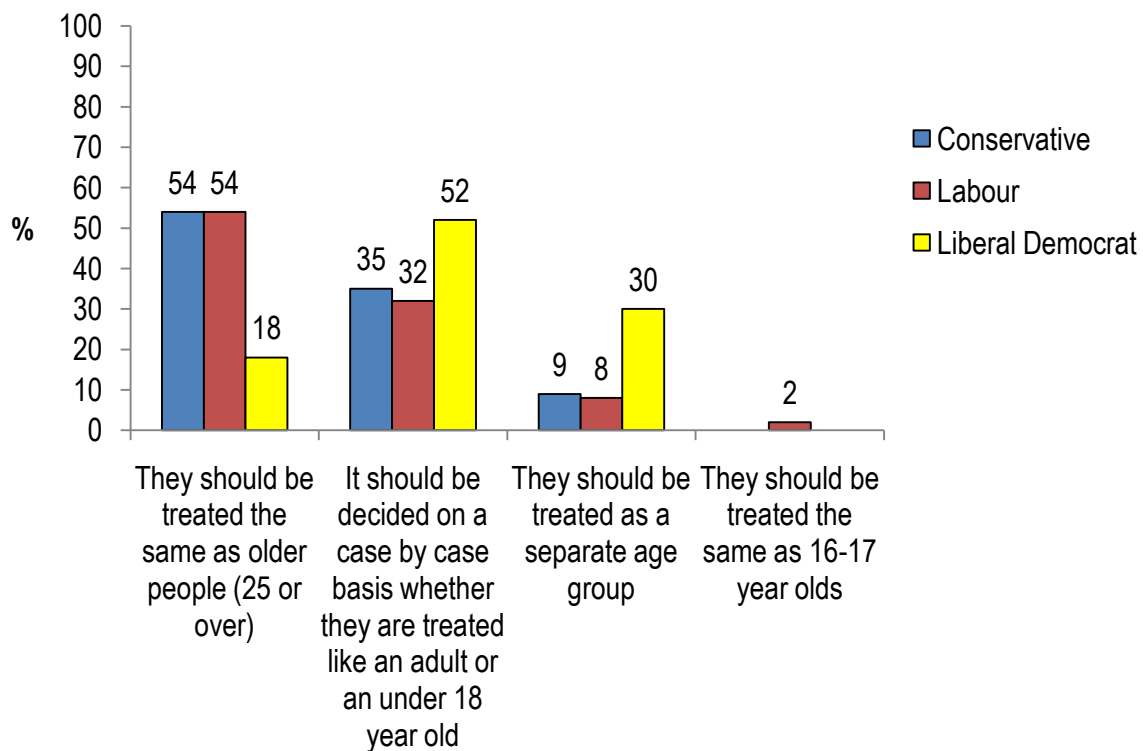


Fig.2.2: How young adults should be treated in court
Base: MPs by party

As was the case in Section 1, Liberal Democrats appear to be more sympathetic towards T2A proposals, than MPs from the other two parties. More than half of all Liberal Democrats (52%) say that it should be decided on a case by case basis, with around one third of Labour (32%) and Conservative (35%) MPs saying the same.

Not only this, but Liberal Democrats (30%) are around three times more likely to say that young adults should be treated as a separate age group, with just one in ten Labour MPs (8%) and Conservative

MPs (9%) saying the same. While Conservative and Labour MPs express similar opinions here, Liberal Democrats go against the grain. For example, while more than half of Labour (54%) and Conservative MPs (54%) say that young adults should be treated the same as older people (25 or over), just one in five Liberal Democrat MPs (18%) say the same.

2.3: MPs FURTHER ANALYSIS

Interestingly, older MPs are less likely to say that young adults should be treated the same as older people (25 or over) with 45% of MPs born pre-1950 saying that this should be the case, compared to nearly two thirds of MPs (63%) born in 1960 or after who say the same.

2.4: PUBLIC FURTHER ANALYSIS

Women (39%) are more likely than men (30%) to say that young adults should be treated on a case by case basis.

Finally, people working within the public sector (39%) are slightly more likely to say that young adults should be treated on a case by case basis, when compared to those working within the private sector (33%).

These results suggest that for all demographic groups alike, there is an encouraging alignment with T2A's campaign for young adults to be treated on a case by case basis. Given that this group of young adults have the highest re-offending rate, it may be worth T2A championing these arguments even further among the public and parliamentarians alike.

SECTION 3: TYPES OF MATURITY

Members of the public were asked to state at what age they think people reach full maturity in a variety of different areas. Parliamentarians were not asked this question.

Q3. At what age do you think people reach full maturity in each of the following areas?

- Intellectually
- Emotionally
- Ability to understand and take responsibility for actions
- Ability to manage own finances
- Ability to live independently
- Ability to raise a family

3.1: ALL MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

The below chart indicates the average age for each measure of maturity.

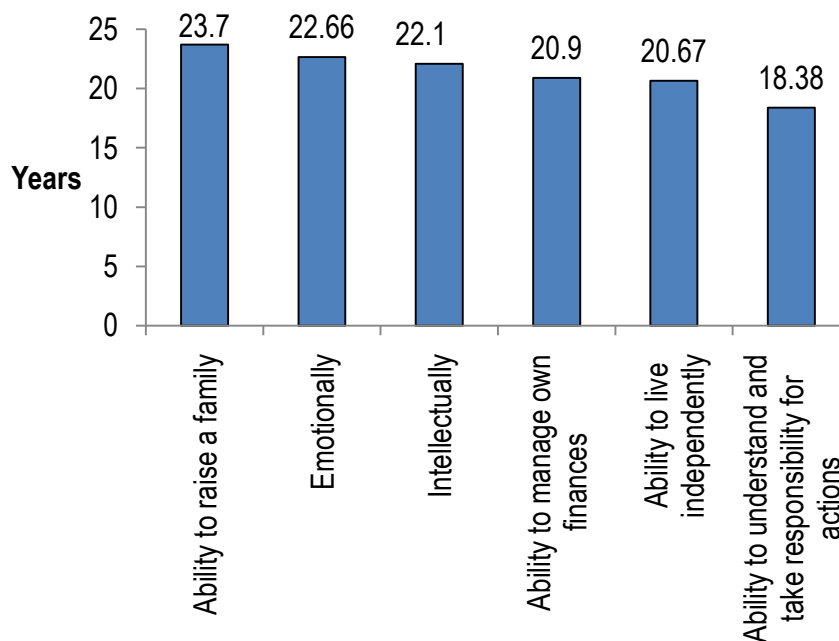


Fig.3.1: The average age that the public think young adults reach full maturity in a variety of different areas

Base: All members of the public

Essentially members of the public think that full maturity has been reached in each of the areas tested, by the time young adults reach the age of 24. People think that young adults take the most time to gain the maturity required to raise a family, an average age of 23 years and 8 months old is given here.

Members of the public think that young adults are able to understand and take responsibility for their own actions by the time they are 18 years old and 5 months (on average). This is particularly interesting given that in the UK children are seen to be criminally responsible from the age of 10.



T2A Alliance has directed a lot of focus on the issue of the intellectual and emotional maturity of young adults and how this should impact on their treatment within the system. Given this, it is worth noting that the greatest percentage of the public do not consider young adults to be emotionally mature until the age of at least 25 (29%), with an average of 22 years old. On average, people believe that both intellectual and emotional maturity are reached at the age of 22. Given the age that people believe emotional maturity is reached, it confirms the importance that emotional maturity should be considered in sentencing of young people in court.



Full Data Tables