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UK youth justice – out of step and unacceptable!

An expert law conference at Northumbria University, Newcastle, has today said the Government must follow the example of other countries and stop criminalising children as young as ten.

Organised by [Northumbria Law School](#), the *Age of Criminal Responsibility (ACR)* Conference attracted leading judges and authorities on youth and social justice. The event also comes just as the Government announces a review into youth justice - and in particular how best to tackle re-offending. In recent years there has been a reduction in the number of young people

entering the youth justice system. However, little progress has been made in reducing reoffending, with 67 per cent of young people leaving custody reoffending within a year.

In an uncompromising message senior law lecturers [Doctor Raymond Arthur](#) and [Nicola Wake](#) from Northumbria Law School said if the Government is serious about tackling reoffending it is “totally unacceptable” that the UK can still treat children as young as ten as criminals.

Doctor Arthur said: “This low age is seriously out of line with other nations, including most other European countries and international human rights standards. It is also at odds with other responsibilities and human rights. For instance a young person must be 16 years old before they can consent to sexual relations, including consensual sexual relations with another young person. A young person cannot join the armed forces until they are 16 years old. They must be 18 years old to buy cigarettes or alcohol, get a tattoo or vote. The aim of this conference is to encourage debate and discussion on the current age of criminal responsibility in England and Wales.”



[Watch video on YouTube here](#)

Nicola Wake added: “Youth justice can of course be an extremely sensitive area, especially for victims of youth crime and their families. However, if we are to cut reoffending children should not be treated like adult criminals. They need education and support, not to have their life chances seriously undermined by a criminal record.”

Nicola also points to a recent report in the media of children as young as 6 being questioned by the police for sending indecent images on social media, and a 500% increase in the number of children arrested for so-called sexting. “I think what this reveals above all is a failure within society to address the problem of educating children when it comes to the dangers of social media,” she explained.”

The ACR conference was held to provide a forum for exploring the latest research and developments in understanding the challenges facing young people in conflict with the law. Outcomes of the conference should be of interest to a wide audience including researchers, policy makers, judges, lawyers, psychologists, psychiatrists, criminologists, educators, and professionals in many other allied disciplines who address the subject of childhood, youth and criminality.

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