

Alcohol Abstinence Monitoring Requirement (AAMR)

SENTENCING
ACADEMY

Peer-reviewed research on the effectiveness and impact of sentences, orders, and requirements.

Carly Lightowlers, University of Liverpool

Published: 14 Aug 2025
Last updated: 14 Aug 2025

SHARE THIS     

Summary

This bulletin summarises research on the effectiveness of the Alcohol Abstinence Monitoring Requirement (AAMR) for community orders and suspended sentence orders in England and Wales. AAMRS can be imposed under the terms set out in Schedule 9 Part 12 sections 25-26 of the Sentencing Act 2020. AAMRs require adults to abstain from alcohol (or reduce their consumption) for up to 120 days where their offending is alcohol related. Compliance with the requirement is monitored by a transdermal alcohol monitoring device (also known as an alcohol tag). In this way, abstinence from alcohol serves both as punishment (denial of pleasure) and a gateway to reform and reduced reoffending.

Evidence about AAMR's effectiveness to date has focused on compliance as a measure of success with promising results. However, evidence on reoffending is limited and mixed, with only one study finding that AAMRs reduced reoffending beyond the requirement to wear the alcohol tag. Studies to date have yielded findings predominantly from pilot sites rather than examining AAMR's impact since its national roll out.

An AAMR may be imposed as part of a community or suspended sentence order.

Alcohol is implicated in many crimes and many courts sentence cases involving intoxication (Lightowlers, 2022). A fifth of people under supervision of the Probation Service have an alcohol problem (Hodge 2022).

Through provisions in the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (Commencement No. 14) Order 2020, an alcohol abstinence and monitoring requirement (AAMR) may be imposed by courts in England and Wales as part of a community or suspended sentence order (see Schedule 9 Part 12 section 25, Sentencing Act 2020). An AAMR can be imposed for any offence, if the person with a conviction is not dependent on alcohol, but their offending is alcohol related.ⁱ Imposing an AAMR does not require the person's consent and can require someone to abstain from consuming alcohol (or not to consume alcohol above a specified level) for up to 120 days.

Compliance with abstinence requirements is supervised by Probation and monitored using transdermal alcohol monitoring devices (or alcohol monitoring tags) which test alcohol levels in the person's sweat every 30 minutes. While wearing the tag, the wearer cannot drink alcohol without it being detected. If detected, probation authorities are alerted, and the individual can be brought before the court to face further sanctions (e.g. fines and/or imprisonment; HMIP 2021).

Abstention from drinking is thought to both deterⁱⁱ and reduce opportunities to engage in alcohol-related offending (HMCTS and MoJ, 2012). The AAMR was originally conceived as additional punishment for persons whose offending is alcohol-relatedⁱⁱⁱ but also serves as a risk management tool and means of promoting rehabilitation. Abstention from alcohol thus serves both as punishment (denial of pleasure) and means of reducing reoffending (by removing opportunities to drink and engage in associated offending).

This bulletin reviews empirical studies on the AAMR's effectiveness, published in English, from 2016-2025.

AAMR use is supported by stakeholders and continues to increase.

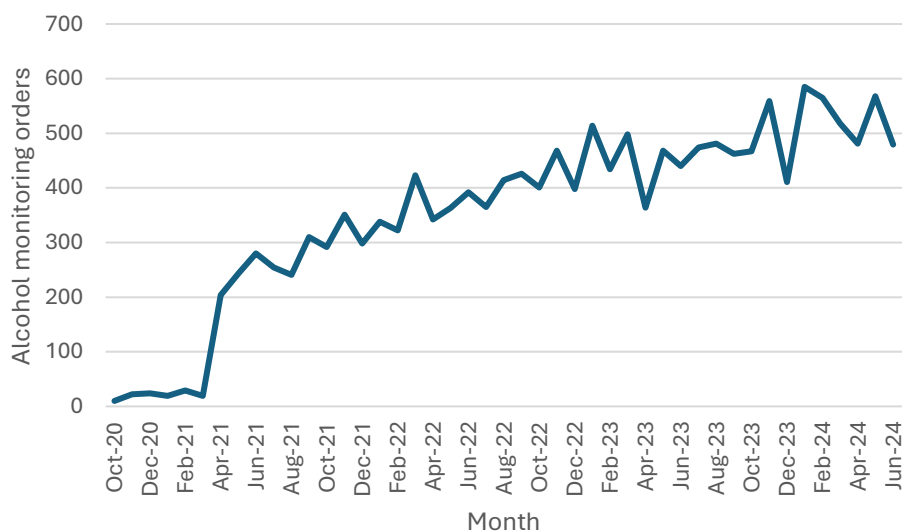
AAMR use was piloted in London and North Yorkshire, Lincolnshire and Humberside^{iv} and was welcomed by stakeholders as a tool to specifically address alcohol-related offending (Hobson et al., 2018) and fill a gap in effective community options for non-dependent drinkers (Roberts et al., 2019). Whilst initially designed as a punitive response, stakeholders also saw its value for supporting rehabilitation (Hobson et al., 2018). The abstinent period gave tag-wearers a break from drinking and time to reflect on their alcohol consumption and its impact on offending behaviour (Pepper and Dawson, 2019). It also gave those monitoring and supporting wearers opportunities to engage in honest exchanges about their drinking and any lapses so appropriate support could be provided (Roberts et al 2019). These represented welcome unintended consequences (Pepper and Dawson, 2019) and stakeholders supported the national roll out of AAMRs across the UK (Hobson et al., 2018). Following the pilots, the AAMR was rolled out nationally in Wales on 21st October 2020 and in England on 31st March 2021.

Despite a lack of evidence on the AAMRs impact on longer-term drinking patterns and/or reoffending, the use of alcohol monitoring in criminal justice has been steadily increasing. AAMR use is promoted as part of a suite of technological advancements that can support the management of people with convictions in the community and potentially be integrated with

existing interventions to foster rehabilitation in the recent sentencing review (MoJ, 2025b). AAMRs have also been heralded as a means of facilitating behavioural change for those supervised by Probation in the community in the Beating Crime Plan (UK Government 2021) and as a means of diverting women from custody in the Female Offender Strategy (MoJ, 2018).^v

Indeed, there has been a steady increase in the number of individuals subject to alcohol monitoring since the AAMR's introduction, increasing from 10 AAMRs in October 2020 to 479 in June 2024 (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Number of individuals in England and Wales subject to new alcohol monitoring order by month^{vi}



An analysis of 1,987 AAMRs supervised by Probation between 1 January 2014 to 31 December 2020 revealed an average AAMR length of 67 days. Durations tended ‘to cluster around 30-day (monthly) intervals (namely, 30, 60, 90, 120 days)’ (Lightowlers, 2025). AAMRs were commonly used for sentencing summary (less serious) offences (Lightowlers, 2025).

Whilst additional support/alcohol interventions running alongside monitoring requirements is recommended as best practice (Malan de Merindol, 2022), it is not essential, and the extent to which this occurs is unclear (Pepper and McSweeney, 2025). Likewise, an inspection report suggests that opportunities are being missed to acknowledge positive progress and to refer those completing AAMRs to further support services (HMIP, 2022).

Despite AAMRs not being appropriate for people who are dependent on alcohol (and/or in receipt of an Alcohol Treatment Order [LINK TO Evidence Bulletin on ATRs]), there have been instances where both have been allocated (Lightowlers, 2025). Probation practitioners have reported cases where an AAMR was not appropriate, owing to higher levels of drinking than originally reported by defendants (HMIP, 2022). This is important, as erroneous allocations of AAMRs to persons with alcohol dependence has serious health risks.

AAMRs can reduce alcohol use and encourage sobriety.

To date, government commissioned evaluation studies have centred on pilot sites and focused on short-term *formal* compliance^{vii} (Bottoms, 2001) evidencing high rates of abstinence from

alcohol whilst subject to the AAMR. However, there is little evidence on *substantive* compliance^{viii} (Robinson and McNeill, 2008) in the form of desistence from offending (Lightowlers, 2025). Indeed, the London and Humberside, Lincolnshire and North Yorkshire (HLNY) evaluations demonstrated high levels of compliance in the form of sobriety/abstention from alcohol whilst subject to the AAMR, but limited impact upon reoffending outcomes.

The AAMR was piloted in London between 2014-2018. Findings from the feasibility study in a few boroughs revealed an AAMR compliance rate of 92%^{ix} (Pepper and Dawson, 2016). Compliance rates remained high at 94% when the AAMR was subsequently rolled out across London (Hobson et al., 2017b). And both compliance rates (94%) and sober day rates (98%) remained high in the final evaluation (Harrison et al., 2020).

Similar findings were observed in the HLNY AAMR pilot (2018-2019), which saw 94% of individuals subject to an AAMR successfully complete the requirement. This was equal to individuals being sober for 97% of days during which they wore the tags (Roberts et al., 2019).

Results across the two pilot sites were heralded as a considerable success (Harrison et al., 2020) and formed the basis of the UK Ministry of Justice announcing the national roll out of the AAMR.

Since their national roll out, compliance – as calculated from the number of total days monitoring devices were in place and complied with (MoJ, 2024b) - with AAMRs remains high. As of 29 November 2024, compliance with AAMRs was as high as 97%. However, Lightowlers (2025) found evidence to suggest that there are cases where an AAMR is imposed but deemed unworkable,^x observing that just over three in four (78%) abstinence requirements imposed between 1 January 2014 to 31 December 2020 across England and Wales were successfully completed. Successful completion was also less likely for those serving community sentences for theft offences. This acquisitive crime profile may reflect behaviour linked to sustaining chronic alcohol use or dependence, or be influenced by other confounding factors such as limited income or homelessness – areas that warrant further investigation (Lightowlers, 2025).

Importantly, we know little about whether AAMRs affect abstinence or controlled drinking outcomes once the tag has been removed (OHID, 2023, s.17). And, despite promising pilot evaluation results, the AAMR's impact as a tool in deterring alcohol consumption and reducing alcohol-related offending on a wider scale is yet to be evidenced (HMIP 2022).

Evidence is less clear about the relationship between AAMRs and reoffending.

The government has highlighted the high compliance rate of people who remain alcohol free whilst wearing the tag (MoJ et al., 2022). However, this does not consider whether the tags successfully reduce reoffending, as there is little systematic evidence that AAMRs reduce reoffending.

Two of the pilot evaluation studies looked at reoffending – in the form of arrest and charge rates 6- and 12-months post-sentence commencement (Harrison et al., 2020) and offending in the first 12 months from order start date and nine months since order completion (Hobson et al., 2017a). Comparing the AAMR cohort and a matched comparison group, neither study provides evidence of the impact of AAMR on recidivism, although very few tag-wearers had been re-arrested or charged while wearing the tag; indicating a potential deterrent effect whilst the tag is worn (Harrison et al. 2020).

A pioneering national study using combined probation and magistrates' courts datasets (January 2014 - December 2020) demonstrated that abstinence requirements reduced reoffending and the frequency of reoffending. Wearers were on average 33% less likely to reoffend (controlling for similar offence and demographic profiles; Lightowlers, 2025).

Evidence on AAMR's longer-term effects on drinking and reoffending is needed.

There is limited evaluation of the AAMR given its relative infancy. Government pilot evaluation studies have focused on compliance rather than reoffending and offer limited insights into longer term changes in drinking behaviour. However, a national evaluation of the AAMR is in progress at the time of writing.

Lightowlers (2025) was the first national study to yield promising results of the impact of AAMRs on reoffending outcomes. The data observation window in this study ran from 1 January 2014 to 31 December 2020, which predates national roll out of the AAMR (October 2020 for Wales and March 2021 for England) and limits insights to those mainly from pilot sites. Findings may therefore relate to conditions in these areas (including increased resourcing and closer management/monitoring of practice) that differ to those found nationally.

Lightowlers' (2025) study operationalised reoffending by re-appearance in court. This underestimates reoffending, as many crimes are undetected or diverted away from the court. This could be improved by using measures of reoffending that capture contact at earlier stages in the criminal justice process, such as being cautioned by the police (as deployed in the MoJ's measure of proven reoffending; MoJ, 2025a) or by including police arrests and charges (as in the AAMR pilot evaluations by Hobson et al., 2017a; Harrison et al., 2020). However, all measures of reoffending based on criminal justice contact necessarily underestimate the true prevalence of crime (including alcohol-related crime; Lightowlers et al., 2024). All measures have limitations (Gormley et al., 2022), and neither approach accounts for changes in offending profiles or severity.

Research on the effectiveness of AAMRs could be improved further by making use of Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) data held by Probation, as these could be used to further insights into which drinkers (e.g. light versus heavy drinkers) AAMRs are (or are not) working for (Lightowlers, 2025). Moreover, understanding how people's alcohol consumption, offending behaviours and motivations to change interact with AAMRs – and AAMR's combination with other interventions or sentence requirements - will help correctly determine eligibility for these requirements. Building on the research evidence with the above suggestions would help target AAMRs at the populations most responsive to this intervention.

Any non-experimental study design aiming to attribute a reduction in reoffending to AAMRs specifically will face challenges, especially where AAMRs are combined with other programmes or interventions aimed at someone's alcohol consumption and/or offending behaviour. In such designs, it is not possible to rule out all the factors that impact upon someone's propensity to offend (Gormley et al., 2022). Longitudinally studying the same individuals over time whilst controlling for a range of demographic and situational factors, alongside the improvements detailed above, will nevertheless go a long way to improving the scant evidence currently available on the effectiveness of AAMRs.

Conclusion

Research has demonstrated high levels of compliance with AAMRs. However, AAMR's impact on reoffending rates are less clear and there is little evidence on their longer-term effects on drinking and/or reoffending.

Developing a better understanding of how alcohol abstinence orders are being used, with what impact on reoffending, and with whom is key to improving our understanding of how well these orders are working. This is especially important given their potential reach, as many crimes involve alcohol. Further research and evaluation of the AAMR in England and Wales is thus encouraged, with publication of a national evaluation on the horizon at the time of writing.

This Bulletin is part of a series on the effectiveness of sentencing in England & Wales. Other Effectiveness Bulletins can be found [here](#).

For further information, contact info@sentencingacademy.org.uk

References

- Bainbridge, L. (2019). Transferring 24/7 Sobriety from South Dakota to South London: the case of MOPAC's Alcohol Abstinence Monitoring Requirement Pilot. *Addiction*. 114(9), 1696-1705.
- Bottoms, A., (2001). Compliance with community penalties. In (Ed.s) Bottoms, A., Gelsthorpe, L., and Rex, S. *Community Penalties: Change and Challenges*. Cullompton: Willan.
- Gormley J., Hamilton, M. and Belton I. (2022). *The Effectiveness of Sentencing Options on Reoffending*. London: Sentencing Council. Available at <https://www.sentencingcouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Effectiveness-of-Sentencing-Options-Review-FINAL.pdf>
- Harrison A., Yesberg, J., Keenan, M., Red Quadrant, MsSweeney, T. and Webster, R. (2020). *Alcohol Abstinence Monitoring Requirement Final Impact Evaluation*. Mayor of London Office for Policing and Crime, London, UK. Available at https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/aamr_final_impact_report_100521.pdf
- Hobson, Z., Harrison, A. & Dawson, P. (2017a) *Alcohol Abstinence Monitoring Requirement – South London Pilot Indicative Impact Report*. London: Mayor of London Office for Policing and Crime, London, UK. Available at https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/annex_1_-_aamr_early_impact_report_210417.pdf
- Hobson, Z., Dangerfield, B. & Harrison, A. (2017b). *Alcohol Abstinence Monitoring Requirement. The Pan London roll out: A Review of Process and Performance from Year 1*. Mayor of London Office for Policing and Crime, London, UK.
- Hobson Z., Harrison A. & Duckworth, L. (2018). *Alcohol Abstinence Monitoring Requirement – A review of Process and Performance from year 2*. Mayor of London Office for Policing and Crime, London, UK. Available at https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/aamr_final_process_performance_y2_report_final.pdf
- Hodge, D. (2022). A sobering success for alcohol monitoring requirements. Available at <https://insidehmcts.blog.gov.uk/2022/06/01/a-sobering-success-for-alcohol-monitoring-requirements/>
- HM Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) (2022). *The use of electronic monitoring as a tool for the Probation Service in reducing reoffending and managing risk*. Manchester; HMIP.
- HM Courts & Tribunals Service (HMCTS) and Ministry of Justice (MoJ) (2012). *Preparing courts for sobriety tags*. <https://insidehmcts.blog.gov.uk/2021/05/20/preparing-courts-for-sobriety-tags/>
- Kilmer, B. (2019) Commentary on Bainbridge (2019): Improving the evidence base for 24/7 Sobriety. *Addiction*, 114: 1706– 1707. <https://doi.org/10.1111/add.14657>.
- Lightowers, C. (2025) *Court enforced alcohol abstinence: Does it reduce reoffending?* Available at: <https://www.octopus.ac/publications/qaf6-yw34/versions/latest>.
- Lightowers, C. (2024a) *Do court-imposed alcohol interventions reduce reoffending?* ADR UK. Available at: <https://www.adruk.org/news-publications/news-blogs/do-court-imposed-alcohol->

interventions-reduce-reoffending/#:~:text=Completion%20rate,treatment%20requirements%20were%20successfully%20completed.

Lightowlers, C.(2024b) *Enforced alcohol abstinence: does it reduce reoffending?* ADR UK. Available at: https://www.adruk.org/fileadmin/uploads/adruk/Documents/Data_Insights/Data_Insight_Enforced_Alcohol_Abstinence_Does_it_reduce_reoffending_01.pdf.

Lightowlers C. (2022) Intoxication and Sentencing: A review of policy, practice and research. *Sentencing Academy*. Sentencing Hub. Available at <https://sentencinghub.sentencingacademy.org.uk/research-policy/intoxication-and-sentencing/>.

Lightowlers, C. Bryant, L. and Horsefield, O. (2024). Obscured by its omnipresence? Conceptual and practical issues around measuring alcohol-related crime. In (Ed.s) Laura Huey and David Buil Gil. *The Crime Data Handbook*. Bristol University Press.

Malan de Merindol R. (2022) Alcohol Monitoring England and Wales. Ministry of Justice presentation delivered May 2022 12th CEP Electronic Monitoring Conference, Helsinki. <https://www.cep-probation.org/12th-cep-electronic-monitoring-conference-presentations-workshop-results-and-pictures-are-online/>

Ministry of Justice (2025a). Guide to proven reoffending statistics. Available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6807bdea3bdfd1243078e6ee/Technical_guide_to_proven_reoffending.pdf

Ministry of Justice (MoJ) (2025b). Independent Sentencing Review: Final report. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-sentencing-review-final-report>

Ministry of Justice (2024a). Electronic Monitoring Statistics Publication, June 2024. Data Table 4.2 Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/electronic-monitoring-statistics-publication-june-2024>

Ministry of Justice (2024b). Ad-Hoc Alcohol Monitoring Statistics Publication, Dec 2024. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/ad-hoc-alcohol-monitoring-statistics-publication-dec-2024/ad-hoc-alcohol-monitoring-statistics-publication-dec-2024>

Ministry of Justice (2018). Female Offender Strategy. UK Government.

Ministry of Justice, Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service, and The Rt Hon Kit Malthouse MP (2022). Alcohol tags helping thousands of offenders stay sober. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/alcohol-tags-helping-thousands-of-offenders-stay-sober>

Office for Health Improvements and Disparities (OHID) (2023). UK clinical guidelines for alcohol treatment: specific settings and populations. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/uk-clinical-guidelines-for-alcohol-treatment/uk-clinical-guidelines-for-alcohol-treatment-specific-settings-and-populations#alcohol-treatment-in-the-criminal-justice-system>

Pepper, M. and Dawson, P. (2016) Alcohol Abstinence Monitoring Requirement: A process review of the proof of concept pilot, MOPAC Evidence and Insight Unit evaluation report. Mayor of London Office for Policing and Crime, London, UK. Available at https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/aamr_final.pdf

Pepper, M. and McSweeney, T. (2025). Evaluating Technological Innovation Through the Alcohol Abstinence Monitoring Requirement: From Local Proof of Concept Pilot to National Roll-Out. In: Dawson, P. (eds) Applied Policing Policy Research. Springer, Cham.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-87240-2_13

Roberts, E., Turley, C., Piggott, H., Lynch-Huggins, S., Wishart, R. and Kerr J. (2019). Evaluation of the AAMR tagging pilot Year 2 process evaluation findings. Available at <https://www.northyorkshire-pfcc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Evaluation-of-the-AAMR-tagging-pilot.pdf>

Robinson, G., and McNeill, F. (2008). Exploring the Dynamics of Compliance with Community Penalties, *Theoretical Criminology* 12(4):431-449.

UK Government. (2021). Beating Crime Plan. UK Government.

ⁱ And does not have an Alcohol Treatment Requirement (ATR) recommended or in place.

ⁱⁱ Compliance with alcohol abstinence monitoring (in the form of abstention/sobriety) is attributed to the (swift and certain) deterrent effect of further action in the US context (Kilmer, 2019). However, as the policy transferred – and mutated – in the English and Welsh context the celerity and certainty of breaches was lost in the AAMR's implementation (Bainbridge, 2019).

ⁱⁱⁱ Explanatory Memorandum to Criminal Justice Act 2003 (Alcohol Abstinence and Monitoring Requirement) (Prescription of Arrangement for Monitoring) (Amendment) Order 2015 (2015 No. 1482) https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2015/1482/pdfs/ukxiem_20151482_en.pdf.

^{iv} Two AAMR pilots were implemented in London between 2014-2018, with a third implemented in North Yorkshire, Lincolnshire and Humberside between 2018-2019.

^v Moreover, Alcohol Monitoring on License (AML) for prison leavers has since been implemented in England and Wales (in June 2002 and November 2021 respectively).

^{vi} Figures compiled from MoJ 2024b.

^{vii} Compliance with the rules and requirements of an order or licence.

^{viii} Active engagement and cooperation with the requirements and purposes of the order.

^{ix} Based on the number of cases returned to court and convicted of breaching their AAMR.

^x As well as other administrative reasons, the requirements may have been terminated as well as failure to comply on another requirement or condition or death of the person on probation.