

Summary

Evaluation of the usability of Quick Scan

1. Reason, purpose and research questions

On commission from the Sanctions, Probation and Victim Care Department (DSP), the Netherlands Probation and After-Care Foundation started developing the so-called Quick Scan in 2003 in the context of the Reduction of Recidivism (TR) policy programme. The purpose of Quick Scan is to make an estimate of the risk of recidivism and responsiveness of the suspect and, on that basis, to advise the judiciary on whether or not to use follow-up activities within the probation and after-care service (particularly regarding administration of the RISC (recidivism measuring scale)).

Quick Scan was adjusted after an initial pilot with the instrument in 2004. A second pilot was then held in the regions of The Hague and Roermond in the period from March to June 2006.

The objective of this test phase was to examine the usability of the instrument for probation and after-care workers and to gain an idea of the preconditions which must be fulfilled for an adequate nationwide implementation of Quick Scan.

The research centred on the following questions:

1. Is Quick Scan usable for probation and after-care workers in practice?
2. For which group(s) of suspects can probation and after-care workers use Quick Scan in practice?
3. What preconditions must be satisfied in order to do so?

These three main research questions encompass about ten sub-questions.

The research questions formulated in relation to the usability of Quick Scan for probation and after-care workers are:

1. To what extent is Quick Scan usable as a source of information/an aid for probation and after-care workers in forming an opinion on the risk of recidivism and the possibility to influence the client's behaviour?
2. To what extent do those involved in the probation and after care service consider Quick Scan a good selection instrument for giving advice on whether or not to use the RISC?
3. To what extent do the probation and after-care workers consider Quick Scan sufficiently user friendly/administrable? On what points is improvement desired?
4. How long does it take to administer Quick Scan? What factors play a part?
5. Are the Quick Scans filled in completely? If not, which parts are not? What is the reason for this?

Research questions relating to the usability of Quick Scan for the target group.

Are there groups of suspects for whom Quick Scan is not suitable/administrable? If so, what is the reason for this?

6. To what extent can the instrument be used for suspects who deny guilt?
7. Can inclusion or exclusion criteria be identified for administering Quick Scan on the basis of this evaluation?

Research questions relating to the preconditions:

8. What preconditions (e.g. knowledge and skills of probation and after care workers, available time and place of administration) must be satisfied in order to administer Quick Scan?
9. How do the chain partners¹ of the probation and after-care service who are (indirectly) involved in the trial rollout experience the possible burden arising from the probation and after-care service's working with Quick Scan?

2. Research scheme

Operationalising usability

In the study, the term (practical) usability is explained as, on the one hand, intrinsic usability and, on the other, preconditional usability. Intrinsic usability means the ability to estimate the risk of recidivism and responsiveness, and the ability to give advice on administering the RISC. Preconditional usability encompasses the user friendliness of the instrument, administration time, target groups, necessary knowledge and skills of the probation and after-care worker and suchlike. Usability in the sense of the validity and reliability of the instrument is outside the scope of this study.

Research methods

The information needed to answer the research questions was collected in the following manner.

1. Quantitative analysis of 139 administered Quick Scans + a linked evaluation form. On the evaluation form, questions were asked about:
 - the degree to which the probation and after-care worker could estimate the suspect's risk of recidivism and responsiveness and give advice regarding administration of the RISC on the basis of Quick Scan;
 - the time needed to administer and fill in the Quick Scan;
 - the ease with which the suspect could be classified in one of the offence categories distinguished.

These data are analysed according to pilot location, in relation to the background characteristics of the suspect.

¹ Ultimately, no chain partners were involved in the study. In view of the present stage of development of Quick Scan, it was decided in advance to leave members of the Public Prosecution Service and judiciary out of the study. The police were not involved in the study either, as in both Roermond and The Hague, the location coordinators indicated that nothing had changed with respect to the situation before the start with Quick Scan, because early intervention interviews were already held at all times. The fact that this is now being done with a new instrument has no consequences for the police. The secretarial offices of the district courts are part of the Probation and After-Care Service, thus they are not chain partners.

2. Group interviews with probation and after-care workers. In these interviews, the initial findings are discussed of the analysis of the evaluation forms, the content of the Quick Scan (content, quantity, formulation, order and offence-relatedness of the questions), the target groups for whom Quick Scan can be used and the preconditions for proper use of the Quick Scan.
3. Telephone interviews with three work supervisors and three employees of the district court secretarial office.
On the one hand, the telephone interviews with the work supervisors dealt with the burden they themselves experience from working with Quick Scan and, on the other, with their impression of the usability of the instrument for the probation and after-care workers whom they supervise.
The telephone interviews with the district court secretaries were about the burden they experience as a result of working with Quick Scan, namely the collection and delivery of judicial documentation (criminal record) and filling in the cover sheet of the Quick Scan as much as possible.

Participants and dropouts

No Quick Scan was administered to some of the suspects who were in principle eligible for a Quick Scan. The main reasons for this were release, refusal to cooperate, transfer/transport and the fact that the suspect was already known to the examining magistrate. The suspects to whom a Quick Scan was administered differed from the dropouts particularly in respect of the type of offence of which they were suspected and the statistical risk of recidivism. The suspects to whom the Quick Scan was administered were more often suspected of relational or sexual violence and had a higher statistical risk of recidivism. These are the suspects for whom the Quick Scan and RISC are particularly intended. In addition, the distribution of the suspects to whom the Quick Scan was administered among the various offences, the gravity of the offences and several other background characteristics was so great that, given a presumed connection with the usability of Quick Scan, a great diversity of experience was gained in this pilot with respect to usability.

3. Findings

Usability of Quick Scan for estimating the risk of recidivism and the possibility to influence behaviour, and as a selection instrument for advice on whether or not to use the RISC (1,2)²

In 40% of the cases, the probation and after-care workers considered Quick Scan to be intrinsically quite usable, which means that both a good estimate of the risk of recidivism and responsiveness can be made and good advice given on administering the RISC. In the remaining 60% of the cases, according to the probation and after-care workers, Quick Scan falls short on at least one of the three aspects. Separate consideration of the three aspects shows that in 60% of the cases, the risk of recidivism can be estimated well, and in 60% of the cases the responsiveness can be estimated well, and in 78% of the Quick Scans administered, good advice could be given on the RISC.

² The numbers between brackets indicate the research questions to which an answer is given.

For an answer to the question whether the Quick Scan is usable, however, insight is needed into where the Quick Scans lead when the risk of recidivism, responsiveness and/or the RISC advice cannot be determined adequately on the basis of the Quick Scan. To what extent does this lead to unnecessary administration of the RISC³ (namely administration to suspects who are ultimately not eligible for behavioural intervention) or inadequate advice to the judiciary? No information is, however, available on this. Intrinsic usability can be increased by not administering the Quick Scan at a time that the suspect is under the influence of drugs, is very emotional or difficult to approach because of a psychological disturbance, and by asking additional questions (prestructured or by continuing to ask specific questions). Asking additional questions does, however, result in an efficiency dilemma: the need for quality (additional questions) is at odds with the quick screening for which Quick Scan is essentially intended.

User friendliness (3)

Quick Scan is experienced by the probation and after-care workers as a nice instrument, provided it is clear exactly for what and how the Quick Scan is to be used. There is one explicit point of criticism: the Excel entry program is considered as very user unfriendly. In addition, the administration of the Quick Scan on paper, followed by digital entry, is inefficient. Furthermore, the intended role of the district court secretarial office – to fill in the cover sheet and statistical data plus collecting the information for this – falls short. In The Hague, probation and after-care workers filled in the data themselves and in Roermond, the probation and after-care workers found it necessary to check the entry work of the district court secretarial office, which meant double work.

Other points for improvement are the automatic production of the final conclusion: it should come in the form of a report; and better availability of additional information which is needed to obtain the most complete possible picture of the suspect (especially the police report). Suggestions are also made to adjust several formulations and questions in the Quick Scan. This is on the understanding that, at all times, probation and after-care workers will be able to make the desired adjustments only if this does not impair the scientific requirements set on the instrument.

Administration time (4)

A predetermined maximum administration time (interview time) of 30 minutes proves to be feasible. In The Hague, this time was achieved in the test phase within a month during the early intervention interviews (during TOM sessions (sessions in which the public prosecutor offers the suspect a settlement penalty), the administration time is also less than 30 minutes, which, however, is mainly determined by the little time available for administration at the time Quick Scan is used). This time is not related to characteristics of the suspect or the offence, nor to the experience of the probation and after-care worker with administering the Quick Scan. The total administration time of the Quick Scan (incl. preparation, entry and drafting the advice) was 68 minutes at the end of the test phase. This total administration time is, however, determined by the type of offence (this also leads to variation in the number of questions asked) and by the experience of the probation and after-care worker with administering the Quick Scan.

³ With the introduction of Quick Scan, Quick Scan serves to determine if a suspect is eligible for intervention, while Risc is primarily used to determine the type of intervention.

Degree to which the QS is filled in completely (5)

The degree to which the QS is filled in completely leaves something to be desired on several points. Regarding the statistical factors, especially the data which are not known prior to the interview are lacking. They are not finally filled in after the end of the interview. With respect to the dynamic factors, the gaps range between 0-47% of the questions, spread among almost all factors. Only questions about sexual violence are always consistently filled in by the suspects of such offences. The reason for not filling in the QS completely is that the probation and after-care worker does not consider some of the questions to be meaningful or formulated properly. In addition, the difference in the order of the questions and entering of the data only afterwards may also contribute towards incomplete filling in. The final opinion on the risk of recidivism and responsiveness (“low-moderate-high”) is often not filled in (in 22% and 35%, respectively) in the right place. An opinion is, however, given in the space for an explanation.

(Un)suitability for groups of suspects (6,7,8)

Few groups of suspects emerge for whom the usability of Quick Scan is better than for others. It is, however, not very meaningful to administer it to:

- persons regarding whom it has been established beforehand that an RISc must be administered. These are mainly suspects of serious offences;
- persons with whom no discussion can be held that produces reliable answers. These are mainly suspects with whom a discussion cannot easily be held because of psychiatric problems. If relatively short-term situations of unapproachability are concerned (being under the influence of drugs or alcohol, extreme emotionality and suchlike) the Quick Scan can be administered at a later date, provided the processing time allows this.

A reservation can be made regarding the usability of Quick Scan for a few other groups of suspects:

- Quick Scan is not necessarily unusable for suspects who deny their guilt. The questions about the offence at “self-insight” should be formulated differently for these suspects. Nevertheless, it is uncertain to what extent a good enough idea can be obtained of the self-insight/responsiveness of a denying suspect.
- the Quick Scan could be administered to persons who do not speak Dutch with the assistance of an interpreter. The question in this regard is the extent to which relevant nuances and details emerge from an interview that runs through an interpreter (Do answers seem socially desirable? Can the interpreter communicate to the suspect exactly what the probation and after-care worker wants to know? etc.).

Preconditions for adequate administration of the Quick Scan (9)

- Knowledge and skills: experience with conducting early intervention interviews is required. Quick Scan is more than just a questionnaire to be administered literally. The ability to continue asking questions in the right way, within the limits set by the holding of a ‘Quick’ Scan, is important to be able to obtain a good picture of the suspect.
- Timing/organisation: in TOM sessions, the time available for administering the Quick Scan is often (too) short. In addition, the outcome of the Quick Scan does

not help much in determining the penalty, because only the choice between a community punishment order and a training order still has to be made. Using the Quick Scan before the Public Prosecution Service decides on a settlement penalty is more efficient.

- Time: The probation and after-care workers are not negative about the time it takes to administer the Quick Scan (including preparation, data entry, working out a final opinion), provided this time fits within the standard time in the work process. Administering the Quick Scan on paper, followed by digital entry, is, however, felt to be inefficient. The most time can be saved on this point.
- In addition, better communication among the chain partners about the transfer/release of suspects is desired in order to keep unnecessary travel time of probation and after-care workers to a minimum.

4. Recommendations

Below, in addition to the target groups and preconditions already mentioned, several recommendations are made, aimed at improving the intrinsic usability of Quick Scan and optimising the introduction and use of Quick Scan on a national scale.

1. The following measures can serve to increase the intrinsic usability of Quick Scan:
 - o asking additional questions. There are two possibilities for this:
 1. Additional (prestructured) questions. This increases the administration time of each Quick Scan, which is not necessary for 40% of the Quick Scans and is therefore not automatically desired. Room should, however, be made so that, at the discretion of the probation and after-care worker, (some of) the questions concerning the social network and relational problems could be posed to other suspects as well, and not just to suspects of a specific offence. The probation and after-care workers feel that these subjects are relevant for obtaining a good picture of many suspects, irrespective of the type offence.
 2. Continuing to ask non-prestructured questions. The probation and after-care workers should be better instructed about the room they may (and must) take to ask additional questions, which are different for each suspect (see also Recommendation 3).

In making the choice to ask additional questions, and choosing the way in which this is to be done, it is very important to see how the conflicting goals of speed on the one hand and good quality information on the other can be reconciled. The administration of an almost complete RISC nevertheless in this stage should be prevented.
 - o postponement of the administration of the Quick Scan if a suspect is under the influence of drugs, very emotional or difficult to approach because of a psychological disturbance.
 - o addition of a 'no opinion/cannot be estimated well' answer category to the answer categories at the final opinion on the risk of recidivism and on responsiveness.
2. Conducting a further investigation first should be considered before going ahead with the nationwide introduction of Quick Scan. This can be done in the form of a third pilot, in which, for the Quick Scan adjusted on the basis of the findings in the second

pilot, the extent is examined to which usability has been improved on all three aspects of the Quick Scan (over 40%). An alternative is to conduct a further investigation into the Quick Scans administered in this second pilot. For the 60% which does not score 'good' on at least one aspect, the quality of the RISC advice and advice to the judiciary should be examined. Another option is to implement Quick Scan in stages, while monitoring the usability and making adjustments where necessary⁴.

3. In the introduction of the instrument and its accompanying instructions, several matters need additional attention:
 - o The purpose of Quick Scan should be clarified more explicitly: what is Quick Scan to be used for and what not? On the one hand, it should be made very clear to the probation and after-care workers that the Quick Scan does not replace the entire early intervention interview or the interview prior to the TOM session. In addition, it is important to indicate the extent to which the Quick Scan can/may be used for more than just early intervention interviews and TOM sessions (especially for interviews for which no structured instrument exists yet, for example in accelerated proceedings).
 - o The room Quick Scan offers to depart from the questions and order of questions:
 - Quick Scan is intended as a guideline, whereby it is important to ask any necessary questions in greater depth on the basis of knowledge and experience. The probation and after-care workers do not seem to be sufficiently aware of this, which may cause them to say that they cannot by far estimate the risk of recidivism and responsiveness well at all times. Emphasising this room for using one's own expertise is also important for the acceptance of the instrument among the more experienced probation and after-care workers. They rather often experience a structured questionnaire as a straightjacket in which they are unable to express their professionalism adequately, and therefore have a more negative opinion of Quick Scan than the less experienced probation and after-care workers.
 - The importance of asking all questions. It should be examined whether (and if so, why) possible resistance exists among the probation and after-care workers to asking the questions which, in the pilot, were often not filled in. It is important to remove this resistance and thus prevent questions from not being asked.
 - Whether or not departure from the order of questions is allowed (this does indeed occur frequently at present).

⁴ This option can be justified on the basis of the idea that a standardised, theoretically substantiated instrument is preferable to the old working method.

4. It is preferable to use the same application as for the RISC as the entry program.
5. To prevent questions from not being filled in, "forced filling in" could be built into the entry program. When the Quick Scan is administered digitally, forced filling in could conflict with any possibility allowed to depart from the order of the questionnaire. The importance of each measure should then be weighed.
6. Having the cover sheet and statistical factors filled in by the district court secretarial office should be reconsidered. If the district court secretarial office does this, these employees must have sufficient knowledge to be able to fill in all questions adequately (particularly relevant in relation to the offence category), so that checking by the probation and after-care workers will not be necessary and double work is avoided. In addition, there should be as little time as possible between the filling in of the cover sheet and statistical factors and the time at which an appointment is made for administration of the Quick Scan. This prevents time being spent on entering the data, while ultimately no Quick Scan is administered because of the release/transfer of a suspect.
7. The advice on the administration of the RISC (yes/no) should be included in the Quick Scan. First of all, this is in the interest of the uniformity which the instrument envisages: certain combinations of the scores on risk of recidivism and responsiveness could be programmed to automatically give positive or negative advice on the administration of the RISC, while also offering an opportunity for a reasoned departure from this. Inclusion of the RISC recommendation would also be necessary for any third pilot and for a validation test of the Quick Scan. This (but also a different) form of registration of the RISC recommendation can give insight into the pending cases, because the number of positive RISC recommendations will be a good indicator of the actual number of RISC's to be administered in a certain period.
8. For TOM sessions, a different time should be considered for using the Quick Scan. The instrument can play a greater role if the Quick Scan is used before the Public Prosecution Service can decide on a settlement penalty. If the present time of administration is maintained, it would be advisable to examine the extent to which the public prosecutor actually uses the information obtained on the basis of the Quick Scan. This should subsequently be made very clear to the probation and after-care workers as well.