

# Psychological Maturity Assessment Identifying Maturity Stages in Young Adults

Professor Amanda Kirby

# Psychological Maturity

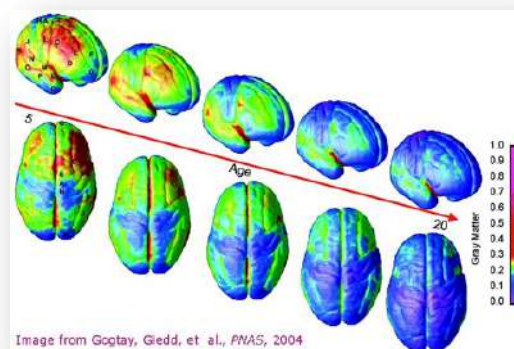
**Emerging adulthood** is the name given to the important stage (16-25 years old) that bridges adolescence and adulthood, when the individual is usually dependent on their parents. Arnett (1994) describes this time as a distinct period in terms of identity exploration. The adolescent requires two separate processes to become an adult: separation from parents/carers and individuation and development of a sense of self (Meeus *et al.*, 2005).

The transitional period from late adolescence to young adulthood is characterized by changes that involve multiple dimensions, including biological, psychological and social (Rocque, 2015). Maturation is referring to developmental transition in which individuals improve their ability to control emotions and behaviours. It can be influenced by an array of factors.

**Psychosocial maturity** refers to improved socio-emotional competence and adaptive functioning among adolescents (Galambos *et al.*, 2005). Steinberg & Cauffman (1996) devised three main categories to encompass psychosocial maturity:

- **Responsibility** includes self-reliance, self-esteem and a well-developed identity. These traits refer to a better perceived self-image.
- **Temperance** is related to controlling impulsive behaviours and possessing a higher level of self-control. It is a regulatory mechanism that helps prevent seeking immediate gratification, similar to self-control, as explained by Gottfredson & Hirschi (1990).
- **Perspective** is defined as the ability to foresee short- and long-term consequences and make decisions within a larger context. Perspective can also be seen as a trait that indicates an improved future orientation.

All three components are expected to work in a harmonious manner to form psychosocial maturity. Evidence shows that Young Adults differ from adults with regards to self-regulation, decision making capacity and understanding the long term consequences of their actions.



Young Adults in prison are not only transitioning to adulthood and therefore going through physiological and psychological changes. Many will have numerous needs that add to the complexity of them reaching maturation whilst in a custodial environment.

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# Psychological Maturity

Young persons' development and behaviour has been noted to be influenced by peer-peer relationships (Dishion *et al.*, 2010). As a consequence of this, if someone is mixing with peers that are behaving in a maladaptive way this can have a malign influence on their behaviour.

The period of adolescence and emerging adulthood is also recognised as a time when the brain continues to develop, especially the pre-frontal cortex which is responsible for planning, time management and control of emotions and impulses (Taylor *et al.*, 2015).

There is also evidence that specific factors in the *past* can influence current and future psychological wellbeing including the presence of more than one adverse childhood experiences e.g., witnessing domestic violence, parental separation, and/or parental mental illness or substance misuse (Hughes *et al.*, 2016).

There is also some evidence that some individuals may be more delayed in terms of brain development than the general population and in particular in those with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities( who are Neurodivergent), the 'group within the group' (Gioia *et al.*, 2002).

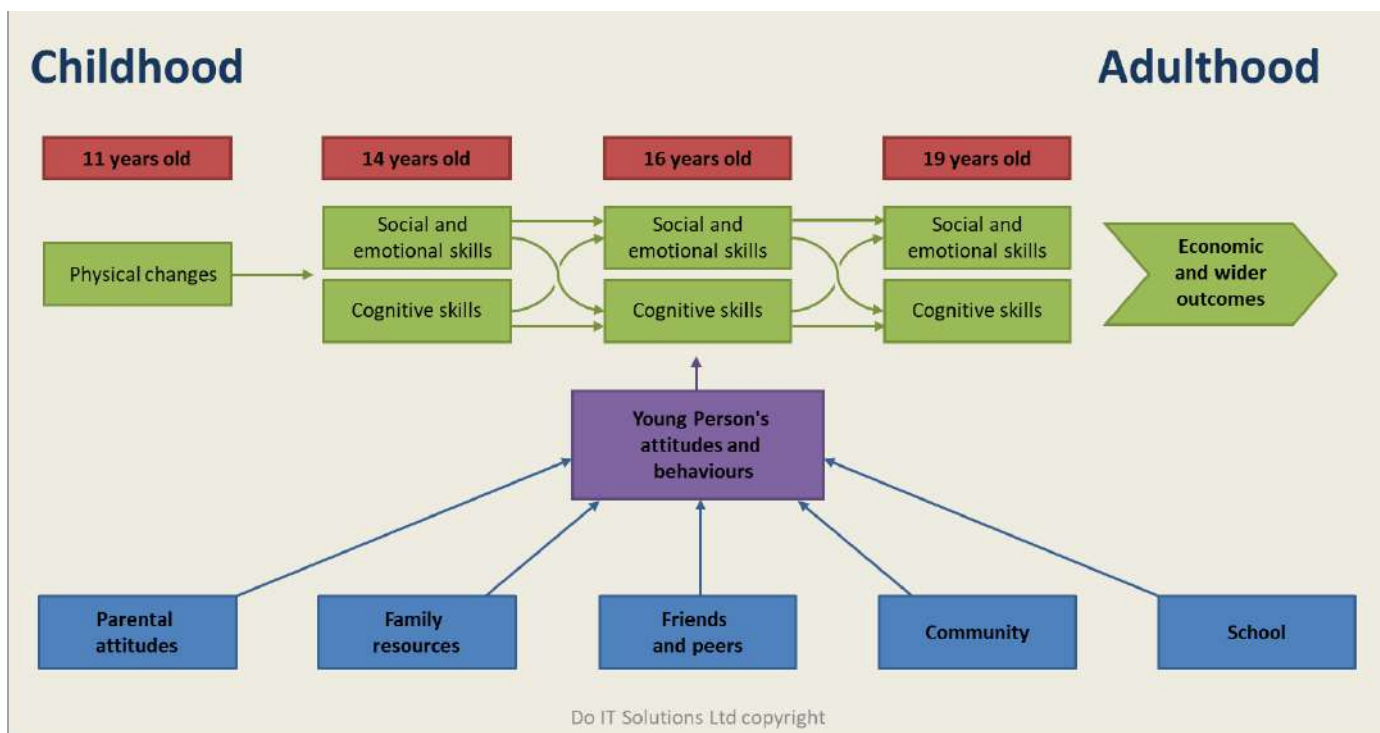
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# Psychological Maturity and offending behaviours

The reoffending rate within one year of release for those who are 18 to 25 years is 10.5 % higher than adults (56.1%, compared to 45.6% of those aged 25+).

Studies have suggested that Young Adults with a low level of maturity has a higher risk of reoffending (Rocque 2014; Schubert *et al.* 2016). Assessing Young Adults against key maturation factors allows for improved and early identification of the areas where targeted intervention would help to support their development and assist their maturation into adulthood.

There is a growing body of literature considering the factors at play that may result in youth being less mature especially in the context of the Criminal Justice System. A combination of several factors may result in some people being even more vulnerable.

Monahan *et al.* (2009) undertook research with individuals who were 14 -22 years and showed youths who persisted in antisocial behaviour exhibited deficits in elements of psychosocial maturity, particularly in *impulse control*, *suppression of aggression* and *future orientation*.

Four factors have been described to measure maturation rates:

- **Perspective** (understanding consequences, empathy)
- **Temperance** \*(recklessness/risk taking, managing anger, impulsivity)
- **Responsibility** (over-reliance on and/or influenced by others)
- **Future Orientation** (long term consequences of actions, planning ahead)

\*The temperance measure consistently predicted self-reported total, violent, and nonviolent delinquency for boys (Cruise *et al.*, 2008).

*“Although the challenges and stresses of incarceration would tax the faculties of even those most adept at coping with adversity, adolescent offenders face this situation with the added disadvantage of immaturity. Incarceration separates youth from their parents at a time in development when youths' well-being (Helsen, Vollebergh, & Meeus, 2000) and acquisition of coping skills (Patterson & McCubbin, 1987) are still influenced heavily by the family.”*

Cauffman *et al.*, 2012

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# Psychological Maturity and offending behaviours

There are some relevant factors at play that have been shown to influence social and psychological maturation. These have been less well described in the Criminal Justice context, despite them being more common in some Young Adults in the Criminal Justice System than in the mainstream population. These factors include:

- Presence of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), especially the impulsivity often associated with this.
- A lack of positive parental input.
- Being or having been a LACYP (Looked After Children and Young People; Rees 2012).
- A history of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
- Presence of other developmental disorders, including Learning Disability.
- Length of incarceration.

In a study by Dmitrieva *et al.* (2012) looking at psychosocial maturity, the total amount of time incarcerated in a residential treatment facility, but not a secure setting, had a negative effect on the developmental trajectory of psychosocial maturity.

Age at incarceration moderated the effect of recent incarceration. Youths who perceived their incarceration setting as unsafe were shown to have a decline in temperance and Youths who declined in antisocial behaviour showed increases in psychosocial maturity

Low orientation to the future and a strong inclination toward immediate gratification are central components of poor self-control. There is a need to consider what elements of this are more important such as planning ahead, time perspective, anticipation of future consequences.

Impulse control and suppression of aggression are linked to desistance from antisocial behaviour during the transition from adolescence to

adulthood (Cauffman & Steinberg, 2000; Perrone *et al.*, 2004; Pratt & Cullen, 2000; Pratt *et al.*, 2004).

Personal responsibility, resistance to peer influence and consideration of others also increase over the course of late adolescence. Although there is variability in individuals' levels and patterns of growth along these dimensions, individual differences in mean levels or patterns of growth in these aspects of maturity are not predictive of persistent antisocial behaviour.

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# Do-IT Psychological Maturity assessment

## Taking a biopsychosocial approach

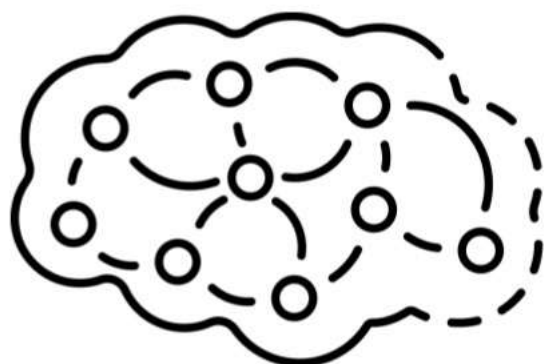
Taking a biopsychosocial approach allows for all relevant information about the Young Adult to be captured. The break down of responses (rather than just a score) provides an in-depth picture. This allows the right interventions to be targeted to support with each Young Adult with their maturation into adulthood.

## What to measure?

Measurement of the Young Adult against the four maturation factors is one element of the assessment.

However, to gain a true reflection additional questions relating to other factors known to influence maturation need to be asked. These include questions regarding the Young Adult's:

- Personal background.
- Age at first incarceration.
- History of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).
- Presence of developmental disorders, including Learning Disability.



## Are self-report measures valid?

Self-reports of antisocial behaviour are both reliable and valid. For example, one study showed that self-reported antisocial behaviour is highly correlated with official arrest data (Brame *et al.*, 2004). There is some evidence that self-report may present lower scores and so the need to capture other factors is important in the Young Adult's life.

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# Psychological Maturity assessment

## Learning Disability (LD)

Young Adults with LD may have day-to-day functional and independent living difficulties that make decision-making much harder. They may be more likely to be bullied, may find it harder to engage in peer-to-peer dialogue, are at greater risk of self harm and may have less attention paid to them as they are less able to ask for support (Docherty, 2010). They may also have a greater risk of additional physical, mental, social and health needs.

## Attention Hyperactivity Deficit Disorder (ADHD)

Young Adults diagnosed with ADHD, or those who have been undiagnosed but exhibit the traits, will have challenges against the maturation factors. Impulsivity, lack of understanding of consequences and a tendency to be easily influenced are all traits of ADHD (Craig *et al.*, 2016).

## Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) (also known as Acquired Brain Injury (ABI)

Research has shown that those affected by TBI can be misdiagnosed as having ADHD as both conditions present similarly. As noted by Williams (2012), there is also emerging evidence that childhood TBI is linked to crime: in a study of young people in custody in England, 60% reported some kind of 'head injury'. TBI can have an impact on the pre-frontal cortex and increase impulsivity and difficulties with organising and planning (Gioia *et al.*, 2002).

## Mental health challenges

The ability to focus, plan and make appropriate decisions may be influenced by the type and degree of mental illness present, e.g., schizophrenia or bipolar disorder (Bortolato *et al.*, 2015). These conditions (diagnosed or undiagnosed), along with difficulties with substance misuse, may be another factor that results in impulsive behaviour and poor decision making.

## Nutrition

Household food insecurity has been linked to elevated risk of mental health problems (Poole-Di Salvo *et al.*, 2016), which may have knock-on effects on psychological maturity.

## Looked-After Children and Young People

If a Young Adult has been in care, their maturity levels may have been affected more so than the general population. A study by Rees (2012) identified that Looked After Children and Young People performed less well in core domains including mental health, emotional literacy and cognitive ability compared with general population norms. Instability of the home setting may result in a lack of parent figure and less opportunities for pro-social modelling.

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# Psychological Maturity assessment

## Past abuse and/or neglect

Experience of abuse or neglect in childhood is associated with increased impulsivity (Shin *et al.*, 2016). This may at least partially explain the well-established link between childhood maltreatment and later criminal and antisocial behaviour (Kerig & Becker, 2015).

## Exclusion or lack of school

A lack of schooling or being moved around the education system may result in less opportunity for social engagement and learning pro-social behaviour. Thus, this may influence a Young Adult's overall level of maturation.

## Age of first incarceration

The age of first incarceration may impact on a Young Adult's maturation. Incarceration is known to cause short-term slowing of juveniles' gains in psychosocial maturity (Dmitrieva *et al.*, 2012). This may occur due to young offenders missing out on pro-social experiences and exposure to situations that would support their maturity. They may also, whilst incarcerated, mix with peers who reinforce their existing criminal behaviour (Damm & Gorinas, 2016). Those serving longer sentences are at greater risk of this reinforcing peer effect.

## Youth homelessness

While youth homelessness *per se* does not influence maturation, it may be a marker of additional adversity and/or a lack of parent/carer support. Homeless Young Adults are at greater risk of substance misuse, poorer health outcomes and mental illness (Childress *et al.*, 2015).

## Criminal 'style'

Young offenders who exclusively, or increasingly as they mature, commit solo offences demonstrate greater psychosocial maturity, lower rates of anxiety, fewer psychopathic traits, less self-reported offending and less gang involvement than youth offenders who commit a mixture of solo offences and offences with co-offender(s) (Goldweber *et al.*, 2011). This research evidence firmly debunks existing media stereotypes of solo offenders as dangerous, psychopathic loners.

*"It is recommended that further, more in-depth assessment should be conducted for any individual 'screened' as having maturity issues."*

Wakeling & Barnett (2017)

*"Individuals who are involved in comparable levels of antisocial activity as teenagers—even serious antisocial activity—are heterogeneous in their psychological functioning."*

Monahan *et al.* (2009)

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# Using Do-IT Profiler

Do-IT Profiler is an accessible, person-centred, computer-based, modular screening and assessment system which can identify strengths and challenges (both intrinsic and extrinsic) in a person's life and provide practical guidance for the individual and staff working with them.

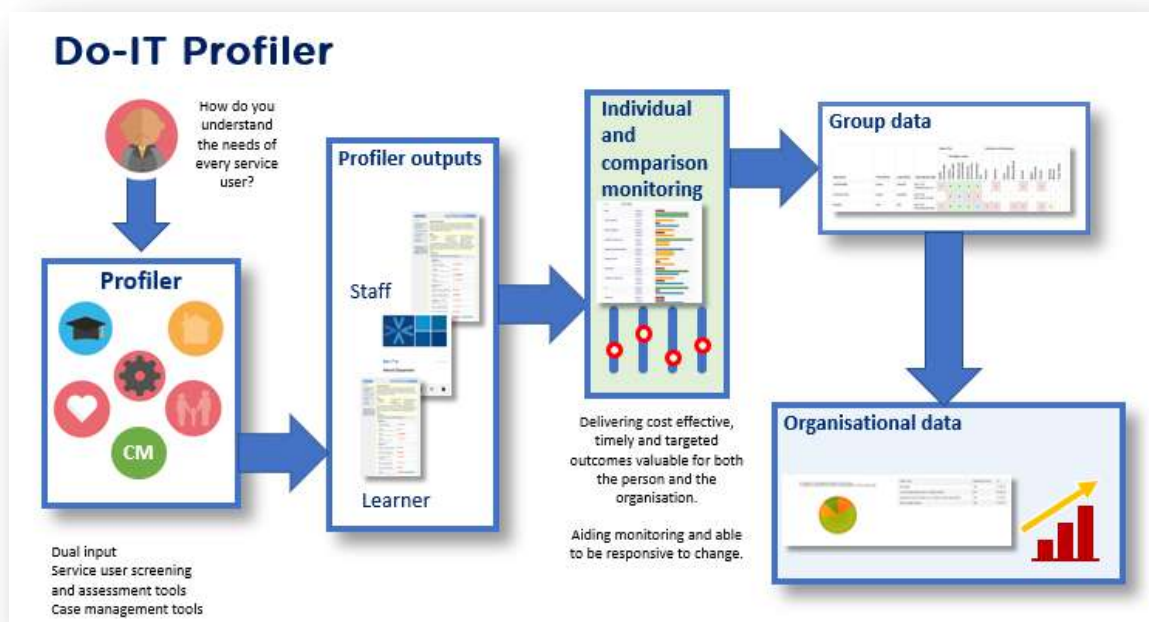
Experience, research and testing over the past ten years has allowed the development of tools by international experts in the fields of learning and neuroscience. These include tools specifically for assessing Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (LDD) in the context of the prison. The system captures background information about the person - their past experiences as well as current relating to education, health, home and offending behaviour. Together, this information along with additional specific questions relating to maturity can provide a detailed picture of the Young Adult.

The modules available can: capture baseline demographics; assess job readiness and

motivation, employability skills, literacy, numeracy and ICT skills; and assist with health and wellbeing.

Once the Profiler modules are completed by the Young Adult, targeted resources and guidance are immediately available, based on the individual's responses. Information is given for the individual AND for staff. Resources are in multiple formats, e.g., sound, video and text format, to meet different learning styles.

Profiler is built on an efficient Management Information Platform that collates all data automatically, enabling data-driven decision-making and planning to be undertaken easily and efficiently. A quick picture of a group of Young Adults' maturation levels can be obtained to target who is more vulnerable and pin-point where support should be given.



*"The young always have the same problem - how to rebel and conform at the same time. They have now solved this by defying their parents and copying one another."*

Quentin Crisp

# How can Do-IT Profiler help?

Using Do-IT Profiler's Maturity Assessment has a number of advantages:

- Standardised questions capture factors that could impact on maturity levels, ensuring consistency of both the questions asked and the way they are asked.
- Online self-assessment removes the potential bias known to occur when vulnerable young people are questioned by staff members or other authority figures (Davies & Morgan, 2005).
- Easily used with large groups – tested in settings such as HMP Parc over many years.
- No additional data entry required – all data is automatically analysed.
- Rapid assessment – as Profiler is already in place, the additional questions will take no more than 10 minutes to complete.

Do-IT Profiler can provide a Maturity Assessment that is completed by the Young Adult.

The Young Adult completes the questions online using the accessibility tools, including a variety of text and background colour options and text-to-speech. With a built-in replay button, Young Adults are able to hear the question read several times if required.

The Young Adult's responses are automatically calculated and added to the Executive Summary report already *in situ* and/or a 'Maturity Assessment Report'. The latter is produced instantly with an indication of who is most vulnerable along with the details and suggested sign-posted routes pertaining to this.

Maturity Assessment summary	
<b>Key</b> <span style="color: red;">●</span> High vulnerability <span style="color: blue;">●</span> Low vulnerability <span style="color: orange;">●</span> Medium vulnerability <span style="color: green;">●</span> No vulnerability	
Dynamic Factors	
Perspective	Low vulnerability
Temperance	Becomes angry easily, acts impulsively
Responsibility	Often influenced by others
Future Orientation	Some difficulty with planning ahead
Trouble Coping	Severe difficulties with coping
Static Factors	
Excluded from school	Yes 2-3 times
Age of first incarceration	15
Care leaver	Yes
Living arrangements before prison	Homeless
Disability/Difficulty	ASD
Age of leaving education	Under 12
Additional support at school	Yes
Head injury	Yes
Recommended Interventions	
Based on the responses given, the following are suggested interventions that could support the maturation of the young adult. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Anger management and dealing with emotions</li> <li>- Time management</li> <li>- Organising and planning</li> </ul>	

Username	First Name	Last Name	Last Result Date	The Way I Learn			
				Reading and writing skills	Attention and concentration	Social and communication...	Coordination and
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144546	144546	144546	07/04/2016	3	1	3	3
144547	144547	144547	07/04/2016	4	4	4	4
144548	144548	144548	07/04/2016	2	3	4	2
144549	144549	144549	28/11/2017	1	2	2	3

From the management dashboard, the staff member is able to quickly identify those Young Adults with low maturity levels individually, as a group and at the whole-prison level using the easy-to-identify RAG banding.

## References

Davies, M. & Morgan, A. (2005) Using computer-assisted self-interviewing (CASI) questionnaires to facilitate consultation and participation with vulnerable young people. *Child Abuse Review*, 14(6), pp. 389-406.

# How can Do-IT Profiler help?

## Data and Outcomes

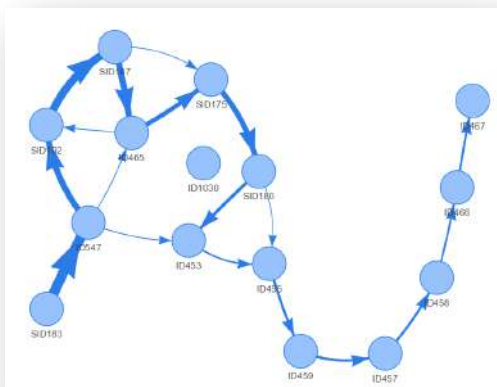
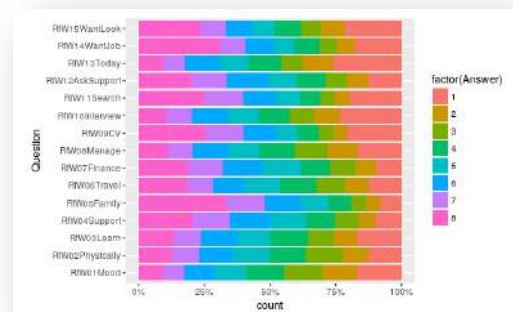
### Outcome Measures

Outcome measures may be established prior to the use of the Psychological Maturity Assessment to identify the impact of the interventions on the maturity of the Young Adults.

- Number of Young Adults progressing to Enhanced IEP status.
- Number of Young Adults gaining employment in low-risk jobs within the prison.
- Number of Young Adults receiving adjudications.
- Amount of C&R usage with Young Adults.
- Number of Young Adults engaged with Education and Work.

### Predictive analytics

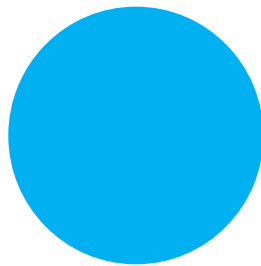
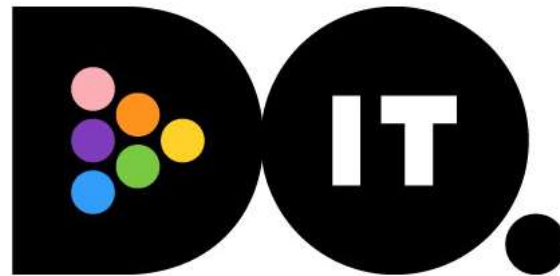
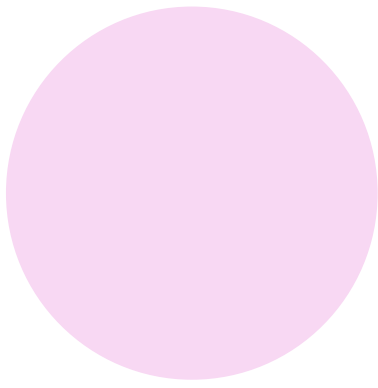
The data provided by the Psychological Maturity Assessment can also provide a means of predicting those who are most vulnerable as a result of their maturity level.



### Data Analytics

Helping you make the most of data received from Do-IT Profiler.

- + Analysing Survey Data
- + Downloading files from Do-IT Profiler - Background data
- + Downloading files from Do-IT Profiler - Export User Data
- + Data Analytics for Decision Making
- + Changing the Paradigm of Educational Assessment



## Contact

For further information

[www.doitprofiler.com](http://www.doitprofiler.com)