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## Jack Woodley Case Sheds Light on Rules Protecting Young Criminals' Identities

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The identities of all ten teenagers convicted of killing Jack Woodley have now been made public after court orders banning their names expired. The case has brought renewed attention to how and why young offenders are sometimes shielded from identification in the UK, and under what circumstances judges decide to lift those restrictions.

In the UK, the age of criminal responsibility is ten, meaning a child can be arrested or charged from that age. Serious crimes committed by children or teenagers are tried in the Crown Court, where proceedings are usually open to the public. However, judges can

impose Section 45 orders under the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999, making it a criminal offence to publish any information that could identify someone under 18 involved in criminal proceedings. This includes their name, address, school, or photographs.

Jack Woodley's murder in Houghton-le-Spring in 2021 remains one of the most shocking crimes in the North East. The 18-year-old had been enjoying a day out when he was surrounded by a group of strangers aged between 14 and 17. He was kicked, punched, stamped on, and stabbed in the back with a Rambo-style knife. He died in the hospital the next day. All ten attackers were convicted of murder and given life sentences, with minimum terms ranging from eight to 17 years, adding up to 124 years in detention.

Their names could not be made public until the youngest, Lewis Rose, turned 18. Once the Section 45 orders expired, the press were free to identify all those involved.

The same legal protection has applied in other serious cases. In 2017, Jordan Joe Robson was just 16 when he climbed through a stranger's window and raped her. Despite his conviction, a judge ruled that his identity would remain protected until he turned 18. His victim, Becky Chaplin, later waived her right to anonymity and expressed relief when Robson's name was published, saying it could help prevent further attacks.

In other instances, courts have decided to lift restrictions before a young offender reaches 18. In 2019, Ewan Ireland stabbed Peter Duncan to death in Newcastle's Eldon Square. Although initially unnamed due to a reporting ban, his identity was revealed weeks later when he turned 18. In the case of Tomasz Oleszak's murder, the judge removed the anonymity order immediately after conviction, ruling that public interest outweighed concerns for the defendant's welfare.

Another high-profile example was the murder of schoolgirl Holly Newton. Reporting restrictions meant the killer, Logan MacPhail, could not be identified, and key details of the case were withheld. After his conviction, a High Court judge ruled his identity should be made public, stating that the nature of the crime and the need for open reporting justified lifting the ban.

When deciding whether to make or remove a Section 45 order, judges must balance the welfare of the young offender with the principle of open justice. Factors include the seriousness of the crime, the level of public interest, and how close the offender is to their 18th birthday.

