

Wiltshire Probation Area

Inspection report

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Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) works in partnership with Her Majesty's Inspectorates of Prison and Probation and inspects the management and provision of learning and skills for offenders across the whole range of custodial establishments and probation areas. Inspections may include those serving whole or part of their sentence in the community.

Inspectors judge the quality of the provision against the *Common Inspection Framework* for further education and skills 2009 (*Common Inspection Framework* 2009) and contribute to the inspection frameworks of Her Majesty's Inspectorates of Prisons and Probation.

Information about the probation area

The probation area covered by Wiltshire Probation Trust (the trust) consists of two unitary authorities, Swindon and Wiltshire. The head office is in Trowbridge and offices located in Chippenham, Devizes, Salisbury and Swindon. Probation service staff, private training providers and further education colleges provide education, training and employment support. The area includes one prison, Her Majesty's Prison Earlestone.

Around 189,500 people live in Swindon, 3.7% of the south-west population. The population profile includes a high proportion of children and working-age people and a 4.8% minority ethnic population. The employment rate is high. The banking, finance and insurance sector accounts for over a quarter of jobs and manufacturers, such as Honda, are also major employers.

The percentage of Swindon's workforce with no qualifications, 6.6%, is the same as that for the south-west and below the national figure of 8.9%. A relatively low proportion of its workforce is qualified to National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 4. Eighteen of Swindon's 19 areas are ranked among the most deprived 20% nationally. The overall recorded crime rate in 2007/08 was 33.4 per 1,000 people, compared with 28.5 in the south-west and 35.7 nationally. Of particular significance are offences relating to violence against the person (17.7%), theft from a vehicle (6.7%) and robbery (1.3%).

Wiltshire's population of 452,600 is nearly 9% of the south-west population. It includes a high proportion of children and only 1.6% from a minority ethnic group. The proportion of the workforce with no qualifications is below the national average and the proportion qualified to NVQ 4 is also slightly below. Just over half of Wiltshire's jobs are in the public administration, education and health, distribution, hotels and restaurants sectors. The county also has a relatively large manufacturing sector. Three areas are among the most deprived 20% nationally, two in Trowbridge and Salisbury City. The unemployment rate is 4.2% compared with 3.9% in the south-west.

Wiltshire has the second lowest crime rate in the south-west and the eighth lowest nationally for key offences in 2007/08. This includes violence against the person (10.6%), theft from a vehicle (4.1%), burglary (2.5%) and robbery (0.2%).

Information about the offender learning and employability providers:

Lead providers and their subcontractors	Number of learners on discrete provision	Types of provision
Wiltshire College	1 waiting to start (new provision) 3	Literacy and numeracy Other vocational courses
Learning Curve	77 17	Level 1 employability award Short vocational courses
N-ergy	11 5	BTEC level 1 employability (Way4ward project) NVQ level 2 Performing manufacturing operations (PMO)
New College	2	DIY project
BTCV	2	New Deal provision/work experience
Swindon College	1	Vocational course
TABS	2	Vocational training
North Wessex Training	3	Vocational training
Pitman Training	1	ITQ
Progress 2 Work	1	Employment support
Wiltshire Probation	98 3	ETE gateway Way4ward project

The following text is Ofsted's contribution to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation's offender management inspection.

Summary report

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade: satisfactory
Capacity to improve	Grade: satisfactory
Quality of provision	Grade descriptor satisfactory
Assessment and sentence planning	
Implementation of interventions	
Achieving and sustaining outcomes	satisfactory
Leadership and management	satisfactory
Equality and diversity	satisfactory
Safeguarding	satisfactory

Overall effectiveness, including capacity to improve

Most offenders received a satisfactory diagnostic assessment before starting learning activities. Arrangements for induction into unpaid work and community payback projects were generally good and most offenders gained an accredited employability award. Achievement rates for offenders into sustained employment were above probation targets. Achievement rates of literacy and numeracy qualifications had been high over the previous two years but were low for 2009/10. Teaching and learning overall were satisfactory with some good aspects. Offenders' literacy and numeracy support needs were insufficiently assessed at induction to community payback and their individual learning plans failed to identify meaningful targets to monitor progress.

The trust's strategic planning for offender learning and employability was clear. Communications within the probation area on a day-to-day operational basis were very effective and staff worked well together to share good practice. The trust's commitment to equality and diversity was satisfactory. However, more work was needed to promote and reinforce equality and diversity to offenders. The trust's obligations towards offenders as vulnerable adults were satisfactory.

The trust's capacity to make and sustain improvements was satisfactory. The range and quality of unpaid work placements had significantly improved and were very good and particularly effective in meeting offenders' needs. Information, advice and guidance was very good and well-delivered by probation staff across the county. The provision of literacy and numeracy support had decreased in recent months due

to insufficient government funding. However, plans to resolve this, by using Wiltshire College's, provision were well advanced. Quality improvement and the trust's self-assessment arrangements required further development as did their collection and use of data.

What does Wiltshire Probation Trust need to do to improve further?

- Improve the initial assessment process to ensure that offenders' learning support needs are clearly identified and used to develop a meaningful and effective learning plan which contributes fully to sentence plans.
- Increase the range of accredited literacy and numeracy support, the quantity of accredited training and implement arrangements to recognise and record non-accredited learning across the county.
- Implement self-assessment arrangements and use data to support target setting, as effective tools to measure and further improve the quality of education, training and employment provision.

Offender perspective - learning and employability as confirmed by inspectors.

A total of 46 offenders were interviewed as part of the inspection process, individually or in groups. Many offenders felt that learning and employability skills interventions helped improve their prospects for employment and their self-confidence. Most offenders appreciated the advice given to them by education, training and employment officers and external agencies, about applying for jobs and dealing with disclosure. Those offenders on unpaid work felt very well supported, and many felt that the opportunities to improve their skills were good. They recognised and valued their chance to pay back to the community. Some offenders commented that access to literacy and numeracy programmes was poor. Women offenders interviewed appreciated the opportunities to work in a women only group on unpaid work projects although many preferred to work in mixed groups. Some offenders interviewed were unaware of the opportunity of using 20% of unpaid work for education, training or employment related activities.

Main inspection report

The quality of provision

Grade: satisfactory

Assessment and sentence planning

Education, training and employment related information, advice and guidance provision was very good. Education, training and employment officers offered good and prompt support across the county. Additional staff had recently been recruited to ensure that prompt support was offered to those offenders in geographically hard to reach areas. Relationships between officers and offenders were highly productive and purposeful in finding helpful ways to overcome barriers to employment. Probation staff education, training and employment champions worked in each office, meeting frequently to identify and share good practice in supporting offenders. Some staff extended their working day to ensure that employed offenders benefitted.

Learning and employability related induction arrangements were well developed and effective. The Learning Curve staff provided a comprehensive accredited induction into unpaid work projects over two days at weekends. Tutors used a variety of stimulating activities in a welcoming environment on probation premises. Offenders were fully aware of health and safety requirements and used personal and protective equipment appropriately. All projects were checked well before acceptance and closely supervised. However, during induction, staff overlooked opportunities to challenge inappropriate language and stereotypical comments. The promotion and reinforcement of equality and diversity at induction were insufficient.

Offender managers' promotion of education, training and employment was good and many of them placed sufficient importance to it as an activity. Offender managers were keen and supportive and many made appropriate referrals. Referrals were timely and exceeded probation targets. The use of education, training and employment as a specified activity was low, but it was rarely used as a requirement following breach of order.

Initial screening was completed at pre-sentence assessment followed by diagnostic assessments at induction to learning and skills. Initial assessment findings were not used well to develop learning plans and targets were often too general. Initial assessment of literacy and numeracy support needs at induction into community payback was insufficiently developed. In most cases, relevant information was exchanged promptly between offender managers, community payback supervisors and education, training and employment officers.

Implementation of interventions

Employability skills training and experience provided through unpaid work was good. Supervisors and placement providers were good role models of appropriate values and behaviours in their interactions with clients. Offenders demonstrated good vocational skills including the use of tools and equipment. They worked well together, were aware of the need for punctuality and demonstrated responsibility to the beneficiary.

The range and quality of unpaid work activities were very good. Individual and group placements provided a wide range of experiences for offenders and many were located with well established voluntary organisations with considerable experience of the client group. The very supportive beneficiary organisations offered considerable practical support, were flexible in managing offenders, and recognised the valuable contribution they made to their causes. Some organisations commented that they could not survive without the support provided by offenders. Offenders achieved well in a 'Lights for learning' project that provided accredited awards at level 2. Other work placements provided skills training opportunities, which provided evidence for an accredited employability award. Employed offenders attended well-managed placements at weekends and women offenders were offered discrete women only projects.

Liaison and partnership working with a range of organisations, support agencies and local learning providers, as part of a multi-agency approach to interventions, was good. Good links with a range of organisations had enabled education, training and employment officers to make appropriate referrals when specialist advice and support was required, or required programmes not within the trust's scope.

A limited range of short vocational courses, based on offenders' feedback, was designed and delivered for the first time in September 2010 to replace provision previously funded by the Offender Learning and Skills Service. These courses included preparation for the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) test, construction skills, driving theory, health and safety, money management and start your own business.

In Trowbridge, two offenders who previously failed to participate in education, training or employment support attended all four sessions of a CSCS course, passed the test and progressed to a driving theory course. Two offenders in Salisbury had achieved a customer service qualification and progressed to a national qualification in travel and tourism. Further work was needed to expand the short programme provision and to ensure it was responsive to learners' identified training needs. Plans to increase the range of programmes included horticulture, catering, painting and decorating, and retailing. Some offenders' skills development was not formally accredited and the recognition and recording of progress and achievement process required further development.

Following changes in the funding arrangements for learning and skills in July 2010, literacy and numeracy support was no longer provided on probation premises.

Wiltshire College had recently been contracted to deliver literacy and numeracy training but this had not started. Literacy and numeracy were not contextualised and linked to the short course programme. Overall, learners had insufficient opportunities to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. The development of learners' information and communication technology skills had not been sufficiently addressed.

Achieving and sustaining outcomes

Grade: satisfactory

Job outcomes were good. Data showed that approximately 50% of offenders referred to education, training and employment obtained employment. The progression of offenders into sustained employment was significantly above the probation trust's targets. Offenders achieved well in 2008/09 with most offenders completing their learning aim. In 2009/10, 20% of those who started on accredited programmes achieved but a further 62% were still in training and expected to achieve.

Opportunities for offenders to achieve literacy and numeracy qualifications were good over the previous two years at over 60%. This has reduced to 24% in the current year due to lack of provision. Completion of short courses was very good with the majority of offenders gaining qualifications.

Insufficient accredited training was available. Although offenders on unpaid work were developing good vocational and employability skills, their competence was not always formally accredited. Very few accredited training courses were available alongside the unpaid work activities.

Leadership and management

Grade: satisfactory

Wiltshire Probation Trust had a clear and strong focus on supporting and developing the education, training and employment pathway to meet individual offenders' needs. Recent changes to the management structure had benefitted the learning and skills provision; communications between staff in all offices had significantly improved. A clear quality improvement plan had been produced which highlighted areas of strength and areas requiring further development. Thorough and effective monitoring processes had been introduced and showing measurable impact. These included, for example: the development of partnership arrangements with colleges and private training providers to improve the provision of literacy and numeracy support; the transfer of information, advice and guidance into the probation service and the development of short learning programmes.

The education, training and employment pathway was well managed. Officers were well-qualified and experienced with some qualified to NVQ level 4 in information, advice and guidance. One was qualified to level 3 and working towards a level 4 qualification. Many officers had been in post a number of years and were confident and able in working with the client group.

Unpaid work provision was well managed across the county. Communication between education, training and employment officers, offender managers, unpaid work supervisors, placement managers and supervisors was very good. Links with beneficiaries was particularly effective. Productive partnerships maximised training and job opportunities for offenders, particularly joint work with local councils. Individual placements were managed well and provided very good skills development and employment prospects.

The promotion of equality and diversity was generally satisfactory. Supervisors and employers/placement providers were sensitive to the needs of offenders and ensured that they understood the needs of the public and the tasks they were asked to complete. Working relationships were respectful. Offenders felt safe on unpaid work placements. However, staff missed opportunities to reinforce equality and diversity at community payback induction sessions and did not challenge the inappropriate language and behaviour of some offenders enough. Data were not used to determine and compare achievement of different groups across the various areas of the county.

Safeguarding arrangements to support offenders, as vulnerable adults, were satisfactory. In most cases, offender managers ensured that all relevant staff were effectively aware of offenders' diversity needs. All providers completed an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check for relevant staff. Appropriate policies were in place and staff had received training on risk assessments.

Insufficient statistical data were collected and used to inform management decisions and set targets for improvement. The value and accuracy of data collected lacked clarity. A database was being developed to integrate with the probation service offender data recording system (CRAMS) but at the time of inspection, this had not been fully implemented.

Quality improvement arrangements were underdeveloped. The clearly defined staffing structure placed a definite focus on education, training and employment and learning and skills within the trust's reducing reoffending agenda. The trust placed an over reliance on providers' own quality assurance processes. Processes to monitor the quality of education, training and employment provision and fully establish self-assessment as a tool for continuous improvement across the county had not been introduced.

Information about the inspection

1. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) assisted by two other inspectors and the Wiltshire Probation Trust's Assistant Chief Executive Officer for Interventions as co-ordinator, carried out the inspection. Inspectors took account of improvement/development plans, previous inspection reports, reports from the inspectorate's monitoring visit and data on learners and their achievement.
2. Inspectors used a range of methods to gather the views of learners including group and individual interviews. They also visited learning sessions, assessments, progress reviews and unpaid work placements. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes offered.

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