

Avon and Somerset Probation Area

Inspection report

Unique reference number:	50573
Name of lead inspector:	Simon Cutting HMI
Last day of inspection:	3 December 2010
Type of provider:	Probation Trust Avon & Somerset Probation Trust
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The 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 Avon and Somerset Probation Area

Avon and Somerset consists of five local authorities including Bristol, South Gloucestershire, North Somerset, Somerset, Bath and North East Somerset. The area has a population of 1.5 million, is the 10th largest probation area, and covers 4,853 square miles.

Avon and Somerset Probation Trust operates through three local delivery units which reflect the geography and infrastructure of the area. Bristol has the sixth highest crime rate per head of population amongst local authorities in England and Wales. In 2009/10, the probation trust managed over 5,700 offenders. Of these, 61% received a community order, 24% were in custody and 15% were on licence. Avon and Somerset Probation Trust prepared over 4,800 pre-sentence reports for magistrates and Crown courts. Of these 77% were fast or oral reports. Offenders completed 151,534 hours of work on community payback projects.

The probation trust employs 536 staff in over 30 locations across the Avon and Somerset area including in four approved premises, male prisons at Leyhill, Bristol and Shepton Mallet, a women’s prison at Eastwood Park and Eden House and a day centre for women in Bristol. A dedicated team of 15 probation trust staff support offenders with education, training and employment needs.

Information about the offender learning and employability providers:

Lead providers and their subcontractors	Number of learners on discrete provision	Types of provision
Avon and Somerset Probation Trust;	2105 offenders (2009/10)	Nextstep services - information advice and guidance
Avon and Somerset Probation Trust; supported by the Department for Work and Pensions	263 offenders (2009/10)	SAFE – vocational risk assessments for offenders and ex-offenders on Jobcentre Plus programmes
Bristol Learning Communities	104 offenders (2009/10)	Driving theory and health and safety
A4E lead provider working with Avon and Somerset Probation Trust; co-financed by European Social Fund and National Offender Management Service	Variable	Way4ward – a mix of provision
Bristol College	Variable	Learndirect provision, mostly literacy and numeracy

Lead providers and their subcontractors	Number of learners on discrete provision	Types of provision
Norton and Radstock College	Variable	Literacy and numeracy
Yeovil College	Variable	Literacy and numeracy
Other providers	Number of learners	Types of provision
Restore Trust – a social enterprise established by Avon and Somerset Probation Trust	At the time of the inspection 56 offenders were engaged on this project.	Employability training in construction skills

A wide range of other providers, including voluntary and charitable organisations, provide further learning and employability skills services to offenders.

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: good
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Capacity to improve	Grade: satisfactory
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	Grade descriptor
Quality of provision	good
Assessment and sentence planning	
Implementation of interventions	
Achieving and sustaining outcomes	good
Leadership and management	good
Equality and diversity	good
Safeguarding offenders as vulnerable adults	satisfactory

Overall effectiveness, including capacity to improve

Avon and Somerset Probation Area's use of education, training and employment court orders or supervision requirements to support offenders' engagement in related activities was high. Report writers and sentencers had insufficient guidance on how to make most effective use of them. A high number of offenders were referred for

education, training and employment assessments. Initial assessment of offenders' literacy and numeracy were not always shared with providers. Offenders received good information advice and guidance. Resulting action plans were inadequately included in sentence planning arrangements.

Teaching and learning were good. In literacy and numeracy provision, tutors' use of individual learning plans was weak. Offenders made use of a wide range of provision. Avon and Somerset Probation Trust's arrangements for community payback projects were good. Offenders received good personal support to help overcome barriers to learning. Success rates on learndirect and health and safety related provision were good. Offenders improved their employability skills, but this was insufficiently evidenced to support a job application. Overall, attendance at education, training and employment sessions was low.

The trust was highly committed to the role of education, training and employment in reducing reoffending rates. It made innovative use of external links to extend and improve the provision. The trust's commitment to improve the quality of provision was good but the arrangements to assure the quality of the provision were underdeveloped as was the use of data. Most of strengths identified at the previous inspection had been maintained, but progress to resolve the majority of weaknesses had been slow.

What does Avon and Somerset Probation Trust need to do to improve further?

- Further improve outcomes for offenders referred to information, advice and guidance and education, training and employment activities by providing guidance to report writers, sentencers and other key workers on the effective use of court orders, supervision plans or other arrangements.
- Improve the use of data and information to manage the provision and support quality improvement by more effective sharing of information across partners and key workers and more effective use of relevant performance measures.
- Develop opportunities to recognise achievements in independent living and job-seeking and employability skills to support successful and sustainable progression.

Offender perspective - learning and employability as confirmed by inspectors.

Offenders commented that the education, training and employment officers provided good information, advice and guidance and that they were very helpful and supportive. Licensed offenders, and those taking learndirect programmes, stated that they did not like having to repeat initial assessments of literacy and numeracy, which some found too easy and which they did not find helpful. Although offenders were pleased that they were being helped to achieve a qualification, some found it very difficult to attend as they did not get a refund for their travel costs. Some offenders commented that group sizes in Skills for Life sessions were too big and they would have liked more individual help. A few did not like having to improve their literacy

and numeracy before they could access information and communications technology qualifications. Offenders found lessons lively and full of variety, although some found concentrating for two hours without a break difficult. Offenders were pleased with their progress and whilst a minority were being motivated to continue in education, most were keen to have more help with finding employment.

Offenders on unpaid work orders felt that they benefitted from the routine of having to get up to go to work. They were well supported by their supervisors and commented that the work they were completing improved their local communities. Although most offenders knew that they could use up to 20% of their unpaid work court order for education, training and employment they felt there was insufficient information about what they were allowed to do or how to do it.

Main inspection report

The quality of provision

Grade: good

Assessment and sentence planning

Avon and Somerset Probation Area's use of education, training and employment court orders or supervision plans to support offenders' engagement was high. Court orders were used well to improve access to literacy and numeracy provision in Yeovil and Jobcentre Plus programmes for offenders who were long-term unemployed. Whilst general guidance was available, this was insufficient to ensure pre-sentence report writers and sentencers made effective use of court orders and other strategies to meet offenders' education, training and employment needs. The proportion of offenders who were screened for their literacy and numeracy prior to sentencing was low.

A high number of offenders were referred for education, training and employment assessments. The majority of these resulted from literacy and numeracy assessments carried out by education, training and employment officers during pre-placement work sessions for offenders with unpaid work court orders. Licensed offenders' prison records, to support assessments and activities, were insufficiently available. Offenders referred to learndirect provision completed an initial assessment of their learning needs, even though they had previously completed these tests.

Offenders received good information, advice and guidance. Education, training and employment officers were well qualified and knowledgeable. They understood the needs of offenders well. The officers were skilful at motivating offenders to overcome barriers to progress and reduce negative attitudes. Offenders agreed realistic action plans, with effective risk assessments to support suitable employment. Officers used their knowledge of available provision well to benefit offenders. Offenders were supported well to develop job-seeking skills and to manage the disclosure of their offence to potential employers. However, offenders' information, advice and guidance action plans were inadequately shared with offender managers and were insufficiently incorporated within sentence plans.

Implementation of interventions

Teaching and learning were good. Sessions were well structured with a good variety of different activities to interest learners. Tutors made good use of questioning techniques. The standard of learning aids was good and supported learning well. Offenders were motivated and made good progress. Tutors did not always have adequate information on each offender's specific learning needs. In literacy and numeracy sessions, their use of individual learning plans was weak and these were not shared effectively with offender managers.

Offenders made use of a wide range of provision to support their needs. Avon and Somerset Probation Trust provided a good range of specialist provision, mostly working in partnership with others. This included European social funding to support offenders access mainstream and specialist services, the Restore Trust and Eden House which provided a safe environment for women to address their offending behaviour or their risk of offending. The trust's support and advice for future employment (SAFE) service extended successfully its services to support ex-offenders with disclosure issues and employment related risk assessments. Offenders in approved premises had satisfactory access to education, training and employment activities. However, progress to introduce an enhanced regime of purposeful activities was slow.

Education, training and employment officers had good awareness of locally available provision. However, they had an insufficiently clear analysis of the provider base to help them identify gaps in provision, or which was the most appropriate. Offenders' access to learndirect's literacy and numeracy provision was good. This was not the case for other literacy and numeracy provision. It was only available in term times and, combined with minimum group size requirements, was difficult to maintain viable group sizes. At the time of the inspection, provision was unavailable in Bridgewater. Although interpreters were made available when needed, the provision of English for speakers of other languages was inadequate.

Avon and Somerset Probation Trust's arrangements for community payback projects were good. Pre-placement work sessions were well planned. Supervisors emphasised the importance of health and safety well. They gave offenders clear information on what was expected of them and the standard of work that was required. Officers were very effective in encouraging offenders to use up to 20% of their order for education, training or employment related activities. In 2009/10, 1,780 offenders were referred to an information, advice and guidance session. A wide range of partnerships provided good individual placements and group projects. The unpaid work team linked different community projects together well to provide a variety of experiences for offenders. Offenders had good relationship with their supervisors who they felt were fair and supported them well.

Offenders received good support from Avon and Somerset Probation Trust. Education, training and employment officers were skilled at working with offenders to overcome barriers to learning. They helped offenders deal with a wide range of personal needs including accommodation, mental health, finance and personal

development. Offenders with child care responsibilities received effective support to be able to attend community payback sessions. Community payback supervisors acted as positive role models and helped offenders to improve.

Achieving and sustaining outcomes

Grade: good

The success rates of offenders on learndirect's literacy and numeracy provision were good. Success rates on the health and safety related provision and driving theory were high. Employment outcomes for the first group of offenders to leave the Restore Trust programme were good. In the last three years, Avon and Somerset Probation Trust had significantly exceeded its target for referring offenders to education, training or employment and was achieving its targets for sustained employment and employment on termination of an order. Attendance was low at literacy and numeracy sessions and especially for New Deal appointments.

Offenders on the Restore Trust programme were developing a good work ethic. They were improving their confidence and self-esteem in work situations, as were offenders working towards the construction site certificate of safety card. The quality of the work they produced was good. Offenders on community payback projects appreciated the way that the projects helped the community and particularly liked working on projects that benefited the elderly or children. Offenders improved their employability skills through well-structured work and a range of good work experiences. Most offenders were improving their ability to work in group activities. Records of the skills that offenders developed through community payback projects were insufficiently detailed and could not be used by an offender to support an application for work.

Leadership and management

Grade: good

Avon and Somerset Probation Trust's senior managers and education, training and employment and community payback staff were highly committed to the role of education, training and employment in reducing reoffending rates. This commitment was set out well in strategic and operational plans and implemented through the organisational structure. Managers used the distribution of education, training and employment officers across the area well to raise the profile of education, training and employment in the local delivery units, approved premises, and within local partnerships. The education, training and employment team communicated well with offender managers to support them effectively in their work with offenders. They attended meetings regularly with other staff to raise the profile of their work. Education, training and employment staff were motivated, felt well supported and had good access to training.

Avon and Somerset Probation Trust made innovative use of external links to extend and improve the provision. Links with Jobcentre Plus are particularly good. Jobcentre Plus offender champions in each local centre worked well with education, training and employment officers to support offenders. Their outreach employment activities

in south Bristol benefited those with a criminal background. The Restore Trust, Eden House and SAFE were all projects involving partnerships which were extending services to meet the needs of offenders and other vulnerable adults.

The promotion of equality and diversity was good. A single equalities scheme and an action plan were in place. Initiatives to engage Black offenders in Bristol using positive role models and working with relevant partner organisations had been established. Eden House was used effectively as an alternative to prison for women offenders in which they could address their offending behaviour. Community payback projects took place at times to accommodate offenders who were employed. Offenders with childcare responsibilities received good support. Offenders who needed help with their English had access to an interpreter.

Safeguarding arrangements to support offenders as vulnerable adults were satisfactory. Policies and guidance for managers and staff supported them effectively in their work with adult offenders. All staff were required to complete relevant training. A separate policy and guidance was provided for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. The trust placed a particular emphasis on risk assessment and safe work environments. Risk assessments were shared effectively with partners. Offenders were given clear direction on how their offending behaviour affected their employment prospects. The trust's arrangements to be assured of each provider's safeguarding arrangements were underdeveloped.

Avon and Somerset Probation Trust's commitment to improve the quality of provision was good. The trust used protocols and service level agreements to improve working with key partners. It had a quality improvement plan in place to resolve weaknesses. Quality and development co-ordinators were responsible for improving the provision and developing new initiatives. Education, training and employment staff met with colleagues from the other probation areas in the South West to share good practice. The trust's quality assurance systems were incomplete. Quality monitoring arrangements of key processes to determine their effectiveness or the contribution of education, training and employment to offender management were insufficient. The trust's arrangements to assure the quality of provision to which offenders were referred were underdeveloped.

Avon and Somerset Probation Trust's use of data was underdeveloped. Reporting systems provided an unclear account of performance and the use of performance measures to improve the quality of provision was underdeveloped. The trust made insufficient use of data to analysis the performance of different groups of offenders to narrow gaps in performance gaps. Systems to share data and information effectively across partners were insufficient.

Information about the inspection

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, assisted by the Avon and Somerset Probation Trust's assistant chief officer as co-ordinator, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of provider most recent self-assessment reports and development plans, comments from funding bodies, previous inspection reports and data on offenders and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.

Inspectors use a range of methods to gather the views of offenders including group and individual interviews. They looked at questionnaires offenders had completed on behalf of the trust. They also visited learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews.

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Record of Main Findings (RMF) in the context of inspections in probation areas to provide evidence which is used to inform Her Majesty's Chief Inspector's annual report.			
Provider Name:	Avon and Somerset Probation Area	Inspection No	50573
Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; 16-18 Learner responsive: FE full-time and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including E2E); 19+ responsive: FE full- and part-time courses; Employer responsive: Train to Gain, apprenticeships Blank Column: insert Judicial Services or Nextstep as appropriate			

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall					
Approximate number of enrolled learners						
Overall effectiveness	2					
Capacity to improve	3					
A. Outcomes for learners	2					
A1. How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2					
A1.a) How well do learners attain their learning goals?	2					
A1.b) How well do learners progress?	3					
A2. How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2					
A3. How safe do learners feel?	3					
A4. <i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	Na					
A5. <i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	Na					
B. Quality of provision	2					
B1. How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	3					
B2. How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2					
B3. How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	2					
B4. How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2					
C. Leadership and management	2					
C1. How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2					
C2. <i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>						
C3. How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	3					
C4. How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	2					
C5. How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	3					
C6. How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	3					
C7. How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2					

*where applicable to the type of provision