

Northamptonshire Probation Trust

Inspection report

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Type of provider:	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 the probation area

The Northamptonshire Probation Trust (the Trust) attained trust status on April 1 2010. The Trust includes the urban areas of Northampton; Wellingborough; Kettering; and Corby and extensive rural areas mainly in the west and east of the county. In the 2001 census, the minority ethnic population of Northamptonshire was 4.9%, significantly lower than the national figure of 7.9%. The largest minority ethnic populations were in Northampton and Wellingborough. More recent government projections suggest a significant increase in the Asian population in the urban areas and, in addition, the Polish community describe Northampton as hosting the highest concentration of Polish immigrants in the United Kingdom. The Trust is the smallest of the 35 Trusts. At the time of the inspection the Trust was restructuring and had reduced staff across management grades.

The Director of Interventions, Partnerships and Community, has oversight of the provision of education training and employment and the Partnership Unit Manager has responsibility for the operational management of this area. The five education, training, employment and employment advisors and the partnership administrator employed by the Trust were in the process of transferring to the Local Delivery Units. Some staff were funded through the mainstream budget and some partly through external contracts with the Department of Work and Pensions and the National Offender Management Service.

Northamptonshire has one prison, Her Majesty's Prison Wellingborough and the Trust has approved premises, Bridgewood, on the outskirts of Northampton.

Information about the offender learning and employability providers:

Lead providers and their subcontractors	Number of learners on discrete provision during the week of the inspection	Types of provision
Northamptonshire Probation Trust	135	Initial assessment and induction, IAG and Jobmaets contract
Working Links	16	Reviews, training and assessment
Working Links with Tresham College	15	Skills for Life

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
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Capacity to improve	Grade Satisfactory
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	Grade descriptor
Quality of provision Assessment and sentence planning Implementation of interventions	Good
Achieving and sustaining outcomes	Good
Leadership and management Equality and diversity including arrangements to support vulnerability	Satisfactory Satisfactory

Overall effectiveness, including capacity to improve

The Northamptonshire Probation Trust gave offenders good information advice and guidance, tailored to their individual needs. Education, training and employment staff supported offenders well to help them overcome individual difficulties and disabilities and promote their learning and development. However, initial screening of offenders' literacy and numeracy needs by offender managers was insufficient and they did not refer all offenders who would benefit from education, training and employment interventions to the service.

Offender records were well organised. Unpaid work placements were well managed, of high quality and many provided useful informal training, with significant benefits to the community. Education, training and employment provision in approved premises was good. Partners accessing different funding streams generally worked well together, although there was some unnecessary duplication of activity in different projects. The Trust provided only very limited opportunities for the recording and accreditation of employability and vocational skills in unpaid work.

Outcomes for learners were good with high achievements in many accredited programmes and good skills development in unpaid work. Job outcomes were good overall although outcomes, including sustained outcomes, in the offender learning and skills service provision were poor.

The Trust had a clear positive strategy for the development and maintenance of education, training and employment in an environment of changing learning and skills

funding arrangements. Action planning was clear. However, arrangements for quality improvement were underdeveloped and not sufficiently systematic across all the learning and skills provision.

The Trust had made satisfactory progress since the previous inspection. Staff had resolved some of the areas for improvement although the insufficient accreditation opportunities in unpaid work and further developments in quality systems remained areas for development. Arrangements for equality and diversity and safeguarding vulnerable adults were satisfactory.

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

- Improve systems for the identification of offenders' education, training and employment needs by ensuring that all offenders without relevant qualifications are appropriately screened for their literacy and numeracy needs and that this information is available to relevant staff.
- Monitor, record and, where appropriate, accredit learners' development of employability, vocational and interpersonal skills in unpaid work
- Review and improve or establish systems for quality improvement within the education, training and employment service and with partners.

Offender perspective - learning and employability as confirmed by inspectors.

A total of 38 offenders were interviewed as part of the inspection process, individually or in groups. Those involved in unpaid work were generally very positive about the experience and could identify benefits both for themselves and for the local community. They valued the good relationships they built with their supervisors, volunteers and other offenders on the programme and many described the useful skills they had learnt while on their placement. Offenders, including those with very significant barriers to employment, were very positive both about the support staff gave them to build their confidence and the information advice and guidance to help them plan their future. They valued the support they were given by volunteer mentors. Learners on Skills for Life programmes were very positive about their learning and the access that achieving these qualifications gave them to further vocational training. Learners on employment related programmes within the contracted provision valued the opportunity to gain qualifications that helped them get a job.

Main inspection report

The quality of provision

Grade Good

Assessment and sentence planning

The individual care and support for offenders was good and promoted their learning and development. Staff ensured that offenders who accessed the service received an effective initial assessment that highlighted their individual experience, educational achievement and personal circumstances that had an impact on their further education and employment prospects. Referrals to support and training agencies for tailored support and training which best met offenders' needs were appropriate.

Offenders who had particular barriers and learning difficulties and disabilities received very good support from officers through the 'REACH' project. For example, one worker dedicated a day a week to supporting offenders in approved premises towards gaining employment. The Trust made very good use of volunteer mentors to support offenders on this project.

Staff ensured that offenders on unpaid work programmes were aware that they could use 20% of the hours on their order for education, training and employment activities. Some had taken advantage of this and others had voluntarily accessed learning opportunities such as **learnirect** programmes.

Information, advice and guidance for offenders was good. Staff had a wide range of experience both inside and outside the probation service and they used their knowledge and experience well to personalise the information and guidance support they gave to offenders. They gave very careful attention to offenders' talents and aspirations, to ensure that their goals were realistic and to match them to potential job opportunities. Staff ensured that all contact and meetings in the 'REACH' project were well recorded on the case assessment tracking system. Offender managers had good oversight of the cases and they managed the performance of offenders effectively.

Offender managers did not always adequately identify offenders' learning and skills needs. They did not always screen offenders for their literacy and numeracy needs before writing their sentence report and few offenders had learning plans. Only a minority of offenders with an offender profile system were identified as having a learning need. The majority of offenders who accessed activities did so on a voluntary basis.

Implementation of interventions

Staff maintained well organised records to help to manage and track offenders' progress. Records on case assessment tracking system were relevant and up-to-date. They accurately reflected the work done with offenders to achieve their planned goals. Staff effectively transferred the data from this system to the service's case recording and management system (CRAMS). Partners in offenders' learning

had access to the system and could add information and ensure that all records were accurate. Staff negotiated and maintained offenders' action plans. These included clear goals and targets, which were generally specific and set completion dates.

Offenders had access to a range of good quality unpaid work placements. As far as possible, staff matched placements well to offenders' skills and experience. Staff ensured that all placements and offenders who were placed were appropriately risk assessed. For those offenders with a very low skills base the placements offered challenge and facilitated skills development. Offenders were aware of the possibility of using 20% of their order for their learning and skills activities and some did so, and some extended this through learndirect provision. However, the accreditation available for learners on unpaid work was very limited.

The Trust had developed very effective partnerships with local community organisations. This had enabled the trust both to identify local projects that benefited the community and to realise wider local authority and government priorities. For example, the work in partnership with Yardley Hastings Community Centre promoted sustainability through creating compost using garden waste.

Although no formal classes took place in the Trust's approved premises, the education, training and employment provision for offenders was good. Officers used the 'REACH' project very effectively to support most residents to overcome individual difficult and complex barriers to employment. One officer with dedicated time in the approved premises effectively challenged offenders' progress and encouraged them to make increasingly mature and independent decisions. Key workers in approved premises provided a range of good informal learning activities which met the needs and interests of residents and in which staff expected all residents to participate.

Work with partners to meet a variety of offenders' needs was generally good. Partners worked well together to make effective use of their strengths and to share information. A good range of funded projects provided offenders, who had different levels of skills, experience and job readiness, with suitable training and support programmes to help them gain employment. Offenders moved between programmes so that they could access support at an appropriate level. However, transfers were not always sufficiently co-ordinated and offenders sometimes repeated activities such as constructing curriculum vitae and information, advice and guidance interviews unnecessarily. In the recent past Tresham College had provided Skills for Life classes on probation premises. Funding for this was no longer available and the tutor now directed learners to mainstream college provision. Whilst the tutor made every effort to alleviate offenders' fears and concerns about stigmatisation and anxieties about large group classroom situations, learners remained concerned about entering mainstream classes.

Attention to health and safety and safe working practices was good. Induction into unpaid work placements involved site safety and it also related to the tools used and potential hazards. Staff carried out detailed risk assessments of individuals based on their offending behaviour and history. This information was shared with unpaid work supervisors who were sensitive to offenders' personal needs and social circumstances.

Opportunities for the accreditation and recording of the development of offenders' vocational and employability skills in unpaid work were insufficient. Links to suitable vocational programmes to facilitate accreditation and progression were limited. Most learners did not have a record of their achievement. However, one community partner did provide a certificate to acknowledge the quality of offenders' work and to celebrate the completion of the work allocated to them.

Achieving and sustaining outcomes

Grade Good

Outcomes for learners were good. The success rates on Tresham College's literacy and numeracy courses for offenders were high and had improved consistently over the previous three years. Every learner who completed a entry level literacy and numeracy programme achieved their qualification in 2008/09. In addition, of those completing level 1 and 2 programmes, the proportion that achieved their qualification improved from 65% in 2006/07 to 98% in 2008/09. However, since the beginning of 2008/09 no offenders had accessed college provision. The achievement of qualifications for learners in the offender learning and skills service funded provision was good. Sixty-three per cent of all learners who started programmes with Working Links achieved an accredited outcome. Offenders on many unpaid work projects achieved a good range of skills and many made a useful contribution to the development of their communities.

Job outcomes for learners across all education, training and employment programmes were 55% of all referrals to employment in the year to date. However, job outcomes were low for learners in the contracted learning provision at 23% and sustained job outcomes were very low at 8.5%.

Leadership and management

Grade
Satisfactory

The Trust had a clear vision and strategy for the development of education, training and employment for offenders within the county. The strategy took careful account of the changing funding arrangements and made a clear statement about the role of the Trust within a wider community partnership. The Trust's detailed action plan was based on the strengths of partners and designed to make the best use of the changing funding conditions to ensure the sustainability of the provision.

Much informal communication, both internal and external, was very effective. This was particularly the case where partners worked from probation offices and where offender managers and advisors worked alongside each other. In particular, within the 'REACH' project there were helpful three-way meetings between information, advice and guidance workers, offender managers and offenders. This enabled a comprehensive and consistent approach and supported offenders with complex needs to remain involved. Communications within the education, training and

employment team were very good. The team worked well together and kept each other fully informed about local activities and opportunities and discussed their own good practice. External partners appreciated and made good use of their access to information systems in spite of their concern that the information was not always up-to-date. However, not all formal systems were well developed and in some offices and within some programmes, communication was less systematic and effective.

The Trust had maintained satisfactory performance against targets. Managers regularly collated monthly returns and compared them against monthly targets and accumulative results. The partnership unit had been successful in meeting many targets set, but with the reduction of Skills for Life provision in particular, referrals to providers had been low and the achievement of qualifications equally low.

The arrangements for equality and diversity were satisfactory and safeguarding arrangements to support offenders as vulnerable adults were satisfactory. The draft safeguarding vulnerable adults policy and procedures were clear, appropriately met legislative requirements and included useful guidance for staff in identifying possible abuse and making referrals. The respect between staff and offenders was very strong and staff offered offenders very good support appropriate to their needs. The education, training and employment staff consistently approached their work in an open and non-judgemental way and they dealt very effectively with offenders with a challenging range of needs and barriers. The Trust had recently planned but not yet provided equality and diversity training and updating. The number of minority ethnic and female learners overall was small and managers had only recently begun to analyse the performance of different groups. However, this recent analysis showed that although the number of referrals of females and minority ethnic learners to education, training and employment was proportionally high, compared to the offender group as a whole, the success rates for these groups were significantly lower than those of white males.

Systems for quality improvement were underdeveloped. Managers were establishing self-assessment procedures and a useful and well-structured report was in place for unpaid work. However, other self-assessment procedures needed further development to become effective improvement tools. Managers had recently established a system of peer review for education, training and employment staff but the staff had not been given any training to support them and develop their skills. These staff had limited access to external networks and opportunities to share good practice regionally and nationally. Managers were developing systems for the collection and analysis of feedback from offenders and learners but this information was not systematically used to improve the provision. Partners did not generally share learner feedback with the Trust.

Information about the inspection

1. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), assisted by the The Director of Interventions, Partnerships and Community as co-ordinator, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment reports and development plans, previous inspection reports and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
2. Inspectors use a range of methods to gather the views of learners including group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They also visited learning sessions, assessments or progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subjects the provider offers.

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