

# Cheshire Probation Area Report

## Inspection Report

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**Unique reference number:** 57967

**Name of lead inspector:** Simon Cutting HMI

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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 Cheshire probation area**

Cheshire has a population of about 1 million. Unemployment hot spots include Halton and West Cheshire. Crime rates overall are lower than the national average. Cheshire probation area is the 21st largest. In 2009, it had an overall caseload of 3,800 offenders, of which 97% were White and 88% were male. Over 50% of offenders had an employment need, 23% had a basic skills need, nine per cent had a learning difficulty and 24% had no qualifications.

Cheshire Probation Trust's (the trust) assistant chief executive responsible for interventions is responsible for employment and learning and skills. These are delivered through four local delivery units, based in West Cheshire, East Cheshire, Halton and Warrington. Each local delivery unit is led by an assistant chief executive. There are two approved premises in the area, Linden Bank and Bunbury House, and three prisons, Her Majesty's Prison (HMP) and Young Offender Institution (YOI) Styal, HMP Risley, HMYOI Thorn Cross.

The Manchester College holds a temporary contract from the probation trust to provide specialist employment and learning and skills workers and a job broker. The college takes offenders with some history of employment, who need support in re-engaging in the job market.

A European Social Fund and National Offender Management Service co-financed project is delivered by Achieve North West, which was established by the probation trusts in the North West. A manager and six caseworkers work across the local delivery units, approved premises and prisons to improve the employment prospects of offenders.

**Information about the offender learning and employability providers:**

<b>Lead providers and their subcontractors</b>	<b>Number of learners on discrete provision 2010/11</b>	<b>Types of provision</b>
The Manchester College	400 starts on Skills Funding Agency supported programmes  227 starts on Skills for Jobs European Social Fund supported project (31/10/08 to 31/03/2011)	Accredited training and employment  Information, advice and guidance and development of employability skills in work clubs leading to employment
Achieve North West	40 referrals per month	Information advice and guidance, employability skills in work clubs and to local provision
Subcontractors Barrowmore and Train to Change  Salford Foundation		Vocational and employability skills  Mentoring service

A wide range of other local training providers and colleges are used to support offender learning and skills.

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

## Summary report

<b>Overall effectiveness of provision</b>	<b>Grade:</b> good
<b>Capacity to improve</b>	<b>Grade:</b> good
	<b>Grade descriptor</b>
Quality of provision	good
Assessment and sentence planning	
Implementation of interventions	
Achieving and sustaining outcomes	good
Leadership and management	good
Equality and diversity	good
Arrangements to support vulnerability	good

### Overall effectiveness, including capacity to improve

Cheshire Probation Trust placed a high priority on the use of employment and learning and skills to reduce reoffending. The majority of offenders were screened to identify their education, training and employment needs effectively. However, the assessment of offenders' literacy and numeracy skills was insufficiently systematic. Staff actively promoted the use of 20% of unpaid work orders for employment and learning and skills activities.

Unemployed offenders received good support at well organised work clubs. The small job brokerage scheme was very effective. The range of provision for offenders in approved premises was good. Teaching, training and assessment practices were good, but individual learning plans and guidance action plans were inadequately shared with offender managers. The trust's development of their mentoring scheme was good. Offenders on community payback had good opportunities to develop vocational and employability skills and produced good standards of work. However the trust did not ensure offenders had a record of the skills they had improved. The proportion of offenders achieving an accredited award was good. The trust significantly exceeded its key performance targets.

The trust worked proactively to sustain provision that benefited offenders, but its use of a strategy based on effective needs analysis was underdeveloped. Partnership working was strong. The trust made good use of data to identify and improve the performance of different groups of learners. Supervisors' promotion of safe work practice on community payback projects was good. Internal quality assurance

arrangements were good and resulted in improvements in the provision. The trust's arrangements to gain assurance of the quality of external agencies' provision were underdeveloped.

### **What does Cheshire Probation Trust need to do to improve further?**

- Introduce a strategy, based on an analysis of offending behaviour and labour market opportunities, to establish local employment and learning and skills priorities.
- Further support offenders' prospects for employment and progression by formal recognition of improvements in their employability skills and standards of work achieved.
- Further develop the use of targets and measures to improve the quality of provision and develop strategies to gain assurance of the quality of the employment, learning and skills provision.

### **Offender perspective - learning and employability as confirmed by inspectors.**

Offenders valued the opportunity to combine meetings with their offender manager and attendance at a job club. A minority of offenders commented that the induction to community payback and the available vocational courses concentrated too much on manual work such as construction and amenity horticulture, and did not have much relevance to the sectors in which they wanted to work. Offenders felt they had been set realistic targets to achieve and recognised the work they needed to do to gain employment. A few offenders would have liked help with their literacy. Offenders were pleased that they could use part of their court order to attend courses that improved their skills. Some offenders commented that the courses went on for too long without a break, although they appreciated the encouragement they received to achieve a qualification. Many said this was the first certificate they had ever achieved and this was the encouragement they needed to continue with their learning. Offenders on unpaid work orders recognised how their work helped local communities and the skills they were improving. A few found the work had encouraged them to consider volunteering on completion of their order. Offenders in approved premises appreciated the effort providers were making to help them make the transition from life in custody to living and working in the community.

## **Main inspection report**

### **The quality of provision**

**Grade: good**

#### Assessment and sentence planning

Cheshire Probation Trust placed a high priority on the use of employment and learning and skills to reduce reoffending. This focus was well set out in policy and guidance. Offender managers were required to justify situations when an offender assessed as needing support for their employment or learning and skills did not

receive it. Regular checks were undertaken to ensure this policy was being implemented. A range of interventions were used to encourage offenders to take up employment and learning and skills support, but guidance on the implementation of specified activity requirements was insufficiently detailed.

Offenders were screened at the start of their sentence to identify their potential learning needs and other barriers to learning. This provided a suitable base line which was used by offender managers to complete each offender's sentence plan requirements. However, for a minority of offenders screening was incomplete. When learning needs were identified, offenders were referred to an adviser for an initial assessment, at which an appropriate information, advice and guidance action plan was completed. These plans were not shared effectively with offender managers. The assessment of offenders' literacy and numeracy skills was insufficiently systematic. Partners placed insufficient emphasis on identifying this need.

Staff actively promoted the use of 20% of unpaid work orders for employment and learning and skills related activities, especially to unemployed offenders. On community payback, offenders' needs were assessed and well matched to an appropriate placement or project. External agencies that were used were carefully screened. Appropriate offender risk assessments were in place and shared with supervisors.

#### Implementation of interventions

Unemployed offenders in each local delivery unit received good support for the development of their vocational and job seeking skills. Key providers, including Achieve North West, The Manchester College, Next Step, and Jobcentre Plus, helped them to overcome barriers to learning and employment and encourage the uptake of volunteering. The work clubs were well organised. Providers worked well together for the benefit of offenders. Advisers were experienced and suitably qualified. They made good use of locally available provision. Offenders received good support for finding employment. The job brokerage scheme was very effective, although the scheme was too small. Staff had good knowledge of local job markets. Inspectors noted some very good examples of employer engagement.

Support for improving unemployed offenders' skills concentrated on developing construction, horticultural and other manual work skills and made little reference to developing skills to work in other sectors such as offices and shops. Low skilled employed offenders received insufficient support. Offenders had insufficient access to literacy and numeracy support.

The range of provision for offenders in approved premises was good and was improving for women offenders. The enhanced regime in the approved premises provided offenders with effective individualised learning programmes, with a strong emphasis on employability. Women offenders benefited from access to the facilities and services at the Halton Women's Centre. A course designed to improve women's confidence had been introduced and the trust was developing women only work clubs.

Cheshire Probation Trust's development of a mentoring scheme was good. Over 60 mentors were available to support offenders with a wide range of needs. The mentors were well trained. They used their wide range of skills and experiences well to support offenders. Their work included support for offenders being released from prison, help with reading and writing and support for offenders low in confidence, motivation or low concentration skills. However the impact of this scheme has not yet been fully evaluated.

Teaching, training and assessment practices were good. In 2009/10, 87% of offenders referred to employment and learning and skills provision started a programme. Staff had a very good approach to engaging offenders who were referred. Offenders quickly improved their motivation for learning. Tutors used a good range of learning activities and made good use of learning aids. Offenders participated well; they developed good technical skills and received good support with their job seeking skills. In a small minority of sessions teaching did not always focus sufficiently on the ability of the offender. Assessment was thorough and was used to ensure offenders adopted safe working practice and worked efficiently to meet the demands of industry. Staff worked well to provide offender managers with feedback on the progress of the offenders they were supervising. In a minority of individual learning plans target setting was weak. These plans were inadequately shared with offender managers.

Offenders on community payback schemes had good opportunities to develop vocational and employability skills, such as team work. Cheshire Probation Trust arranged good quality lone placements and group projects. Projects were well supervised. Offenders were well prepared with good attention to health and safety. They worked with purpose and supervisors provided ongoing assessment to ensure offenders utilised their time effectively in a safe and positive environment. Cheshire Probation Trust had built up strong relationships and a very good reputation for the work carried out by offenders.

## **Achieving and sustaining outcomes**

**Grade: good**

Outcomes for offenders were very good; 58% of offenders who started a learning programme achieved an accredited outcome. Cheshire Probation Trust was significantly exceeding its key performance targets and was the highest performing area in Achieve North West project.

Offenders make good progress and improved their employability through developing new skills and achieving awards. In 2010/11, over 250 offenders had secured sustained employment during their sentence. The proportion of offenders who were in employment at the end of their court order was good and a small number became engaged in voluntary work. Offenders on unpaid work produced good standards of work. Offenders took pride in their work and were proud of the work they had done. However Cheshire Probation Trust did not ensure offenders had a record of the skills they had improved which could be used to show a potential employer.

## Leadership and management

**Grade: good**

Cheshire Probation Trust worked proactively to support and sustain provision that benefited offenders. Managers had responded quickly to recent changes in available provision which were creating barriers to learning. A temporary contract was in place to maintain key elements of the provision whilst alternatives were being identified. Although employment and learning and skills performance targets were included in annual business plans, this was not effectively informed by a well developed employment and learning and skill strategy based on an effective needs analysis.

Partnership working in Cheshire probation area was strong. The trust's education, training and employment managers met regularly with key partners and providers. Communications were very effective. They worked well together for the benefit of offenders. Work relations between providers and offender managers were satisfactory.

The promotion of equality and diversity were good. A single equalities policy and action plan was in place and staff had completed relevant training. Partners placed a good emphasis on supporting offenders to remove barriers to employment and learning and skills activities. The trust's mentoring scheme was used well to support offenders in this regard. Arrangements ensured offenders could manage family commitments. Most of the provision was located in local offices. This enabled offenders to combine supervision meetings with their offender manager and attendance at their work club. Women only provision and work clubs were being introduced. The trust made good use of data to identify the performance of different groups of learners. Effective action had been taken by the trust to address issues this analysis had identified. Safeguarding arrangements to support offenders as vulnerable adults were good. Supervisors' promotion of safe work practice on community payback projects was good. Offenders received information on health and safety which identified individual responsibilities, expectations and safe working. Issues and accidents were dealt with swiftly and safely. Documents were completed on site. Offender risk assessments were effectively shared with providers and partners. Cheshire Probation Trust had satisfactory arrangements for ensuring providers' staff were appropriately vetted, including enhanced Criminal Record Bureau checks. Draft guidance on working with offenders as vulnerable adults has been drawn up.

Cheshire Probation Trust made good use of quality systems. They had a regular programme of quality and performance audits and made good use of the audit outcomes to improve work practices and the quality of provision. Recently introduced peer reviews of the work offender managers undertook with offenders was leading to improvements in standard setting and sharing of good practice. The trust made regular use of aggregated stakeholder feedback. For a minority of audits, the trust made insufficient use of recommendations and actions to promote improvements, or of measures to assess the effectiveness of improvements made or the completion of actions. The trust's arrangements to gain assurance of the quality of external agencies' provision were underdeveloped.



### **Information about the inspection**

1. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, assisted by one of Cheshire Probation Trust's assistant chief executive's, as co-ordinator, carried out the inspection also took account of trust's most recent self-evaluation reports and development plans, their position statement and data on the achievements of offenders over the last three years.
2. Inspectors use a range of methods to gather the views of offenders including group and individual interviews. They looked at questionnaires offenders had completed. They also visited learning sessions, assessments and reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from a range of the programmes and activities which offenders attend.

<b>Record of Main Findings (RMF) in the context of inspections in probation areas</b> to provide evidence which is used to inform Her Majesty's Chief Inspector's annual report.			
<b>Provider Name:</b>	Cheshire Probation Area	<b>Inspection No</b>	366111
<b>Learning types: 14 – 16:</b> Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; <b>16-18 Learner responsive:</b> FE full-time and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including E2E); <b>19+ responsive:</b> FE full- and part-time courses; <b>Employer responsive:</b> Train to Gain, apprenticeships <b>Blank Column:</b> insert Judicial Services or Nextstep as appropriate			

Grades <b>using the 4 point scale</b> 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	<b>Overall</b>					
<b>Approximate number of enrolled learners</b>						
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>2</b>					
<b>Capacity to improve</b>	2					
<b>A. Outcomes for learners</b>	<b>2</b>					
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?	2					
A2. How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2					
A3. How safe do learners feel?	2					
A4. <i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	n/a					
A5. <i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	2					
<b>B. Quality of provision</b>	<b>2</b>					
B1. How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2					
B2. How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	3					
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					
<b>C. Leadership and management</b>	<b>2</b>					
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>	n/a					
C3. How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	2					
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?	2					
C6. How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	2					
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

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