

Staffordshire and West Midlands Probation Area

Inspection report

Unique reference number:	57988
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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 Staffordshire and West Midland probation area

Staffordshire and West Midlands Probation Trust (SWMPT, the trust) was created in April 2010 following the merger of Staffordshire and West Midlands probation services. It is one of the largest of the 35 probation areas across England and Wales and consists of 17 local authorities. The trust serves a wide range of urban and rural communities, through nine local delivery units (LDU); Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Staffordshire, Stoke-on-Trent, Walsall and Wolverhampton. At any one time, SWMPT supervises over 16,000 adult offenders in the community.

Approximately 80% of offenders are on community orders and 20% are on licence from prison. The trust employs over 2,000 staff. Each year the trust completes about 24,000 pre-sentence reports. The trust's own data indicate that education, training and employment are linked to offending behaviour in about a third of all offenders. The trust manages 10 Home Office approved premises, of which one provides support for women offenders and one for those with mental ill health.

A senior manager has responsibility for offenders' learning and employability and is supported by a manager responsible for partnerships and commissioning services, co-ordinators and education, training and employment advisers (advisers). Staffordshire probation area was last inspected in September 2008 and the West Midlands in June 2008.

Offender learning and employability is funded mainly by the Skills Funding Agency and European Social Fund projects co-financed by the National Offender Management Service and The Department for Work and Pensions. A wide range of over 50 local training providers, charities and colleges are used to support offender learning and employability. These include:

Area	Type of provision	Key Providers
Staffordshire and West Midlands	Information, advice and guidance	Staffordshire and West Midlands Probation Trust
Birmingham	Literacy, numeracy and language	Birmingham Metropolitan College and Solihull College
	Job clubs and employability	Pertemps People Development Group and its subcontractors
Black Country	Literacy, numeracy and language	City of Wolverhampton College, Dudley College, Sandwell College, Stourbridge College, Walsall College, Walsall Adult and Community College
	Job clubs and employability	Pertemps People Development Group and its subcontractors
Coventry and Solihull	Literacy, numeracy and language	Coventry Adult Education Service, City College Coventry and Solihull College
	Job clubs and employability	Pertemps People Development Group and its subcontractors

		and Coventry City Council
Staffordshire	Literacy, numeracy and language	Stoke College
	Job clubs and employability	South Stafford College, Stafford College, Stoke on Trent College

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	good
Assessment and sentence planning	
Implementation of interventions	
Achieving and sustaining outcomes	satisfactory
Leadership and management	satisfactory
Equality and diversity	good
Arrangements to support vulnerability	satisfactory

Overall effectiveness, including capacity to improve

Information, advice and guidance arrangements were good. Detailed risk assessments of offenders were used well. Strategies to promote learning and employability to offender managers were good. Guidance on the effective use of interventions and voluntary engage of offenders in learning and employability was insufficient and learning plans were insufficiently integrated into sentence plans. The trust’s approach to initial and diagnostic assessments was insufficiently effective.

Teaching and learning were good. SWMPT and its partners worked well together. Offenders had access to a wide range of provision with a strong focus on employability. Courses in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) were inadequate and literacy and numeracy provision in Staffordshire was insufficient. Offenders had good support from teachers, mentors and advisers but they did not plan or agree sufficiently challenging actions and targets in order to progress.

Offenders’ development of confidence, self-esteem and employability skills was good. Achievement rates were satisfactory. The trust achieved its targets for employment which were satisfactory. Offender outcomes varied significantly between the local delivery units. Learners felt safe.

Strong commitment by staff and good team working benefited offenders. Links with providers and employers were well developed. SWMPT placed a strong emphasis on local priorities and employment opportunities. Its use of strategic planning was underdeveloped. Initiatives and projects to widen participation and extend the

provision were good. The trust's arrangements to gain assurance that key aspects of the services used by offenders met their needs were insufficient. Quality assurance arrangements were satisfactory but self-assessment was underdeveloped. Progress since the last inspection was satisfactory and SWMPT's capacity to improve was satisfactory.

What does Staffordshire and West Midlands Probation Trust need to do to improve further?

- Improve the clarity of the arrangements through which offenders are engaged in education, training and employment, including the effective use of interventions within sentence plans.
- Develop the use of self-assessment to identify areas for improvement and promote quality improvements.
- Improve outcomes for offenders through better planning and challenge of their learning to enable them to progress.

Offender perspective - learning and employability as confirmed by inspectors.

Offenders thought the staff were friendly and very supportive and they appreciated being treated as adults. They valued the support they received from their advisers as this helped them realise what they needed to do to make progress. Offenders said that the job clubs helped them get ready for work and that the employability sessions were improving their chances of getting a job. A minority of offenders would like more help with their interview techniques. A few offenders said that there were too few opportunities to gain a useful qualification near to where they lived. Offenders on community payback projects felt well supported by their supervisors and appreciated that attendance at these projects could be fitted around college, childcare and other commitments. Many said that their confidence and self-esteem had improved. Those offenders who attended accredited courses were pleased to have achieved an award, which was often for the first time. This made them more determined to succeed.

Main inspection report

The quality of provision

Grade: good

Assessment and sentence planning

Probation staff paid good attention to the risk assessments of offenders when planning interventions. Detailed risk assessments provided by offender managers were used effectively by advisers and unpaid work placement co-ordinators. These ensured that each offender was well matched to their placement with a learning provider or community payback scheme and that their job applications were for suitable employment. Occasionally, offender managers took too long to complete risk assessments.

SWMPT had good arrangements for the provision of information, advice and guidance to unemployed offenders during the working week. However, not all offender managers referred offenders effectively to the advisers and some continued to make referrals direct to providers. Advisers were skilled at working with offenders and made good use of employability compacts to ensure offenders had an agreed set of actions to support their progress towards employment. They had good links with local organisations and providers. Specialist advisers were used well to support and engage minority ethnic and female offenders. Low-skilled employed offenders were a low priority. In a minority of circumstances, advisers' support for offenders released from custody was hampered because relevant information from prisons was not available.

The trust's staff, responsible for learning and employability, promoted these well to offender managers. They attended joint meetings, regularly circulated newsletters and ensured that each offender's activities were regularly updated on internal databases. Advisers were located within probation offices which improved communications. In better local delivery units, these arrangements ensured that staff focused well on the learning and employability needs of offenders and that interventions were effectively prioritised.

SWMPT provided insufficiently clear guidance on how to make effective use of court orders, supervision requirements and voluntary engagement of offenders in learning and employability interventions. The overall approach was inconsistent. In a small number of cases, court orders were used as a punishment for a breach of order and the terms of orders given did not always match the provision available. Nevertheless, in Staffordshire offenders benefitted from a well designed order through which they attended a useful employability training programme.

SWMPT's approach to initial and diagnostic assessments was insufficiently effective. The incidence of timely and adequate assessment of individual learning needs was low. Too often, offenders with additional needs were not screened for their literacy and numeracy prior to sentencing. In most cases, initial assessments were not completed until just prior to commencing a literacy or numeracy course. A more

detailed assessment of literacy and numeracy and of other learning needs was not carried out as a matter of routine.

Implementation of interventions

Teaching, learning and coaching were good. Programmes were lively and well structured, with a variety of activities to engage and motivate learners. Teachers used discussion, questioning techniques and role-play well. Learners were motivated, enjoyed their learning and were making good progress. In most sessions the pace of learning was good. Accommodation was of a good standard. Resources to support learning were generally good but teachers made insufficient use of information learning technology (ILT) to support learning.

SWMPT and its partners worked well together to ensure the provision met the needs of offenders. They were strongly committed to supporting offender learning. The range of provision was wide and had a strong focus on employment and the development of employability skills. Many courses were available on probation premises. These were particularly effective in engaging offenders who would traditionally not engage with learning. Drop-in sessions provided a flexible format. They were well attended. Courses available in community centres were well targeted to meet local needs. Learning and employability were well integrated into the prolific and persistent offender programmes. Specialist providers were used well to support offenders. This included support from an employer network which provided offenders with good opportunities to gain work experience. The provision of ESOL was inadequate and literacy and numeracy were insufficiently available in parts of Staffordshire.

Offenders received good support to achieve positive outcomes. SWMPT made good use of mentors to help offenders overcome barriers to learning. Mentors had a wide range of relevant expertise which was used well by ensuring their skills were well matched to each offender's needs. Mentors were well managed and supported. Advisers provided good support. They made regular contact with offenders to track their progress. When needed, advisers provided offenders with individual support and coaching to improve their confidence and motivation.

Many aspects of community payback were good. In some local delivery units, staff gave priority to placements and projects which provided offenders with opportunities to develop their work skills. In Staffordshire unemployed offenders attended a programme on employability at the start of their order. They also used part of their order to access information, advice and guidance and to attend a job club. A well run horticultural project linked to qualifications in South Birmingham provided good opportunities for progression into employment. In this and other projects uptake was too low. Recently, the provision of learning and employability for offenders in approved premises had declined significantly. A few premises had made good progress to remedy this decline.

Activities with offenders to plan and agree challenging actions and targets for them to achieve and make progress were insufficient. Learning plans placed too much emphasis on achieving a qualification and not enough on the actions offenders needed to take to succeed. Staff did not include sufficient recognition of targets for personal development. Offenders who attended job clubs made insufficient use of action plans to support their development and use of job-seeking skills and to challenge them to make progress in gaining employment. Target setting in employability compacts was not always sufficiently specific or time limited. Overall, employability compacts and learning plans were insufficiently integrated into sentence plans.

Achieving and sustaining outcomes

Grade: satisfactory

Achieving and sustaining planned outcomes

Offenders were developing good employability skills and had much improved confidence and self-esteem. Most offenders were sufficiently confident to take part in role-plays and talk about their work. Many offenders were able to take more responsibility for their own learning. On employability courses, offenders were developing good employability skills such as interview techniques and were becoming skilled at dealing with standard interview questions. Standards of behaviour were generally good. Attendance was satisfactory and was better where provision was based on SWMPT's premises.

Overall achievement rates of offenders who completed an accredited learning programme were satisfactory and were good on specialist provision. SWMPT regularly achieved its performance targets, which were improving each year. The number of offenders who gained sustained employment during their sentence had increased by about 50% in the last three years. The proportion of offenders who were in employment at the termination of their court order was satisfactory. However the achievement of employment related outcomes and awards varied widely between local delivery units. Offenders felt safe, behaved well and SWMPT paid good attention to their health and safety.

Leadership and management

Grade: satisfactory

SWMPT placed a strong emphasis on effective communications, which were good. Well qualified staff attended a good range of meetings regularly in order to keep offender managers and others well informed. They worked effectively together in order to focus strongly on the needs of offenders. Staff morale was good and they had a strong commitment to ensuring offenders benefited well from their activities. SWMPT was committed to maintaining its good and effective links with providers and employers. It placed a strong emphasis on addressing local employment priorities and opportunities for offenders. Although the trust had a strategy and action plan that directed its work with women offenders, it did not have an overall learning and employability strategy. However, a review was near completion.

The promotion of equality and diversity was good. The trust and its partners worked well with offenders to remove barriers to employment and education. When needed, offenders were given support from volunteer mentors. SWMPT's use of initiatives and projects to widen participation and extend the provision to support minority ethnic and other disadvantaged groups were good. SWMPT's strategy and action plan to engage women offenders were effectively improving outcomes. Staff had recently completed training in equality and diversity and safeguarding. Safeguarding arrangements to support offenders as vulnerable adults were satisfactory. SWMPT's use of risk assessments when arranging activities and community payback was good. The trust's staff had a good understanding of the needs of offenders as vulnerable adults. Their promotion of health and safety and safe working practice to offenders was satisfactory.

SWMPT made insufficient use of formal agreements with the providers used by offenders. It did not assure that key aspects of each provider's work were effectively in operation. These included information sharing protocols, feedback on learner outcomes, safeguarding arrangements, equality and diversity, and the quality of provision.

Quality assurance arrangements were satisfactory. SWPMT made appropriate use of its own quality systems. At the operational level, team work to improve the quality of provision was satisfactory and staff made appropriate use of feedback from offenders. Relevant performance objectives were included in staff appraisals. The trust had recognised that good practice needed to be shared more effectively and had recently introduced an 'effective practice' unit to support this work. SWMPT's use of self-assessment to identify areas for improvement and quality improvement action planning was underdeveloped and it made insufficient use of its own performance indicators to set targets to measure and evaluate performance.

Information about the inspection

1. Three of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) assisted by the Staffordshire and West Midlands' Head of Probation, Solihull Local Delivery Unit, as co-ordinator, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the trust's most recent development plans, comments from its partners and providers used by offenders, previous inspection reports and data on offenders and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
2. Inspectors used a range of methods to gather the views of offenders including group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires offenders had completed. They also visited learning sessions, assessments or progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes and activities which inspectors attended.

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:	Staffordshire and West Midlands Probation area	Inspection No	385662
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 (2011/12)	1300					
Overall effectiveness	3					
Capacity to improve	3					
A. Outcomes for learners	3					
A1. How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	3					
A1.a) How well do learners attain their learning goals?	3					
A1.b) How well do learners progress?	2					
A2. How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	3					
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>	n/a					
B. Quality of provision	2					
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?	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	3					
C1. How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	3					
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?	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?	3					

*where applicable to the type of provision

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