

West Mercia Probation Area

Inspection report

Unique reference number:	57987
Name of lead inspector:	Julia Horsman HMI
Last day of inspection:	23 March 2012
Type of provider:	Probation Trust
Address:	90 Mill Street Kidderminster DY11 6XA
Telephone number:	01562 820071

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 West Mercia Probation Area

West Mercia Probation Area has considerable diversity in terms of its rural/urban profile. Offender management arrangements are overseen by West Mercia Probation Trust, (WMPT; the trust) which is currently in a transition phase with the integration of programme staff into offender management roles. The trust's head office is based in Kidderminster and its services coordinated through four local delivery units in Herefordshire (Hereford); Shropshire (Shrewsbury); Telford and Wrekin (Telford) and Worcestershire (Worcester, Redditch, Kidderminster). WMPT has one approved premises in Worcester for offenders who are of high risk to others. Four prisons are located in the area. The trust employs around 400 staff, 56% of whom work directly with offenders; in addition a large amount of offender engagement in West Mercia is delivered through services which are commissioned through partner agencies.

The area has a population of just under 1.2 million, of whom 2.3% are from minority ethnic groups. Ethnicity rates vary across the local delivery units, from 5.2% in Telford and Wrekin to 0.9% in Herefordshire. At the time of inspection a third of the 3,209 offenders had an assessed education, training and employment need; 178 were participating in learning provision, including information, advice and guidance sessions and 680 were in community payback placements. WMPT is the lead partner for the AIM Partnership, a regional European project developing innovative approaches to overcoming barriers to employment for offenders.

In 2011, Skills Funding Agency changes affected the information advice and guidance arrangements for the trust's provision; their information, advice and guidance team was disbanded in March 2011. Four advisers provided some continuity of service via YSS, our Strategic Partner, who were contracted to deliver Next Steps (IAG) and 'On Trak' in three of our locations. These YSS contracts ceased in November 2011. Three external organisations then were contracted to provide information advice and guidance to offenders. In 2011 the delivery of Community Payback was restructured and integrated into the four local delivery units. Some LDUs retained specialist community payback offender managers, others moved to a generic model with community payback cases distributed through the teams.

A wide range of over 20 local training providers, charities, social enterprises and colleges are used to support offender learning and employability. These include:

Information about the offender learning and employability providers:

(not all referrals came from probation)*

Lead providers and their subcontractors	Number of learners on discrete provision in 2011	Types of provision
Warwickshire Probation Trust	300	Next Steps – information, advice and guidance
YSS – Next Steps	100 (<i>until 31.10.11</i>)	Information advice and guidance in three locations in West Mercia

YSS - Pathways	Shropshire: 21 Herefordshire: 53 Worc'shire: 288 Telford: 48	Wrap-around support for offenders with complex needs including mentoring and referral into accredited learning provision
YSS – On Trak	161	Contract for wide range of employment support activity
Shropshire County Training	300*	Includes Learndirect literacy and numeracy provision in Telford and Shropshire
Willowdene Training Shropshire	22	Land-based, construction, engineering and behavioural change skills' activities for drug mis-using offenders
ASHA women's centre Worcester	57*	Life-long learning and personal development courses and support for women offenders
Sandycroft women's centre in Redditch	Not available	Literacy and numeracy learning sessions
The Shift project in Worcestershire	15	YSS run project offering agricultural skills
The Fold project in Worcestershire	38	YSS run project offering holistic support and horticultural skills for offenders with complex needs
Pertemps People Development Group	January 2012 start	NOMS employability contract started November 2011
Hereford literacy project	4	Literacy – pilot short project started in December 2011
Braley House approved premises Worcester	18 bed provision	Learning sessions for high risk offenders living at the premises
Other providers	Number of learners	Types of provision
Telford College	Not recorded	Literacy and numeracy in the community
Kidderminster College	Not recorded	Literacy and numeracy and general vocation training
Red Cross charity shops	4	Community Payback placement: offering NVQ level 2 in retail
Marie Curie charity shops	5	Community Payback placement – NVQ level 2 in retail
Safety & Training Ltd	2	CPCS accredited training
EPIC @ The Trunk Community Centre Bromsgrove	10	Social enterprise providing community support
CICT Training	30 approx	Literacy and numeracy
Telford women's project (CHEC)	16	Community based project for women offenders offering: personal development, lifelong learning and peer mentoring training

Jump Fitness: Telford & Shropshire	15	NVQ level 2 gym instructor accredited training
------------------------------------	----	--

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
----------------------------	----------------------------

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

Overall effectiveness, including capacity to improve

Information, advice guidance support was good. Advisers paid good attention to offenders' risk assessments for planning realistic goals. Education, training and employment referrals had started to increase in 2012 following a three year decline; only 202 offenders were referred in 2011.

Teaching and learning activities were good, with some outstanding aspects. A wide range of community payback placements provided good learning opportunities. Care farm provision provided very effective support for priority offenders' individual needs. WMPT's targets for offender employment were exceeded at most trust offices. In some activities, offenders' new knowledge and skills were insufficiently recognised and recorded to promote self-confidence and progression into employment. Skills for self-employment were not adequately promoted. Literacy and numeracy provision was too inflexible to support adequate take-up. Low numbers of offenders achieved accredited awards.

Strategic planning for 2012-13 was good. Managers were well informed by some useful data analysis and by offenders' and providers' feedback. Equality and diversity and safeguarding were satisfactory with appropriate arrangements in place to support offender vulnerability. Offenders living in rural, isolated locations in Shropshire had limited access to support and interventions.

The trust's capacity to improve was satisfactory. It had maintained the majority of its key strengths from the previous inspection in 2008, but too many key areas for improvement remained. A good review of the impact on offenders of changes in funding and delivery in 2011 had provided good awareness of the provision. Processes to adequately and systematically quality assure interventions were being revised. The trust had recorded key points for action planning in 2012-13, both centrally and in local delivery units.

What does West Mercia Probation Trust need to do to improve further?

- Increase the referrals to education training and employment and improve the achievement and recording of accredited awards and of other outcomes for offenders. Provide support, training and information to ensure that offender managers have accurate and easily accessible information for use with offenders. Provide structured opportunities across the trust for staff to share ideas and best practice.
- Encourage better take-up of provision to support the development of offenders' literacy and numeracy skills. Ensure the provision is sufficiently flexible to enable offenders with an identified need to have good equitable access across the area.
- Further develop quality assurance arrangements, including annual self-assessment. Ensure further data analysis and user feedback are used effectively as tools to evaluate and action plan with clear and measurable targets to support effective and closely-monitored quality improvement.

Offenders' perspective - learning and employability as confirmed by inspectors.

Offenders spoke highly of the support and guidance they received from staff. Offenders who were working with animals, plants and farm machinery on the care farms valued the different opportunities this gave them, including time for reflection and planning for their future. Offenders on community payback placements recognised the benefit to the community of their work. They liked the opportunity to improve their employment prospects by learning new skills, including some placements where they could gain qualifications. The women offenders using the women's centre in Worcester valued the way staff enabled them to gain self-confidence which was helping them plan for their future. Offenders wanted more help with searching for jobs, making applications and in interview techniques. Offenders felt that more help in understanding how they could use their new skills and become self-employed would help them progress into working for themselves more successfully. Some offenders expressed a need to get help to improve their English and maths skills. Offenders were concerned that poor transport links in rural and isolated areas meant that not all offenders could easily access the trust's activities.

Employers' perspective - as confirmed by inspectors,

Employers judged that opportunities for retail accredited opportunities to offenders working alongside volunteers in charity shops and their actions to provide offenders with positive role models promoted equality. The community payback activities, such as clearing land, maintaining churchyards and other community buildings were valued by benefactors and recognised as providing useful work to benefit local communities.

Main inspection report

The quality of provision

**Grade:
satisfactory**

Assessment and sentence planning

Offenders received good information, advice and guidance support from advisers who had broad ranging knowledge of agencies and providers for onward referral. The better interviews were comprehensive and well structured, identified barriers to learning and employment and provided realistic and beneficial direction for the offender. Advisers recognised the impact of the complex lives of some offenders and had good links with other agencies for useful referral. Advisers' record keeping of interviews varied in quality. Better examples were thorough and detailed with clear target dates for actions to be completed. Copies were given to offenders for reference. Some interviews were less well documented for reference and effective review; offenders did not receive copies of these showing what they needed to do and by when.

Advisers generally paid good attention to offenders' individual risk assessments for planning realistic goals. Providers and referral agencies did not always receive sufficient information about offenders' risks to adequately inform judgments for their appropriate participation in activities. Offender managers generally had insufficient information about local education training and employment providers to discuss with offenders. Managers were aware that there had been insufficient referrals of offenders with an education training and employment need; this trend had declined since 2009. Offenders with an education training and employment component in their sentence plan or court order requirement had continued to be appropriately referred. Offender managers with extensive community payback placement knowledge used it well to match opportunities to offenders' needs. This included referrals to placements with accredited learning available and/or the chance of progress to roles with greater responsibilities. Offenders' take-up of education training and employment activities for up to 20% of their sentenced community payback hours had reduced greatly in 2011 following the changes in funding and removal of much in-house provision.

Implementation of interventions

Teaching and learning were good overall. Practical skills learning activities were particularly impressive at Willowdene Training social enterprise and care farm in Shropshire. Staff placed a strong emphasis on health and safety, clear explanations and close checking of learning; the learning environment was very good and well equipped. Learning sessions across the provision were generally well structured, lively and effective, using a variety of activities to engage offenders in learning. The pace of learning was generally effective and allowed for good attention to individual offenders' needs. Information learning technologies were rarely used to stimulate and support learning and very few computers were available for use by offenders. At the approved premises in Worcester, very good use was made of group work sessions to explore

relationships and identify barriers to progression into employment. The ASHA women's centre in Worcester had good accredited and non-accredited learning activities which were well-planned and managed sensitively, encouraging participation and supporting women offenders in improving their self-confidence and self-esteem.

Good care farm provision supported the individual needs of high-priority offenders well. Staff provided good role models and exhibited a strong pro-social modelling culture. Offenders took pride in their work. Clear and detailed records of offenders' skills and personal development were well maintained and communicated frequently and systematically to offender managers. Offenders in both care farm and charity shop placements often continued as volunteers; inspectors noted good examples of progression into employment and promotion to posts of responsibility. Offenders did not receive enough information about self-employment and how they could use their new vocational skills and knowledge and work for themselves.

Offenders with low levels of literacy and numeracy were not sufficiently involved in improving these skills. Much of the provision offered since the funding changes was too inflexible and insufficiently accessible to offenders. The locally organised Hereford literacy project was good, but only very low numbers of offenders were benefitting from the experience. Of the colleges, only Kidderminster College had flexible start dates throughout the year to enable offenders to start when motivated. Literacy and numeracy skills development was underdeveloped. Since 2011, the trust had provided literacy, numeracy and other opportunities to contextualise these skills within vocational learning or every-day life activities, in sessions away from the probation offices. .

Offender managers, key workers and information advice and guidance staff had good partnership working aimed at making best use of available information to support offenders. Offender managers with recently changed roles were struggling to keep up-to-date with education training and employment provision in order to have well-informed discussions about local placement providers. Staff had insufficient awareness of take-up by their offenders of the accredited training opportunities available to them and of offenders' achievement of qualifications through other interventions.

Offenders had good access to a broad range of community payback placements, including individual placements in retail shops and group-work on outdoor and indoor projects in the community. The placements provided a good range of learning opportunities for offenders to develop their personal and work-related skills. Offenders were developing good work skills, but opportunities were being missed to celebrate these achievements. Employed offenders had appropriate access to week-end working. Placements generally offered flexibility for unemployed offenders, who could work extra days to meet their individual needs. Offenders had the facility of converting 20% of community payback hours for education, training and employment well promoted to them. However, most of this time was only used for offenders' information advice and guidance interviews.

WMPT had exceeded its target of 45% of offenders in sustained employment at the termination of their order or licence in 2011, at five of its seven offices. Only Shrewsbury and Kidderminster offices were just below target. Success rates were high at 92% for offenders sustaining their employment for more than a year after leaving the residential programmes at Willowdene Farm. The trust's staff supported these offenders, who travelled from out of the area for the specialist drug rehabilitation programmes. Community payback placements, and particularly at Willowdene, placed a strong emphasis on the promotion and reinforcement of good health and safety in work practices. Literacy and numeracy skills development was underdeveloped and was generally insufficiently accessible due to inflexible start dates.

Low numbers of offenders achieved accredited awards. The low referral rates contributed to this. In addition, there was insufficient recognition and recording of offenders' progress and achievement of employability skills through interventions.

Leadership and management

**Grade:
satisfactory**

Strategic planning for 2012-13 was good. Managers were well informed by some useful data analysis and by offenders' and providers' feedback; this aided their evaluation of the provision prior to the inspection. Good actions had taken place since October 2011 in gathering offenders' and providers' feedback, supporting good awareness of the provision by managers. Management decisions taken in 2011 to rectify the three year declining trend in referrals to education training and employment seem to have started to become effective; the highest numbers of referrals since June 2010 were made in February 2012. Effective data analysis in 2012, including disaggregation of statistics across the trust's six offices, informed management decisions at strategic level and in local delivery units. The trust's managers were aware that their data systems were under-utilised. Useful information relating to resettlement was not being recorded for all achievement of qualifications, unaccredited employment-related skills, and/or positive progression. A wide range of training for probation staff included online learning to introduce or update safeguarding and equality and diversity learning. Offender managers had insufficient support, training and information to help them keep up-to-date with the impact on offenders of funding changes in 2011. Neither did they have adequate reference materials to provide them with current and accessible education training and employment information.

The trust's clear processes for Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks of staff included enhanced CRB checks. Requirements for providers and partners to have appropriate safeguarding checks were well organised. Approved premises were well managed and provided a safe environment to those offenders deemed high risk. Equality and diversity and safeguarding were satisfactory with appropriate arrangements in place to support offender vulnerability. However, access to education training and employment activities for offenders living in rural and isolated locations, mostly in Shropshire, was inequitable. This was mostly due to the poor transport links. Offenders relying on public transport

found it very difficult to attend activities punctually, if at all. An innovative idea of buying a ready equipped 'learning bus' to take activities to hard-to-reach offenders was unsuccessful, due to inadequate funds to run it.

Insufficient processes were in place, including providers' arrangements, to adequately and systematically quality assure the full range of interventions. A new pilot survey, which systematically gathered partners' and provider's evaluation of their aspects of the provision, was used well to inform a position statement prepared prior to inspection. The well-structured survey used clear, relevant questions and key points from responses had been recorded for central and local delivery unit action planning in 2012-13. However, this had not extended to action planning targets and staff responsibilities.

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:	West Mercia Probation Trust	Inspection No	385663
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	Judicial				
Approximate number of enrolled learners	500	500				
Overall effectiveness	3	3				
Capacity to improve	3					
A. Outcomes for learners	3	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?	3					
A2. How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	3					
A3. How safe do learners feel?	3					
A4. <i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	-					
A5. <i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	-					
B. Quality of provision	3	3				
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?	3					
B4. How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	3					
C. Leadership and management	3	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>	-					
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?	3					
C3/4. Combined grade	3					
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

Information about the inspection

1. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) assisted by West Mercia's education, training and employment lead manager, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of provider most recent position statement and action plans, the previous inspection report, education training and employment data on offenders and their accredited achievement.
2. Inspectors use a range of methods to gather the views of offenders including group and individual interviews. They interviewed education training and employment lead managers and offender managers from local delivery units, senior probation officers, advice and guidance staff and partner and provider staff. They also visited learning sessions, assessments and advice and guidance sessions and offenders in work placements.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It rates council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this report in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 08456 404040, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester, M2 7LA

T: 08456 404040
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk
© Crown copyright 2012